

“EVERYTHING IS PEACHES DOWN IN GEORGIA”:  
CULTURE AND AGRICULTURE IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH

by

WILLIAM THOMAS OKIE

(Under the Direction of Paul S. Sutter)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation chronicles the rise of the Georgia peach as a major crop and a central symbol of the South since the 1870s. It tells of a vision of environmental reform articulated by horticulturists in the nineteenth century, the role of northerners in the commercial success of the fruit in the 1890s, the problem of markets in the 1900s, the place-making attempts of middle Georgia elites in the 1920s, and the centrality of African American or Latino labor throughout.

In telling this story, the dissertation makes two central claims. First, historians cannot account for the redevelopment of the South after the Civil War without addressing the role played by the region’s environment and by human ideas of that environment. Although scholars have frequently portrayed the New South campaigns from the 1880s through the 1950s as industrial and urban projects aimed at integrating the southern hinterland into the national economy, the story of the Georgia peach suggests that this modernization agenda also encompassed environmental and aesthetic concerns. On one hand, boosters portrayed the southern environment as a land of semitropical abundance where the average farmer could make a good living on a small parcel. On the other hand, the region’s environment did not always play along: climatic variability, warmth and humidity, and poor soils made for unpredictable harvests

and elusive rural prosperity. As a result, although horticulturists proposed an array of crops for the region's farmers in the nineteenth century, only peaches grew very widely.

Second, scholars must consider agriculture as culture – not just plants and soil and weather but visions and narratives. As a symbol, the peach seemed tailor-made for postbellum southern culture, for it had none of the negative associations with gullied fields and black poverty that burdened cotton cultivation. But peach culture depended upon cotton, especially for its seasonal labor supply, which always comprised the region's most marginalized groups. And even where peaches took hold, fruit culture did not produce a landscape of tasteful gardens, as its boosters promised, but of expansive plantations. As such, it fell far short of a comprehensive vision of reform.

INDEX WORDS: Peach, Georgia, Fort Valley, Horticulture, Environmental History, Agricultural History

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*para Kelly*

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Ev'rything is peaches down in Georgia  
What a peach of a clime  
For a peach of a time  
Believe me, Paradise is waiting down there for you.<sup>1</sup>

In summer 2011, news outlets buzzed with adorable little stories about the “peach war” between Georgia and South Carolina. The *New York Times* stumbled upon it first with a report that laid out the “harsh truth” that South Carolina had shipped more than twice as many peaches, and depicted Georgia growers quietly rebelling against the heavy hand of South Carolina’s dominance.<sup>2</sup> National Public Radio chimed in with an interview of Desmond Layne, associate professor of pomology at Clemson University, extension tree-fruit specialist, and self-described “Dr. Peach.”<sup>3</sup> Then CBS’ Early Show piled on, sending flannel-clad reporter Taryn Winter Brill to the orchards of Titan Farms in Ridge Spring, South Carolina — with 600,000 trees, the largest peach farm east of the Mississippi — and Big Six Farms in Lee Pope, Georgia. The footage featured long-sleeved Latino pickers, their faces as inscrutable as their hands were swift, but the interviews highlighted the growers’ prerogatives: “We feel like we do one thing real well, and that’s grow the sweetest peaches in America,” said Will McGehee of Big Six. “I’ll go to my

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<sup>1</sup> Grant Clarke (words), Milton Ager and George W. Meyer (music), “Everything is Peaches Down in Georgia” (New York: Leo Feist, Inc., 1918), accessed 22 September 2011 at <http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/inharmony/detail.do?action=detail&fullItemID=/lilly/devincent/LL-SDV-220033>.

<sup>2</sup> Kim Severson, “Peach Rivalry Becomes War Between the Tastes,” *The New York Times*, July 27, 2011, sec. U.S., [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/28/us/28peaches.html?\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/28/us/28peaches.html?_r=2).

<sup>3</sup> “Sweet Lessons from a South Carolina Peach Professor,” *All Things Considered* (National Public Radio, August 18, 2011), <http://www.npr.org/2011/08/18/139755064/sweet-lessons-from-a-south-carolina-peach-professor>.

grave swearing that Georgia peaches taste better than any other peaches,” McGehee’s uncle Al Pearson drawled. “I’m just fortunate to be in the right place.”<sup>4</sup> As if in agreement, Brill intoned, “Location: for those on the front lines of the peach war” — and the camera cut to a crew of about a dozen Latino workers striding toward the camera, stepladders and picking bags in their arms, like infantrymen returning from those front lines — “it’s what keeps them fighting.” Back in the studio, the *Early Show* anchors did a blind taste test of South Carolina and Georgia peaches. They could not tell the difference.<sup>5</sup>

The indecision of the *Early Show* was telling, for the fruit is not uniquely suited to the state of Georgia. Peaches grow everywhere. The fruit came originally from east Asia, probably the Chengdu region near Tibet, where researchers have discovered peach pits in the ruins of neolithic villages (6000-7000 BC), and a thousand-year-old tree, six stories high and thirty feet around at the trunk.<sup>6</sup> Not surprisingly, the fruit has held a place in Chinese mythology at least since the second century B.C., when the peaches in the garden of the Queen Mother of the West were said to bestow immortality.<sup>7</sup> In the sixteenth century, Shanghai staked its reputation on the succulent “honey nectar peaches” grown in walled gardens by local elites who had made their fortunes in the region’s fifteenth-century cotton boom.<sup>8</sup> Today, near the Shanghai satellite town of Yangshan, a version of the “honey nectar peach” still grows to enormous size. Workers wrap each one in newspaper to protect their delicate flesh from injury, and buyers consume them —

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<sup>4</sup> Taryn Winter Brill, “Georgia-South Carolina Peach War,” *CBS Early Show* (CBS, August 15, 2011), <http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=7376923n&tag=mncol;lst;5>.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> H. Huang, “History of Cultivation and Trends in China,” in *The Peach: Botany, Production and Uses*, ed. Desmond R. Layne and Daniele Bassi (Cambridge, MA: CABI, 2008), 37–38.

<sup>7</sup> Mark Swislocki, “The Honey Nectar Peach and the Idea of Shanghai in Late Imperial China,” *Late Imperial China* 29, no. 1 (2008): 2.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 9–13.



slurp them over sinks — within twenty-four hours of harvest.<sup>9</sup> China grows almost half of the world's peaches, with over 1.7 million acres, or about six times the area in the U.S.<sup>10</sup>

Peaches are widespread in Europe, too, having traveled there via the Silk Road trade sometime in the first or second century. In the seventeenth century, peasants from the Paris suburb of Montreuil earned a reputation among kings and nobles for growing delectable peaches, the trees strapped to south-facing stone walls to ripen them unseasonably early.<sup>11</sup> Today in Greece, Italy, and Spain, large fruit companies ship peaches all over western Europe, employing Romanians and other migrants to harvest the fruit in season. Spanish growers currently produce almost as many peaches and nectarines as the entire United States.<sup>12</sup>

It was the Spanish who, five centuries ago, brought peaches to North America. The pits traveled easily and germinated readily, and Jesuit friars scattered them wherever they went as part of their overall civilizing agenda for the New World. Native Americans, of course, were never entirely on board with this civilizing project, but peaches rapidly won their approval. The stones entered the intracontinental trade and spread all along the eastern seaboard. British settlers found them at Jamestown, and in the 1600s William Bartram came upon them so frequently in his travels through the southeast that he assumed they were native.<sup>13</sup> In the southwest, the fruit

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<sup>9</sup> Stan Sesser, "The Best Peach on Earth," *Wall Street Journal*, August 21, 2009, sec. Life & Style, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970203946904574300192082040918.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Huang, "History of Cultivation and Trends in China." See also the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization Statistics site at <http://faostat.fao.org>.

<sup>11</sup> Susanne Freidberg, *Fresh: A Perishable History* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 130.

<sup>12</sup> In 2009, the US produced 1,197,670 metric tons, while Spain produced 1,191,300. Italy produced 1,692,500, while China's production of 10,170,038 dwarfed everyone else's. See <http://faostat.fao.org>.

<sup>13</sup> William Bartram, *William Bartram: Travels and Other Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1996), 518; Donald Edward Davis, *Where There Are Mountains: An Environmental History of the Southern Appalachians* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 48–49; Lewis C. Gray and Esther Katherine Thompson, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860*, Carnegie Institution of Washington Publication (Washington, D.C.: The Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1933), 5, 7, 69; U. P. Hedrick, *The Peaches of New York*, Annual Report of the New York Agricultural Experiment Station 24, vol II, part 2 (Albany: J.B. Lyon Company, 1916).

became a central part of the Navajo diet, and Navajo orchards dotted the Canyon de Chelly area of New Mexico as late as the 1970s.<sup>14</sup> Today, California grows more peaches than all the other states combined, but a number of other places grow the fruit commercially: Michigan and Ontario on the shores of the Great Lakes, Colorado's High Junction region in the shadow of the Rockies, New Mexico, New Jersey, Connecticut, Missouri. In the South, North Carolina and Alabama raise the fruit for local and regional markets, while South Carolina's production is second only to California's.

If Georgia has no monopoly on peaches, neither does the peach have a monopoly on Georgia agriculture. Other products are far more economically important to the state. Peaches made up less than half a percent of Georgia's \$12 billion agricultural production in 2010, ranking well below broilers, pecans, ornamental nursery plants, and even pine straw and deer hunting leases.<sup>15</sup> Georgia farmers grew nearly one million acres of cotton in 2007, more than half a million acres of peanuts, and only 129,921 acres of tree fruit.<sup>16</sup> If the state was known by its most significant agricultural contributions, it would be the rye state, the peanut state, or the pecan state — it was number one in all of these crops in 1997.<sup>17</sup> Even cotton has a solid claim to the state's identity: Georgia was second only to Texas in cotton acreage in 2007.<sup>18</sup> Peaches have made a few

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<sup>14</sup> Stephen C. Jett, "History of Fruit Tree Raising Among the Navajo," *Agricultural History* 51, no. 4 (October 1, 1977): 683.

<sup>15</sup> The Center for Agribusiness and Economic Development at the University of Georgia, *2010 Georgia Farm Gate Value Report* (Athens: University of Georgia, November 2011), 6. Accessed 22 May 2012 at <http://www.caes.uga.edu/center/caed/pubs/2011/documents/AR-11-01.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> "Table 33. Specified Crops by Acres Harvested, 2007 and 2002," *2007 Census of Agriculture - State Data, Georgia* (GPO, 2007), 27-29. Accessed 21 September 2011 at [http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Full\\_Report/Volume\\_1,\\_Chapter\\_1\\_State\\_Level/Georgia/st13\\_1\\_033\\_033.pdf](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_1_State_Level/Georgia/st13_1_033_033.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> State Rankings - 1997 Crop Year accessed 21 September 2011 at <http://usda.mannlib.cornell.edu/usda/nass/CropRank/98180/1/cropsst.txt>

<sup>18</sup> In 2007 Texas planted some 4.9 million acres, while Georgia had 1,030,000 acres. Arizona was next with 860,000 acres. See "Cotton: Area Planted and Harvested by Type, State, and United States, 2007-2009" in Crop

people wealthy, but if growers pushed up their trees tomorrow, the state's agricultural economy as a whole would experience the loss as a small bump in the road. Despite claims to the contrary, Queen Peach never dethroned old King Cotton.

Yet Georgians laud the peach. The fruit is everywhere. Its image is plastered on license plates, on watertowers and street signs, in literature from the state-run low-income insurance program PeachCare for Kids. When Georgian Ty Cobb made his name playing for the Detroit Tigers, the moniker "Georgia Peach" was a natural fit. When Ben and Jerry's made a peach ice cream in 1986, they packed it with — what else? — "Fresh Georgia Peaches." In 1996, when the Summer Olympics came to Atlanta, the organizers dug up four peach trees from Al Pearson's Big Six Farms near Fort Valley and transplanted them in Centennial Olympic Park.<sup>19</sup> Atlanta's New Year's Eve celebration features a "Peach Drop" to countdown to midnight. In 2011, when *American Idol* star and Rossville, Georgia native Lauren Alaina released her debut album, "Georgia Peaches" was the first single. "There's a reason why the boys love the Georgia peaches," she sang, unwittingly tapping into a long poetic tradition in the South. There was Lynyrd Skynyrd's 1977 "funny talkin', honky-tonkin' Georgia peach," preceded by the Allman Brothers Band's "Eat a Peach for Peace" album, preceded in 1918 by Milton Ager and George Meyer's "Everything is Peaches Down in Georgia."

So if there is nothing particularly Georgian about peaches, why is "Georgia peach" a household name? Why have southerners — and Georgians in particular — clung to the fruit? The answer to this question has everything to do with the manner and the timing of the fruit's emergence as an agricultural commodity in the South.

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Production Annual Summary, 2010. Accessed 21 September 2011 at <http://usda.mannlib.cornell.edu/usda/nass/CropProdSu//2010s/2010/CropProdSu-01-12-2010.txt>.

<sup>19</sup> "Peach County peach trees make Olympic cut," *The Macon Telegraph* ((27 Jan, 1996) 1B.

The peach industry had its origins in the dreams of nineteenth-century southern horticulture. These farmers, floriculturists, breeders, and nursery-owners understood themselves as soldiers in the “Great Cause” of higher taste — the ability to appreciate the pleasing curve of a country lane as well as the delicious tang of a good strawberry. Horticulturists were important environmental figures in the nineteenth century. They not only articulated an environmental vision but also worked in the landscape, changing the genetic makeup of individual plants as well as the ecological makeup of entire regions.<sup>20</sup> Horticulturists, the thinking went, were gentlemen who could grasp the finer points of agriculture and high culture alike, and who could, with their knowledge and plant material, change the world. Growing fruit would raise the standard of country living just as growing flowers in a window box could save a tenement-dwelling immigrant family from degradation. In the east, landscape designers like A.J. Downing in the 1840s and rural progressives like Liberty Hyde Bailey in the 1890s argued that horticulture could bring not only profit but beauty to the countryside. In California, horticulturists presented themselves not as managers of factories in the field but as environmental renovators and leaders

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<sup>20</sup> Before his untimely death, Philip Pauly was the foremost advocate of horticulture as a subject of historical investigation. See Philip J. Pauly, *Fruits and Plains: The Horticultural Transformation of America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Philip J. Pauly, “Is Environmental History a Subfield of Garden History?,” *Environmental History* 10, no. 1 (January 1, 2005): 70–71; Freidberg, *Fresh*; Ben A. Minteer, *The Landscape of Reform: Civic Pragmatism and Environmental Thought in America* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006); Aaron Sachs, “American Arcadia: Mount Auburn Cemetery and the Nineteenth-Century Landscape Tradition,” *Environmental History* 15, no. 2 (April 1, 2010): 206–235; Douglas Cazaux Sackman, *Orange Empire: California and the Fruits of Eden* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); David Schuyler, *Apostle of Taste: Andrew Jackson Downing, 1815-1852, Creating the North American Landscape* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Steven Stoll, *The Fruits of Natural Advantage: Making the Industrial Countryside in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Ian R. Tyrrell, *True Gardens of the Gods: Californian-Australian Environmental Reform, 1860-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). A handful of southern historians have given some attention to horticulture. See James Calvin Bonner, *A History of Georgia Agriculture, 1732-1860* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1964); James Calvin Bonner, “Peach Industry in Ante-Bellum Georgia,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (December 1947): 241–248; J. D. Fair, “The Georgia Peach and the Southern Quest for Commercial Equity and Independence, 1843-1861,” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 86, no. Part 4 (2002): 372–397; Gilbert Courtland Fite, *Cotton Fields No More: Southern Agriculture, 1865-1980*, *New Perspectives on the South* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984); Willard Range, “P.J. Berckmans: Georgia Horticulturalist,” *Georgia Review* 6 (Summer 1952): 219–226; Willard Range, *A Century of Georgia Agriculture, 1850-1950* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1954).

of democratic communities. In both cases, horticulture moved in a current of nineteenth-century agricultural reform that sought permanence and uplift through improved agricultural practices.<sup>21</sup> Southern horticulturists joined this long tradition of fruit-growing as a higher pursuit than horse-and-plow agriculture. They drew upon this older horticultural language of beauty and sophistication. And just as important, they created varieties that could thrive in the South, not just peaches, but also pears, apples, grapes, gooseberries, strawberries, to name a few.

Around the turn of the century, boosters made the peach into a symbol of the New South. The peach orchard became not just economic substitutes for cotton but also a symbolic substitute for the old “Cotton Kingdom.” By the late nineteenth century, King Cotton was showing his age: pocked with overworked farms, wrinkled with gullies, glassy eyes peering blankly out of unkempt and unshaven old fields, his poor white and black “retinue” suffering under a “feudal” labor arrangement. The time was ripe for “Queen Peach” – to borrow a metaphor from the moment – to take power. She was fresh, colorful, refined, delicate, sophisticated. Because peaches required more book-knowledge, and because of the way they gilded the southern landscape with blossoming orchards, the fruit signified rural uplift. *Attention!* they said to travelers, *rural development in progress here*. And this change took place in both rhetoric and reality, for in certain places — Fort Valley and Cornelia in Georgia, Ridge Spring and Spartanburg in South Carolina, Aberdeen in North Carolina – peach growing actually did

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<sup>21</sup> On Downing and Bailey, see U.P. Hedrick, *A History of Horticulture in America to 1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950); Ben Minteer, *The Landscape of Reform: Civic Pragmatism and Environmental Thought in America* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006); and Philip Pauly, *Fruits and Plains: The Horticultural Transformation of America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). On California, see Ian Tyrrell, *True Gardens of the Gods: California-Australian Environmental Reform, 1860-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); David Vaught, *Cultivating California: Growers, Specialty Crops, and Labor, 1875-1920* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999). For more general studies of agricultural reform, see Jack Temple Kirby, *Poquosin: A Study of Rural Landscape and Society* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Lynn Nelson, *Pharsalia: An Environmental Biography of a Southern Plantation, 1780-1880* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007); and Steven Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth: Soil and Society in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002).

transform the landscape. Physically, these places were soon “dotted with orchards” as observers liked to say. Economically, peaches provided a crucial late-summer influx of cash. For landowners and renters alike, strapped for funds as they waited for cotton bolls to ripen, the peach harvest could keep a local economy alive.

The peach was no emissary of sustainable local agriculture, though. Indeed, despite the reputation of the fruit as a signature southern crop, northerners propelled the fruit’s dramatic expansion. Men like John Howard Hale formed investment firms, bought up thousands of acres, and reconstituted the southern plantation with Yankee flourishes. This production boom led to gluts in markets, which in turn led to earnest – and ultimately unsuccessful – efforts by growers, consumers, and government agencies to understand what happened to fresh fruit from field to table. The peach owed its commercial success to northern investment and to northern markets. Distribution networks spiderwebbed, and Georgia growers found themselves connected to distant places with sticky and convoluted threads.

As these connections stretched out horizontally, middle Georgia growers redoubled their efforts to claim the fruit for their particular place. They carved out their own county, named after the fruit, and staged a series of elaborate festivals that articulated their vision of a progressive “wonder county,” a gift of the gods and of peach cultivation. Crucially, their vision excluded African Americans, a fact that became clear as maintaining a labor force became the central struggle for peach growers in the twentieth century.

Peach acreage and production declined after the 1920s, but the fruit remained visible and accessible as a symbol of a renewed South. This symbolic power, in turn, gave outsized influence to peach growers throughout the twentieth century. As the southern peach industry fell upon hard times, they drew upon the cultural capital of the previous century of development to

call for state and federal intervention. In 1962, Peach County played host to an expansion of federally funded research on tree crops in middle Georgia: the Southeastern Fruit and Tree Nut Research Laboratory in Byron. By 2004, all of Georgia's peach growers had signed on to a federally sponsored labor program called H-2A, which allowed them to bring in workers from Mexico for summertime harvests.

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In telling this story of the Georgia peach, I make two central claims. First, the postbellum New South campaign was an environmental and aesthetic program as well as an industrial and economic one. That is, we cannot understand the post Civil War South without paying attention to the relationship between the southern environment and the environmental visions that modernizers sought to implement. The New South campaigns, so the story goes, were primarily oriented toward the development of industry. For New South promoters such as Henry Grady, historian Paul Gaston reminds us, the “crusade for an urban, industrialized society was their absorbing concern.”<sup>22</sup> From the perspective of the cities where Grady and other New South prophets did their work, agricultural diversification merely supplemented the all-important task of industrialization. From the perspective of the countryside, however, horticulture represented a kind of third way between industrialism and the old plantation: by growing peaches, southerners

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<sup>22</sup> Paul M. Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), 68. For other treatments of the first New South after the Civil War see Edward Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life after Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Don H. Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Joseph Reidy, *From Slavery to Agrarian Capitalism in the Cotton Plantation South: Central Georgia, 1800-1880* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971). On the second New South after World War II see James Cobb, *The Selling of the South: The Southern Crusade for Industrial Development, 1938-1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982); Pete Daniel, *Breaking the Land: The Transformation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice Cultures since 1880* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985); Jack Temple Kirby, *Rural Worlds Lost: The American South, 1920-1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987); Bruce J. Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy since the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996).

could practice a progressive, urban-oriented agronomy without sacrificing their rural way of life. The story of the southern peach boom highlights these environmental and aesthetic components of the New South.

Second, and more broadly, I argue that we cannot understand agriculture without reference to culture. Agriculture *is* culture: it comprises not just soil and plants, and animals but visions and narratives as well. The content of those visions and narratives matters. In particular, the aesthetic boosterism of the southern peach boom illuminates how ideals of beauty and change might shape the development agendas of other times and places. In late twentieth-century Southeast Asia, for example, new rice cultivars sponsored by U.S. agencies created a darker-green, more orderly landscape, which in turn created a visual representation of non-communist progress. The Green Revolution, as Nick Cullather explains, was thus “illustrated . . . in a parable of seeds.”<sup>23</sup> A similar dynamic was at play in turn-of-the-century Georgia, as boosters who knew very little about farming praised horticulture as the sort of uplift that could defuse the increasingly explosive tendencies of the farmers’ movement.<sup>24</sup> The horticulturists, for their part, believed that a more beautiful countryside created by more educated farmers would yield contentment. Those farmers thinking about joining the laboring classes in the cities, or worse, becoming anarchists or communists, might think again if their yards had lawns and their agricultural portfolio included more than cotton and corn. The idea that seemed commonsensical to horticulturists in the nineteenth century — that farmers and communities would look like what they grew — has implications not only for how we understand agriculture historically, but also how we see rural development today.

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<sup>23</sup> Nick Cullather, “Miracles of Modernization: The Green Revolution and the Apotheosis of Technology,” *Diplomatic History* 28, no. 2 (April 2004): 254.

<sup>24</sup> Henry Woodfin Grady, “The Farmer and the Cities,” in *The Complete Orations and Speeches of Henry W. Grady*, ed. Edwin DuBois Shurter (New York: Hinds, Noble & Eldredge, 1910), 158-191.



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The Early Show “Peach War” segment typified daytime television’s breezy summertime fare. There were no dramatic exposés of counterfeit fruit, infestations of *E. coli*, or abusive employers. *Oh, it’s peach season*, the viewer might think. *Maybe I’ll go buy some southern peaches*. But if the episode was not exactly hard-hitting journalism, it touched on several important themes in the history of the Georgia peach.

First, this is a story about *place*, or more precisely a series of key landscapes: a nursery, a home and garden, a plantation, a marketplace, a stage, and a labor camp. Taryn Brill was wiser than she knew when she observed the importance of location, for growing peaches has meant reckoning with places as physical entities *and* as human creations – elevation, climate, soil, and biota, *and* transportation networks, communities of knowledge, and labor forces. More to the point, the peach story underscores how redevelopment campaigns aim at creating a different “look” for particular places. If fruit took hold in a place, reformers promised, the entire community would be healthier, smarter, and prettier. The peach became a signature success story of these “New Souths,” especially in the years after Reconstruction.

Second, this is a story about labor. When Brill spoke of the importance of location, she apparently referred to the growers’ own sense of place. But the camera, panning across a Latino picking crew, told a different story. Peaches are famously soft and perishable, and raising and marketing the fruit has always been a matter of human hands. Growers would sell no peaches without people to harvest them. And from the late nineteenth century to the present, the laborers beneath the trees have always been among the most marginalized of the South’s peoples. Labor has been just as important as location to the success of the Georgia peach.

Third, this is a story about lies. The breezy tone of Taryn Brill's narration and the general absurdity of the entire segment have analogues throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The image of the Georgia peach has moved unmoored from the fruit's production, bearing little relationship to the actual conditions of the rural South. And it is this distance between rhetoric and reality that makes the story of the Georgia peach so important today.

Modernization projects need symbols, ways of depicting their progress.<sup>25</sup> For the great modernization project that was the New South campaign, it was crucial to find images and products that could attract outside capital and still honor the native productions of the South. Peaches fit the bill. At the very moment when the South needed a new face, the peach was there. It was a perfect symbol for the New South, for as a commercial product it *was* new, and had none of the negative associations with which cotton was burdened: poverty, racial oppression, gullied fields. Yet as a symbol and as a crop, the development program of which the fruit was a part fell short, because it condoned rather than confronted the oppressive political economy of the cotton belt. Peach growing did not replace but relied upon cotton. And it did not produce a landscape of tasteful gardens but of expansive fields.

"Ev'rything is peaches down in Georgia," Milton Ager and Grant Clarke sang in 1918, "paradise is waiting there for you." Perhaps unwittingly, the New York songwriters captured the story of the Georgia peach, for the fruit has long been central to campaigns that imagine and arrange the beautiful South. A century ago, the peach symbolized modern, progressive agriculture; today it harkens back to a lost South of rural loveliness. But everything has *not* been

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<sup>25</sup>I am drawing here on the emerging literature on the imagination of development. See for example Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle Against Poverty in Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, *The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2003).

peaches down in Georgia. Then and now, the peach has obscured as much as it has revealed, the velvety skin and delicate flesh concealing the imperishable stone. It is time now to peel and slice.

## CHAPTER 2

### PROSPER BERCKMANS STARTS A CLUB

John Howard Hale was on his way from Georgia to Mississippi when he fell ill, “so sick” that he did not think it safe to travel so far. Instead, the census surveyor and Connecticut horticulturist accepted the invitation of Prosper Berckmans to Fruitland, “his beautiful home on the highlands up the river” from Augusta, Georgia. Hale was only the latest in a long line of distinguished guest at Fruitland. The horticulturists Charles Downing, Marshall Wilder, and William Brinkle, the botanist Asa Gray, the natural historian Louis Agassiz, and poet and travel writer Bayard Taylor – in “days gone by” all had been frequent guests of Berckmans. As they roved around Fruitland’s four hundred acres, Berckmans pointed out plants, shrubs and trees that had been gifts of one or another of these men from “some far country”: a little plot of Korean Bermuda grass, some fine melons Taylor had carried home from Persia, and many more. Deeply impressed, Hale called Berckmans the “leading pomologist of America and of the world” and credited him with revitalizing the American Pomological Society. But it was Berckmans’ nursery that gave Hale “many new horticultural ideas.” The grounds abounded with “choice plants and shrubs under the highest cultivation” and “every known fruit that can be grown in that warm southern climate.” The figs were ripe, and Hale ate freely.<sup>1</sup>

Prosper Berckmans, the son of a Belgian baron, had only been in the U.S. a few years when he launched Fruitland, the nursery that would become the South’s foremost seller of, as he

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<sup>1</sup> J.H. Hale, “Journey in the South,” *The Hartford Courant*, August 7, 1890, sec. 3.

put it in his catalog, “Fruit and Ornamental Shrubs, Vines, Roses, Evergreens, Bulbous Roots, Green House and Hedge Plants, &c.”<sup>2</sup> From Augusta he would distribute both the necessary knowledge and the plant material to remake the landscape and the culture of the South. His nursery at Fruitland would be the first point of light in a benighted land, or so Berckmans hoped.

The Georgia peach has its roots in this nineteenth-century horticultural transformationism. The vision captured the imaginations of gentleman farmers on both sides of the Atlantic and, a few decades later, the Pacific as well.<sup>3</sup> Andrew Jackson Downing, perhaps the most famous American in this group, once urged a reader to be an “apostle of taste” in his rural community, showing by example how to build a lovely home and lay out a landscape.<sup>4</sup> Prosper Berckmans was the foremost apostle in the South. He saw in the region fertile ground for the development of an aesthetic agriculture and a civilized culture, and he started the club, the Georgia State Horticultural Society, that did as much to advance this agenda as any other institution. In time, due to both environmental and social factors, the horticultural ideal narrowed to mere peach growing. But in the mid-nineteenth century, *Prunus persica* was just one of many potential change agents contemplated by the reformers of Berckmans’ generation.

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<sup>2</sup> Fruitland Nurseries, *1861 Descriptive Catalog of Fruit and Ornamental Shrubs, Vines, Roses, Evergreens, Bulbous Roots, Green House and Hedge Plants, &c. Cultivated and for Sale at the Fruitland Nurseries* (Augusta, Ga.: James L. Gow, 1860).

<sup>3</sup> Cheryl Lyon-Jenness, “Planting a Seed: The Nineteenth-Century Horticultural Boom in America,” *The Business History Review* 78, no. 3 (October 1, 2004): 381–421; Philip J. Pauly, *Fruits and Plains: The Horticultural Transformation of America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Emily Pawley, “‘The Balance-Sheet of Nature’: Calculating the New York Farm, 1820-1860” (Ph.D., University of Pennsylvania, 2009); David Schuyler, *Apostle of Taste: Andrew Jackson Downing, 1815-1852, Creating the North American Landscape* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Ian R. Tyrrell, *True Gardens of the Gods: Californian-Australian Environmental Reform, 1860-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Jackson Downing, “On the Improvement of Country Villages,” *Horticulturist* 3 (June 1849): 545-49, quoted in Schuyler, *Apostle of Taste*, 1.

Why was the South, from the viewpoint of the horticulturists, in need of change? The southern prospect was conflicted in the 1850s. On the one hand, the region was one of the most prosperous agricultural regions in the world in the early 1800s. Cotton production skyrocketed as short staple or upland cotton took hold. The crop thrived in the expansive southern piedmont. By the 1850s, cotton had spread further west and further into the Georgia hills than ever before.<sup>5</sup> In 1860, the South produced 70% of the world's cotton.

On the other hand, the costs of the short-staple cotton boom were starting to show by the 1830s. As prices fell and the land lottery opened up Cherokee lands in western Georgia, farmers left the eastern piedmont gullied and bare. "Cultivated fields were hardly ever discernible," wrote Carl Arfwedson, a Swedish traveler going by stagecoach through middle Georgia in 1830s. "The houses . . . hardly deserved the name of human habitations: had they been without chimneys, I should have been inclined to consider them as sheds for the reception of hogs." The residents of those houses were not much more refined, according to Arwedson, in dress, manners, and language partaking "of the repulsive features of wild nature."<sup>6</sup> Meals were mostly corn and pork, as Arfwedson discovered at one home in Columbus, Georgia, in the 1830s. After a liberal round of whiskey, they ate pickled pigs feet, then bacon "swimming in molasses," then cornbread and milk, which they then "washed down" with another half-glass of whiskey.<sup>7</sup>

Two decades later, Georgia's farmers showed little sign of learning their lesson from the rapid exhaustion of their eastern farms. "We are awfully bad off up here," John Trott of Troup

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<sup>5</sup> Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890*, Updated. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Jack Temple Kirby, *Mockingbird Song: Ecological Landscapes of the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Carl David Arfwedson, *The United States and Canada, in 1832, 1833, and 1834* (London: Richard Bentley, 1834) 1: 418.

<sup>7</sup> C.D. Arfwedson, *The United States and Canada, in 1832, 1833, and 1834* (London: Richard Bentley, 1834), 2: 11, quoted in Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake*, 39.

County testified to the readers of *The Soil of the South* in 1851, “having nearly worn out one of the prettiest and most pleasant counties in the world.” Trott looked out and saw not noble plantations but “waving broomsedge . . . barren hillsides . . . terrible big gullies.”<sup>8</sup> Or, as northern reformer Solon Robinson wrote of middle Georgia, “Probably no soil in the world has ever produced more wealth in so short a time, nor has been more rapidly wasted of its native fertility.”<sup>9</sup>

This short-staple cotton landscape provided plenty of material for the jeremiads of agricultural reformers. From the 1830s through the 1850s, they blamed cotton monoculture and frontier-style, land-swallowing agriculture for the widespread soil exhaustion and increasing outmigration.<sup>10</sup> New York agricultural reform journals of men such as Daniel Lee (*The Genesee Farmer*, 1831-39) and Jesse Buel (*The Cultivator*, 1834-65) saw the southern plight as part of a more general problem of outmigration. Fresh land lured farmers west and removed motivations for practicing a conserving, permanent husbandry. These agriculturists sought salvation in “improvement,” a series of variations on English convertible husbandry.<sup>11</sup> Improvement placed the cycling of soil nutrients at the center of the agricultural enterprise, and the collection of animal manure at the center of soil nutrients. Stability, not a high profit margin, was the goal. “Permanence of society, landscape, and home,” historian Steven Stoll writes, “was the paramount value of improvement.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Soil of the South* I (March 1851), 36, quoted in Bonner, *A History of Georgia Agriculture*, 64.

<sup>9</sup> Herbert A. Keller, ed., *Solon Robinson, Pioneer and Agriculturist*, 2 vols. (Indianapolis, 1936), II, 378, 479, quoted in Bonner, *A History of Georgia Agriculture*, 61-62.

<sup>10</sup> See James Calvin Bonner, *A History of Georgia Agriculture, 1732-1860* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1964), chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>11</sup> Steven Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth: Soil and Society in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002), 20.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

In 1843, southern reform efforts found their most enduring journalistic voice in J.W. Jones' *Southern Cultivator*.<sup>13</sup> Designed to "improve the Mind, and Elevate the character of the tillers of the soil, and to Introduce a more enlightened system of culture," Jones dedicated the *Southern Cultivator's* "humble but zealous efforts to the restoration of the exhausted lands of the country, to introduce an enlightened system of agriculture." Jones, writing from Augusta, Georgia, then leveled the blame at cotton monoculture. "We have seen and felt," he wrote, "the blighting effects upon the interests and independence of Southern planters of the too common and fatal system of Agriculture almost universally adopted, and it has long been to us a source of deep anxiety."<sup>14</sup>

A few years later, like-minded Georgians organized the Southern Central Agricultural Society, a group dedicated to "inquiring into the resources and facilities of agricultural pursuits and the advancement of the arts and sciences, connected therewith, and into the best method of developing the one and illustrating the other."<sup>15</sup> Self-conscious about the divisions between the farmland only recently opened in the Cherokee hills and the plantations of the lower part of the state, the members looked to amateur science and to old fashioned "social and friendly intercourse between planters" to establish a better husbandry in the South.<sup>16</sup> Their annual fairs were ceremonies of multitudinous praise, honoring the finest bushel of wheat, the tastiest lemon, the most ingenious straw cutter, the woolliest sheep, the prettiest embroidery. Cotton was the economic elephant in the room at these events, allotted a tiny space compared to its immense

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<sup>13</sup> There had been other southern journals that promoted improvement, including Ruffin's *Farmer's Register* and *DeBow's Review*.

<sup>14</sup> "To the Southern Planter," *The Southern Cultivator* 1, 1 (March 1, 1843), 6.

<sup>15</sup> Southern Central Agricultural Society, *Transactions of the Southern Central Agricultural Society, from Its Organization in 1846 to 1851* (Macon, GA: B.F. Griffin, 1852), 263.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 264.



importance in the South at large. In 1850, members of this society founded the suggestively titled *Soil of the South*, based in Columbus, Georgia, which quickly joined the chorus of reform. “Why . . . should we, like a set of dastards, desert the graves of our fathers, in pursuit of virgin soil?” wrote one western Georgia planter the journal in 1853. “I, for one, am determined to hide my red hillsides and fill up my gullies.”<sup>17</sup>

An “enlightened system of agriculture,” with the power to hide red hillsides, fill gullies, and keep the South’s soil and people alike in place: this was the goal of southern agricultural reform. These men were early soil chemists (like Edmund Ruffin of Virginia), botanists (like Henry Ravenel of South Carolina), practitioners of convertible husbandry (like John Taylor). They were concerned with the economic vulnerability of the cotton boom, and the political vulnerability of the eastern states as outmigration shifted representation westward. But these improvers were also aestheticians; to them, outmigration was not only an economic and political crisis but also a crisis of landscape. They deplored the ramshackle southern landscape with its scraggly fields full of broom sedge and scrub pine. Under the influence of the cotton boom, settlers had destroyed the native forests, plundered the soil of its nutrients, and, worst of all, abandoned their farms. Without soil fertility, there was no basis for continued wealth in the Southeast. The cotton boom, while it had made many of them wealthy, had sacrificed beauty on the altar of profit.

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Prosper Jules Alphonse Berckmans may not have been in on this conversation when he first came to America – he was only a boy – but he had an eye for detail. In 1850, when he was

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<sup>17</sup> *Soil of the South* III (Jan. 1853), 394, quoted in James Calvin Bonner, *A History of Georgia Agriculture, 1732-1860* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1964), 72.

just eighteen, he boarded the *Peter Hattrick* and sailed out of Antwerp's harbor. He spent more than a month aboard the *Peter Hattrick* with a motley crew of Belgians, Prussians, and seventeen *vauriens*, or "good-for-nothings." Then, he visited the big cities of New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston; camped in the north Georgia mountains; took a steamship up the Mississippi River; felt the spray of Niagara Falls; floated down the Erie Canal.<sup>18</sup> For this son of an artistic Belgian baron, raised in a castle and trained in European boarding schools, the tour of busy, topsy-turvy American society was tremendously exciting. As if to keep pace, Berckmans kept an almost-daily record of his experiences in a volume he titled *Voyage en Amerique* in large and elegant lettering.

The world was in motion in 1850, and Prosper Berckmans wanted to see, hear, taste, and smell it. He strained to put this rumpus in order. Everything he witnessed needed to have a name, a place in the natural history of the world. On September 10 he saw his first sea tortoise; on September 16 he identified large stretches of marine algae as *golffoide* or "Gulf Weed"; on September 21, a large fish called "Black fishes." One day he saw several whales he thought were called "Souffleurs," or spouters; another he witnessed the harpooning of a porpoise and the extraction of its liver. Nearly every day of the voyage, he described the weather, wind direction and speed, animals and plants, and the health of the passengers.

Occasionally, even in the terse language of the diary, beauty overwhelmed him. A "bad storm" on August 28 made the sea a "new sight," "magnificent to behold." On Wednesday, August 28, storm petrels skipped lightly across the "lovely" sea, "light green with great patches of grey. The birds flew partly underwater, allowing waves to "sweep over them" before they

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<sup>18</sup> Prosper Jules Alphonse Berckmans, "Voyage En Amerique", 1850, 1, Berckmans Family Papers, MS 122, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.

continued their flights, like European swallows.<sup>19</sup> One Saturday evening, shortly after three days of ship-wide seasickness, Berckmans stood on the deck of the *Peter Hattrick*. “I see the sun set,” he wrote. “It is the most beautiful sight one can see.”<sup>20</sup> Nor did his noticings stop as the ship approached the harbor. The New Jersey shoreline, dotted with country homes and resort hotels, was “*tres beau*”; the New York harbor with its “forest of masts” was “*fort beau*.”<sup>21</sup> Once ashore, he traveled from New York to New Jersey, where he described the woods near Elizabethtown as “very picturesque,” something like an English garden. One gets the sense that the Belgian’s vocabulary could not keep pace with his experience.

And so he made lists. Near Elizabethtown, New Jersey, Berckmans went hunting. He saw little game, though he killed a milk snake and caught a yellow tortoise. But other quarry abounded, and these he captured with his eyes and pen: oaks (*Quercus coccinea*, *macrocarpa*, *dentata*, *sempervirens*, and *lacinata*), maples (*Acer campestre* and three other species), cedars (*Cedrus niger*), tulip trees (*Liriodendron virginiana*), hickories (*Fagus silvestris* and *castanea*), “butternuts” (*Juglans ulmus*), lindens (*Tilia microphilla* and *platyphylla*), along with more unfamiliar herbaceous plants such as blue gentians and white orchids. He also strolled through “many orchards,” though Berckmans noted summarily that the agriculture was “not advanced” and that these were lowly cider apples, and no pears.<sup>22</sup>

As the lists in Berckmans’ diary suggest, this 1850 journey was more than a youthful romp through America. He did not return home to Belgium. Instead, after a year of travel and observation, he welcomed his father and stepmother to New York, and the whole family settled

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 7.

in Plainfield, New Jersey. Though some later biographers have suggested religious and political persecution as the reason for their migration, Berckmans himself mentions nothing of the kind. Nor was economic desperation a primary reason. By all appearances, his family in Belgium was well off: they had a thousand-year history of nobility and owned several “castles” near Lier, not far from Antwerp. Economically, Belgium was on a solid footing, second only to England in iron production. The revolutions that shook nearly all of Europe in 1848 were mere tremors in Belgium.

Why, then, would a Belgian baron and his family immigrate to America in 1850? A couple of possibilities appear in the lives of two other families, friends of the Berckmans. The Sutro family crossed the Atlantic with Berckmans in 1850 because their manufacturing business in eastern Prussia had been destroyed during the 1848 revolutions. They sought to reestablish themselves in America with the energy of their two sons. After they parted in New York, the Sutro family moved to Baltimore, where Berckmans visited them in 1851.<sup>23</sup> A few years later the Sutros moved to California, where Adolph made his fortune with some clever engineering during the Comstock Lode boom in 1859, and eventually become a Populist mayor of San Francisco.<sup>24</sup> But in 1850, Adolph and Prosper apparently became good friends aboard the *Peter Hattrick*. Perhaps they discussed the gold rush then going on in California. The restless energy of the New World must have resonated in their teenage bodies.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>24</sup> Adolph Sutro to P.J. Berckmans, January 16, 1895, Prosper Jules Alphonse Berckmans Collection, Cherokee Garden Library, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, GA. Thirty years later Sutro become the “anti-Octopus” populist mayor of San Francisco, and in 1895, he received his old travel companion triumphantly. “I shall be greatly pleased to see you,” he wrote to Berckmans, inviting him to the family estate at Sutro Heights for lunch to “talk over the olden days.”

General Louis Joseph Barthold LeHardy of Belgium offered another model for upper class immigration. In 1848, LeHardy and about twenty-five others left Brussels for the United States, and ended up in Rome, Georgia, a town of about 3,000 and the emerging capital of Cherokee Georgia.<sup>25</sup> The 320-acre estate of Gen. LeHardy and the infant colony that surrounded became Prosper Berckmans' home base during his 1850 trip – evidently the LeHardys and Berckmans knew one another in the Old World. Berckmans was impressed with the high quality of the soil and the “limpid and delicious” water from several springs. Members of the little Belgian colony were still arriving during Berckmans' stay: the Gosfuins had also purchased a plantation not far from LeHardy's, which Berckmans visited and enjoyed the “excellent Bordeaux wine.”<sup>26</sup>

Prosper Berckmans seemed to be considering both mines and plantations during his American tour. During his visit with the LeHardys in Rome, he took a trip across the northern part of the state to Habersham County. Near Clarksville, a haphazard little town Berckmans judged to be “in very bad taste”, he noted the price and condition of several properties. One 500-acre plantation contained “the best soil I that I have seen here,” and listed for \$3,000; another pair of plantations, both with plenty of rich bottomland soil, was available for \$7,000.<sup>27</sup> Berckmans also spent a number of days exploring foundries and other ironworks in Habersham, and pronounced the region “rich in minerals and in mines of gold, silver, iron, and zinc.”<sup>28</sup> The specificity of his observations suggests that Berckmans was in the market for either a plantation or a mine, or both. His diary was, in part, a set of notes on investment opportunities.

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<sup>25</sup> George Magruder Battey, *A History of Rome and Floyd County, State of Georgia, United States of America, Including Numerous Incidents of More Than Local Interest, 1540-1922*, vol. 1 (Atlanta, GA: Webb and Vary Co., 1922), 355–356.

<sup>26</sup> Berckmans, “Voyage En Amerique,” 20.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 21.

But Berckmans' diary will not sustain a portrayal of the young Belgian as a hard-nosed speculator. The day before his notes on Habersham's agricultural and mineral opportunities, Berckmans' hunting troop took a spontaneous detour to Tallulah Falls, a set of four cataracts dropping about 350 feet through a dramatic gorge. George Cooke's Hudson River School-style painting of the so-called "Niagara of the South" in 1841 featured what appears to be a group of upper class tourists viewing the falls from one of the gorge's precarious outcroppings.<sup>29</sup> Like these presumed seekers of the picturesque and the sublime, Berckmans was impressed. "Never would I have imagined such a grandiose sight," he wrote that night. "It surpasses everything I have seen." A couple of miles away, atop a mountain, the young Belgian burst into poetic simile: "On one side we see an immense plane, which looks like a calm and peaceful sea," he wrote. "On the other side, we see the mountains, which like a storm-tossed sea. It is a superb sight, especially with the kind of sunset I have seen," he gushed. "The air is pure. The view sweeps an immense space."<sup>30</sup>

It would be artificial to draw sharp distinctions between business and beauty for any of these men. There was little separation between the two. Gold shimmered; men heated and hammered it and ultimately shaped it into fine ornamentation. Gold also made people rich; indeed for centuries it *was* wealth. One could love gold for its beauty *or* for its value. And the same was true of landscapes and plants. The Belgian saw profits and aesthetic promise as inseparable in both.

Mining did not pan out for Berckmans, and he would never own a plantation like LeHardy's. The industrializing world was on the cusp of another sort of boom in 1850, and

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<sup>29</sup> Andrew B. McCallister, "Tallulah Falls and Gorge," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, February 19, 2009, <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-949>.

<sup>30</sup> Berckmans, "Voyage En Amerique," 19.

Prosper was perfectly positioned to take advantage. As the urban world grew, and with it demand for vegetables and fruits and flowers, horticulturists – those with the aesthetic sensibility and botanical skill to bend plants to their needs – gained prestige. The plant lists in Berckmans’ diary, then, divined his future more accurately than his mineral investigations. For just as the minerals were the raw materials for Sutro, who would extract his fortune from mines, these native plants were the raw materials for Berckmans, who would cultivate a horticultural fortune. The enormous genetic variation to which Berckmans bore witness in his diary was the foundation for a profitable culture in plants and fruits. In the hands of one who knew how to select and breed new varieties, this genetic diversity was a botanical gold mine.<sup>31</sup>

By 1850, horticulture was transitioning from a fashionable pursuit of the gentry — a hobby with the gloss, at least, of scientific investigation — to a serious business proposition. It had been a way to spend excess money; increasingly, it would be a way to make money. Horticulturists did not jettison their aesthetic sensibilities as their work became more profitable. The older horticultural arts — the dabblings of gentlemen in their greenhouses and fruit gardens — remained with the enterprise. But in the early nineteenth century, however, horticulturists developed a much stronger sense of economic importance. Increasingly, these floriculturists and gardeners couched their avocation in professional terms; they called their collective pursuits the “science of horticulture” and formalized their aspirations by founding societies — the Horticultural Society of London in 1804, similar groups in France and the Netherlands, and the

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<sup>31</sup> Emily Pawley, “‘The balance-sheet of nature’: Calculating the New York farm, 1820-1860” (Ph.D., University of Pennsylvania, 2009), 167.

Massachusetts Horticultural Society in 1829.<sup>32</sup> They were ambitious and serious: American nurseryman Charles Hovey called horticulture “the great cause.”

Prosper Berckmans’ father, Dr. Louis Mathieu Edouard Berckmans, was present at the creation of this new gardening. Born in 1800, he trained as a medical doctor but preferred playing violin and painting. Sometime in the 1820s, while traveling in the Belgian lowlands, he met and married Marie Gaudens, who was either a lowlands peasant or a direct descendent of Spanish nobility, depending on which genealogist tells the story. Marie gave birth to Prosper in 1830, while Louis was away fighting for Belgian independence from the Netherlands. She died of complications.<sup>33</sup> Though Louis later married again, he was haunted by the death of his first wife to the end of his days.<sup>34</sup> As if to console himself, Louis Berckmans buried himself into horticulture.

At the time, Belgian horticulture stood, as it were, at the altar of the pear. Though the fruit had been cultivated since the days of Homer, it earned its aristocratic reputation in seventeenth century France. As early as 1608, French nobleman and experimental farmer Olivier de Serres counted the ways he loved pears by enumerating the fruit’s variability. Shape: “round, long, pointed, blunt, small, and large.” Colors: “Gold, silver, vermilion, and satin green.” Flavors: “Sugar, honey, cinnamon, clove.” And smell: “musk, amber, chive.” An orchard without pears, de Serres concluded, “would not be worth while.”<sup>35</sup> A contemporary of de Serres listed 254

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<sup>32</sup> Philip J. Pauly, *Fruits and Plains: The Horticultural Transformation of America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 2, 52-53.

<sup>33</sup> Biographical Notes, Prosper Jules Alphonse Berckmans Collection, Cherokee Garden Library, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta History Center.

<sup>34</sup> Herman vander Linden, *Belgium: The Making of a Nation* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1920), 301. Belgium saw little upheaval from the 1848 revolutions, but the nobility lost much of their influence.

<sup>35</sup> Olivier de Serres, *Le Theatre d’Agriculture* (1608), quoted in U. P. Hedrick, *The Pears of New York* (Albany, NY: J.B. Lyon Company, 1921), 14.



distinct varieties in 1628. Pears ranked second only to figs in Louis XIV's gardens at Versailles. Two hundred years later, another French pear enthusiast listed 238 varieties.<sup>36</sup> By 1867, the number of pear varieties had quadrupled: 900 varieties, grown under 3000 different names.<sup>37</sup>

Why the sudden proliferation in pear varieties? The Belgians. In the early nineteenth century, Belgian pomologists turned the French fascination into an obsession. As late as 1921, when New York horticulturist Ulysses Hedrick surveyed the pear varieties currently under cultivation, these Belgians' varieties numbered in the hundreds. And it was the work not of professional horticulturists but of amateurs: "priests, physicians, apothecaries, attorneys, tradesmen, and gentlemen of leisure."<sup>38</sup> More significant than the number of varieties they produced, though, was the way they changed the fruit. In the eighteenth century, pears were crisp, apple-like fruit, as they had been for millennia. By the mid-nineteenth century, pears were soft, melting, buttery -- hence the prevalence of the term *beurre* (French for butter) in pear nomenclature. After centuries of cultivation, the Belgians created the modern pear in just a few decades.<sup>39</sup> This transformation was largely the work of Jean Baptiste Van Mons, the chemist whom Louis Berckmans had assisted two-volume *Arbres Fruitiers*, a compendium of Belgian horticulture as it stood in 1836.

Van Mons dedicated his substantial horticultural talents to the demonstration of a theory that better varieties could be created by selecting the best fruit from young trees. The Theory of Van Mons was not simply a hypothesis, but an attempt to solve the problem of horticultural — and therefore cultural — decline. In the late 1700s, fruit growers feared that the existing varieties

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 15. Le Lectier listed 254 in 1628; Noisette listed 238 in 1833.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 17.

(most of which dated to the Renaissance) were “running out.” These old varieties seemed to produce fewer and less appetizing fruits and to succumb more easily to disease. Thomas Knight, president of the Royal Horticultural Society in London, offered one explanation: a single tree had a lifespan of two or three hundred years, which included all tissues of the tree, even grafts and grafts of grafts. An apple variety found in 1550, in other words, would start to “run out” around the turn of the nineteenth century. Knight’s solution was cross-pollination: manually taking the pollen from the stamens of a wilder tree and fertilizing the pistil of the cultivated variety. In this way, Knight hoped to produce hybrids that joined the vigor of the wild trees with the desirable eating characteristics of the old varieties.<sup>40</sup> His approach was unpredictable, though. Most fruit varieties at this time were “found,” chance productions of nature, and cross-pollination improved on chance only marginally. Knight’s method was a kind of horticultural alchemy, relying on studied mixing to create new varieties rather than serendipitous discovery.

If Knight’s garden was a laboratory, Van Mons’ was an industrial sluice box.<sup>41</sup> Rather than look for secret ingredients in individual varieties, he ran millions of seedlings through a grueling selection process and propagated the best still standing. Van Mons explained the problem of varietal decline by arguing that older fruits, like European aristocracies, had become too refined and cultivated for their own good. The horticulturist’s task, then, was to develop new aristocracies from seed, by choosing the best seeds not of wild field trees, but of inferior garden seedlings – not of peasant stock, in other words, but from the middle class. To get these seedlings into line, the horticulturist had to be aggressive and observant, managing his nursery like a reform school. His young charges would feel his hand at every turn. Thus, Van Mons discarded

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<sup>40</sup> See Pauly, *Fruits and Plains: The Horticultural Transformation of America*, 65–66.

<sup>41</sup> A sluice box is an industrial version of panning for gold: running large quantities of water and gravel through a box with a screen that allows gold to sink to the bottom.

the old varieties and started with trees most gardeners would consider useless, usually just one generation removed from wild seedlings. In the first generation, he cared little for the quality of the tree and instead required that they be young and in “state of variation”: they might be thorny or stunted and generally bore nearly inedible fruit.<sup>42</sup> He selected the most promising seedlings of these, cut off their taproots and pruned them vigorously, harvested the unripe firstfruits of these seedlings, allowed the fruit to rot, and then planted again. After five generations of this uninterrupted reproduction, Van Mons claimed, his pear seedlings were nearly all superior selections.

The key point of Van Mons’ more physical and — to borrow the words of one historian — “republican” approach, was that variety development entailed a continual struggle between horticulturist and plant.<sup>43</sup> As varieties aged, Van Mons thought, they became harder to manipulate, as if they had grown wise to the wiles of the horticulturist. The Theory of Van Mons thus imputed a kind of intelligence to fruit trees. The old varieties that he and other pomologists had inherited at the end of the eighteenth century were too smart to produce superior – defined in human, gustatory terms -- offspring. To carry out successful amelioration, the horticulturist needed superhuman perseverance. As Van Mons put it in 1835: "To sow, re-sow, to sow again, to sow perpetually, in short to do nothing but sow, is the practice to be pursued, and which cannot be departed from; and in short this is the whole secret of the art I have employed."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Andrew Jackson Downing, *The Fruits and Fruit Trees of America* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1845), 7; William Kenrick, *The New American Orchardist*, 7th ed. (Boston: Otis, Broaders, and Company, 1844), 33.; H.A.S. Dearborn, “Horticulture,” *New England Farmer* 8, no. 28 (January 29, 1830), 220.

<sup>43</sup> Pawley, “The balance-sheet of nature,” 161; Pauly, *Fruits and Plains: The Horticultural Transformation of America*, 66.

<sup>44</sup> Jean Baptiste van Mons, *Arbres Fruitiers: Leur Culture En Belgique Et Leur Propagation Par La Graine; Ou, Pomonomie Belge, Expérimentale Et Raisonnée* (Louvain, Belgium: L. Dusart et H. Vandembroeck, 1835), 223.

Van Mons' theory barely lasted through the nineteenth century, but his monomaniacal obsession with proving it made his estate an astonishingly productive place. His solution to the problem of varietal decline was to gather a cornucopia of genetic variability in a tiny place: at one time, he had 80,000 unique seedlings in his gardens. He claimed that these trees did not pollinate each other, that no hybridization took place, though certainly this was happening. He named and propagated some *four hundred* new pears, forty of which were still in cultivation a century later.<sup>45</sup> Van Mons “accomplished more than any other single individual up to the middle of the nineteenth century in breeding new and valuable fruits,” wrote an American horticulturist in 1906.<sup>46</sup> His experiments, in other words, demonstrated the value of selection as a breeding technique. He sifted, as Hedrick put it in 1921 “millions of seedlings through the coarse meshes of the sieve of selection.”<sup>47</sup> And he was an amateur.

The Belgian's work was not just important in the realm of pomology, but also genetics and biology more generally. In 1855, for example, Charles Darwin wrote to the *Gardener's Chronicle and Agricultural Gazette* and begged for correspondents who had “carefully sown named seeds and have noted the result.” Van Mons, Darwin noted, had “sometimes raised from the seed of one variety of Pear a quite distinct kind,” but his results were uncertain at best: “it now appears Van Mons was careless in marking the varieties sown.” Do some varieties produce “truer offspring” than others? Darwin wanted to know. What of plums?<sup>48</sup> The sexual behavior of fruit trees was part of the larger mystery of evolutionary biology.

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<sup>45</sup> Hedrick, *The Pears of New York*, 18.

<sup>46</sup> W.M. Munson, “Plant Breeding in Its Relation to American Pomology,” *Annual Report of the Maine Agricultural Research Station* 22, no. 132 (1906): 151.

<sup>47</sup> Hedrick, *The Pears of New York*, 19.

<sup>48</sup> Charles Darwin, “Seedling Fruit Trees,” *Gardeners' Chronicle and Agricultural Gazette* no. 52 (29 December 1855), 854. Accessed 3 March 2009 at <http://darwin->

When Van Mons died in 1842, fellow Belgian and heir-apparent to his pear expertise, Alexander Bivort, purchased and then transported many of his 80,000 pear trees from Louven to his garden at Geest St. Remy, about twenty miles away.<sup>49</sup> A few years later, from 1847 to 1851, Bivort produced his own monument of Belgian pomology, the four-volume *Album de Pomologie*. In the 1850s the administration of King Leopold I appointed Bivort the secretary of the Royal Commission of Pomology, where he again produced a multi-volume anthology of Belgian fruits. The Commission was the envy of horticultural societies around the world as an example of government sponsorship of horticulture.<sup>50</sup> But in Belgium it was just an expression of right affection for the pear.

Louis Berckmans raised his son Prosper in the heyday of the Belgian pear craze. While Louis had learned as he went, working with Van Mons on his *Arbres Fruitiers* in 1835-36 and with Alexander Bivort on his *Album* in 1848, Prosper received formal training at botanical gardens in Paris and Tours. In 1848, Prosper Berckmans returned to Iteghem to assist in managing the estate and also collaborated with his father and Bivort on the *Album*.<sup>51</sup> At age eighteen, then, Prosper was already very much a part of Belgian's horticultural world. And he was clearly impressed with the Theory of Van Mons. For years afterward, though he also practiced Knight's cross-pollination techniques, he instructed his American followers in what he called "the law of reversion." He praised Van Mons' notion of genetic over-refinement in 1876 as the "one of those provisions of Providence" that kept species from becoming so refined that

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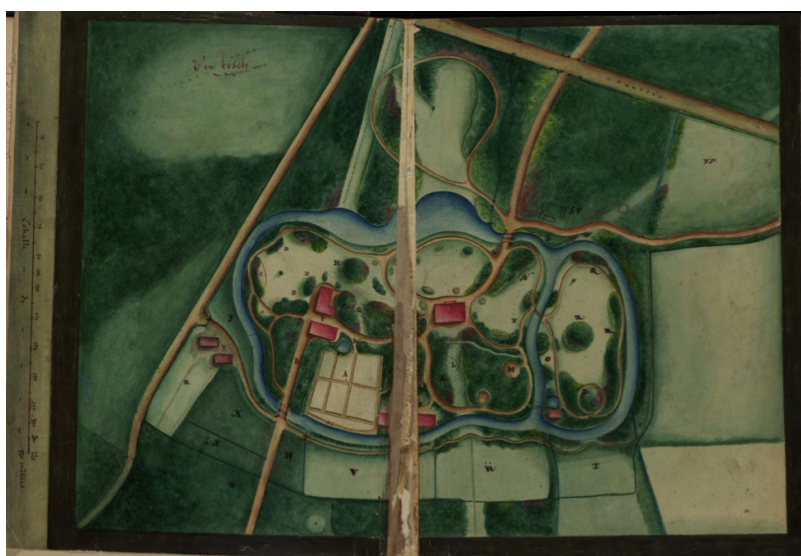
<sup>49</sup> "Unnamed Article on Belgian Pomology," *Gardeners Chronicle and New Horticulturist* (September 26, 1914): 220.

<sup>50</sup> Patrick Barry, "Editor's Table," *The Horticulturist, and Journal of Rural Art and Rural Taste* III, no. 3 (March 1853): 138.

<sup>51</sup> Willard Range, "P.J. Berckmans: Georgia Horticulturalist," *Georgia Review* 6 (Summer 1952): 219-226.

“to go further must end in a diseased tree or imperfect seed, and consequent extinction of the race.”<sup>52</sup>

The Theory of Van Mons was as much about horticultural practice as it was a philosophical abstraction. This truth is borne out in Louis Berckmans’ *Indicateur General*, an 1846 bound volume that mapped out his estate at Iteghem. The book divided the estate into sections, each of which Louis rendered in exquisite watercolor: blue ponds and streams, golden



*Figure 1.*  
The opening illustration of the *Indicateur General*, offering an overview of the entire estate. Louis E. Berckmans, *Indicateur General*, Berckmans Family Papers, Hargrett Manuscripts Library, University of Georgia, Athens

paths, green orchards, and red buildings. Each tree or shrub had a number, and the following pages listed, in a flawless hand, the variety name and relevant details: its originator (Van Mons, Esperen, etc), or, if it was a seedling, which generation. The book is a remarkable representation of the fastidious attention to detail and the aesthetic sensibilities that characterized nineteenth-century Belgian horticulture.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> “Mr. Berckmans’ Address,” Georgia State Horticultural Society, *First Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society* (Atlanta, GA, 1876), 10–11.

<sup>53</sup> Louis E. Berckmans, *Indicateur General*, Berckmans Family Papers, Hargrett Manuscripts Library, University of Georgia, Athens.



*Figure 2*  
A sample page of the *Indicateur General*. On the left is a section of the estate, with each plant numbered, and keyed to a description on the right. Louis E. Berckmans, *Indicateur General*, Berckmans Family Papers, Hargrett Manuscripts Library, University of Georgia, Athens

The migration of the Berckmans family to the U.S. is all the more striking in light of their connection with Jean Baptiste Van Mons. They were aristocrats, with a family heritage going back to the sixteenth century, and no obvious reason to leave Belgium in 1850. Yet they chose to settle in America. Did they fear the decline of their ancestral bloodlines? Did they hope by transplanting themselves to infuse their lineage with New World wildness and vigor? From their estate in Iteghem, about thirty miles equidistant from Antwerp and Brussels, the Berckmans would have seen the rapid growth of these urban centers and the attendant expansion of market gardening. These intensive sites of production of fruits and vegetables meant bigger markets for new varieties, and suggested that the horticultural world was on the verge of a major commercial transformation. Pomology had been a fascinating science; it was also becoming a profitable business.

In 1851, however, the Berckmans family passed through the market gardens of Antwerp and went to the city's harbor instead. In 1851, no doubt after going over the options Prosper had recorded in his diary, Louis Berckmans bought an estate in Plainfield, New Jersey, not far from where Prosper had taken his first American hunting excursion. It was a strategic choice. New

Jersey had been the most advanced fruit-growing region in the country since the early 1800s. It was the home of William Coxe, America's "best pomological writer" of that time and author of *A View of the Cultivation of Fruit Trees*, and not far from the New York horticultural scene.<sup>54</sup>

In Plainfield, the Berckmans fell in with an enthusiastic horticultural community. They started, fittingly, with pears, reportedly bringing with them scions of Van Mons' and Bivort's collections and immediately planting some 10,000 trees. Prosper later remembered walking down a dusty road near their property in Plainfield, when a man in a carriage called down to him: "By the way, can you tell me where I can find the home of Mr. Berckmans? I want to consult with him on some pears."

"I rather think so," said Prosper. "He happens to be my father."

"Crawl in and take me there," replied the man, who turned out to be Andrew Jackson Downing.<sup>55</sup> At that time in his mid-thirties, Downing had become one of the nation's foremost landscape gardeners and pomologists. His 1841 *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* had revolutionized American "taste" toward naturalistic grounds and cottage-style suburban homes. Downing's *Fruits and Fruit Trees of America*, originally published in 1845, was already in its tenth or eleventh edition by 1851, and his journal *The Horticulturist, The Journal of Rural Art and Rural Taste* (1846) competed only with Charles Hovey's Boston-based *Magazine of Horticulture* for influence and readership.<sup>56</sup> Shortly after this meeting with Berckmans, Downing drowned in the Hudson River. But his brother Charles

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<sup>54</sup> U. P. Hedrick, *A History of Horticulture in America to 1860* (New York,: Oxford University Press, 1950), 211.

<sup>55</sup> T.H. McHatton, "Memoir of Dr. P.J.A. Berckmans," in *Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society*, Georgia State Board of Entomology Bulletin 35 (State Board of Entomology and State Horticultural Society, 1911), 9.

<sup>56</sup> Pauly, *Fruits and Plains: The Horticultural Transformation of America*, 60. Pauly, *Fruits and Plains*, 60.



continued revising his *Fruits and Fruit Trees* until 1900, and Patrick Barry carried on his legacy at *The Horticulturist*. Downing was “the prince of American landscape gardeners,” according to one contemporary, the American “apostle of taste,” according to one historian.<sup>57</sup> And in 1851, this horticultural notable was scrambling for the advice of a Belgian newcomer.

The other horticultural intelligentsia were also thrilled. “It is doubtless known to many of our readers,” wrote Patrick Barry, A.J. Downing’s successor at *The Horticulturist*, that Louis Berckmans had “taken up residence permanently in this country, near Plainfield.” Berckmans possessed “ample means to carry forward his experimenting schemes with vigor,” Barry observed. “[W]e look forward to him and his garden with no ordinary interest.”<sup>58</sup> Not to be outdone, Downing’s chief rival, Charles Hovey of Massachusetts, paid a visit to Berckmans’ Plainfield property the following year. A few miles from Elizabethtown — perhaps in the very woods where Prosper Berckmans had hunted in 1850 — the three hundred acre property hid the Berckmans mansion “amid the dense foliage of overhanging trees . . . a place just suited to the retired habits and elegant leisure” of the elder Berckmans. Hovey marveled that Berckmans had left “his beautiful villa at Heyst-op-ten-berg, with all the attractions which taste, aided by wealth, had lavished upon it” for the “wild and uncultivated scenery” of America. Berckmans had set immediately to planting pear seedlings, Hovey found, though many had died crossing the Atlantic. They were “planted in rows, thickly, in different parts of his grounds, which are mapped off in a book, and the trees catalogued in such a way that reference may be had to any

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<sup>57</sup> “Magnolias at Lexington, Ky,” *Farmer’s Home Journal* (Lexington, KY), reprinted in “Domestic Intelligence,” *Gardener’s Monthly* 15 (ed. Thomas Meehan, Philadelphia, September 1873), 283; See also Schuyler, *Apostle of Taste*.

<sup>58</sup> Patrick Barry, “Editor’s Table,” *The Horticulturist and Journal of Rural Art and Rural Taste* 5, no. 1 (January 1855): 46.

lot with the greatest facility.” It was an organized, ambitious estate, and Hovey expected great things from this “co-worker in the great cause.”<sup>59</sup>

Louis Berckmans was Belgian pomology incarnate. He brought to life the work of Van Mons and Bivort and other Belgians, which had drifted intermittently across the Atlantic since the 1820s. As Robert Manning of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society later recalled, Louis Berckmans’ arrival “threw a great deal of light on what had before been obscure and uncertain, and seemed to give reality to what had previously appeared dim and unreal.”<sup>60</sup> But the Berckmans did not find America to be a horticultural desert. Unformed potential, or wild untamed growth, maybe. In choosing Plainfield, the Berckmans joined a vibrant horticultural fraternity, giants in the “great cause” as Hovey put it. These were the men who in 1848 founded the American Pomological Society and began a quixotic quest to bring order to the bad names of American fruits.<sup>61</sup> Unlike the “wealthy enthusiasts” of England and the institutionally-supported pomologists of Belgium and France, American pomologists were mostly nurserymen from New York or Boston.<sup>62</sup> For Charles Hovey, Andrew Downing, and several others, pomological expertise and profitable nurseries went hand in hand. When Patrick Barry surveyed the American scene in 1851, he noted the “unusual degree of attention” on fruit culture, as represented by increasing orchards, nurseries, periodicals, books, and horticultural societies — so much so that some called it “a sort of speculative mania.”<sup>63</sup> It was a good time to be in fruit. As Barry argued,

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<sup>59</sup> Charles Hovey, “Suburban Visits: Residence of L.E. Berckmans, Plainfield, NY,” *The Magazine of Horticulture* 22, no. 11 (November 1856): 518-520.

<sup>60</sup> Robert Manning, comments in Business Meeting in *Transactions of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society* (Boston, 1884), 127

<sup>61</sup> Pawley, “The balance-sheet of nature,” 185.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>63</sup> Patrick Barry, *The Fruit Garden*, 1st ed. (New York.: Charles Scribner, 1856), iv.

"Fruit culture . . . whether considered as a branch of profitable industry, or as exercising a most beneficial influence upon the health, habits, and tastes of the people, becomes a great national interest."<sup>64</sup>

Whether they were more concerned with beauty or with profit, American horticulturists sought to order the horticultural abundance of the new land. According to New York horticulturist Ulysses Hedrick, apples and peaches were numerous and diverse in eighteenth-century America. Pears were a different story. Hedrick wrote of vigorous, productive, blight-free pears planted by the French during the colonial period, and lamented, "Out of the thousands of these old French trees, no named variety arose, and probably all are now lost to cultivation."<sup>65</sup> There is a sense, then, that horticulturists thought of naming and describing as an act of preservation — once designated, a given variety could be recognized, budded, propagated, and kept for posterity. Thus one of the key parts of every meeting of horticultural and pomological societies was the catalogue: discussing and recording the characteristics of varieties.<sup>66</sup>

Despite New Jersey's horticultural reputation, the Berckmans men soon found the climate too harsh for their delicate pear trees. They stayed long enough for Prosper Berckmans to earn his American citizenship and to wed Mary Craig.<sup>67</sup> Then, in 1856, Louis and his second wife Elizabeth divorced. Heartbroken again, he left Elizabeth with their two sons Auguste and Emile

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Hedrick, *A History of Horticulture in America to 1860*, 154.

<sup>66</sup> Emily Pawley has an excellent discussion of the politics of naming in her 2008 dissertation. See Pawley, "The balance-sheet of nature."

<sup>67</sup> Essex County, New Jersey, "Prosper J. A. Berckmans, Declaration of American Citizenship" (United States of America, November 27, 1855), Prosper Jules Alphonse Berckmans Collection, Cherokee Garden Library, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, GA.

(who would himself be party to a nasty precedent-setting divorce in 1860), and moved South.<sup>68</sup> In so doing, they exchanged the fine fellowship of the mid-Atlantic for a horticultural backwater.

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In late October, 1851, as Berckmans settled themselves in Plainfield, New Jersey, the Southern Central Agricultural Society of Georgia hosted its fifth annual fair in Macon. There Reverend Stephen Elliott addressed the gathering on “Horticulture.” Elliott was the son of prominent South Carolina botanist Stephen Elliott, the first Episcopal bishop of Georgia, a founder of girl’s school near Macon, and, most famously, a staunch supporter of slavery and the Confederate cause. But he was also a gardener: that year, he won a five-dollar silver cup for the greatest variety of vegetables grown by a single individual at the fair.<sup>69</sup> His “Horticulture” address raised many of the questions that would occupy horticulturists for the next fifty years.

Elliott began with the southern landscape, describing in turn the “tangled luxuriance of our Eastern shores,” the “rugged steeps of our northern mountains,” and the “gently rounded hills of our midland counties.”<sup>70</sup> Here was everything a horticulturist could want: the “overarching masses of foliage and flowers,” the “broad sheets of water . . . in pellucid brightness”; the “line of beauty” and “ever changing hues” of the mountains and gorges; the “sighing waterfalls and grassy knolls.”<sup>71</sup> This was Georgia for Elliott.

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<sup>68</sup> Anne Berckmans, obituary of L.E. Berckmans, Jan 14, 1997, in Rome Area Archives, Rome, GA; see also Range, “P.J. Berckmans: Georgia Horticulturalist.” For the divorce, see *Emile C. Berckmans v. Sara E. Berckmans*, Reports of Cases Decided in the Court of Chancery of the State of New Jersey, vol. 16 (1863) p. 122f.

<sup>69</sup> Southern Central Agricultural Society, *Transactions of the Southern Central Agricultural Society, from Its Organization in 1846 to 1851*, 44.

<sup>70</sup> Stephen Elliott, Jr., “Address on Horticulture,” in *Transactions of the Southern Central Agricultural Society, from Its Organization in 1846 to 1851* (Macon, GA: B.F. Griffin, 1852), 111.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 111–112.

And yet — here Elliott transitioned into the speech’s second movement — this natural bounty had yielded almost nothing in the way of horticultural refinement. Why? Elliott enumerated four “reasons for [Georgia’s] backwardness” in the cultivation of vegetables, flowers, fruit, and landscapes.<sup>72</sup> First, Georgia’s climate and soil were so amenable to the production of fruit and flowers, according to Elliott, that residents had become “mere dependent idlers on her bounty.”<sup>73</sup> Elliott’s analysis agreed with Andrew Downing’s just a few years before, when he argued in his *Fruits and Fruit Trees of America* that residents of temperate climates were destined to be careful fruit culturists. In the north, said Downing, harsh weather pushed horticulturists to work harder in their amelioration efforts. In the tropics, on the other hand, horticulturists would be found “indolently seated under their shade, and finding a refreshing coolness both from their ever-verdant canopy of leaves, and their juicy fruits.” Downing thought it self-evident that he would not find the “patient and skilful [sic] cultivator” in such a climate.<sup>74</sup> Though not exactly tropical, the South was fecund enough to make people lazy with their fruit, according to Elliott. Southerners stopped short of genuine improvement, content to enjoy these natural advantages in their “wild and untrained excellence.”<sup>75</sup>

Second, since horticulture was the art of domesticating and training natural excellence, it was the “science of a settled and permanent population, not the pursuit of a people struggling for

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 112. Stephen Elliott Sr. published *A Sketch of the Botany of South Carolina and Georgia* in 1824, and his papers are housed at the Harvard Herbarium (see <http://www.huh.harvard.edu/Libraries/archives/ELLIOT.htm>); for the younger Elliott’s biography, see “Episcopal Church” in the *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, available online at <http://www.newgeorgiaencyclopedia.com/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-1551&hl=y>; on his support of slavery see his 1862 sermon, “Our Cause in Harmony with the Purposes of God in Christ Jesus,” (Savannah: Power Press of John M. Cooper, 1862), available as call number 4150 Conf. in the Rare Book Collection at UNC Chapel Hill, and online at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/imls/elliott5/elliott5.html>; on the Montpelier Girls School see the historical marker at <http://georgiainfo.galileo.usg.edu/gahistmarkers/montpelierhistmarker.htm>.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>74</sup> Downing, *The Fruits and Fruit Trees of America*, 1.

<sup>75</sup> Stephen Elliott, Jr., “Address on Horticulture,” 113. Elliott, 113.

bread.”<sup>76</sup> Georgia was only a generation removed from being “Indian country,” Elliott reminded his listeners, intoning dramatically that “within the recollection of our children, the war whoop was heard upon our Western limits.” He exaggerated, of course, for the Cherokee were very much a “settled population,” some of whom owned extensive orchards. Much of what Elliott understood to be natural abundance, especially in peaches and apples, was the result of Cherokee cultivation and selection.<sup>77</sup> Elliott assumed that horticultural knowledge came from books — which led him to his third reason for southern horticultural backwardness: they had no books. That is, none adapted to their climate. Southerners were imitating the horticulture of London in a climate more like Tuscany. And the dissonance between the South’s soil and climate and the “book knowledge” of English horticulture was “absolutely pernicious” in its discouraging effect on experimentation.<sup>78</sup> Those who tried often gave up.

Not only did they lack books, said Elliott, but the southern economy was not diverse enough to support nurserymen, florists, market gardeners, and orchardists. Unlike in England and the North, where prominent horticulturists all owned nurseries, the South had no nurseries and not enough urban population to create sufficient demand for flowers or fruits or vegetables. Southern horticulturists, like Elliott himself, earned their livings in other trades. Profitable agriculture in the South was staple crop agriculture, and horticulture suffered from its “absorbing pursuit.”<sup>79</sup> Finally, Elliott pointed a finger at those who made staple crop agriculture the central focus of southern society: the planters. These most powerful people in southern agriculture were

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 114, 115. Elliott apparently did not consider Indians a “permanent population,” nor did he mention (if he was aware of it) the sizeable orchards of prominent Cherokees such as Major Ridge and John Ross.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 115, 116.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 117, 118.

their own worst enemy. Isolated lords of their demesnes, individualistic and tradition-bound, planters were notoriously difficult to “collect into societies” said Elliott. Societies, for Elliott, were much more than social organizations. They were “the instrumentality of the present day for the advancement of every science and art.”<sup>80</sup> If the Southern Central Agricultural Society barely survived, how could horticultural societies be expected to thrive? For horticulture seemed “much more connected with mere ornament and luxury.”<sup>81</sup>

Elliott thus hinted at a critique of planters more fully developed by other reformers in this period. They were, as a historian memorably put it, not *landlords* but *laborlords*. Land was relatively abundant, particularly after the removal of Native American tribes opened up the old southwest to Anglo settlement. Their wealth tied up in slaves, planters sought to maximize the productivity of their labor rather than their land. Often this meant a modified form of swidden farming – girdling trees, burning, and planting in the ashes. A quick three or four harvests and the field could be abandoned for more fertile terrain. The political economy of slavery seemed to dictate that horticulture be an afterthought – a seedling orchard for slave provisioning and hog foraging and maybe a little brandy distilling. Only those who fancied plants would claim the mantle of pomology.

When Elliott peered into the future, however, he was more optimistic. An increasingly permanent population, more interested planters, larger towns, more nurseries, and a wider circulation of journals — all of these seemed to be in the offing in 1851. “Patience and perseverance,” Elliott counseled. “Let us, in horticulture, as in everything else, learn a nobler

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

ambition, and make our land what God and nature intended it should be, a land of surpassing beauty and exceeding joys.”<sup>82</sup>

Elliott then applied this basic three-pronged interpretation—natural abundance, wasted by a lack of development, but with future potential—to a few specific fields. After lamenting the lack of disciplined floriculture, he turned his attention to pomology. He began by describing a rather sensual act of consumption: “A delicious peach is handed us, whose skin peels off like that of a well boiled potato, the rich juice the while streaming down our fingers, and while the flesh melts in our mouth and the combined qualities of smell and taste and sight are gratified to the utmost.” And yet this seductive drupe went unnamed, and therefore, unknown: “*‘tis still only a peach*, and great astonishment is expressed at a desire to know any thing more about it.”<sup>83</sup> Elliott echoed the concerns of the American Pomological Society: without correct nomenclature, southerners knew “neither our riches nor our poverty.”<sup>84</sup>

Scientific nomenclature was no good without “taste.” Elliott devoted his last remarks to landscape gardening, which revealed southern deficiency more than any other branch of horticulture. He deplored the typical southern homestead as a thoughtless blot on the landscape. “It is sickening,” he wrote of middle Georgia, “to behold its deformed appearance.” For although nature had made it lovely (“nothing is more picturesque than the alternation of hill and dale, the undulating sweep of a rolling country, the variety of foliage that arises from the mixture of so many species of forest trees”), the settlers had not improved its “curve line of beauty” but allowed it to decay into “the rugged wrinkles of an early decrepitude.”<sup>85</sup> Here Elliott painted two

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 141.



pictures: the South as it was, and the South as it could be. As it was, houses were “the most wretched specimens of architecture” with outbuildings “arranged just in the most conspicuously awkward positions”; orchards were “where our ornamental grounds should be”; vegetable gardens “thrust up their tall collards and peasticks.” Southern estates were “bare red hills, crowned with great white houses glaring at you,” with “negro quarters of the most ungainly aspect, with cotton and corn growing up to the very doors” along a “straight up and down clay road, flanked by straggling Virginia fences on either hand.” In the estate’s bare dooryard, “consumptive hogs” wallowed in “dirty puddles.” There was not a proper lawn in sight.

But Elliott also saw the southern landscape as it could be: pretty country seats surrounded by tastefully arranged ornamental grounds, approached by winding roads through native forests which were cultivated into parks and groves. Slave cabins were kept at a distance, and homes displayed education, refinement, culture. When you approached the house, instead of dirty pigs you saw members of the family reading or debating in the cool air of the wide verandahs. Elliott concluded with a personal testimony to the refining influence of horticulture on a southern man: “[Horticulture] has opened before me higher views of the beneficence of my Creator, and has taught me the important lesson — a lesson which cannot be too impressed upon an utilitarian age — that over and above the useful, the profitable, the necessary, God has deemed it wise to surround his creatures with the beautiful, the picturesque, the sublime.”<sup>86</sup>

This notion of creating counterlandscapes to the world of the market revolution and “get-aheadism” was a prominent one in the mid-nineteenth century. A.J. Downing, Calvert Vaux, and Frederick Law Olmsted were promoting and designing Central Park in New York City; the

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 149.

Unitarian elites of Boston were laying out Mount Auburn cemetery.<sup>87</sup> But the call to repose and reconsideration of the gifts of nature had a different timbre in the South, where the landscape was still mostly rural. The need was not so much for quiet places in the midst of urban hustle as it was for order and aesthetic sensibility in laying out villages and home landscaping.

Elliott's address, as it turned out, traced the contours of southern horticulture for decades to come, when no one thought more about the aesthetic implications of southern agriculture than horticulturists. When Louis and Prosper Berckmans came to Augusta in 1857, they worked to remedy the South's horticultural backwardness in all the ways Elliott envisioned. They joined a club, started a nursery, wrote in journals, designed landscapes, and bred new varieties of fruits and flowers.

Louis Berckmans joined a club even before he had even settled in the South. In 1853, the *Southern Cultivator* published a "Proposition to the Fruit Growers of Georgia" for a "Georgia Pomological Society" that would meet twice a year as an auxiliary to the Southern Central Agricultural Society. The first meeting was to be August 17, in Athens.<sup>88</sup> William White, the author of *Gardening for the South* and one of the South's two or three preeminent horticulturists at the time, replied in the following issue that a horticultural society would be even better than the more narrowly proposed pomological society, since "Flowers, vegetables and fruits naturally go together," and "He who plants a choice fruit tree will be sure to plant roses if he has not already."<sup>89</sup> In the next issue, as if to further muddy the waters, Stephen Elliott added his own

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<sup>87</sup> Aaron Sachs, "American Arcadia: Mount Auburn Cemetery and the Nineteenth-Century Landscape Tradition," *Environmental History* 15, no. 2 (April 1, 2010): 206–235.

<sup>88</sup> W.H.T., "Georgia Pomological Society," *Southern Cultivator* 11:7 (Jul 1853), 209.

<sup>89</sup> William N. White, "Georgia Pomological Society," *Southern Cultivator* 11:8 (Aug 1853), 243.

voice to the pomological cacophony, and, as Vice President for Georgia of the American Pomological Society, called a meeting in Augusta in October.<sup>90</sup>

The Georgians managed to meet at last in Athens three years later. There they put together their society, electing Stephen Elliott as president; Mark Cooper, William White, and James Camak as officers; and —suggesting that they understood themselves to be part of the national horticultural scene—Louis Berckmans and Patrick Barry as corresponding members.<sup>91</sup> By January 1857 they had settled on a Constitution and By-Laws, and throughout 1857 the society’s reports appeared not only in *The Southern Cultivator* but also *The Horticulturist*.<sup>92</sup> They held their first annual meeting in early August 1857, in Athens just after the State College’s commencement.<sup>93</sup> By 1858, less than a year after the Berckmans’ arrival in the South, Louis Berckmans was president of the GPS, for, as William White put it, “No other man could fill the chair so well.”<sup>94</sup> In his annual report on fruits, Berckmans proclaimed progress: “In respect to correctness, great improvement is manifest the last two years, and we no longer see the same Pear, Apple, &c, exhibited under three or four different names.”<sup>95</sup> Southern pomology — like northern pomology a decade earlier — was finally bringing some order to the haphazard horticultural landscape. Though later Prosper Berckmans remembered the GPS as little more

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<sup>90</sup> Stephen Elliott, “American Pomological Society,” *Southern Cultivator* 11:9 (Sep 1853), 273.

<sup>91</sup> William N. White, “Horticultural Department,” *Southern Cultivator* 14:9 (Sep 1856), 283.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.; White, “Report Upon Grapes of The Committee Ad Interim of The Pomological Society,” *The Horticulturist and Journal of Rural Art and Rural Taste* (Oct 1, 1857), 457.

<sup>93</sup> White, “Report Upon Grapes,” 457.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.; “Pomological Society of Georgia, L.E. Berckmans, President,” *Southern Cultivator* 16:9 (Sep 1858), 286.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

than “a social reunion of a few kindred spirits,” he nevertheless boasted in the 200 distinct fruit varieties displayed at their final meeting in 1860.<sup>96</sup> The GPS was an important beginning.

In 1857, Louis, Prosper, and Prosper’s wife Mary moved to Augusta, Georgia. No detailed records of the proceedings of the GPS survive, but it is easy to imagine the informal arrangements that arose through the Berckmans’ association with this group. Augusta hosted not only the *Southern Cultivator*, but also a short-lived journal, *The Southern Field and Fireside*, for which Prosper Berckmans served as horticultural editor for a short time. Several nurseries already operated there. Augusta was strategic in other ways, too. Swedish traveler Carl Arfwedson ranked it second only to New Orleans in the 1830s. No other southern town, Arfwedson wrote, “has a more agreeable exterior, and inspires the stranger at first with a stronger idea of comfort and wealth than Augusta.” Its situation was “in every respect advantageous: on the borders of two cotton-growing States, and lying close to a navigable river” that fed easily into Savannah and Charleston, the two greatest south Atlantic seaports.<sup>97</sup> Augusta, as its imposing cotton warehouse indicated, grew out of the upland cotton boom: a large proportion of upland cotton from both South Carolina and Georgia passed through Augusta on its way to the sea. And it was an early shipping point for southern peaches. Botanist Henry Ravenel and textile magnate William Gregg both sent peaches from their estates near Aiken, South Carolina, through Augusta. They were among the first to sell Deep South peaches in New York. In all these ways, Augusta was an obvious choice for the Berckmans in 1857.

Augusta was also home to the enterprising Dennis Redmond. Redmond had been a key figure in the development of antebellum southern horticulture, touting the South’s climatic

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<sup>96</sup> Georgia State Horticultural Society, *First Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society*, 8.

<sup>97</sup> Carl David Arfwedson, *The United States and Canada, in 1832, 1833, and 1834* (London: Richard Bentley, 1834) 1: 410-411.

advantages and the need for regional self-reliance in the pages of the *Southern Cultivator*. In 1853, Redmond purchased a 315-acre indigo plantation, turned it into a nursery, and christened it, “Fruitland.” In 1854, he built what architectural historians would describe as a “Louisiana plantation house . . . reminiscent of the West Indies.”<sup>98</sup> It was the perfect home for an improving southern farmer. It was not built of the usual brick or wood, but of concrete, which was, according to Redmond, less susceptible to fire, moisture, and vermin; more suited to the southern climate (cool in summer and warm in winter); and easier to build, requiring only one “mechanic” and a crew of “common field hands”. The ten-foot wrap-around verandahs, ten-foot wide hallways running the length of both floors, and transom lights on the second floor allowed “the freest possible circulation of pure air.”<sup>99</sup> The bottom floor housed workaday rooms: a pantry, storeroom, office, dairy room, and fruit ripening room. The second floor was bedrooms and parlors. A cupola atop the second floor gave Redmond a commanding view of his plantation and workers as well as a “beautiful prospect of the city of Augusta, the opposite hills of South Carolina, and the surrounding country, for many miles.”<sup>100</sup> Fruitland was, in short, the architectural embodiment of the horticultural ethos: practical, business-like, progressive, and yet aesthetically-minded as well.

This was the home that, by degrees, became the Berckmans operations center in the South. In April 1857, Redmond announced an “Important New Arrangement!” with Louis Berckmans which gave him “full access to all the grafts and buds” of “the well known” pomologist’s pear collection. This collection, Redmond boasted, was one of the best in the world, containing “*many*

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<sup>98</sup> Michael Reynolds, “A History of Fruitland Nurseries, Augusta, Georgia and the Berckmans Family in America,” *Magnolia* XVIII, no. 1 (Winter 2002-2003), 3.

<sup>99</sup> Dennis Redmond, “Fruitland,” *Southern Cultivator* 15:8 (Aug 1857), 242.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

*hundred of the best named varieties*” along with “more than *twenty thousand* new seedlings of great promise,” as well as “all the best and rarest varieties of other fruit known in Europe and America.”<sup>101</sup> In January 1858, the firm was officially listed as under the management of “Redmond and Berckmans.”<sup>102</sup> Another advertisement trumpeted, “we are now prepared to furnish a complete succession of native Apples, Peaches, &c. from the earliest to the latest, and of unsurpassed quality. We have, also, a superior collection of Pear Trees, native and foreign — both dwarf and standard, and shall, hereafter, make the Pear one of our special objects of culture.”<sup>103</sup> By October, only P.J. Berckmans’ name was on the advertisements, under which Redmond offered a “hearty thanks” to his readers for their encouragements and endorsed the new proprietors of Fruitland. Redmond, meanwhile, struck out on his own with a business he called, “Vineland,” which sold roots and cuttings of “Grapes for the South!”<sup>104</sup> The editor of the Walterboro (S.C.) *Sun* explained that Redmond had “purchased a beautiful hill-side,” converted it into a vineyard, and was now devoting his attention mostly to grapes.<sup>105</sup> In 1860 the correspondent for the R.G. Dun and Company, an early credit-rating agency, reported that Redmond had “not much means” and lived “pretty well up to his income,” so that he was “slow and hard up for money generally.” Berckmans, meanwhile, was a good businessman — the correspondent had “no hesitation in selling him all he wants to a reasonable extent.”<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Dennis Redmond, “Fruitland Nursery, Augusta Ga.,” *Southern Cultivator* 15:4 (Apr 1857), 136. Redmond also had the assistance at this time of Robert Nelson, a Danish immigrant who had made his name as a nurseryman with his Troup Hill Nursery in Macon, Georgia.

<sup>102</sup> “Fruitland Nursery, Augusta, Geo.” *Southern Cultivator* 16:1 (Jan 1858), 40.

<sup>103</sup> Advertisement, *Southern Cultivator* 16:1 (Jan 1858), 34.

<sup>104</sup> “Grapes for the South,” *Southern Cultivator* 28: 6 (Jun 1860),; 28, 6; 162

<sup>105</sup> “Fruitland and Vineland,” *Southern Cultivator* 28: 6 (Jun 1860), 190.

<sup>106</sup> R.G. Dun and Company Credit Report Volumes, *Georgia, Vol. 1b, Augusta-Richmond Co.*, Credit Report, R.G. Dun & Co. Collection, n.d., 161., Baker Library Historical Collections, Harvard Business School.

Berckmans had the further advantage of marrying well: his wife Mary Craig Berckmans owned real estate worth \$10,000.<sup>107</sup>

In 1858, *Horticulturist* editor Peter Mead described Fruitland Nurseries as “a firm commencing under uncommonly favorable auspices.” Prosper Berckmans, the son of the “well-known pomologist of New Jersey,” would help to build up a “first class Southern nursery” specializing in fruit. “Pomology,” Mead concluded, “is advancing rapidly in that region.”<sup>108</sup> Redmond agreed in 1861, noting with pleasure the “very hopeful and encouraging aspect of Southern Pomology” and anticipating “a degree of activity and success which must greatly redound to the prosperity and happiness of our country.”<sup>109</sup>

By 1861, Berckmans boasted that Fruitland had, along with 900 apple varieties, 300 grapes, 300 peaches, more than 1,300 named varieties of pears plus 10,000 “unproduced seedlings” of pomological luminaries such as Van Mons, Esperen, Dr. Brinckle, and Berckmans himself. Fruitlands thus served as an outpost of European horticulture: Berckmans was “in constant correspondence with the principle European growers” and imported any new variety “at once.” But like Berckmans himself, the nursery also translated that horticultural eminence into practical agriculture for the South. His grounds at Fruitland were extensive enough to “compare and study the influence of soil and aspect upon the same varieties,” he explained. Observing the new fascination with fruit growing in the South, and convinced of the “great importance of depending mostly upon southern seedling fruits” to succeed in this pursuit, Berckmans had taken

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<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>108</sup> “Editor’s Table,” *Horticulturist and Journal of Rural Art and Rural Taste* 8 (Feb 1858), 89.

<sup>109</sup> Dennis Redmond, “Report from the State of Georgia,” *Southern Cultivator* 19:3 (Mar 1861), 92.

“great pains” to sift through all the cultivated varieties and offered only those “well tried as to all their merits.” One could order a Fruitland fruit tree with confidence.<sup>110</sup>

The Civil War interrupted the South’s “rapid advance,” as orchards became battlefields, and fruit trees stood in the line of fire. The physical destruction of the orchards during the war symbolized a deeper violence when it came to horticulture, for who had time for landscape gardens and fine pears when so many southerners were starving? “Unavoidable neglect, and want of a market during the war; and, since its close, the inability of many to cultivate their orchards properly,” a writer for *The Land We Love* summarized in 1867, all “tended to check its progress.”<sup>111</sup>

Sectional strife disrupted what horticulturists had viewed as an essential partnership between North and South.<sup>112</sup> By the 1870s, Berckmans thought the South ready to pursue its horticultural destiny.<sup>113</sup> His Fruitland Nursery—the estate he had purchased from Redmond—was, at over a hundred acres, already one of the largest in the South, and was “apparently making money” in 1875, as the correspondent for R.G. Dun estimated his worth at \$25,000 and pronounced him worthy of large amounts of credit.<sup>114</sup> His public persona expanded along with his wealth: he had served the state agricultural society for several years as chairman of the

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<sup>110</sup> Fruitland Nurseries, *1861 Descriptive Catalog of Fruit and Ornamental Shrubs, Vines, Roses, Evergreens, Bulbous Roots, Green House and Hedge Plants, &c. Cultivated and for Sale at the Fruitland Nurseries* (Augusta, Ga.: James L. Gow, 1860), 3–5.

<sup>111</sup> “Peach Culture,” *The Land We Love* III, no. 3 (July 1867), 257.

<sup>112</sup> Here I disagree with John D. Fair, who portrays southern horticulture as very nationalistic, even autarchic. See “The Georgia Peach and the Southern Quest for Commercial Equity and Independence, 1843-1861,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 86, no. 3 (Fall 2002).

<sup>113</sup> Georgia State Horticultural Society, *First Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society*, 8.

<sup>114</sup> R.G. Dun and Company Credit Report Volumes, *Georgia, Vol. 1b, Augusta-Richmond Co.*, 260.



horticultural committee, and he edited the horticulture department of the Augusta based *Farm and Garden*.<sup>115</sup>

The time was ripe, from Berckmans' point of view, for a separate horticultural organization: not only did the South cry out for the cultural uplift that horticulture could provide, but Berckmans' nursery business stood to make a tidy profit from it.<sup>116</sup> And so, in 1876, a group of men gathered in Macon's Central City Park and chartered the Georgia State Horticultural Society to "promote and encourage the science of Horticulture in all its branches, by the most feasible means," to establish Horticultural Schools, to hold regular exhibitions of the state's products.<sup>117</sup> Berckmans was elected president of the Society, an office he would hold until his death in 1910. It was one of the most enduring societies of its kind in the South.

Having organized the Society that he believed would bring horticultural prosperity to the state and the region, Berckmans took the podium to deliver the inaugural presidential address, touching on themes that would occupy him for the next thirty years. He waxed eloquent on the capacity of fruit growing to deliver not only increased income but also a "refining influence" to Georgia's farmers. The establishment of the GSHS, he assured his audience, heralded a "progressive era" for the state's agriculture.<sup>118</sup> But he also took time in his opening salvo to address more practical questions, delineating, for example, his understanding of the two methods of improving fruits. In "progressive improvement" one simply planted the seeds of the best fruits on the best trees; in "cross impregnation or hybridizing" one actively intervened in sexual

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<sup>115</sup> Range, "P.J. Berckmans: Georgia Horticulturalist," 221, 223.

<sup>116</sup> Berckmans never discussed his vested interests in the horticultural society. More interest in fruits, vegetables, and flowers would certainly have meant more business for nurseries like Fruitland, but it seems unlikely that he was not also motivated by a sincere love for horticulture and a belief in its transformative power.

<sup>117</sup> Georgia State Horticultural Society, *First Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society*, front matter.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

reproduction, taking pollen from one tree to fertilize another.<sup>119</sup> His annual addresses followed a similar pattern for years to come: philosophical meditations, practical advice, and policy recommendations. Berckmans thus assumed the role of the aristocratic educator, taking the fecund but undeveloped Southland and turning it to more civilized pursuits by instructing southerners in the finer points of horticultural practice.

Prosper Berckmans was sensitive to the changing direction of postwar horticulture, a change exemplified in the different careers of pears and peaches in the South. Louis Berckmans' arrival in the South in 1857 heralded the region's promise as a fruit producer. If he had his wish, Augusta would have been the next pear capital of the world. As Dennis Redmond proclaimed to the American Pomological Society in 1859, "We have much reason to believe that in the South only is the Pear destined to arrive at its highest development and perfection." Redmond was confident that Louis Berckmans' efforts to plant pear orchards around South would "give quite an impetus to the culture of this magnificent fruit."<sup>120</sup> Louis bore this confidence out, at least in print, defending the culture of the pear against dismissal because of failure and blight. In July 1859, for example, he delivered an address to the Aiken (S.C.) Vine Growing Association in which he admitted that the suitability of southern pears was a "much controversied subject" even in the North, but argued that with proper cultivation — especially protection of the delicate bark from the "so-called dreaded action of the Southern sun"<sup>121</sup> — the fruit could be a success in the South. Then, he prophesied: "I shall not see the time when the South, from Virginia to Alabama, shall be considered the fruit garden of America, but I am fully convinced that such a time must

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 11, 12.

<sup>120</sup> Dennis Redmond, "The Pomological Resources of the South," *Southern Cultivator* 17:10 (Oct 1859), 314.

<sup>121</sup> L.E. Berckmans, *Pear Culture in the South*, Aiken Vine Growing Association (7 July 1859), 4, 6. In Hargrett Rare Books and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia, Athens.

and shall come, and that thousands of acres, unfit for cultivation of cotton and corn, will be converted into remunerating orchards. All we want,” he concluded, “is a little patience — a rare thing with a *fast* people.”<sup>122</sup> As if to demonstrate his optimism, Louis even named his first home near Augusta “Pearmont.”<sup>123</sup>

But pears never saw much success in the South. Fire blight decimated even the one notable “southern” pear, the LeConte variety, and no lasting market developed for southern pears in the North. Aside from the Berckmans themselves, few southern horticulturists had the resources or the patience to pursue the exacting Van Mons method of successive selection. The same went for Redmond’s efforts at Vineland: southern wine would have to wait until the twenty-first century to make much of a mark.

Instead, southern horticulturists paid more and more attention to an easier fruit: the peach. While pears and grapes had potential, Redmond admitted as early as 1859 that the peach was the fruit of the people. “The South is the true home of the Peach,” he told the American Pomological Society.

It has long been, and is yet, *the* favorite fruit of the people, no less for its intrinsic excellence, than for the ease with which it may be propagated from seed, and the early period at which it comes into bearing. Thousands of the very finest seedling peaches, unnamed and comparatively unknown, are scattered thro’out the South, along the road-sides, in the open fields, and in the remote corners of fences and hedges. The tree will sometimes bear fruit the second year from the seed, and always the third year; and when ‘worked’ succeeds well either grafted or budded.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>123</sup> L. E. Berckmans, “Renovation of Old Trees,” *Southern Cultivator* 17:7 (Jul 1859), 217.

<sup>124</sup> Redmond, “The Pomological Resources of the South,” 314.

In other words, while the pear demanded fastidious care, peaches thrived without any care at all. The Berckmans may have come South for the pear. But they would stay — at least young Prosper would — for the peach.

This transition from diversified horticulture to peach monoculture was gradual. In part the peach's triumph stemmed from the difficulty of the southern environment. Despite the turgid praise heaped on the lavish beneficence of Georgia's climate, its natural advantages were actually quite limited. The southeast's high humidity and warm winters rolled out the welcome mat to insect pests. At the same time, irregular rainfall stressed trees, making them more vulnerable to those pests as well as fungi, bacteria, and viruses. In view of these challenges as well as unpredictable springtime temperatures — with late, killing frosts every few years — fruit growers could not rely upon a profitable harvest. Other horticultural crops succeeded momentarily — apples in northern Georgia in the early twentieth century, wild goose plums in the cotton belt in the late nineteenth — but only peaches remained commercially viable for long. *Prunus persica* adapts easily and grows vigorously, and the fuzz helps protect the fruit from some of the South's abundant insects and pathogens.

The other factor that forced horticulturists to relinquish their visions of diversified permanence in favor of simple peach growing was the labor force. As the trauma of the civil war faded, Berckmans and other agricultural improvers began to see it as something of a blessing. He couched this conviction carefully, in horticultural and not societal terms, but one can see the emergence of a southern middle class sentiment here, distinct from — but not willing to directly offend — the planting elite. The Civil War, by destroying slavery, laid a new foundation for horticulture in the South. At least this is how Berckmans later remembered it: "farming upon a smaller scale followed as a natural consequence of this change [emancipation] in our labor," he

argued in 1876. "Fruit growing, which to the cotton planter was a secondary matter, [became] one of great solicitude to the farmer" only since the end of the war.<sup>125</sup>

Berckmans' counterintuitive logic requires some unpacking. How, exactly, did emancipation help the horticultural cause? The more dominant note in the immediate postbellum period was uncertainty if not outright despair. An exchange on "The Labor Question" in the Augusta-based *Farmer and Gardener* – for which Prosper Berckmans was the horticultural editor – illustrates this point. A letter writer known only as "Agricola" argued that "negro labor is better adapted to our cotton growing States, and must succeed better" than any "introduced" groups.<sup>126</sup> Agricola made familiar arguments about the physical superiority of former slaves for working in the "almost tropical" climate of the cotton belt – though he offered some additional specious evidence about the "thick and woolly covering of his *cranium*" designed to "fit him for the midsummer rays." The only question for this writer, then, was whether freedman labor could be as efficient as slave. He thought all that was needed was for planters to "organize into societies and pass suitable resolutions" to require recommendations from former employers. In reply, the editor of *Farmer and Gardener* accepted Agricola's premises – physical adaptation of black labor – but scoffed at the idea of societies and resolutions giving planters sufficient control over labor. The *Farmer and Gardener* was a consistent defender of immigrant labor. The freedmen were reliable enough, he said, but the "young negro" promised to become a "worthless, idle vagabond." Without white immigrant workers, the South's "fruitful fields" would become "barren wildernesses."<sup>127</sup> Virginia historian Philip Bruce also lamented the instability of younger

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<sup>125</sup> Georgia State Horticultural Society, *First Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society*, 9.

<sup>126</sup> "The Labor Question," *The Farmer and Gardener* (10 June 1871), 4.

<sup>127</sup> "The Labor Question in the Future -- Immigration," *The Farmer and Gardener* (10 August 1871), 4.

workers: “They drift around the country in gangs in search of work that will assure them the highest wages,” Bruce complained, “and to a certain degree become mere tramps.”<sup>128</sup>

There was a silver lining to this unpredictability, however, for the growing of specialty crops. The seasonal extremes of labor demand for fruits and vegetables, according to Bruce, comported nicely with “the preference of the negro in a state of freedom for work that is not continuous.”<sup>129</sup> Another celebrant of southern truck farming pointed out that truck farm labor required little retraining. However “ignorant and inefficient”, Wells Sherman contended, “the negro was a hand laborer.”<sup>130</sup> Anyone who could pick cotton could pick strawberries or peaches. Savannah truck farmer Arminius Oemler went so far as to declare that the “death of slavery was, so to speak, the birth of truck farming on an extensive scale” in the South, for “it would otherwise have been impossible.” The truck farmer could not have maintained enough slaves to harvest his crops and still make a profit. Emancipation, according to Oemler (himself a former slave-owner), had created the perfect supply of seasonal labor, sufficiently under-employed to supply the truck farmer “during the pressing season of gathering his crops.”<sup>131</sup> And in the cotton belt, as growers would discover, the peach harvest could not have been more perfectly timed, coming as it did in midsummer just before the cotton harvest. Labor throughout the rural South was cheap and easy to find, particularly at that moment in the season.

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<sup>128</sup> Philip Alexander Bruce, *The Rise of the New South*, ed. Guy Carlton Lee, vol. 17, *The History of North America* (Philadelphia: G. Barrie & Sons, 1905), 25.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 17:64.

<sup>130</sup> Wells Alvord Sherman, *Merchandising Fruits and Vegetables; a New Billion Dollar Industry* (Chicago: A. W. Shaw, 1928), 35.

<sup>131</sup> Arminius Oemler, *Truck-Farming at the South: A Guide to the Raising of Vegetables for Northern Markets* (New York: Orange Judd, 1883), 8. Arminius Oemler, *Truck-Farming at the South: A Guide to the Raising of Vegetables for Northern Markets*, rev. ed. (New York: Orange Judd, 1910), 8.

The postbellum years thus marked a change in horticultural knowledge, from the gentlemanly expertise of the antebellum South to the more single-minded commercialism of the New South. It also brought a parting of Louis and Prosper Berckmans. The separation of the Berckmans men paralleled the more general change in horticulture.

In 1870, Louis completed his about-face from his days as a dashing military officer by settling, alone, in a one-room cottage atop Mount Alto, near Rome. There he lived as part of the small Belgian colony pioneered by his friend L.J.B. LeHardy some twenty years earlier, and kept his neighbors puzzled by his “interesting” habits. In his “little vine-clad cottage” he kept a “classic library” and paintings of generals from his military days in Belgium, while his grounds blossomed with fruit trees and flowers.<sup>132</sup> “I wish you could come up and enjoy the fine peaches and pears,” he wrote to his grandsons in 1880. “I wish you could come here to see the beautiful landscape all around, and walk over the trails of our rugged mountains.”<sup>133</sup> His favorite dish was a mixture of rice, lemons, and apples, and he never drank, even when offering “delicious wines” to visitors. He smoked a mixture of tobacco and homegrown rose leaves in a pipe. He walked everywhere he went, even into old age, and one Rome resident remembered him as unmatched in “physical ability and vigor.”

But deep sadness hung over his days. He would not speak of his second wife Elizabeth, and seemed to miss his first wife Marie too much to speak of her. When a neighbor inquired about his wistful countenance after a violin solo, he said simply: “My first wife, the mother of

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<sup>132</sup> The foregoing comes from a transcript of a news article, Donald Harper, “The Hermit of Alto,” dated 1888; Louis E. Berckmans, and an obituary by great granddaughter Anne Berckmans, dated June 14, 1997; both in Rome Area Archives, Rome, GA.

<sup>133</sup> L.E. Berckmans, letter to Robert and Allie Berckmans, 10 February 1880. Rome Area Archives, Rome, GA.

Prosper, my dear boy, was an angel from heaven.”<sup>134</sup> In one letter to his grandsons Robert and Allie, who had just witnessed a shooting at the University of Georgia in Athens, he lamented the event as a “fatality for which you could not provide.” Then his reflections took a philosophical turn: “our best wisdom cannot provide against [accidents],” he wrote. “We get into *scrapes* without our doings or knowledge, and happy is he or she indeed, who safely goes through this world, full of dangers and pitfalls, before his pilgrimage is ended.” Then, on a personal note, he added: “My retired life is at least comparatively secure and I mix not with men and society, in order to escape scores of annoyances and perils.” He concluded, bleakly, “This world is a battlefield filled with unknown perils.” Even Jesus had to submit to them.<sup>135</sup>

Locals called him “The Hermit of Mt. Alto,” a description he acknowledged in letters to his three grandsons when they were in school. “I live most retired,” he wrote to Robert and Allie Berckmans in 1882, “pay scarcely any visits to neighbors, and keep busy with my plants and trees.” He visited Fruitland rarely, in part because there he did not have a “*real private room*” with a fireplace. (At Fruitlands, “they do not believe in fireplaces!”, he complained.)<sup>136</sup> He declined to meet the headmaster of their school. “I do not go to public gatherings any more as I had too much of that during my long life,” he explained, “and I hate crowds, and public celebrations of all kinds.”<sup>137</sup>

While his father lived in a twelve by fifteen foot room, Prosper filled the expansive Fruitlands mansion and grounds with activity. He dedicated himself to building the nursery

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<sup>134</sup> Donald Harper, “The Hermit of Alto,” dated 1888; Louis E. Berckmans, obituary Anne Berckmans, dated June 14, 1997; both in Rome Area Archives, Rome, GA.

<sup>135</sup> L.E. Berckmans to Robert and Allie Berckmans, 13 April 1882. Transcript in Rome Area Archives, Rome, GA.

<sup>136</sup> L.E. Berckmans, letter to Robert and Allie Berckmans, 6 November 1882. Rome Area Archive, Rome, GA.

<sup>137</sup> L.E. Berckmans letter to Robert and Allie Berckmans, 11 August 1880. Rome Area Archive, Rome, GA.



business and reshaping the southern landscape at Augusta. Prosper Berckmans kept in contact with his father — Louis’ letters are full of references to updates on the grandsons, especially — but there is a hint of sadness as well. Sometime in 1868, as he made the rounds in his orchards, a line of poetry came to him. In his orchard notebook, among drawings of gooseberry varieties and lists of pear seedlings, he hastily scrawled this couplet from William Wordsworth’s “Resolution and Independence” (1807):

We Poets in our youth begin in gladness;  
But thereof in the end come despondency and madness.<sup>138</sup>

Wordsworth referred to a melancholy mood that had fallen upon him as he considered the suffering that might be in store for one like him who had lived “As if life’s business were a summer mood; / As if all needful things would come unsought.” But he came upon an elderly leech-gatherer who earned an honest but paltry living wandering the moor gathering leeches, who impressed Wordsworth with his “stately” purposefulness in his lonely trade. Like the leech-gatherer, Louis Berckmans lived his last years in solitude. This retirement did not guarantee protection from suffering, Berckmans acknowledged, but “if misfortune befalls me, I will at least have the proven consolation that I did not seek them.”<sup>139</sup> Twenty months after Louis Berckmans sent those words to his grandsons, on December 5, 1883, he returned to Fruitland. The next day, he walked to Augusta and back, a total distance of about three miles. The next day, December 7, he died, at age 82.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Prosper J. Berckmans, “Prosper J. Berckmans Orchard Notebook” (Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries, n.d.), MS 1261, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries. William Wordsworth, “Resolution and Independence,” *The Complete Poetical Works*, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1888; Bartleby.com, 1999), accessed 12 November 2010 at [www.bartleby.com/145/](http://www.bartleby.com/145/).

<sup>139</sup> L.E. Berckmans to Robert and Allie Berckmans, 13 April 1882, Rome Area Archives, Rome, GA.

<sup>140</sup> Ann Berckmans, “Dr. Louis Mathieu Eduard Berckmans,” April 27, 1969, Rome Area Archives, Rome, GA.

A few months later, Prosper returned to Europe, taking along his wife Mary and his son Prosper Jules Alphonse, Jr (“Allie”) for a three month jaunt through England, Belgium, France, Switzerland, and Germany. Allie was just a year younger than Prosper when he had come to America in 1850; like his father, he too kept a trip diary. But the two journals were worlds apart. Whereas the father’s diary was earnest, almost obsessive in its careful records and plant lists, looking always for financial opportunity, the son’s was casual, irreverent, careless, expressing the easy confidence of a successful businessman’s son. They did their part as tourists, visiting cathedrals, churches, art museums, parks, and castles. He witnessed the still-unfinished Palais du Justice, “one of the finest buildings in Europe” and a late harvest of Belgian King Leopold II’s brutal occupation of the Congo.<sup>141</sup> But Allie seemed just as interested in going out dancing with women: the “peasant girls” at a village feast, one Louise Morehead, a party of “seven young ladies,” a “real pretty girl” whose husband was “so stiff” Allie wanted to choke him.<sup>142</sup>

Rather than looking forward into the family’s future, as Prosper had done during his 1850 voyage, Prosper Jr. peered into the family’s past. When they were not visiting tourist sites or carrying on business with other nurserymen, they stayed with family and friends in Belgium, at Heyst-op-den-Berg, Iteghem, and Lier. “I thought we would never get done meeting old acquaintances,” Allie complained.<sup>143</sup> Still he praised their liberal hospitality, even from the half-dozen or so old family servants, who offered the Berckmans so many quarts of beer they barely made it back to their quarters.<sup>144</sup> He saw his father’s birthplace, the paternal estate of his

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<sup>141</sup> Prosper Jules Alphonse Berckmans, Jr., “Trip Diary 1884,” (Prosper Jules Alphonse Berckmans Collection, Cherokee Garden Library, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, GA) 6.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

recently-departed grandfather, and the uniform of one of the men who died fighting beside Louis in 1832.<sup>145</sup>

It was probably during these visits to the old castles that Allie copied down information on the family's history of nobility. The coat of arms featured a birch tree in between two human figures; "berck" was Flemish for "birch" and "mans" Flemish for "men."<sup>146</sup> Thus the Berckmans were "birch men" — men of trees. When Louis named his son Prosper he prophesied. Prosper Jules Alphonse Berckmans was the man who prospered from trees.

The question remained as to whether trees would also prosper the South.

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 5, 7.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., inside cover.

## CHAPTER 3

### SAMUEL RUMPH PLANTS A SEED

Samuel Rumph intended to arrive early to the annual meeting of the Georgia State Horticultural Society in Augusta. It had been ten years since Berckmans, Rumph, and the other horticulturists had met in Macon to found the society, and now, for the first time, they were coming to Berckmans' home territory. Rumph was a young horticulturist, one of the Society's brightest stars. From his Willow Lake estate near Marshallville, Georgia, he served as GSHS vice president of the third congressional district, or middle Georgia. Due in large part to Rumph's nursery and fruit business, the district had acquired a reputation as the foremost fruit growing region in the state.

Rumph departed Willow Lake on Monday, July 27, intending to arrive in Augusta that evening. When he got on the train, however, he discovered that his fruit would be detained, so he spent the night, with his fruit, in Macon. No need to entrust one's fruit to the railroad for any longer than necessary; one really could not take too much care. After his arrival Tuesday around 4 o'clock, the task of unpacking the fruit took up the entire evening. The next day, Berckmans, with whom Rumph expected to spend "the balance of the time," informed Rumph that he "must not leave until Friday evening" as Berckmans wanted him "on hand at his house on Friday" for the big Society bash he planned to host there. This had not been Rumph's plan. So, the dutiful husband sat down that evening, pulled out a piece of office stationery — the kind with the red engraved watermark of a Shockley Apple and the letterhead introducing Samuel H. Rumph as

the proprietor of Willow Lake Nursery in Marshallville, where he grew and dealt in “Fruit Trees and Fresh and Evaporated Fruit” — and wrote to his wife Clara Elberta Moore Rumph. He had been married for almost eleven years; their daughter Clara was nine years old.

“My Dear Little Wife,” he began, using his customary salutation. He explained the situation with his fruit and Berckmans’ request that he stay longer. He expected to be home Saturday morning, though he promised to write again if he decided to leave earlier. He seemed to feel badly about this, so he concluded with two appeals to her good nature. First, he gave her a preview of the fruit exhibit competition: “So far W. Lake has the best show of Apples & Peaches,” he wrote, as if to say that his long absence was paying off in horticultural success. Second, he apologized. “I am sorry to be compelled to stay so long from my little darling,” he wrote, “but I think it would be best for me to spend Friday with Berckmans.”<sup>1</sup>

As it turned out, the 1885 meeting was a good one for Rumph. His fruit display dwarfed all the others, even Berckmans’, with fifty-eight peach varieties, forty-five apples, thirteen pears, ten grapes, two pomegranates and one quince. On Thursday, the examining committee mentioned Rumph’s exhibit first in each category, praising his “fine specimens” of Carter’s Blue Elgin Pippin, Jewett’s Best, and Red June apples; his Clapp’s Favorite pear; and his large Elberta peaches.<sup>2</sup> Willow Lake’s peaches and apples *were* the best that year. And not only did Rumph win the compliments of the fruit committee, but he also earned the public approbation of Berckmans himself. In a Wednesday discussion of the relative merits of seedling and grafted peaches, Rumph spoke in favor of grafted peaches, provided that they were cultivated frequently. Berckmans was pleased with this defense of proper horticulture, and, like a proud father,

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel H. Rumph to Clara Elberta Moore Rumph, July 29, 1885. Deanna and Sam Grice Personal Collection, Snellville, Georgia.

<sup>2</sup> Georgia State Horticultural Society, *Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society*, vol. 10 (Atlanta, GA: James P. Harrison and Co., 1885), 49–50.

proclaimed that “Mr. Rumph had struck the real secret in the cultivation of his peaches.” His frequent cultivation of his orchards “was the reason of his great and continued success.”<sup>3</sup> Little wonder then, that Rumph’s district report struck a high note, despite the wet spring and low quality harvest. “The interest taken in this immediate vicinity in fruit culture . . . continues without abating,” he observed. “[T]his is destined to be the largest shipping point in the State.”<sup>4</sup>

And in 1885 at least, Rumph’s horticultural success did not prevent him from fulfilling his familial obligations. Berckmans had the Society out to Fruitlands on Thursday afternoon, so presumably Rumph returned to his “little darling” on Friday, ahead of schedule. And the meeting itself began with M.P. Foster’s welcome, which exhorted the men to prove their masculinity with more attention to their homes. “I venture to express the opinion,” said Foster, “that while it may not be and is not the duty of every man who possesses land to raise more [fruits and vegetables] it is an imperative obligation resting upon him that he should at least produce as much as may be consumed by them.” It was not just bad economics to buy what one could grow, said Foster, it was “a shame upon our manhood” and a “monstrous neglect” of their children. And then, apparently unable to control his “sorrow, tinged with anger,” Foster confessed the sins of his generation. There were “acres immediately surrounding many homes, grown up in weeds, suffered to continue their noxious growth until they sap the vigor and strength of sturdy manhood, and steal the ruddy glow of health from the cheeks of the wife and children.” Worse, the houses themselves were completely bare of flowers, the sacred “messengers between earth and heaven” yet not deemed precious enough by southern men to “increase their ever-increasing beauties.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 10:39.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 10:35.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 10:27–28.

Foster in all his circumlocutory glory captured a sentiment close to the heart of the horticultural enterprise in the South: that the home was a primary front in the battle for southern civilization. Society secretary T.L. Kinsey called it a “beautiful address”; Dr. William Jones thought it a “soft speech” unlike any the horticulturists had heard.<sup>6</sup> It was as if he felt called to model the task to which he called the farmers, never leaving his words plain, but gilding them with periphrasis, never using a single word when two were available. And while Samuel Rumph’s reaction to Foster’s homily is lost to us, his life made him the exemplar of this horticultural ideal.

In the wake of Reconstruction, the men of Prosper Berckmans’ horticultural society provided one answer to the question of what should be done to rebuild the South. On the one hand, horticulturists embraced the language of beauty. They planted flowers. They nurtured fine fruits and delivered them to distant markets, delicate and fragrant like debutantes at a ball. On the other, they espoused the principles of business and science. They made money. They replaced tangled thickets of seedling fruits with orderly orchards of named varieties; they cleared away genetic anarchy with the hierarchical pronouncements of their annual Catalogue.

Their association with fruit and flowers fell short of the rugged masculinity of the late 1800s, but they reclaimed their manhood with the character of their association with these things — by managing their fruit and flowers with scientific expertise and business acumen. The planter oversaw vast cotton plantations with the labor of his slaves; the horticulturist cultivated more intimate spaces with his own expert attention to detail. And so we move from the European nursery-estate of an aristocratic Belgian migrant, to the home life, plant breeding skill, and business sense of a middle Georgia native. In the story of Samuel Rumph, we see the incarnation

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 10:28.

of Prosper Berckmans' vision for the South. His story also reveals the New South campaign of the 1880s as more than a series of appeals for northern investment in southern industrialization. The New South campaign also had a significant environmental component, a rural aesthetic sketched out in general terms by boosters like Henry Grady but articulated precisely and lived out concretely by the horticulturists – above all, by Samuel Rumph. A set of stories developed around his rise that we might call the fable of Sam Rumph.

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*Once upon a time, there was a poor orphan named Sam. His brother died on the day Sam was born. His father died when Sam was but one year old. His grief-stricken mother went to live with relatives. So Sam grew up in the house of his grandparents Lewis and Maria.*

*When he was just six years old, his grandfather Lewis received a gift from a relative, a small collection of six named peach trees from a Delaware nursery: Chinese Cling, Early and Late Crawford, Stump the World, Oldmixon Free, and Tillotson. These were set out not far from the house, in the family orchard. The Chinese Cling became the family favorite for the quality of its fruit. One day after the family had enjoyed the delicious pale flesh, Maria washed and dried some of the pits, dropped them in a work basket, and forgot them for the next twelve years.<sup>7</sup>*

*But young Sam was taken with the idea of fruit growing. So he “begged for a few acres” to pursue his fruit hobby and received a “somewhat unprofitable sandy farm.”<sup>8</sup> There, with nothing to guide him but faith in his solitary work, he pursued his “Utopian dream.” Worms and blight besieged him at every turn, so that “year after year it seemed he was pursuing a barren hope.”<sup>9</sup> But he worked very, very hard. “He watched every tree, improved every graft, developed every*

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<sup>7</sup> Medora Field Perkerson, *White Columns in Georgia* (New York: Rinehart, 1952), 294.

<sup>8</sup> “The Georgia Peach,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 5, 1896, sec. 16; “Some Inside Facts About Georgia’s Fruit Industry,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, June 28, 1908, sec. A2.

<sup>9</sup> Pleasant A. Stovall, “The Land of the Fruit Grower,” *Macon Telegraph* (8 August 1895), 4.



*promising peach, and looked after his shipments.” He was so busy and determined that for years he ate breakfast with the family only on Sundays and refused to “indulge in late morning naps.”<sup>10</sup>*

*Seeing his interest, Maria showed the ambitious eighteen-year old the seeds she had saved. She didn’t even know if they would come up, but they were his grandfather’s favorites. The next year, 1870, he obliged and planted them in his nursery, and a few years later it became clear that he had a winner: a fruit with the firm flesh of the Chinese Cling, but a freestone. “It could be broken in half with the hands.” The “honeybees and the vagrant breezes of a long ago springtime had blended an even more subtle magic.”<sup>11</sup> Following its instinct, a honeybee had flown from flower to flower in the Rumph’s grove of named varieties. Bathed in pollen from Crawford, Stump-the-World, Oldmixon and Tillotson flowers, this bee of fortune landed on a Chinese Cling blossom and rubbed that pollen mixture onto the pistil, and by some mysterious process just the right pollen grains fertilized the ovum. And thus was born the queen of peaches, which Sam named “Elberta” in honor of his wife Clara Elberta. He then sold it throughout the 1880s and 1890s in the markets of New York City and made a small fortune. “Planning produced it — observation secured it — a Georgia boy to the ‘manor born’ did the planning and observing.”<sup>12</sup>*

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<sup>10</sup> “Peach and Grape,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 28, 1895, sec. 5. See also J.W. Frederick, “History of the Elberta Peach-Tree,” in W.B. Meritt, ed., *Selections for Arbor Day in the Schools of Georgia* (Atlanta: Georgia Department of Education, 1904), 11.

<sup>11</sup> Perkerson, *White Columns in Georgia*, 294. Medora Field Perkerson, *White Columns in Georgia* (New York: Rinehart, 1952), 292-298.

<sup>12</sup> J.W. Frederick, “History of the Elberta Peach-Tree,” 11.

“The story of the Elberta,” wrote the USDA’s chief pomologist in 1908, “reads like a romance.”<sup>13</sup> Rumph’s story was a kind of allegory for the rise of the New South, revealing the hopes for an aesthetically-pleasing rural New South as well as an industrial and commercial one. That the fable coalesced and persisted as it did testifies in part to the paucity of sources on Rumph’s life. His 1885 letter to his wife Clara Elberta Rumph is one of only a few surviving personal effects: a business card, a handful of similar letters, a will, a desk, and a hand-hewn model of a refrigerated box car complete the collection.<sup>14</sup> Contemporary accounts in newspapers and horticultural society meetings provide some additional information, as do family memories, but unlike Prosper Berckmans, Rumph was a reluctant speaker. He never gave formal addresses at horticultural society meetings, and his newspaper interviews were unforthcoming. He seemed content to let others fill in the details and meaning of his life. Rumph’s successes might “read like a fairy tale,” said one correspondent for the *Atlanta Constitution*, “but they only show the possibilities ahead of a man who has the vim to make them and the intelligence to handle them.”<sup>15</sup> Each the fable’s parts — family, breeding, and business — had kernels of truth, but a careful examination reveals a more complicated story.

To begin with, Samuel Rumph’s family life was far more encompassing than the fable allows. His brother Edwin, only a year old, did apparently die the same year (perhaps the same day) of Samuel’s birth, and his father died a year later. The Macon County administrator auctioned off Samuel Sr.’s real estate, two slaves named John and Mary, and all his “perishable property.” By January 1853, everything from his livestock to his shotgun belonged to someone

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<sup>13</sup> Col. G.B. Brackett, “The Peach Industry in Georgia,” in Georgia State Horticultural Society, *Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society*, vol. 27 (Augusta, GA: Press of the Augusta Chronicle, 1908), 16.

<sup>14</sup> I am indebted to Deanna and Sam Grice for sharing their personal collection of Rumph ephemera with me.

<sup>15</sup> “Peach and Grape.”

else. Before Samuel was ten years old, his mother Caroline had left as well, to live with cousins in Copiah County, Mississippi.<sup>16</sup>

But Samuel Rumph was not alone. His grandparents Lewis and Maria raised him, and their status and history in middle Georgia gave him a solid start in life. The Rumphs, along with a dozen other families—Strothers, Hileys, Murphs, Slappeys, Plants, Kaiglers, Fredericks and others — had emigrated from Germany and Holland in the 1730s and settled in Orangeburg District, South Carolina. They governed Orangeburg as county officers and policed it with local militias that became famous for daring exploits against the Tories during the American Revolution.<sup>17</sup> Yet once middle Georgia became available — once the Creek Indians had been forcibly removed — they branched out readily. The first Orangeburg migrants came in 1821 or so; the Rumphs moved with another set of families in 1832. Like the plantation landscape itself, Rumph’s people were on the move in the 1820s and 30s.

In Marshallville they grew cotton, and did so successfully. Slaves made up more than a third of the population in the 1840s and 1850s.<sup>18</sup> By 1850, Samuel Rumph’s grandfather Lewis, one of the original settlers of Marshallville, was worth upwards of \$30,000 and owned sixty-four slaves. Unlike many of their contemporaries, however, who stopped in Georgia for a few years before going further west for richer lands, the Orangeburg families’ “western fever” seemed to dissipate in Georgia. They had abandoned Orangeburg together; once in the Marshallville area, they tarried together, too, and their names remain prominent in the area today, nearly two

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<sup>16</sup> William M. Haslam, “Announcement,” *Macon Telegraph* (Macon, GA, July 12, 1853), 3; Ancestry.com, *1860 United States Federal Census* (Provo, UT: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2009), Copiah, Mississippi, roll M653\_580, page 895, image 411, Family History Library Film 803580.

<sup>17</sup> Alexander Samuel Salley et al., *The History of Orangeburg County, South Carolina: From Its First Settlement to the Close of the Revolutionary War* (R.L. Berry, printer, 1897), 471f.

<sup>18</sup> Louise Frederick Hays, *History of Macon County, Georgia* (Spartanburg, S.C.: Reprint Co., 1979), 157. The numbers in 1845 were 5,194 total and 1,870 slaves.

centuries later. Like immigrants from another land, the Orangeburg families intermarried, partnered in business, and generally strengthened the networks they brought with them rather than remaking them in their new place. John Donald Wade, a scion of one of these families (the Fredericks), later wrote that Marshallville in the 1860s seemed a “just launched extension of 1830 South Carolina, a South Carolina with its lands still unexhausted, its population still unbled by the great migrations.”<sup>19</sup> As late as 1900, Wade reported, mixed marriages – when one of the spouses was not of Carolina origin – met with resistance from the original families. When one of those old-timers was “utterly outdone but too pious to exclaim violently,” he would comfort himself with the thought that “after all he was no longer in Carolina, and could not expect things to be just right elsewhere.”<sup>20</sup>

Samuel Rumph grew up in the heart of this tightknit community; fire he was a child of the cotton plantation. His grandfather Lewis was a major planter, one of the largest in middle Georgia. His great-grandfather Jacob had been a militia captain in Orangeburg and Brigadier General of the South Carolina militia, and the family still took pride in his dramatic exploits on behalf of the Revolutionary Army. He came of age too late to make his mark militarily as his great-grandfather had done, and in the meantime the slaves that had been the basis of his grandfather’s wealth were suddenly free to stay or go as they wished. How would Samuel Rumph live up to his paternal heritage? What was a young man of the postbellum South to do?

Rumph used his family’s wealth and prominence to his advantage. While many men of his age struck out for cities or western lands, Samuel Rumph dug in deeper in Marshallville. At age eighteen, he took the job of managing his grandfather’s farm, and in 1870 he was already personally worth \$8,500. He was surrounded by about seventy black farm laborers and domestic

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<sup>19</sup> John Donald Wade, “Marshallville,” in *ibid.*, 219.

<sup>20</sup> John Donald Wade, *The Marshallville Methodist Church: From Its Beginning to 1950* (1952), 7.

workers, including one Samuel Rumph, who was about the age of the white Samuel Rumph's father.<sup>21</sup> It appears that the white Rumphs continued to employ the same African American families who had served them as slaves. Samuel Rumph's ancestors had given him high expectations; they had also left him the gift of abundant land and labor.

He pursued these opportunities within the orbit of family life. His grandfather Lewis Rumph married again, late in life, this time to Maria Kaigler, who was Samuel's maternal grandmother. Lewis and Maria had two children. One of these, Lewis Adolphus, was raised practically as Samuel's brother, but he was actually Samuel's double half-uncle — half brother to Samuel's father and his mother. If it were possible to confuse matters any further, the Rumphs appeared determined to do so: in 1874 Lewis Adolphus and Samuel Henry Rumph married sisters, Virginia Rebecca and Clara Elberta Moore, in a double wedding ceremony.<sup>22</sup> In making of Marshallville a permanent home, the Rumphs and the other Orangeburg families provided a model of agrarian stability that the next generation would laud as the standard. Marshallville became a touchstone for John Donald Wade and the Southern Agrarians' critique of "industrialism" in the 1930s, but that is a story for a later chapter.

By staying put, Samuel Rumph fulfilled the dreams of a generation of agricultural reformers. Rumph's decisions mapped closely to their prescriptions for rural development; he behaved as if heeding the calls for both permanence and diversification. Even better, he did so in middle Georgia, which at that time had only been cultivated by white planters for a generation or two. These planters sought to wring as much cotton out of the soil as possible, and the consequences for the southern landscape were grave. "It is sickening," Stephen Elliott growled in

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<sup>21</sup> Ancestry.com, *1870 United States Federal Census* (Provo, UT: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2009), Houston, Georgia, Roll M593\_158, Page 120B, Image 244, Family History Library Film 545657.

<sup>22</sup> See Louise Frederick Hays, *The Rumph and Frederick Families, Genealogical and Biographical* (J. T. Hancock, 1942).

1851, “to behold [middle Georgia’s] deformed appearance.” Settlers, rather than improving the landscape’s “curve line of beauty” had allowed it to decay into the “rugged wrinkles of an early decrepitude,” throwing up the “most wretched specimens of architecture” on their “bare red hills.”<sup>23</sup>

Many farmers abandoned their plantations, seeking the undiminished fertility of recently widowed western lands. But reformers urged farmers to turn instead toward innovation and development, to manage smaller areas with greater care and attention. For W.B. Jones of Herndon, Georgia, the declining soils and “fast disappearing demoralized labor” had sounded the death knell of “that exhaustive, diffusive system of tillage.” The future held promise only for “[s]mall areas, with intensive manuring and thorough cultivation.” Jones and the horticulturists praised this new age of limits. This kind of cultivation would be “less risky and laborious, less wear and tear upon soil, human and brute muscle, promising more of the real comforts of a home living.”<sup>24</sup> William Browne, a professor of Agriculture and Natural History at the State University, concurred. “The time is gone by when we can abandon our farms to overseers and negroes,” he averred. “Yes, gentlemen, we must live upon our farms.”<sup>25</sup>

Samuel Rumph, of course, was doing just this. It would be hard to overstate the importance of this decision. According to the reformers, the first step in “development” — in making a civilization out of this late wilderness — was to remain in place. For how would the South develop unless people chose not to move on? A story told at the 1892 GSHS meeting illustrated

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<sup>23</sup> Stephen Elliott, Jr., “Address on Horticulture,” in *Transactions of the Southern Central Agricultural Society, from Its Organization in 1846 to 1851* (Macon, GA: B.F. Griffin, 1852), 141.

<sup>24</sup> W.B. Jones, “Growing Vegetables and Seed for Home and Distant Markets—New Industries in the Agriculture of Georgia,” in Georgia State Horticultural Society, *Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society*, vol. 8 (Augusta, GA: James L. Gow, 1883), 19–20.

<sup>25</sup> William M. Browne, “Address on Ornamental Gardening,” in Georgia State Horticultural Society, *Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society*, vol. 7 (Atlanta, GA: James P. Harrison and Co., 1882), 20.

this point. Garland Mitchell Ryals of Chatham County (Savannah) was delivering a paper about “Truck Farming on the Coast Lands.” Ryals had been a Confederate cavalryman and a state legislator; one reporter christened him the “fat genius of Chatham” who “labors and legislates with 325 pounds of flesh.” When a reporter asked him how a man his size kept cool in the humid lowlands of coastal Georgia, Ryals responded, “I keep cool by keeping a clean conscience, and by getting up soon in the morning, so that I have to wait on the hens for my breakfast.”<sup>26</sup> It was an August afternoon in Rome, Georgia, when he gave his paper at the GSHS in 1892, so one imagines he was not keeping cool.

Toward the end of his paper, having described the best practices of location, machinery, preparation, fertilizers, labor, seed, and shipping, Ryals told a story of traveling through Virginia (his birthplace) with his brother. Driving through rolling country, they came to a place “entirely different from anything we had seen” which turned out to be the property of “that crazy fellow Morepaw,” as he was known locally. Morepaw, it seems, had determined to raise tomatoes and early crops in a countryside where no one did that, and everyone thought he was wasting his time. A few years later Ryals and his brother made the same trip. They came to a section “dotted with engines and immense boilers, with an air of thrift and enterprise about everything.” Crazy old Morepaw had turned out to be a prophet, and now twenty-odd imitators had joined him in the truck and canning business. Then Ryals offered the story’s moral:

Thus you see what one man accomplished in reference to canning fruit. He found land in abundance and labor cheap. He had sense enough to take in the situation. Those old moss-backs had sat down there and let things go to rack and ruin. When this man Morepaw came here with his new ideas he was despised of all. But in time he became the king bee of that country.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> “G.M. Ryals,” Georgia Historical Society Notebooks, Savannah, Georgia.

<sup>27</sup> Georgia State Horticultural Society, *Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society*, vol. 17 (Atlanta, GA: James P. Harrison and Co., 1893), 29.

Samuel Rumph was the “Morepaw” of Macon County, but he had an advantage over Morepaw, peanut growers, and other diversifying farmers: what we might call “the horticultural mystique.” Truck farming expanded at the same time as peaches, but few (Morepaw notwithstanding) grew famous with tomatoes or asparagus, though they could be quite profitable. Peaches imbued Rumph’s saga with beauty.

Fruit resonated culturally in various, sometimes contradictory ways. Peaches had come originally (and, in the case of the Chinese Cling variety, recently) from China, and the scientific name conjured up Persia. This association fit nicely with the Americans’ fascination with Asia in the late nineteenth century.<sup>28</sup> Though the fruit had been feral since the eighteenth century, horticulturists frequently portrayed them as exotic. Atlantan Samuel Hape called the peach “the child of the East, thousands of miles from her native land,” though the fruit was “nevertheless so pleased with her home in this beautiful, sunny Southland that occasionally she smiles on her new home and rewards with rich gifts her ardent admirers.”<sup>29</sup>

On the other hand, fruit growing had distinctly European connotations, and orchards seemed to these reformers a necessary part of building a European-style civilization in newly opened American lands. Thus homesteading law required the establishment of an orchard, and John Chapman (Johnny Appleseed) became a national hero for his fruit tree propagation efforts. Too, growing peaches for market required expertise that seemed unnecessary with corn and cotton; any dirt farmer could grow those crops. A peach grower would have to be literate, able to read the growing body of horticultural literature, and also able to observe with scientific precision. For this reason, Berckmans called frequently for horticultural academies that would

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<sup>28</sup> See Kristin L. Hoganson, *Consumers’ Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

<sup>29</sup> Samuel Hape, “Peach Culture,” in Georgia State Horticultural Society, *Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society*, vol. 14 (Atlanta, GA: W.J. Campbell, State Printer and Constitution Job Office, 1889), 55.



train boys and girls in the basics of good fruit and flower management. W.B. Jones held up European civilization as an end goal of this kind of education: “contented homes with a happy population, surrounded by gardens and orchards, as a means of economic and luxurious living.”<sup>30</sup>

Samuel Rumph’s family and community life, then, promised to fulfill one prong of the horticultural reform program. In order for the transformation of the southern landscape to take place, however, there would also have to be new biological material. Plant breeding was an indispensable adjunct to the horticultural mission. New fruit cultivars bridged the gap between the cultured European civilization from which they came and the environmental characteristics of the local landscape. If Samuel Rumph was the embodiment of the horticultural ideal as it related to home and family life, the Elberta peach was the embodiment of the horticultural ideal as it touched on plant life. Rumph’s work with the Chinese Cling, along with the efforts of Prosper Berckmans, Lewis A. Rumph, J.H. Hale, and Eugene Hiley, made peaches into a national commodity. Just as early nineteenth century Belgian aristocrats had transformed the pear, so Rumph transformed the peach. And just as the Belgians had created a fruit for their time — a melting, buttery delicacy to be grown in gardens, ripened in fruit rooms, and served as high society dessert — so Rumph produced a fruit for his — a large, firm-fleshed freestone that could be picked green, packed quickly in bushel baskets, sent to market hundreds of miles away, and still earn top prices. Van Mons and company developed boutique pears; Rumph made an industrial peach.

Rumph’s peach, the Elberta, was a stupendous creation. Its fame spread rapidly after its introduction in the mid 1870s, so that by the early twentieth century more Elberta trees grew in

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<sup>30</sup> W.B. Jones, “Fruits and Vegetables a Hygienic Necessity in Our Climate,” in Georgia State Horticultural Society, *Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society*, vol. 9 (Atlanta, GA: James P. Harrison and Co., 1884), 18–20.

the U.S. than any other fruit variety. By 1925 it was the most popular peach in every state but California, and from 1910 to 1930, when Georgia's peach industry led the nation, forty percent of the state's massive production was 'Elberta.' In 1965 — then ninety years old — it was still among the top ten cultivars in Georgia.<sup>31</sup> It is one of the only varieties still sold at fruit stands by name. And except perhaps for the 'J.H. Hale' (in the North) and the 'Georgia Belle', it is the only peach anyone remembers by name. (The name still conjures up fond memories for the members of the Habersham County Historical Society, as I discovered in 2010. "Oh yes," they said when I mentioned the Elberta, "that was a good peach!") It was also the only variety to earn an ode.

Your cheeks reflect the sunset glow,  
 Elberta!  
 Your rounded outlines please me so,  
 Elberta!  
 Your breath is sweet as summer dew;  
 Your life blood richly flowing through  
 Imparts a matchless charm to you.  
 Elberta, you're a peach!<sup>32</sup>

And that was just the second of five stanzas.

The Rumph fable includes a rather far-fetched origin myth for the Elberta. But the truth about the Elberta's origins may never be known with any precision. Geneticists are satisfied that the Chinese Cling was one parent, but the other parent remains unclear. How did the Chinese Cling, a white fleshed clingstone, produce a yellow fleshed freestone? Many assumed that the Elberta was a cross between Chinese Cling and Early Crawford, which would make sense, since

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<sup>31</sup> U. P. Hedrick, *The Peaches of New York*, Annual Report of the New York Agricultural Experiment Station 24, vol II, part 2 (Albany: J.B. Lyon Company, 1916), 169; Stephen C. Myers, William R. Okie, and Gary Lightner, "The 'Elberta' Peach," *Fruit Varieties Journal* 43, no. 4 (1989): 130–138; "The Peach . . . Has the Complexion of Georgia," *Fortune*, February 1932; Allen G. Waller and Harry B. Weiss, "'The Peach Industry in New Jersey: A Statistical and Economic Study,'" *New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin*, no. 452 (September 1927): 15.

<sup>32</sup> Mabel Swartz Withoft, "The Elberta," *American Florist*, September 26, 1903, 338.

the Early Crawford was a yellow-fleshed freestone. But peach genes are very difficult to pin down. A horticulturist trying to determine the genetic heritage of Elberta in 1923 discovered that out of some 2,200 Elberta seedlings, none resembled Early Crawford, suggesting to him that the Elberta was a self-pollinated seedling — that the Chinese Cling carried recessive yellow flesh genes that emerged in the Elberta. Revisiting the issue in the 1980s, scientists knew that a clinging stone was a recessive trait and could not produce freestones without cross-pollination. Furthermore, the Chinese Cling produced almost no pollen and only rarely proved capable of self-pollination.<sup>33</sup> Samuel Rumph usually maintained the Chinese Cling x Early Crawford hypothesis, but not always. State horticulturist Thomas McHatton lamented in 1914 that the Elberta was “a thing of mystery: its history is lost. Mr. Rumph never told the same story about it twice.”<sup>34</sup> The fruit that made the southern peach industry was a horticultural love-child, the product of a one-night stand with an unremembered suitor.

Not long after Samuel Rumph had originated the Elberta, his double half-uncle and brother-in-law Lewis A. Rumph also retrieved a seed from the same Chinese Cling tree. The seedling became a prolific white-fleshed freestone that Lewis called the Belle, or Georgia Belle. (Supposedly, like Samuel Rumph, Lewis wanted to name it after his wife Virginia, but did not want to give the impression of honoring that state. Belle was a suitable compromise.) A white fleshed freestone, Belle was for many years second only to the Elberta as the South’s leading peach. And so it was that two “sisters” — offspring of the same tree — carried the banner of the horticultural New South into the next century.

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<sup>33</sup> Myers, Okie, and Lightner, “The ‘Elberta’ Peach,” 131–132; E.F. Palmer, “Solving the Fruit Grower’s Problems by Plant Breeding,” *American Society for Horticultural Science Proceedings* 19 (1923): 121.

<sup>34</sup> Georgia State Horticultural Society, Georgia Breeders’ Association, and Georgia Dairy and Live stock Association, *Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society*, vol. 38, Bulletin Georgia State College of Agriculture Vol. 2, No. 12 (Athens: Georgia State College of Agriculture, 1914), 22.

Elberta and Belle were just two of many, many progeny of the Chinese Cling. The variety has been so prolific, in fact, that its introduction to the U.S. from China in 1850 is now known as “the second wave of peach introduction” among horticulturists (the first being Spanish monks in the 1600s).<sup>35</sup> The Chinese Cling itself was not a major commercial player. But hybridized with other varieties, its children were astonishingly productive. At the 1877 GSHS meeting alone, the Chinese Cling parented all seven of Berckmans’ named seedlings. Along with the Elberta, the Georgia Belle, the J.H. Hale, and the Hiley all descended from the Chinese Cling. A 1989 study found the genetic imprint of Elberta and J.H. Hale — the Chinese Cling’s firstborn children, so to speak — in more than 340 modern varieties. The Chinese Cling and its descendants made the shipping peach industry not only in the South but throughout the United States.

To portray this process of selection and dissemination as an accident of evolution, or as an inexorable triumph of the Elberta’s or Chinese Cling’s natural advantages — as the Rumph fable tends to do — does not do the story justice. It is too simple to say that Samuel Rumph planted a seed, or that Robert Fortune found a peach in China, and the rest of the story followed from that point. Human judgment and decisionmaking came in at every juncture. “Nature” played a role — it shaped what was possible — but people made the Georgia peach.

Samuel Rumph seems to have been more knowing than the mythology allows. Even if the story about finding the Elberta in his grandmother’s work basket is true, he was the one who saw the fruit’s potential when it began to bear. More likely his search for the Elberta was more painstaking than serendipitous. As another account had it, Rumph sifted through 1,200 seedlings before he chose the Elberta.<sup>36</sup> After he selected it as a promising seedling, furthermore, he tested

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<sup>35</sup> Daniele Bassi and René Monet, “Botany and Taxonomy,” in *The Peach: Botany, Production and Uses*, ed. Desmond R. Layne and Daniele Bassi (Cambridge, MA: CABI, 2008), 2.

<sup>36</sup> Dorothy Nix, “1870 Dream Led to Famous Georgia Peach,” *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution* (30 April 1967), 6; H.E. Van Deman, “The Elberta Peach,” *The Sunny South* XXII, no. 1129 (16 October 1897), 3. The

it for several years, trying its fruit on the northern markets, bringing it to his elders in the Horticultural Society for their opinions, and then propagating it in his nursery and selling it around the Southeast.

Rumph acted not on his own, then, but as part of a horticultural community. Under Prosper Berckmans' watchful eyes, one of the Society's most enduring contributions was the annual Catalogue of Fruits, which they published along with their record of their proceedings. Lectures varied from year to year, and even district reports were hit-or-miss, but the Catalogue was consistent. It was the central activity of the Society.

Prosper Berckmans, for one, believed in the Catalogue and the larger agenda it represented. When he listed the Society's eight goals in 1876, the first was "to compare the fruits from the various localities and zones of our State, with a view of determining their merits"; the fourth was the publication of the Catalogue in order to "simplify Fruit culture"; the fifth was "to adopt a correct nomenclature of fruits."<sup>37</sup> The goal of the GSHS, in other words, was not diversity, but reliability. The Catalogue was a winnowing tool. The efforts of the GSHS and other organizations yielded a shorter and shorter list of approved varieties each year, as Berckmans noted with pleasure in 1898. That year, many commercial growers limited their production to six peach varieties. In 1876, the Society had listed eighty-nine cultivars, thirty-two of which were deemed worthy of market production.<sup>38</sup> Some of this attrition came from discovering synonyms; some came from discarding unsuitable varieties.

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account actually says 12,000 seedlings, but this appears to be a typo, as other accounts have it as 1,200 seedlings. See Russell G. Snow, "Wonderful Growth and Promise of Peach Industry in Georgia," *The Atlanta Constitution* (Dec 4, 1910) D12B; and Col. G.B. Brackett, "The Peach Industry in Georgia."

<sup>37</sup> Georgia State Horticultural Society, *Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society*, vol. 1 (Augusta, GA: James L. Gow, 1877), 8–9.

<sup>38</sup> Georgia State Horticultural Society, *Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society*, vol. 22 (Augusta, GA: Richards and Shavers, 1898), 12; Georgia State Horticultural Society, *Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society*, 1:24–26.

Yet despite Berckmans' confidence in the dawning light of science, horticulturists were far from grasping what went on "under the hood." Fruit breeding was an exceedingly uncertain science, and efforts to classify *Prunus persica* into categories foundered on the shoals of the species' astonishing variability. White and yellow flesh, clingstone and freestone, bloom type and season were very difficult to explain, to say nothing of the "peach-monsters" (as Ulysses Hedrick labeled them) such as the Peento or flat peach, the cleft peach Emperor of Russia, the nipples peach Teton de Venus, the Perseque "with its teat-like protuberances," or the crimson-fleshed blood peaches.<sup>39</sup> Through the mid-nineteenth century, horticulturists generally classified peaches by whether or not the flesh clung to the pit — "clingstone" or "freestone" varieties, with nectarines (hairless peaches by way of mutation) as a separate category. In 1845, A.J. Downing introduced color as a category as well, finding that some peaches were "pale-fleshed" and others yellow-fleshed.<sup>40</sup> In 1887, a USDA agent named Gilbert Onderdonk introduced a classification scheme for peaches based on their region of origin and climatic suitability. According to Onderdonk and his follower R.H. Price, there were five "races" of the fruit: Persian, Northern Chinese, Spanish, Southern Chinese, and Peento. This classification system became enormously popular; Price's work showed up in *American Gardener*, the *American Pomological Society*, the *Georgia Experiment Station Bulletin*, the *State Horticultural Society of Missouri*, and the *Association of American Agricultural Colleges and Experiment Stations* between 1895 and 1898.<sup>41</sup> But the system had serious limitations. As Ulysses Hedrick complained in 1916, "we

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<sup>39</sup> Hedrick, *The Peaches of New York*, 95.

<sup>40</sup> See Andrew Jackson Downing, *The Fruits and Fruit Trees of America* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1845).

<sup>41</sup> R.H. Price, "Classification of Varieties of Peaches," *American Gardening* (6 August 1898), 560; "Classification of Varieties of Peaches," *Annual Report of the State Horticultural Society of Missouri* 40 (December 1897), 364; R.H. Price, Classification of Varieties of Peaches, *Association of American Agricultural Colleges and Experiment Stations Annual Proceedings* 8 (1894), 82; R.H. Price, "Classification of Varieties of Peaches," *American Pomological Society Annual Transactions* 25 (1897), 110; Hugh N. Starnes, "Some Peach Notes," *Georgia Experiment Station Bulletin* 42 (November 1898), 231.

have wasted so much time and patience in attempting to group varieties according to Onderdonk and Price, and with so little success, that the Onderdonk classification seems to us to be cursed with the confusion of Babel.”<sup>42</sup> In other words, it worked precisely contrary to its goal of bringing clarity to the muddled nomenclature of *Prunus persica*.

This general state of confusion may be one reason why horticulturists talked so much about naming in the nineteenth century. National conferences gave plenty of space to conversations — sometimes contentious debates — about names. The American Pomological Society under the Boston horticulturist Marshall Wilder was obsessed with naming.<sup>43</sup> In the 1883 GSHS Proceedings, Berckmans reprinted the American Pomological Society’s naming rules, along with what can only be described as a rant by that society’s president, Marshall Wilder.

Let us have no more Generals, Colonels, or Captains . . . no more Presidents, Governors, or titled dignitaries; no more Monarchs, Giants, or Tom Thumbs; no more Nonesuches, Seek-no-furtherers, Ne plus ultras, Hog-pens, Sheep-noses, Big Bogs, Iron Clads, Legal Tenders, Sucker States, or Stump-the-World. Let us have no more long, unpronounceable, irrelevant, high-flown, bombastic names to our fruits, and, if possible, let us dispense with the now confused terms of Belle, Buerre, Celebasse, Doyenne, Pearmain, Pippin, Seedling, Beauty, Favorite, and other like useless and improper titles to our fruits. . . .

Let us . . . give to the world a system of nomenclature for our fruits which shall be worthy of the Society and the country--a system pure and plain in its diction, pertinent and proper in its application, and which shall be an example not only for fruits, but for other products of the earth, and save our Society and the nation from the disgrace of unmeaning, pretentious, and nonsensical names, to the most perfect, useful, and beautiful productions of the soil the world has ever known.<sup>44</sup>

If Marshall Wilder and Prosper Berckmans had their way, then, cultivar names would be “simple,” “plain,” and “pertinent.” Horticulturists could not fathom the mystery of their fruit

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<sup>42</sup> Hedrick, *The Peaches of New York*, 93.

<sup>43</sup> See Emily Pawley, “‘The balance-sheet of nature’: Calculating the New York farm, 1820-1860” (Ph.D., Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2009).

<sup>44</sup> Georgia State Horticultural Society, *Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society*, 8:29–30.

trees' sexual habits, but they could cover the genetic unpredictability with solid, commonsense names, like planks across a pit of quicksand.

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Rumph plunged into the business of horticulture. By 1876 he was presenting fruits to the Georgia State Horticultural Society, which meant that he had been raising them for several years already. In 1878, the R.G. Dun Company recorded that he owned a “valuable nursery” and that he derived “a good profit from his orchard”; another correspondent estimated Rumph’s income at eight to ten thousand a year and proclaimed him worthy of borrowing modest amounts. Unlike others, who drank heavily, or borrowed more than they could repay, Rumph was “Sober & attentive to business” and possessed a reputation as “an energetic bus[iness]man with “tem[perate] hab[it]s.” In 1880 he was said to be “Thrifty and money mkg [making]” and “clear of any debts.”<sup>45</sup>

This identity as a man of business seems to have been central to Rumph’s self-assessment as well. Unlike many of his colleagues in the GSHS, he never presented formal papers or delivered stirring speeches. His participation was limited to the exhibits, reporting on conditions in the Third District, and commenting on specific varieties in the discussion of the annual Catalogue. In each case, he rarely missed an opportunity to allude to his commercial success. In discussions of varieties for the Catalogue, a member would name a variety for discussion, and growers with experience would debate ripening time, size, susceptibility to diseases, and so on, before making a motion to strike it from the list or put it in the Catalogue as an approved variety for one or more regions of the state. Rumph’s contributions were littered with dollar signs; he

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<sup>45</sup> 1860 and 1870 *Federal Census*; R.G. Dun and Company Credit Report Volumes. *Georgia, Vol. 20, Macon County, 1852-1880*. Credit Report. R.G. Dun & Co. Collection, Baker Library Historical Collections, Harvard Business School.



could hardly speak without telling how much he had earned in the New York produce markets.

The discussion of ‘Hale’s Early’ in 1877 provides a taste of this pattern:

Mr. Moses, of Washington [County]: It will not do to give up this peach yet — it has the color and size which command good prices. I have failed less on the Hale than any other variety. I had fungus in my orchard two years ago; it injured Hale less than any other variety. I have fruited it for eight years. Most of my crop was cut of nine-tenths last year, while I made a full half crop of Hales.

Mr. President [Berckmans]: I suppose you are aware that they have given it up in Delaware. —

Mr. Moses: It has never rotted with me.

Mr. Rumph, of Macon [County]: I shipped them to New York this year, and received \$9.00 per bushel, June 13th. There are two low places in my orchard in which the Hale rots — never on dry sandy soil.

The discussion of other varieties ran on in much the same way. Rumph sold ‘Fleitas St. John’, July 11 for \$7.00 a bushel in New York, ‘Crawford’ for \$10.00, and the ‘Chinese Cling’ for \$10.50. Then as if concerned that they were not getting his point, Rumph boasted that by packing ripe peaches in live Spanish moss, he had “received from \$3.00 to \$5.50 more in New York than other Georgia shippers.”<sup>46</sup>

Similarly, when Samuel Rumph gave his annual reports as the chairman of the fruit committee for the Third Congressional District (roughly middle Georgia), he emphasized the commercial potential of the place. “It is now generally conceded, both here and abroad,” he said in 1884, “that this section has no equal in its capacity for growing the largest and finest flavored peaches of any shipped to the Northern markets.”<sup>47</sup> At a time when the district representatives could report on a variety of things — the expansion of home orchards, the interest in landscape beautification, the progress of local societies — Rumph again chose to dwell on what sold in northern markets.

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<sup>46</sup> Georgia State Horticultural Society, *Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society*, vol. 2 (Augusta, GA: James L. Gow, 1878), 8.

<sup>47</sup> Georgia State Horticultural Society, *Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society*, 9:7.

What little survives of his personal correspondence betrayed the same ambition to establish his reputation as a nurseryman and marketer of fruits. In 1882, on Willow Lake Nursery stationary, which advertised that he was a “Grower and Dealer in Fruit Trees and Fresh and Evaporated Fruit,” and featured colorful watermarks of Shockley apples, he wrote his “dear little wife” Elberta from the Society’s meeting in Macon, “So far I am ahead on Peaches and Apples.”<sup>48</sup> In 1885, he wrote from Augusta, where he was staying with Prosper Berckmans, “So far W. Lake has the best show of Apples & Peaches.”<sup>49</sup> Clara’s father was proud of his son-in-law. “Tell Sam,” B.T. Moore wrote to Elberta in 1882, “I see in the [*Atlanta Constitution*] that he took the lead in Macon the other day in way of variety of fruits. I hope he will continue to do so it is now getting about time for him to make his luck.”<sup>50</sup>

It was about this time that advertisements for the Willow Lake catalogue began appearing in Georgia newspapers. “ONE MILLION Fruit Trees, Grape Vines, Strawberry Plants, Etc., selling low at Willow Lake Nursery,” the text boasted, under an engraving of a peach.<sup>51</sup> In the preface to his 1887 catalog, he thanked his subscribers for their “liberal patronage” and explained that he only sold those varieties “as are adapted to the Southern climate.” He hoped, by producing first-class trees and selling them widely not just to make money but to “greatly further the interest of Fruit growing.”<sup>52</sup> His catalog that year offered apples, peaches, pears, quinces, grapes, plums, figs, mulberries, and strawberries. But an engraving of a well-endowed branch of

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<sup>48</sup> Samuel H. Rumph to Clara Elberta Moore Rumph, August 1, 1882. Deanna and Sam Grice Personal Collection, Snellville, Georgia.

<sup>49</sup> Samuel H. Rumph to Clara Elberta Moore Rumph, July 29, 1885. Deanna and Sam Grice Personal Collection, Snellville, Georgia.

<sup>50</sup> B.T. Moore to Mr. L. A. Rumph, August 3, 1882. Deanna and Sam Grice Personal Collection, Snellville, Georgia.

<sup>51</sup> “Display Ad 4 -- No Title.” *The Atlanta Constitution*, (February 4, 1887).

<sup>52</sup> Willow Lake Nursery, “Descriptive Catalogue of Fruit Trees, Grape Vines, Strawberry Plants, Etc.,” (1887-1888), 2. Gilbert Seed Catalog Collection, National Agricultural Library Special Collections

Elbertas graced the back cover, and the description of the variety was twice as long as most other peach varieties: “Very large . . . very fine grain, juicy, rich, sweet and splendidly flavored . . . very prolific and . . . handsome.” The Elberta, Rumph said, was one of the “most successful” at market, “selling uniformly at higher prices than any other peach.”<sup>53</sup> Similarly, the catalog section on peaches began with instructions on planting and cultivation, but transitioned quickly to a little superfluous praise. As if his readers were unfamiliar with the most common tree fruit in the state, he advised them,

Take it in its fresh, ripe state, and there is no fruit that so delights the eye or palate, and it not only appeals to the appetite but is highly conducive to health. It is also excellent for culinary purposes, either canned or evaporated. As to its market value none exceeds it.<sup>54</sup>

But it was the 1882 letter from his father-in-law that deciphered Rumph’s efforts: *it is now getting about time for him to make his luck.*<sup>55</sup> Moore did not just wish Samuel Rumph well, did not just pray that God would smile on his efforts, did not hope that he would get lucky at the fruit exhibit. These would all have been too passive to describe what Samuel Rumph was up to. No, he was making his luck. Manufacturing it with cross-pollination, grafting, and savvy marketing.

With the Elberta, Rumph not only followed Marshall Wilder’s rules for naming — one word, a relative of the fruit’s originator — but also paid homage to the domestic ideals of southern horticulture. Peach varieties were not always women. Berckmans had a Thurber and a General Lee, for example, memorials to a northern horticulturist and a southern military hero. Sometimes they simply took the name of their originator: the Slappey, the Hiley, the J.H. Hale. But for the Rumphs, the peaches were women, and members of the horticulturist’s own

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>55</sup> B.T. Moore to Mr. L. A. Rumph, August 3, 1882.

household. Their nomenclature pointed directly to the gender dynamics of the late nineteenth-century South.

Perhaps most obviously, the horticulturists feminized and racialized the fruits they discussed. They slipped easily into anthropomorphism. Peaches were feminine: soft, rounded, fragrant. They were white: blushing like the cheeks of a southern belle. The Elberta, said Samuel Hape, was “the acknowledged queen of midsummer varieties, with her golden countenance and blushing red cheeks, synonomous [sic] of health, beauty and wealth, the pride of Georgia and daughter of the South . . . a most beautiful picture to contemplate.”<sup>56</sup> This practice was nothing new, of course: one of Louis XIV’s favorite pears was called *Cuisse-Madame*, or “Lady’s Thigh.”<sup>57</sup> But it was more than affectation. A horticulturist presented his fruit as he might present his daughter to society. Growing fruit and gathering flowers did not exactly exude manliness, but speaking of their fruits as if they were women allowed the horticulturists to stake a claim to masculine respectability.

Of course, fruit had an additional importance as food, and it meant a great deal if a man could provide not just financially for his family but nutritionally as well. Provision, in short, was not an abstract concept. The visible, physical health of a man’s family provided especially firm evidence of his ability to provide. A number of papers at GSHS meetings urged more consumption of fruits and vegetables, especially on farms where they were easily grown. Samuel Gustin believed that “the health and happiness of the people of Georgia would be promoted by a freer use of wholesome fruits and vegetables, and less fat bacon and poorly prepared bread.” Poor southern dinners, in his opinion, frequently sent men to “the whisky whop for

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<sup>56</sup> Hape, “Peach Culture,” 55.

<sup>57</sup> Roger Haden, “An Age Old Love Affair with the Pear” *The Adelaide Review* (2004).

consolation.”<sup>58</sup> W.B. Jones argued for a fixed relationship between climate and food that could not “be violated with impunity.” For example, he cited an Englishman who stuck to his traditional diet of beef and mutton in the tropics, but soon found “his skin clouded over with the sickly hue of climatic influence,” susceptible to tropical diseases such as yellow fever. Meanwhile, Cuban men ate little meat but plenty of citrus and remained “active and wiry.” The same was true of the South, Jones insisted. If one was going to thrive there, one had to eat the foods that naturally grew well in the climate, especially large quantities of fruits and vegetables. Education for southerners meant little “if feeble, degenerate men and women are to be the result.” For how was a boy or girl to learn their literature if they suffered from dispepsia?<sup>59</sup> And how was a young man to make his way in the world who refused a table “filled with intelligently prepared dishes” simply because they were not the familiar meat “swimming in empyrematic oil”? This sort of man not only shamed his community, he was also condemned to “a limited sphere of enjoyment in life” and likely a limited span of life as well.<sup>60</sup> No father could raise his children this way and take pride in his legacy.

The members of the GSHS were intensely conscious of the presence of women at their meetings. M.P. Foster’s “soft speech” to the GSHS in 1885 closed with a ringing exhortation: “To true men and good, encouraged as you are by the approving smile of woman, there is no such word as fail.”<sup>61</sup> It was as if he were the director of a play reminding his players of their real audience: women. Berckmans frequently credited the womenfolk of Georgia with the essential task of making homes lovely places that sons did not want to leave. The horticulturists needed

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<sup>58</sup> Samuel Gustin, “Kitchen Vegetables,” in Georgia State Horticultural Society, *Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society*, vol. 3 (Augusta, GA: Sainsimon and Morrioso, 1879), 22.

<sup>59</sup> W.B. Jones, “Fruits and Vegetables a Hygienic Necessity in Our Climate,” 18-20.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>61</sup> Georgia State Horticultural Society, *Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society*, 10:28.

“help from the women of Georgia,” said Berckmans, in order to “create and encourage a taste for the cultivation of fruits and flowers,” which could keep their sons at home in the countryside.<sup>62</sup>

In 1892, J.C. LeHardy of Savannah addressed his remarks on flower gardens in cities “especially to the ladies” because, he said, “they understand and appreciate flowers better than men do.”<sup>63</sup>

And at Milledgeville in 1901 the horticulturists made a great fuss over the contributions of “the ladies.” Several members noted the unusually large number of women in attendance, and

Berckmans extended a “cordial invitation” to them to “grace our meetings with your presence.”

Patronizingly, he promised that the sessions would “not be long” and that they would “try to make them as instructive to you as possible.”<sup>64</sup> The men were impressed with the palms and ferns

that decorated their meeting room, many of which “would do credit to any first class professional florist.”<sup>65</sup> “When I behold such specimens,” Berckmans declared, “I see that your education is on

a very high plane,” then added that none “can better bring that high plane than the ladies.” Then

he outlined his view of horticultural gender roles. “We men may look to the substantial of life

but [women] look to the aesthetic. . . . we are inspired to day in our work by the grand and

beautiful display which you have so artistically arranged in this hall”<sup>66</sup> And this was the role

assigned to women: audience members who could “smile approvingly” at their men, aesthetic

experts who could create the domestic backdrop that would inspire male accomplishment and

keep the children content at home.

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<sup>62</sup> Georgia State Horticultural Society, *Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society*, 3:6. *GSHS Proceedings* 3 (1878), 6.

<sup>63</sup> J.C. LeHardy, “Flower Gardens in Cities,” in Georgia State Horticultural Society, *Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society*, 17:63.

<sup>64</sup> Georgia State Horticultural Society, *Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society*, vol. 25 (Augusta, GA: Richards and Shavers, 1901), 15.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 25:2.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 25:13.

The horticulturists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, then, held out the home as the battleground of civilization, the place where the future of the South would be won or lost. Perhaps this narrowing of the field of battle was, as some have suggested, a result of defeat in the Civil War — southern men had been cut off from the military and political sphere, and so it was in the management of their households that they reclaimed their manliness.<sup>67</sup> In any event, it made sense that southern agriculturists might turn from their plantations to their gardens, orchards, and homes. “We must live upon our farms,” Professor Browne had said in 1882. And yet their homes were “generally the worst, the ugliest, the most dilapidated houses on the farms, unadorned by a single shrub, or tree or flower.”<sup>68</sup> In other words, there was a direct connection between the front yard and the reconfiguration of southern masculinity following the war.

Henry Grady captured this basic shift in a speech to farmers at Elberton, Georgia in 1889. His description of a visit to a “country home” drew together rural aesthetics with gender roles, religiosity, and politics. First the rural aesthetics: it was a

modest, quiet house sheltered by great trees and set in a circle of field and meadow, gracious with the promise of harvest — barns and cribs well filled and the old smoke-house odorous with treasure — the fragrance of pink and hollyhock mingling with the aroma of garden and orchard, and resonant with the hum of bees and poultry’s busy clucking — inside the house, thrift, comfort and that cleanliness that is next to godliness.

Then the evocation of gender:

Outside stood the master, strong and wholesome and upright; wearing no man’s collar; with no mortgage on his roof and no lien on his ripening harvest. . . . the good wife, true of touch and tender, happy amid her household cares, clean of heart and conscience, the helpmate and the buckler of her husband.

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<sup>67</sup> LeeAnn Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender: Augusta, Georgia, 1860-1890* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 142.

<sup>68</sup> William M. Browne, “Address on Ornamental Gardening,” in Georgia State Horticultural Society, *Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society*, 7:20.

Then framed within proper gender roles, religion: As night fell the father gathered the family around the Bible to read the “old, old story of love and faith.” And finally, politics, as Grady thought to himself, “‘Surely here [and not in Washington D.C.] — here in the homes of the people is lodged the ark of the covenant of my country. Here is its majesty and its strength. . . .’ The homes of the people; let us keep them pure and independent, and all will be well with the republic.”<sup>69</sup>

Now Grady acknowledged that he was no farmer, that his calls for diversification had no basis in personal agricultural knowledge. He painted this image, furthermore, as part of a speech in which he endeavored to drive people away from Populism as one of those “great movements that destroy the equilibrium and threaten the prosperity of my country.”<sup>70</sup> But in just a few words, he managed to articulate a new southern ideal to replace the antebellum lord of the manor: a humble, religious, literate man with a diverse set of agricultural skills and an adoring wife and family. In so doing, Grady touched on themes that had occupied Georgia’s horticulturists for more than a decade already: that there might be a kind of “development” that was industrial in the quality of its work-ethic as much as it was rural in its character; that was urban in its sophistication and scientific knowledge, but agricultural and human in its sensibility; that was masculine in its productivity and provisioning, but feminine in its refinement and beauty. He paid homage to a sort of progress in which rural folk turned tidy profits selling fruits to northern consumers without sacrificing their agrarian souls.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Henry Grady, “The Farmer and the Cities,” *The New South: Writings and Speeches of Henry Grady* (Savannah, Ga.: The Beehive Press, 1971), 83-84.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>71</sup> Charles Postel makes a similar point about the populist movement. See Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).



Which brings us back to Samuel Rumph. Given all this concern for the home life of the farmer, it should come as no surprise that Samuel Rumph's home earned a great deal of attention. His Willow Lake estate near Marshallville always won praise from visitors — praise that echoed descriptions of the proper country home in the talks given at the GSHS. A photograph of croquet-playing picnickers under Rumph's pear trees suggests the kind of leisurely life visitors experienced.<sup>72</sup> Willow Lake was “one of the loveliest in the country, surrounded by fruits and flowers of every species.”<sup>73</sup> The house was a “fine, large, dwelling, with out buildings, all in the best style and in the most perfect order,” wrote one reporter. Wrote another: “The perfect order and system of the establishment is at once apparent. Everything is as neat as a pin, from packing house to fruit crate.”<sup>74</sup> A photograph of the house itself graced the front page of *The Sunny South* in August 1896, and the text praised it as a “model,” what with its Spanish oaks shading the “gem” of a house, the front yard a “bower of shrub and flower.” The article went on: “This is the residence of a man of culture, and a successful man withal, who has an eye to his home as well as to his business. The dwelling itself is supplied with the conveniences and appointments of a city home, while just in easy sight of the shady veranda there are 80,000 peach trees, flanked by picturesque fields of other growth.”<sup>75</sup> Urban conveniences, rural charm: everything about Rumph's life, seemingly, was “picturesque” — like a picture.

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<sup>72</sup> “Picnic Willow Lake Nursery,” photograph ca. 1900 (mac007), Vanishing Georgia, Georgia Division of Archives and History, Office of Secretary of State.

<sup>73</sup> “From Georgia Soil,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, (August 9, 1886) 2.

<sup>74</sup> W.E. Brown, “Rumph's Peaches,” Letter to the Editor, *The Atlanta Constitution* (21 November 1888), 2; “By Field and Lane: A Fair Section—Under Vine and Fig Tree—Old Days,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (26 March 1885), 2.

<sup>75</sup> “The Great South,” *The Sunny South* XXII, no. 1068 (8 August 1896, Atlanta), 1.

And that is exactly how his life and story functioned for horticulturists and other New South boosters. He embodied what visiting Connecticut horticulturist J.H. Hale had praised about the GSHS in 1890: the “stimulus it gave to “adorn” the home and provide the family with “delicious food.” The horticulturists were making money, Hale conceded, but it was not only about money in the end. “The real object is to make a happy home for himself and his family. I think the time will come when every home will be beautiful to look upon.”<sup>76</sup> Samuel Rumph was the image of the South’s future.

In Rumph’s home at Willow Lake visitors saw beauty, but also order and control. A woman, his wife Clara, inspired him, and her aesthetic instincts clearly ordered the interior of his home. But this was so under the auspices of his authority. He was master of this smaller but tightly controlled domain.<sup>77</sup> This smaller world — the attenuated circumstances that challenged postbellum southern masculinity — did not have the final word in Samuel Rumph’s life. He found a way out through business. His second home, then, was the house that business built. And business would be one of the primary realms by which a man could prove himself in the post emancipation South.

In light of these developments, the parenting advice that Prosper Berckmans’ offered in 1886 takes on added significance. He was talking about the problem of rural outmigration, the sad rejection by so many sons of their fathers’ homes and occupations. Instead of deploring the immoral appetites of the young, as many did at this time, Berckmans pointed to the dissatisfactions of their elders. “If we are unsuccessful and consequently dissatisfied with our

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<sup>76</sup> Georgia State Horticultural Society, *Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society*, vol. 15 (Savannah, GA: The Morning News Printer, 1891), 16.

<sup>77</sup> This phrase comes from Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

calling, our children cannot expect benefit or encouragement in following us,” he argued. Which is where the business of horticulture came in. For “if we derive comforts, contentment, happiness and financial success from our pursuit, there is an assurance that . . . their first training will decide this important question.”

And how was one to train their children to love rural life? Berckmans offered two general principals and then two specific words of advice. First, notice your children: “carefully study the peculiar drift of our childrens' minds” and encourage them in the sorts of husbandry for which they show aptitude. Second, delight them with natural beauty: “a beautiful flower or a temptingly colored fruit,” which were “often more potent” than the “gaudy toy[s]” of urban spaces. Then he gave two bits of gender-specific counsel. Sons needed a piece of land stocked with well-chosen fruits, the advice of their fathers as they learned to grow the fruits, and “all the pecuniary returns from the sale of surplus fruits or vegetables.” This arrangement would beat out an allowance by a long shot, said Berckmans. The earnings would “cause them to look with manly pride upon their efforts in earning it.” But it was not just sons who needed this kind of hands-in-the-dirt education. Daughters “should not receive a lesser share of your attention,” he urged. By nature, girls knew flowers, those “more refined products of Horticulture” for which there was a rapidly increasing demand in the cities. Let them raise flowers for their own enjoyment and sell the surplus in the cities.<sup>78</sup>

Thirty years later, as Samuel Rumph drew up his will, he attempted to follow this advice. In the original will, in 1914, he bequeathed Willow Lake to his daughter, the house in town and the Suburban Fruit Farm to his second wife, and a three story brick house in the city of Macon to his son. In 1920, though, he changed these instructions to simple liquidation and division of the

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<sup>78</sup> Georgia State Horticultural Society, *Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society*, vol. 11 (Atlanta, GA: Constitution Job Office, 1886), 14.

proceeds. As this change suggested, Rumph's heirs did not continue in the fruit business. Clara married an ambitious lawyer, Warren Grice, who became chief justice of the Georgia Supreme Court. His son, Samuel Rumph, Jr., moved away from the farm and died at the age of fifty-five near Atlanta, Georgia.<sup>79</sup>

At the end of his life, Samuel Rumph Sr. had made it, and he knew it. He set aside \$1,500 for a gravestone "suitable to my circumstances and conditions in life" — and it remains a striking monument. He listed a remarkable number of personal possessions by name: including his "mahogany rollertop desk," his "marble top iron safe," and his "jewelry consisting of diamond rings and stud, watches and chains," which he left to his son by his second marriage. The picture that emerges in his will is of a man with wide-ranging and ample possessions, and acutely aware of it.<sup>80</sup> Having made his fortune by detailed and scrupulous management, he aimed to dispose of it in the same manner.

In the example of Samuel Rumph, then, horticulture became something less than the full-fledged program of reform envisioned by Berckmans and other horticulturists. He lived a beautiful life, bred a marketable fruit, and made a pile of money. But horticulture had become a path to wealth more than a path to permanence, and this subtle shift become more pronounced in the years to come.

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Despite the homage to homespun horticulture that filled newspaper columns and the meetings of the GSHS, southern pomology increasingly turned to northern investment. In the early 1890s, with the support of horticultural luminaries like Rumph and Berckmans, middle

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<sup>79</sup> State of Georgia, Indexes of Vital Records for Georgia: Deaths, 1919-1998 (Provo, UT: The Generations Network, Inc., 2001), accessed 21 May 2012 at [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)

<sup>80</sup> Rumph, Samuel H. Will. Oglethorpe, GA, n.d. Macon County Probate Court, Montezuma, GA.

Georgians hatched a scheme to attract this kind of outside interest: the Macon Peach Carnival. It was three weeks of entertainment, food, orchard tours, and general merriment, scheduled for the peak of peach season in July 1895. There was nothing particularly original about this idea; this was the age of expositions, after all, Philadelphia in 1876, Atlanta in 1881, Louisville in 1883, New Orleans in 1885, Atlanta again in 1887, Chicago in 1893, Atlanta a third time in 1895, and Nashville in 1897.<sup>81</sup>

Despite this crowded exposition marketplace, Peach Carnival boosters were enthusiastic. The organizing committee was composed mostly of up-and-coming Maconites, members of the Young Men's Business League, who embodied the "electric spirit of enterprise" that was needed to remake the South.<sup>82</sup> These energetic entrepreneurs had captured the support of nearly every notable grower in the state. Their board of directors included P.J. Berckmans, Samuel H. Rumph, J.B. James, W.H. Felton, Dudley Hughes, and J.D. Cunningham, an Atlantan who planted his trees near Kennesaw "in the very track of Sherman's desolating march to the sea," as if pointing to a southern resurrection powered by peaches. State horticulturist Hugh M. Starnes was on the board, and so was Berckmans' old friend Dr. J.C. LeHardy, and Dublin GSHS stalwart John Stubbs. A group of northerners also served as board members: J.H. Hale from Connecticut, and Ohioans N.H. Albaugh and F.W. Withoft. All in all, it was veritable who's who of southern horticulture in 1895.<sup>83</sup>

These men scheduled the carnival for nearly three weeks in early July, when peach production would just be shifting into high gear. As plans coalesced, the newspapermen grew giddy. "PEACHES AT EVERY POINT," trumpeted the *Macon Telegraph* in June 1895. "The

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<sup>81</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*, A History of the South v. 9 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 124.

<sup>82</sup> John T. Boifeuillet, "Peaches and Cream," *The Atlanta Constitution* (Jun 16, 1895), 2.

<sup>83</sup> "The Peach Carnival," *The Atlanta Constitution* (Jun 10, 1895), 7.

Whole State of Georgia Is Full of Fruit of Every Kind to Take the Place of Cotton,” the headline continued: “The Georgia Peach Carnival Is On Every Tongue in the Fruit Region and Fine Exhibits Will Be Sent In to Advertise Their Resources. IT IS THE EVENT OF THE SUMMER.”<sup>84</sup> On the following page the paper boasted that the carnival’s fame was international: the reputable Parisian Spectacular Company of Ontario had inquired about putting on one of their dramatic side attractions – the “Burning of Moscow” perhaps, or the “Fall of Pompeii.”<sup>85</sup> Evidently news had at least reached the Pacific Coast: the *San Francisco Call* noted that Georgia’s peach carnival promised “big things.”<sup>86</sup> Advertisements in the *Constitution* urged Georgians: “Turn Your Face to the Sunrise.”<sup>87</sup>

Those who did turn their eyes toward Macon found a visual feast. The carnival kicked off with a grand procession through downtown Macon which featured policemen, fire engines, local military, floral displays, ladies in fine carriages, floats from Fort Valley and Hawkinsville, and a “watermelon brigade,” followed by a “Rousing Address of Welcome” by the mayor and several other eloquent speakers. Over the next three weeks, the carnival held a baseball tournament, the “Great Interstate Gun Shoot,” horse, bicycle, foot, and boat races, an athletic field day, dances, an Independence Day celebration, a “harvest sermon,” balloon ascensions, and even a medieval tournament featuring young men who rode on horses as “gallant knight[s] of the days of chivalry” and then crowned a young lady “as queen of love and beauty.”<sup>88</sup>

But all of this was a backdrop for the Carnival’s main attraction: the fruit display. At the center of the main building of Macon’s Central City park, great eight-foot stands showcased – as

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<sup>84</sup> “Peaches at Every Point,” *The Macon Telegraph* (16 June 1895), 6.

<sup>85</sup> “A Voice from Canada,” *The Macon Telegraph* (16 June 1895), 7.

<sup>86</sup> Article, *San Francisco Call* (24 June 1895), 6.

<sup>87</sup> “Turn Your Face to the Sunrise” advertisement, *The Atlanta Constitution* (Jun 23, 1895), 22.

<sup>88</sup> John T. Boifeuillet, “Hail Queen Peach,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Jul 7, 1895), 17.

Major Glessner later described it -- “peaches twelve and fifteen inches in circumference, brilliant with their red and gold, tempting to eye and palate; plums in red, yellow and green, large as goose eggs; grapes in purple, pink and amber, the bunches weighing a pound and over; pears and apples in green, yellow and russet of all sizes and varieties; melons weighing from fifty to seventy pounds, with great red hearts of cooling juiciness.”<sup>89</sup> And Glessner did not even mention the cantaloupes, tomatoes, cabbages, quinces, and other produce. Never mind that Carnival manager George Duncan later had to raise money to cover the costs of the fruit, because the growers did not just donate them as he assumed they would. The fruit exhibit was one to remember, a kind of Georgia State Horticultural Society meeting on steroids – or, to use a less anachronistic expression, on artificial guano.

The Peach Carnival brought attention to Macon as a progressive center of commerce, and it capitalized on the excitement leading up to the International Cotton States Exposition, which took place in October of the same year. But like the latter exposition, the organizers of the Peach Carnival had in mind two specific outcomes: investment and immigration. As the advertisements inviting Georgians to the affair put it, the Carnival was “Designed to Unfold to the Eye of Homeseekers and Investors still another page of Georgia’s magnificent resources, and show where ‘man and his opportunity have met in the paradise of the peach.’”<sup>90</sup> It was to be, as Glessner put it, “a living, glowing illustration,” of the advantages of middle Georgia for fruit culture, “a picture painted by the hand of the Great Master in nature’s own colors.”<sup>91</sup> Almost every day of the Carnival, newspapers published tantalizing bits of information about visiting parties of northerners who were invariably wealthy, impressed with the state’s agricultural

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<sup>89</sup> Major Glessner, “Georgia Fruit Fairs,” *The Southern States* (August 1895), reprinted in “The Carnival Illustrated,” *The Macon Telegraph* (Sep 1, 1895), 9.

<sup>90</sup> “Turn Your Face to the Sunrise” advertisement, *The Atlanta Constitution* (Jun 23, 1895), 22.

<sup>91</sup> Glessner, “Georgia Fruit Fairs.”

potential, and sure to buy large parcels of land in middle Georgia. A group of South Dakotans toured lands in Jasper County; a prospector from New York perused the fruit exhibits; a young lawyer from Dayton, Ohio represented an already-organized colony of some two hundred families.<sup>92</sup> The Carnival was attracting outside capital – the “one thing needful to make this part of the state the garden spot of the country.”<sup>93</sup> And all this was according to plan.

For the boosters who put on the Peach Carnival, however, northern and western investors represented more than just capital. Their presence would also make the cotton belt a progressive farming region. Having learned their trade in less productive regions, explained the *Telegraph*, these new Georgians would know all the best methods of “tillage and economy.” They would practice this “improved husbandry” and teach it to their neighbors.<sup>94</sup> Before long the “waste places of Georgia would be settled by practical farmers,” George Duncan predicted.<sup>95</sup>

This was all well and good; the idea of practical farmers colonizing wastelands sounded appealing enough. The implications were rarely spelled out. But for a few offhand remarks, the whole scheme might be taken as an innocent effort on behalf of the common good. Those offhand remarks, however, revealed a more disquieting vision. For example: Major Glessner was the immigration agent for the Georgia Southern and Florida Railroad whose arranged excursions and pamphlets and articles were so crucial to the enterprise of attracting northern interest in southern fruit growing. In his retrospective on the Carnival for *The Southern States* magazine, Glessner casually explained that the idea behind a midsummer fruit fair was to convince northerners that the South’s hottest season was not only tolerable, but even less oppressive than

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<sup>92</sup> “Carnival Still On,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Jul 15, 1895), 3; “The Carnival as an Object Lesson,” *The Macon Telegraph* (July 10, 1895), 6.

<sup>93</sup> “Peaches at Every Point,” *The Macon Telegraph* (16 June 1895), 6.

<sup>94</sup> “The Carnival and Its Effect,” *The Macon Telegraph* (July 21, 1895), 4.

<sup>95</sup> “Fambles Prays,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Jul 26, 1895), 3 “Well Pleased With the Carnival -- Major Duncant Makes a Report on the Peach Celebration”



July in the North. In his words, it was designed to “eliminat[e] the idea that the South is too hot for a white man to live and work in.”<sup>96</sup> An editorial in the *Telegraph* on the effects of the Carnival was even more explicit: “in time,” it predicted, “white agriculturalists will reign in the fields of Georgia.”<sup>97</sup> The picture thus becomes clearer: fruit farms would replace cotton plantations, which tended to be owned by whites but farmed by blacks. Assuming, as these boosters undoubtedly did, that the finer points of such progressive farming would be beyond the average rural black family – and in terms of startup capital, it undoubtedly was – peach culture would make a place in the countryside for the white farmer, and one who was educated, urban-oriented, and well-capitalized to boot. For these visionaries, horticulture was a means of whitening the black belt.

In light of all this, it makes sense that the only role mentioned for black southerners in the great Georgia Peach Carnival was as members of the opening procession’s “Watermelon Brigade.” The policemen and soldiers and firefighters, with their prancing steeds and glinting steel, presented a picture of regimented strength; the floral displays, luxuriant orbits around beautiful maidens and fair ladies, offered the diversion of beauty. The watermelon brigade was “ridiculously funny.” One hundred “little negroes” balanced watermelons on their heads as they marched through the street; when they arrived at the park, they had their hands tied behind their backs for the watermelon-eating contest. The winner was proclaimed “The Watermelon-Eating Champion of the World.”<sup>98</sup> What fun for the white spectators! Those ridiculous “little negroes” with red melon flesh spraying about their faces. Blacks loved watermelons, and whites loved

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<sup>96</sup> Glessner, “Georgia Fruit Fairs.”

<sup>97</sup> “The Peach Carnival and Its Effect”

<sup>98</sup> “Formal Opening Georgia Peach Carnival” *The Macon Telegraph* (July 2, 1895), 6; “Peach is Queen Now,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Jul 3, 1895), 3.

even more to tell jokes about blacks loving watermelons. Why, the “Georgia Watermelon Song” had just been published in the *Constitution* a few days ago:

Oh de melon grow in de corner cool.  
 (Chillun, cl'ar de way!)  
 En I fill de sack, en I load de mule.  
 (Chillun, cl'ar de way!)  
 En I live en die in Georgy  
 When de melon's ripe--oh my!  
 I'll watch en pray  
 Tell it's almos' day  
 En I'll reach home by en by!<sup>99</sup>

For the organizers of the Carnival, then, black southerners represented an amusing sideshow. But of course African Americans were much more crucial to the development of the South than this sort of demeaning nonsense allowed. A few months later, the International Cotton States Exposition in Atlanta would emphasize just how crucial.

In a bit of hyperbole leading up the Peach Carnival, the *Telegraph* and the *Atlanta Constitution* predicted that the Peach Carnival would be comparable, if not superior, to the International Cotton States Exposition, which would take place in Atlanta in October. This comparison was pure bluster; in an age of grand expositions, the Cotton States Exposition was one of the largest. The bold-faced message of the Exposition was one of industrial rather than agricultural development. But the industrial dream could not do without horticulture: the Exposition grounds had to be landscaped. And on whom did the Exposition call but Prosper Berckmans? In March 1895, Berckmans appeared before the Exposition’s planning committee and proposed a landscaping plan of 1,636 evergreens for \$700. His son Robert and his foreman Mr. Skinner were also to be employed for eighteen days to transplant and arrange the grounds.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> “Just from Georgia,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Jun 29, 1895), 6.

<sup>100</sup> C.A. Collier to P.J. Berckmans, 21 March 1895, Series 2: Fruitland Nurseries, 1858-1967, Folder 4: Correspondence, Prosper Jules Alphonse Berckmans Collection, MSS 961, Cherokee Garden Library, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, GA.

And so Prosper Berckmans' Fruitland Nursery provided the greenery for the Exposition in Atlanta — the scenic backdrop, as it were, for the drama of the New South that was to play out on that stage. Thus the horticulturists whispered that the South was not just an open space for the building of factories, but could also be a home. One could lead an aesthetically pleasing life, like that of Samuel Rumph at Willow Lake, with a small initial investment. Your money will go a long way here, they intimated. It will allow you to live like a gentleman. And like disaffected English nobility bound for Caribbean islands, northerners came. Not in great numbers, but with influence enough to change southern peach districts. The Exposition conveyed the unmistakable message that the South was all set for industrial development, and horticulturists offered the corollary that development could also mean a more beautiful landscape.

The other important corollary to this message of industrial development was that blacks and whites were united in the cause. For the Exposition also featured the famous speech by Booker T. Washington, which W.E.B. DuBois sneeringly dubbed “The Atlanta Compromise.” “In all things that are purely social, we can be as separate as the fingers,” said Washington, “yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.”<sup>101</sup> This quotation may be what Washington's 1895 speech is famous for now, but at the time listeners may have latched on to another phrase. “Cast down your bucket where you are!” Washington urged white southerners who looked to immigration for the South's renewal. “Cast it down among the eight millions of Negroes whose habits you know.” (Are you listening, Major Glessner?) Look instead to the black men and women who had “tilled your fields, cleared your forests, builded your railroads and cities, and brought forth treasures from the bowels of the earth, and helped make possible this magnificent representation of the progress of the South” – and all this, Washington carefully

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<sup>101</sup> Booker T. Washington, “Speech Before the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition”, September 18, 1895. Accessed 29 May 2012 at <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?documentprint=69>.

observed, “without strikes and labor wars.” Washington enjoined his fellow southerners to employ these loyal neighbors, all the while “helping and encouraging them as you are doing on these grounds, and to education of head, hand, and heart.” Do these things, he promised, and “you will find that they will buy your surplus land, make blossom the waste places in your fields, and run your factories.”<sup>102</sup>

Critics complained that with these words Washington sold out his people, that he portrayed the black South as little more than dark-skinned brawn to power the South’s industrial catch-up project. But a closer reading shows that Washington offered an alternative to visions such as that of the Peach Carnival organizers. Instead of filling middle Georgia’s waste places with northern horticulturists – instead of expecting that “white agriculturalists” would “reign in the fields of Georgia” – Washington envisioned an economic development project that was of, by, and for the people of the South, both black and white. Couched in the language of subservient cooperation, he painted a competing future of eventual but real economic equality between the races.

Of course Washington was no stranger to the need to court northern capital – his own Tuskegee Institute depended on it – but at the Exposition he addressed his exhortations to his fellow southerners, white and black. But white northerners – some of whom had just enjoyed the amusements of Macon’s Peach Carnival – were also pleased with Washington’s vision, or at least the half they readily grasped: blacks would work! And some of these northerners would cast down their buckets not where they were but where Washington was. Connecticut Yankees come to play business in King Cotton’s Court.

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

And all those words about the numerous, educable, loyal, easily satisfied, and – most importantly – hard-working southern blacks? The “ridiculously funny” entertainment they were supposed to offer?

John Howard Hale, it seems, took them to heart.

## CHAPTER 4

### JOHN HOWARD HALE BUYS A FARM

It must have been a bitter cold day in Rochester when the Western New York Horticultural Society held their forty-first annual meeting in January 1901. The Society's membership had included many luminaries of the horticultural world – Patrick Barry, Charles Downing, Liberty Hyde Bailey – as well as most of the large fruit growers in one of the premier apple-producing regions of the country. In 1901, despite the fact that the Society charged one dollar for admission, some 760 horticulturists made the Common Council chamber of the City Hall “too full for comfort.”<sup>1</sup>

That year, the Society had also invited a visitor with particular knowledge of the South: John Howard Hale, a peach grower from Connecticut who ran a 2,000 acre peach farm in middle Georgia. Hale gave an extraordinarily well-received talk on the first afternoon on “Peach Culture and Marketing,” punctuated with applause and followed by eager questions. So in the evening on the first day, after the audience had enjoyed the up-to-date entertainment of entomological illustrations “thrown upon the screen,” audience members remembered that Hale had “a series of views” from his “great peach orchards in Georgia,” and called for Hale to perform an encore.<sup>2</sup> Though it had been a long day, and though the evening session had already gone on for two

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<sup>1</sup> Western New York Horticultural Society, *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting* (Rochester, N.Y.: Democrat and Chronicle Press, 1901), 132.

<sup>2</sup> One New York entomologist showed photographs of San Jose Scale experiments, while another led the audience through “Insect Episodes of 1900” with slides “colored from nature.” *Ibid.*, 143.

hours, the Society members “were highly entertained” for almost thirty minutes, followed by more questions. It was nearly ten o’clock before the meeting adjourned.

J.H. Hale was accustomed to giving this presentation of his stereopticon slides – it was general knowledge that he had the lantern slides in his possession, and he had given similar talks many times before. He owned more than a hundred slides in all, which highlighted his enormous orchards, his great packing house, his red-label crates of peaches and cantaloupes, his own farm home, and his workforce, especially his black workers and their children.<sup>3</sup> Here was the cotton belt South at the turn of the century, as seen through the eyes of a northern horticulturist. Prosper Berckmans had his nursery, Samuel Rumph his homeplace, and Hale had, with northern capital, reconstituted the antebellum plantation as a fruit farm.



*Figure 3*

“The work was absolutely perfect, and now with more than 250,000 trees in what I am often told is the best arranged orchard in America, I give due credit to the darkey and the mule for the orderly way in which the trees are planted.”

*Figure 4*

“... corn to feed the darkies and the mules on the place . . .”



<sup>3</sup> “State Fruit Growers,” *The Hartford Courant* (7 Feb 1901), 7. Quotes 1-6 and 8-10 are from Hale’s article, “Peaches: A National Product,” *World’s Work*, June 1902, 2174–2177. Quote 7 comes from Hale, “Farm Life and Work,” *The Hartford Courant* (Jun 13, 1896), 1. Quote 11 comes from Western New York Horticultural Society, *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting*, 29. The photographs are from the collection of the Historical Society of Glastonbury, which houses the original glass plate negatives. I am grateful to Dick and Joan Mihm and to HSG director Jim Bennett and librarian Phyllis Reed, who shared the photos with me.



*Figure 5*

“A hotel or lodging house on the place now accommodates a little over two hundred, room and bed being free to those who are willing to conform to the simple rules of decency and good order.”

*Figure 6*

“Meals are furnished at cost, which is about twelve cents, for an abundance of wholesome food in variety . . . “



*Figure 7*

“. . . and yet a majority of white people always prefer to bring their own cooks and provisions from home and rig up a little camp, while others form clubs, buy their provisions from the commissary on the place, and hire some old aunty to cook for them at her cabin at twenty-five cents a week for each person and ‘de chillen take the leavins.”



*Figure 8*

“Then comes the spraying, for we do all that science and practice can suggest to check the ravages of insects and fungous pests, to the end that every specimen of fruit may be the best and most beautiful of its kind.”





*Figure 9*

“It was a great sight to see the work going on. Such an ‘outfit’ (darkey, club and trap) . . . They started off like an army, two to each tree, then at the word ‘go’ the start was made, quick whack, whack, whack, from tree to tree, down the long line to the end, then a gathering in of the harvest, a drink of water, a little rest, and then a fresh attack on the enemy. Whack, whack, whack!”

*Figure 10*

“Careful inspection of the fruit in each basket as the harvest proceeds tones up the quality of the pickers’ work. Wagons with hundreds are always at hand, including two or more boys with each gang to ‘tote’ baskets, so that the harvesters may lose no time looking for ‘empties.’”

*Figure 11*

“White labor is used entirely in the packing house . . . On the opposite side of the sorting table stand the packers . . . who take the peaches from the trays and carefully pack the six baskets in each crate solidly full. . . Several expert instructors in packing work up and down the line constantly.”

*Figure 12*

“As soon as the covers are nailed on the crates, they are rushed into the refrigerator car waiting alongside, and the five hundred and sixty or more crates that go in a car are so spaced that there is a circulation of cold air about each one at all times during transit.”

*Figure 13*  
 “Profitable peach-growing depends more on the man than anything else.”



And thus, with Hale as tour guide, another northern audience peered into the South.

The story of John Howard Hale and his peach farms illustrates the shifting relationships between northern investment and race relations in the 1890s and 1900s. A self-described Yankee who ran his two thousand acre farm near Fort Valley like a factory, Hale also reveled in the novelty of his operation’s southernness, especially its African American labor supply. A close study of Hale’s life and work reveals what made the South such a delicious opportunity at the end of the nineteenth century: its undeveloped land, cheap labor force, and the malleability of its business culture. Fort Valley offered Hale the chance to form an agricultural enterprise in his own image.

The “missionary and political phase of the North’s Southern policy,” as C. Vann Woodward labeled it, had pretty much run its course by the late 1870s, as suggested by the 1877 compromise that put Rutherford B. Hayes in office. What replaced it was not a *laissez-faire* retirement of government resources but a “policy of economic exploitation.”<sup>4</sup> In the name of industrial development, southerners offered the North every opportunity, especially in minerals,

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<sup>4</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*, A History of the South v. 9 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 114.

timber, railroads, and mills. Federal and state governments offered their public lands for sale on an unprecedented scale – millions of acres sold for a song, and mostly to northern groups.

Among these northern investment seekers were the horticulturists. They came with slightly higher ideals than the speculators, however, for horticulture included with it a language of beauty that softened the harder edges of modernization. They were planting trees and bushes, after all, not building factories. They were improving the landscape, and teaching a worthy skill to a needy people, and freeing southerners from their bondage to one-crop cotton. This was how Richard Thompson explained the presence of G.H. Miller in Rome, Georgia, for example. A native of Dayton, Ohio, Miller had singlehandedly diversified the agriculture of northern Georgia – so said Thompson – by introducing peaches which ripened in the “loafing time” before the cotton harvest. Thompson overstated his point – Miller did not invent the idea of growing peaches in the South – but the overstatement is interesting on its own account. Miller not only “interested his neighbors in peach growing,” Thompson boasted, “he is now giving all his attention to fruit growing of various sorts.” And Miller was just one of many Ohio fruit men who had invested in the South: N.H. Albaugh and F.W. Withoft both headed up large farms near Fort Valley.<sup>5</sup>

None of these men had the national profile of J.H. Hale. He made the Georgia peach industry what it was, both rhetorically and materially. And although “exploitation” may be the right word to describe northern activity in mining and timber, Hale’s story suggests that “development” might be a better word to describe the work of northern horticulturists. The South’s mineral and forest wealth was literally carried off in steamships and railcars, but horticulture forced those who might otherwise exploit to be attentive to a place for a longer time.

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Thompson, “Ohio in the New Conquest of Dixie,” *Ohio Magazine*, October 1906, 331.

Trees had to be planted and tended for years before anyone reaped a profit from them. Furthermore, horticultural rhetoric, tangled as it was with Victorian sensibilities about beauty, home, and culture, meshed poorly with the social Darwinism of late-nineteenth century industrial capitalism.

The story of the southern peach industry illustrates this sort of “soft modernization” with particular clarity. For the great development project that was the New South campaign, it was crucial to find images and products that could attract outside capital and still honor the native productions of the South. Peaches were perfect. The fruit were soft and sweet and blushing, like (so its promoters incessantly pointed out) white southern maidens. And because the Georgia peach was first to all the major markets, the fruit seemed somehow to belong to the state. But getting them to those markets required large, temporary labor forces, entrepreneurial acumen, modern management methods, and, increasingly, cutting edge technology — all of which required money, which in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries meant looking north. Peaches were trumpeted, then and now, as a quintessentially southern product, but the peach industry was a northern import.

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Before J.H. Hale raised Georgia peaches in Fort Valley, he had resurrected the Connecticut peach industry. He made a new thing in New England before remaking it in the New South. New England agriculture was at low ebb in the late nineteenth century. Sons and daughters fled the countryside for the big northern cities to hammer and shape in factories and clerk and stock in stores. Or they followed the setting sun as western lands gained their reputation for rockless, fantastically fertile topsoils. Abandoned farm homes multiplied. Rural New Englanders advertised these places as vacation houses for wealthy urbanites, made boardinghouses out of

their working farms for extra cash, and later sponsored “Old Home Week,” a celebration of the region’s rural past aimed at jogging middle-aged memories.<sup>6</sup> *The old small town where you grew up. The narrow lanes and green pastures. The rocky fields. A nice place to visit, and maybe to retire.*

But Hale looked forward. He combined the old discipline of horticulture with the new techniques of the corporate world, and injected fresh life into the family farm and thereby New England farming more generally. Or at least this is the story that Hale told about himself. Like Samuel Henry Rumph, Hale grew up in a fatherless home. Unlike Rumph, who said little about his childhood and allowed newspapermen to fill in the meaning of his rise from rags to riches, Hale proclaimed his story himself. His nursery catalogue, in addition to selling fruit trees and strawberry plants, also offered entertainment in the form of Hale’s memoirs.<sup>7</sup> His 1896 catalogue, for instance, announced the essential arc of Hale’s career: “From a Push-Cart to a Trolley Car.” Inside Hale described his beginnings as a child battling quack-grass in the back lot in order to plant some strawberries, pushing that rickety cart to market, and making enough to gradually build up a fruit empire.<sup>8</sup>

Born in South Glastonbury, Connecticut, in 1853, J.H. Hale was the second son of John A. Hale, a farmer and insurance salesman who died while J.H. was young. Accounts vary as to how successful the father was. The *Hartford Courant* called him “general agent of the Aetna Life Insurance Company” and claimed that he had been “influential in the building up of that

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<sup>6</sup> Howard S. Russell, *A Long, Deep Furrow: Three Centuries of Farming in New England* (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 1982), 316.

<sup>7</sup> In 1906 he ran an advertisement for his free catalogue that promised the “Full story” of the “lifetime experience of largest fruit-grower in America.” J.H. Hale, “Advertisement: Double the Strawberry Crop,” *The Youth’s Companion* (1827-1929) 80, no. 7 (1906): III.

<sup>8</sup> G.H. and J.H. Hale and Hale Georgia Orchard Company, *From a Push-Cart to a Trolley-Car in Fruit Growing* (South Glastonbury, CT: G.H. and J.H. Hale, 1896), cover.

company.”<sup>9</sup> Other accounts portrayed him as a failed farmer who became a traveling insurance man and still failed to pay off the family’s debts.<sup>10</sup> In any case, Hale claimed to have started with little but a set of shoddy tools — a “broken handled shovel, one short handled spade and a hoe” — for transportation that inescapable pushcart, for capital the “skinned” and “run-down” family land, and for labor the “latent energies of two boys, anxious to carry their share of life’s burdens.”<sup>11</sup>

Along with these rather poor resources, Hale also had a rich “love of fruits inherited from ancestors on both sides,” a predilection that showed from his earliest days on the Hale family farm. Years later he remembered “the little Red Rareripe peaches” that grew along the fence rows, especially a seventy-year-old tree to which Hale found himself “strongly attracted.”<sup>12</sup> But with his father dead and a mortgage to pay, the Hale family was “kept hustling” to put food on the table. The peach orchard idea would have to wait. When J.H. was twelve, earning extra money in a neighbor’s cornfield, he discovered “a seedling peach tree, right there in the corn field, loaded down with ripening fruit; rosy, red little peaches, sweet and delicious.” Young Hale rested under the tree, “eating peaches and dreaming of the peach orchard I would have if ever I

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<sup>9</sup>“John Howard Hale, Peach King, Dead,” *Hartford Daily Courant* (13 October 1917).

<sup>10</sup> Lee Jay Whittles, “John Howard Hale: Peach King” (Speech presented at the Historical Society of Glastonbury, Glastonbury, CT, May 19, 1955), 1.

<sup>11</sup> J. H. Hale et al., *Culture, Agriculture, Orchard Culture and the Utility of Weeds* (The Cutaway Harrow Company, 1895), 5; “A Talk About Peaches,” *The Hartford Courant*, February 6, 1888; Whittles, “John Howard Hale: Peach King,” 1; G.H. and J.H. Hale and Hale Georgia Orchard Company, *From a Push-Cart to a Trolley-Car in Fruit Growing*, 1.

<sup>12</sup> Hale, “Peaches: A National Product,” 2164. The most detailed version of Hale’s story came in this article for *The World’s Work*, a journal edited by North Carolinian Walter Hines Page — who, incidentally, also went into peaches in the early twentieth century.

got money enough to buy the trees.” His mind in thrall to this vision, he threw himself into his farm work.<sup>13</sup>

By the fall of 1868, Hale had saved nearly \$100, and it was time to begin. He dropped out of school — he was only going the three coldest months out of the year anyway — and put all his horticultural reading into practice. He began with strawberries and raspberries, crops with fast turnaround, for as he said, “quick returns must be had.” They were had, and then reinvested, and his quarter-acre rapidly expanded to four.<sup>14</sup> In short order J.H. Hale, and to a lesser extent his brother George, became not only sellers of strawberries but nurserymen and acknowledged strawberry experts. In 1882 Hale dueled rhetorically with formidable old Charles Hovey himself over the identity (and superiority vis-a-vis the famous Hovey Seedling) of the new Manchester strawberry that Hale Nurseries was promoting.<sup>15</sup> Hale became a respected peer of Charles Downing, Marshall Wilder, Patrick Barry, and Peter Henderson, and gave frequent talks at horticultural societies and nurserymen’s meetings on strawberry culture and nomenclature.<sup>16</sup>

As it turned out, strawberries were just the opening episode in a star-studded pomological career. A tall, imposing man with a sculpted moustache, Hale was also a witty, forceful public speaker, and by 1889 he was the grand master of the Connecticut Grange.<sup>17</sup> In the 1890s he would campaign for William Jennings Bryan and may have landed a cabinet post had Bryan

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 2166.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Hovey, “‘Hovey’s Seedling’ and the Manchester Strawberry,” *Massachusetts Ploughman and New England Journal of Agriculture* 41 no. 46 (12 Aug 1882), 1; J.H. Hale, “Manchester Strawberry Vs. Hovey Seedling,” *Ohio Farmer* 62, no. 4 (July 29, 1882): 54.

<sup>16</sup> G.H. and J.H. Hale and Hale Georgia Orchard Company, *From a Push-Cart to a Trolley-Car in Fruit Growing*, 3.

<sup>17</sup> “National Grange Excursion,” *The Hartford Courant*, October 16, 1889.

won.<sup>18</sup> Peaches – the Red Rare-Ripes he knew growing up, the tree he found in his neighbor’s cornfield – came back to him in 1877, or so he recalled in his 1896 catalogue. From a remote fencerow those old peach trees called to him, like New England oracles:

“See here boy! We poor neglected old trees have been here in the fence-corners for fifty years or more. We don’t dress as well, in rich dark green, or put on as much style as our sisters down near the house, who are liberally fed with the best of everything, but we don’t get sick and have the yellows.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps it is because the Hales all along back have been feeding their yard manure to trees and crops down about the home, and letting us poor things back on the hills feed on what wood-ashes it was easy to get up here whenever a corn crop or the mowing fields needed a dressing. Anyhow, we are healthy, our buds are tough, and we have often had fruit to feed your tribe when our more favored sisters said it was too cold to work. If you are after money in fruit culture, and want to show the North a trick or two, try a peach orchard up here on the hills!”<sup>20</sup>

By presenting his decision to grow peaches in this way, Hale embedded an old agrarian argument in the pages of his self-promotion: rural New England’s prosperity would come, as it always had, from its soil. Rugged New England peaches would be immune to the yellows, a sickness then decimating old orchards in the Delmarva region and in Michigan.

Hale listened to his trees. By “tramping around with a thermometer just at daylight” he discovered that hillsides were the best places to plant peach trees in order to avoid killing freezes, as they “had a way of sliding the frost off down into the lowlands.”<sup>21</sup> He planted about 10,000 trees in two blocks on leased land that had the desired altitudes. Five years later, when he could expect his first full crop, three severe winters in a row killed all the buds. His friends counseled pulling out before his debt mounted beyond his capacity to repay. Hale demurred.

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<sup>18</sup> M.A. Farber, “An Industry in Glastonbury,” *Hartford Courant Magazine* (8 August 1965), 5.

<sup>19</sup> The yellows was a severe and, for many years, unexplained condition that seriously damaged the old peach-growing areas of Maryland, Delaware, Michigan, and so on.

<sup>20</sup> G.H. and J.H. Hale and Hale Georgia Orchard Company, *From a Push-Cart to a Trolley-Car in Fruit Growing*, 4.

<sup>21</sup> Hale, “Peaches: A National Product,” 2166.



With “my hand to the peach plow I did hate to turn back,” he explained, “and then, thinking how the Lord hates a ‘quitter,’ I began hustling to borrow more money.”<sup>22</sup> A visit from Senator Joseph Hawley, *Courant* editor Charles Dudley Warner, and two other *Courant* editors came at a crucial time, for these “lovers of nature” were smitten with Hale’s peach enterprise, and “expressed great confidence in it.” The loans came in.<sup>23</sup>

Soon Hale had the opportunity to put his long-contemplated marketing plan into practice. In 1887, some ten years after Hale had planted his first Connecticut peach trees — perhaps the first attempt to grow commercial peaches north of New York — he finally harvested a full crop. Determined to wring “all possible profit out of it,” Hale thinned the fruit aggressively, discarding “more than three-fourths of the young fruit” in order to make the remainder larger and more marketable.<sup>24</sup> He opened a storefront in Hartford and advertised tree-ripe peaches a month in advance. Then he visited other major New England towns to pitch his “little story” to high-grade grocers and fruit dealers. The fruit would be gathered fully ripe on a daily basis, carefully sorted and graded, packed in new baskets of “the whitest wood obtainable” and guaranteed to be uniformly perfect through and through. The grocers acknowledge that Hale told “a pretty good story,” but they could not conceive of such premium peaches and held off on advance purchases.<sup>25</sup>

When the harvest season struck, Hale said, his peaches rapidly acquired a high reputation, and he had all the orders he could fill. To meet this growing demand, he worked non-stop, starting each day at 4 a.m. and ending at 11 p.m., running the store front and working out the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 2168.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 2169.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 2171.

kinks in his operation. He discovered, for instance, that even the most honest of men would “sneak the best peaches to the top of the baskets,” so he replaced them with women, whose “quicker eye, defter fingers and natural honesty” made them superior packers and graders.<sup>26</sup> It was a smashing success. Hale reaped a \$10,000 profit, enough to pay off his debtors, reinvest, and expand. He sang the praises of peaches for all of New England. According to the *Boston Journal*, Hale told the venerable Massachusetts Horticultural Society in 1888 that “Connecticut can produce as good peaches as southern states, and that Massachusetts can do still better. The rugged soil of New England seems to be calculated to give a peculiar excellence in flavor.”<sup>27</sup> A year later, the crop was even better: Hale claimed the fantastic profit of \$24,000 on thirty-five acres of peaches in 1889.<sup>28</sup>

Like any good teacher, Hale did not leave his readers to form their own conclusions about his story. He spelled them out in Capital Letters: PUSH and CULTURE. The lesson of Push he claimed to have learned from his “little old push-cart,” which he and his brother borrowed and then purchased from a neighbor for one dollar. Perhaps, Hale mused in 1896, that cart “had more to do with our success than we are aware of. . . . hanging back would not move it a peg, but pushing would, and to ‘keep everlastingly at it’ was the only way to get there.”<sup>29</sup> Of course by “PUSH” Hale meant much more than physical effort. It also meant looking on the bright side, for “nothing so surely tends to success in any enterprise as to ignore the clouds and look for

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 2172.

<sup>27</sup> “A Talk About Peaches.”

<sup>28</sup> Hale, “Peaches: A National Product,” 2173.

<sup>29</sup> G.H. and J.H. Hale and Hale Georgia Orchard Company, *From a Push-Cart to a Trolley-Car in Fruit Growing*, 1.

sunshine.”<sup>30</sup> Push was a watchword of the late nineteenth century. Westering Americans pushed westward the boundaries of the nation, pushed Indians onto reservations, and (eventually) pushed the decrepit Spanish empire back across the Atlantic. Inventors and engineers pushed past obstacles and failures to fashion a pulsing new world for the reconstructed nation. Entrepreneurs pushed their ideas and products onto a public with cash to spend. And yes, it was a gendered concept. Push was something men were supposed to have and do. Women might persevere or sparkle with intelligence, but not push.

“Culture,” the second lesson of Hale’s life, drew on an intentional ambiguity in nineteenth-century horticultural usage. It referred to the general practices of raising plants (“peach culture”); it also meant refinement, taste, civilization (“men of high culture”); it also described the specific act of plowing and harrowing.<sup>31</sup> In Hale’s teenage years, a severe drought and a nasty infestation of quack-grass led him to a plan of “frequent culture” to save a large section of sweet corn. “I rode the old, bony horse probably thirty times up and down, out and across, every row in that corn patch during the awful heat and drouth of July and August, while my brother followed along holding the cultivator. It killed the quack-grass, and it nearly killed me, but the superb crop of corn . . . ground into me through the bones of that old horse’s back a never-to-be-forgotten lesson in Culture.”<sup>32</sup> Hale expanded on this thought in a pamphlet he wrote for the Cutaway Harrow in 1900 titled, “Culture, Agriculture, and Orchard Culture. The Utility of Weeds.” Hale

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> As Philip Pauly wrote, horticulturalists were “immersed in an old and rich linguistic compost redolent with sexuality, primitive religion, and primal group consciousness . . . From the early nineteenth century onward, horticulturalists argued that high culture, producing exquisitely flavored fruits, fancy camellias, and smooth greenswards, would lead to higher culture—to the refinement of public taste.” See Philip J. Pauly, *Fruits and Plains: The Horticultural Transformation of America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 6.

<sup>32</sup> G.H. and J.H. Hale and Hale Georgia Orchard Company, *From a Push-Cart to a Trolley-Car in Fruit Growing*, 2.

believed that cultivating with a tool such as the Cutaway Harrow had the effect of fertilizing and irrigating the soil: “tillage is manure,” he said, for it mixed particles and freed latent chemicals in the soil that would otherwise be inaccessible to plants. Similarly, he maintained, “tillage is moisture,” presumably because it coaxed water to the surface where plants could use it. For Hale, these lessons highlighted the “utility and blessings of weeds, those ever-true and constant friends of the farmer, without which I fear the lessons of culture would never have been fully learned by the most of us soil tillers.”<sup>33</sup>

It should be clear that the lesson of Culture, like the lesson of Push, extended beyond commonsensical agricultural practice. In fact, frequent cultivation could also lead to rapid erosion of soil fertility, as nutrients leached into the subsoil and topsoil washed quietly away. But aggressive culture made sense in an age of “push” because it meant that the farmer was always doing something. “You love to flirt with nature,” a speaker told the members (including Hale) of the Connecticut Pomological Society in 1901, “to stroke her breast with the hoe, massage her with the harrow, and manicure her with the pruning knife, and feed her with fertilizers to see how she'll act.”<sup>34</sup> Not content to idly pluck the fruits of nature, in other words, the cultivator with frequent plowing brought his strength to bear upon the earth. It announced his presence with authority.<sup>35</sup> Hale’s agricultural vision thus drew on the language of masculinity then in vogue. He wanted a strenuous life for the farmer and the farmed.

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<sup>33</sup> Hale et al., *Culture*, 6.

<sup>34</sup> J. Clarence Harvey “The Connecting Link Between Fruit Growing and Fruit Selling” Connecticut Pomological Society, *Report of the Connecticut Pomological Society*, vol. 10 (Harrisburg, PA: Mount Pleasant Press, 1901), 49. The CPS secretary merely noted that “Mr. Harvey’s very interesting and unique address was much enjoyed by all present.”

<sup>35</sup> To borrow a line from Ebby Calvin Laloosh in *Bull Durham*, dir. Ron Shelton, 1988.

Hale's story mapped closely to the upward mobility trope of America's nineteenth-century middle class. Work hard, be smart, don't give up, and success will come your way. This was the mantra of the late nineteenth century, the era of the individual vs. "the interests."<sup>36</sup> The fact that he achieved success through agriculture, and not through land speculation or in corporate America, only increased his appeal: for agriculture benefitted everyone. It was an essential role. Push and culture were ways of expressing a fundamental belief in the power of the individual to "make his luck" through very hard work. But Hale's classic Yankee success story also depended on the very hard work of the undercompensated. And this was a lesson he learned in the South.

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Hale's first visit to the South came in 1890. Officially, he was on a mission from the Census Bureau, for horticulture was finally earning federal attention. Contemplating a special section of the Census of Agriculture on fruits and flowers, the Census director invited Hale to make a national survey of nurseries, seed farms, floriculture, citrus and other tropical fruits, truck farming, and viticulture. Along with this special narrative section, the census for the first time counted production and acreage of individual fruits, not just "fruits and nuts" as a broad category. In surveying tropical fruits, Hale not only gave current production numbers but also estimated *potential* acreage in California and Florida by county. Hale and the Census Bureau were bullish on horticulture.

The census surveyor job was a plum position for Hale. It cemented his reputation as a national authority on fruits and nurseries. It also gave him a chance to satisfy his great curiosity about production practices in different parts of the continent, a license to spy on his competitors,

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<sup>36</sup> See Heather Cox Richardson, *West from Appomattox: The Reconstruction of America After the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

and a first crack at any investment opportunities he discovered. In California he encountered a profusion of fruit unlike anything he had ever seen — forty miles of peach and apricot orchards on the way to Marysville in the Sacramento Valley, rapidly expanding citrus lands near Chico, roses by the bushel at Yuba City.<sup>37</sup> Near Spokane, Washington he caught his breath at four and a half pound potatoes, eight-foot oat straw, and forty-ounce apples; in Walla Walla he toured large nurseries with ten foot cherry trees only a year old; in Idaho’s Snake River Valley he saw “exceptionally good fruit country,” especially for peaches and pears; at the Dalles on the Columbia River he saw “splendid wheat country” and salmon fisheries that made the river seem “almost alive.”<sup>38</sup>

These stupendous sights notwithstanding, the riches of California, Washington, and Idaho never really tempted him. Even years later, Hale declined an invitation to come make an easy fortune growing California citrus from USDA pomologist and leader of Sunkist G.H. Powell. “If you would move out of that country and come out to California to live,” Powell wrote, “you would not have any trouble with frozen buds, and you would make more money in five years than you can make in a life time either in Connecticut or Georgia . . . . The records are simply phenomenal.” Hale was unmoved. “I note what you say about the splendid block of 750 acres of oranges and lemons at Corona,” he wrote, “and there is a lot that is fascinating and tempting in California, but as the fellow said ‘It is so far away’ and I think I had rather live in little old New England and take the risk of climatic conditions.”<sup>39</sup> California was a lovely destination, but not a home.

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<sup>37</sup> Hale, “Among the Roses,” *The Hartford Courant* (3 Dec 1889) 3.

<sup>38</sup> Hale, “Out on the West Coast,” *The Hartford Courant* (6 Nov. 1890), 2.

<sup>39</sup> G.H. Powell to J.H. Hale, 23 April 1907; and Hale to Powell, 1 May 1907; Records of The Bureau of Plant Industry, Soils, and Agricultural Engineering, Record Group 54, National Archives, College Park, MD.

Middle Georgia was a different story. “I just lost my head” upon arriving there, he later said.<sup>40</sup> In August 1890, he wrote to his *Courant* readers: “some things I saw on my last trip half convinced me that I ought to live South at least a part of the year.” And what were those things? “I do like the people, the soil and the climate,” Hale explained, “and with these three essentials all right one can make a happy home, and if I mistake not that’s what we are all aiming at.”<sup>41</sup> Climate, soil, and people — these are indeed the things that Hale and other northern investors liked about the South. His breezy description of these “essentials” to making a “happy home” belied a much deeper understanding of what made the South — middle Georgia in particular — such a fine place for launching an agricultural business.

On a superficial level, Hale claimed to like the southern climate because it was not as hot as he expected. “When I left home I dreaded the heat of a southern summer,” he wrote from North Carolina in early August, “yet since I wrote you last it has been delightfully cool and pleasant here.” His readers, meanwhile, were undergoing a major heat wave. “[M]y friends here laughingly suggest that it will not be safe for me to go up into that hot northern country for a month or six weeks yet.”<sup>42</sup> A New Englander like Hale need not wilt in the South.

More importantly, the southern climate did not preclude a diverse and beautiful landscape. He reported with relief that the lack of “fine grassy lawns, broad meadows, and green pastures” was a cultural preference rather than an environmental limitation – though in fact it was both. For although timothy and clover would not grow in the South, Bermuda grass and Johnson grass

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<sup>40</sup> J.H. Hale, quoted in Georgia Department of Agriculture, *Georgia: Her Resources and Possibilities* (Atlanta, GA: G.W. Harrison, State Printer, 1896), 234.

<sup>41</sup> J.H. Hale, “Notes from the South,” *The Hartford Courant* (22 Aug. 1890), 2.

<sup>42</sup> J.H. Hale, “Journey in the South,” *The Hartford Courant* (7 Aug. 1890), 3. The cool weather was also in the black belt where he would buy his farm: “It has been cool and comfortable now for some days,” he wrote from Birmingham in July. See J.H. Hale, “Some Days in Alabama,” *The Hartford Courant* (30 July 1890), 3.

were suitable alternatives. A northerner could cultivate a decent lawn here, raise a full crop of hay, maintain a pasture for his cattle and horses.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, a visit to P.J. Berckmans' Fruitland estate — which Hale called “perfect Nursery and fruit farm” — confirmed that not only grasses but a profusion of ornamental and edible plants could thrive in the South. On the whole, Hale found southern agriculture and culture lacking in refinement, but Berckmans and the other horticulturists of the Georgia State Horticultural Society proved that the climate was not to blame.

So the climate did not inhibit Hale's personal comfort, nor the survival of certain familiar plants. But Hale also saw that when it came to fruit production, the southern climate was a crucial advantage. He came to this realization in Fort Valley, where he saw that the “fine late peaches which ripen in Delaware the last of August and here in September” ripened in Georgia in early July, putting them in urban markets “ahead of the small inferior early sorts from Delaware and Maryland and so sell for high prices.” In other words, Georgia peaches had the potential to capture the highly profitable early northern market. Why would a discriminating consumer purchase a small peach from Delaware when a big red Georgia peach could be had?<sup>44</sup> Of course, Hale was not the first to make this observation. Berckmans had predicted it; Rumph had made his name with well-timed shipments of Elbertas in the 1880s; and, even as Hale contemplated his own future in Fort Valley, other northern fruit growers were moving in, one

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<sup>43</sup> J.H. Hale, “Notes from the South,” *The Hartford Courant* (22 Aug 1890), 2. This was a false impression. Southern grasses would never approach the nutrient level of northern grasses, and while Bermuda and Johnson grasses thrived, they also proved to be nearly ineradicable in crop fields. See Paul S. Sutter, “What Gullies Mean: Georgia's ‘Little Grand Canyon’ and Southern Environmental History,” *Journal of Southern History* 76, no. 3 (2010): 607; Mark D Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation: An Environmental Biography of George Washington Carver*, Environmental History and the American South. (University of Georgia Press., 2011); Lynn A Nelson, *Pharsalia: An Environmental Biography of a Southern Plantation, 1780-1880*, Environmental History and the American South (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007).

<sup>44</sup> J.H. Hale, “Notes from the South,” *The Hartford Courant* (22 Aug 1890), 2.



Ohio company having recently purchased a 1,200-acre tract near Fort Valley. They understood with Hale that middle Georgia marked the southern limit of peach production, though they may not have understood that commercial varieties had need for a certain number of chilling hours, which were lacking in southern Georgia and in Florida. Add to this the fact that Fort Valley was within a thousand miles of “80 per cent of the consuming population of the country” who lived in major cities from Denver to Boston, and middle Georgia began to seem like a perfect location for growing peaches.<sup>45</sup>

It was not just its location that made middle Georgia so attractive to Hale, but also its elevation. “The land is high and dry,” he reported to his *Courant* readers.<sup>46</sup> Though it’s not clear how thoroughly he had taken in the topography of the middle Georgia landscape in 1890 when he bought his farm, he learned from local growers that the Fort Valley region rarely lost a crop to a late freeze— only two from 1874 to 1894; not one from 1900 to 1926. As an old saying among local growers put it, “If anybody had peaches, we had peaches.”<sup>47</sup> The reason was the same one that had led Hale to put his peaches on hillsides in Connecticut: frost drifts downhill. Cold air will settle in bottomlands, so late frosts will generally be harsher in low areas. Middle Georgia peaches grew mostly on what became known as the “Fort Valley Plateau,” at about 700 feet above sea level the highest part of a ridge separating the Ocmulgee and Flint Rivers. This advantage accumulated over time. Unlike other areas, which lost entire crops to late frosts every

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<sup>45</sup> J.H. Hale, “Notes on Peach Culture,” USDA Division of Pomology Circular 3 (1894) 1.

<sup>46</sup> Hale, “Notes from the South” (22 Aug 1890), 2.

<sup>47</sup> J.H. Hale, “Notes on Peach Culture”; Ralph A. Graves, “Marching Through Georgia Sixty Years After,” *The National Geographic Magazine* Vol. 50, no. 3 (September 1926), 274; Al Pearson, interview by the author, Fort Valley, Georgia, 21 February 2008; By 1893 Hale understood that this was “the most extreme southerly section where the Persian strain of peach can be grown.” Hale, Life and Work on the Farm, *The Hartford Courant* (15 July 1893), 5..

five years or so, Fort Valley growers made some money almost every year. And in years where competitors lost their crops, they made *a lot* of money.

Hale was, if anything, even more enthusiastic about the soil around Fort Valley.<sup>48</sup> He mentioned it every time he wrote about Fort Valley, and his adjectives struggled to keep up: “large, level fields of rich, brown, sandy, loamy soil” — later Hale would add “chocolate-colored” to his list of descriptors. Presumably, Hale and his New England readers pictured their own lands: small, sloping fields and rocky, gray dirt.<sup>49</sup> But what made middle Georgia’s soil so “magnificent” was not just this fertile easy-to-work topsoil, but its red-clay subsoil, laying like an aquifer beneath the surface and giving life to Fort Valley’s fruit culture. “It is a magnificent soil,” Hale proclaimed, “and the peach trees going down into that red clay, it does produce fine colored peaches,” and tasty ones too.<sup>50</sup>

Hale’s observations were confirmed by later soil surveys, the first of which was completed in 1903. Georgia can be divided into three geographic zones—mountains, piedmont, and coastal plain—which generally descend in elevation across the state northwest to southeast. The irregular shelf that separates piedmont from coastal plain (the former North American coastline) is known as the “fall line” due to a preponderance of waterfalls. Here the piedmont’s red clay gives way to sand, forming sandy loams underlain by clay.<sup>51</sup> The authors of the 1903 soil survey of what they called the “Fort Valley Area” also credited the qualities of Georgia peaches to “gray

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<sup>48</sup> See also Hale, “A Short Run Down South,” *The Hartford Courant* (17 July 1891), 3; and “On the Way to Florida” *The Hartford Courant* (2 March 1891), 3.

<sup>49</sup> Hale, “Notes from the South” (22 Aug 1890), 2; J.H. Hale, quoted in Georgia Department of Agriculture, *Georgia: Her Resources and Possibilities* (Atlanta: Georgia Department of Agriculture, 1896), 234.

<sup>50</sup> J.H. Hale, quoted in Georgia Department of Agriculture, *Georgia*, 234. Georgia Department of Agriculture, *Georgia: Her Resources and Possibilities* (Atlanta: Georgia Department of Agriculture, 1896), 234.

<sup>51</sup> Kathryn C. Taylor, “Peaches” in the *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, accessed online 3/25/08 at <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.com/ngc/Article.jsp?id=h-962&hl=y>

land”—the local term—underlain by clay. Staple crops like corn and cotton yielded well in this kind of soil, but of all crops, the soil survey proclaimed, “none does better than peaches. The yield, flavor, and general appearance of the fruit is superior to that grown on any of the other soils in the area.” Not surprisingly, the soil was “in great demand. It is almost all clear and under cultivation.”<sup>52</sup>

The natural advantages of soil and climate caught Hale’s attention, but it was the third “essential” that really got his blood pumping: the *people*. Hale’s regard for the southern people will take some time to unpack, for it ran in two directions at once. On one hand, he was full of high praise for Berckmans and the “earnest workers” of the Horticultural Society. Georgia had become “the foremost horticultural state of the South,” Hale maintained. He visited with P.J. Berckmans at his “perfect Nursery and fruit farm” near Augusta and was astonished at the “high cultivation” and sheer variety of plant material on the nursery grounds. Berckmans, whom Hale called “the leading pomologist of America and of the world,” spoke easily of the frequent visits and botanical mementos of Charles Downing, Marshall Wilder, Bayard Taylor, Asa Gray, Louis Agassiz and others. As the head of both the American Pomological Society and the Georgia State Horticultural Society, Berckmans embodied Hale’s hope that high culture could be practiced in Georgia.<sup>53</sup> Hale was also pleased that the farmer’s movement had picked up momentum in the South, since a “few leading families” had controlled southern political office for years. Though this southern populism seemed “crude” to him, they meant well. Hale believed that “in the end much good would come of it,” that the South held the “brightest prospects” of anywhere in the

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<sup>52</sup> William G. Smith and William T. Carter, Jr., “Soil Survey of the Fort Valley Area, Georgia,” in Milton Whitney, USDA Bureau of Soils, *Field Operations of the Bureau of Soils 1903 [Fifth Report]* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904), 322.

<sup>53</sup> Hale, “Journey in the South,” *The Hartford Courant* (7 Aug. 1890), 3.

nation for a farmers' democracy.<sup>54</sup> In 1892 Hale thought Tom Watson a “bright fellow, with lots of pluck and energy,” though up against a fearsome Goliath of a Democratic Party.<sup>55</sup>

On the other hand, Hale saw a lot of room for improvement. He was “greatly disgusted” when he visited Georgia’s Commissioner of Agriculture and found the office workers “busy as bees” not with the business of promoting the state’s agricultural interests, but with organizing votes for their re-nomination at local political conventions. And no one could “give me one single bit of information in regard to the horticultural interests of the state.” Hale dismissed this “southern plan” of self-nomination and self-promotion while in office as “too much for me.”<sup>56</sup>

Even among the practical farmers of the South — yea, even among the horticulturists — Hale found much to be desired, and he said as much to their faces. For as it happened, the Georgia State Horticultural Society was also meeting in Fort Valley during Hale’s visit. They elected him an honorary member of the club, offered the “right hand of fellowship,” and then gave ear to his impromptu address “on horticultural topics.” He presented his rambling remarks as disinterested advice, but they contained within them the germ of his own business plan.

He made his criticisms gently, in part by using the pronoun “we,” when he really meant the plural “you.” We have it too easy, he said; we take things for granted. We “who work in the ground live so well and make a living so easily that we do not understand our business as well as we should.” It’s easy to complain that other businessmen — perhaps he was thinking of railroad men here? investors? — make more money with less work, he acknowledged, but don’t they have “more system and more knowledge” of their line of work? “Isn’t it a fact that very few of

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<sup>54</sup> Hale, “Notes from the South,” *The Hartford Courant* (22 Aug 1890), 2

<sup>55</sup> Hale, “On His Georgia Farm,” *The Hartford Courant* (28 October 1892), 7;

<sup>56</sup> Hale, “Journey in the South,” *The Hartford Courant* (7 Aug. 1890), 3.

us” — and here Hale included horticulturists in the North, South, and West — “know anything of our business?”

Then Hale explained this concept of “knowing your business.” Knowing your business would take money: “It takes some capital to carry on a large business in fruit growing.” It would take travel: one must become a man of the nation, roving about “to see what others are doing in the same line of business.”(This was of course what Hale himself was doing, and on the federal dime! A fine deal in the Yankee tradition.) And it would take knowledge of marketing. One must “visit our great fruit markets,” where he would discover that “People buy with their eyes very largely, taking that which looks the best.” Hale acknowledged that he had seen “peaches from Georgia that were nicely packed which brought good prices;” he had also seen “others that didn’t pay the freight.” From Hale’s perspective, Georgia growers had been simple producers, but to take their enterprise to the next level they would have to follow the example of entrepreneurs in other fields and comprehend their business from end to end.

Hale concluded his speech with a rousing exhortation:

I have been looking over your peach orchards in Fort Valley. Nature has done a great deal for you; but I believe, if you want to make the greatest amount of money for the amount of capital and labor you have invested, you will have to give even more and better care than you have yet done in Fort Valley. Will you be satisfied with what you have done, or will you aim higher and take double prices and double your business? Do not rest where you are; for you have not got anywhere near the top.

And of course *Hale* was not resting where *he* was. He took his own advice. As he was dispensing it, in fact, he was formulating his own plans to “take double prices and double [his] business.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Georgia State Horticultural Society, *Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society*, vol. 15 (Savannah, GA: The Morning News Printer, 1891), 15–17.

To his *Courant* readers Hale was more pointed in his analysis of the southern peach-growers. Most of the orchards belonged to southerners “who have not manured highly or given extra cultivation,” he observed. Despite this lack of effort, however, some had made “great fortunes.”<sup>58</sup> If they did so just throwing the trees in the ground and reaping the harvests, just imagine what a thrifty northerner like himself could accomplish! Invoking Alexander von Humboldt, who called Mexico a “land cursed with the banana” because its people did not need to work in order to survive and so “were inclined to lack thrift,” Hale applied the same observation to the South. It was a “‘land cursed with too much,’ a rich fertile soil and climate that will produce almost everything.” And yet there were precious few “comfortable well-kept homes” like those of “thrifty New England.” What good were all the South’s “natural advantages” if a man is unable “to carve out [a] pleasant and attractive” home for his family? This was a severe blow, for it struck at the heart of Victorian respectability. What Samuel Rumph had done at Willow Lake, and Berckmans at Fruitland, was the exception rather than the rule in the South.<sup>59</sup>

But poverty was opportunity, and to Hale the South was ripe not only for profit but also for development. “I do believe, if a man wishes to make money and at the same time do good by spreading ‘Yankee thrift’ just where it is most needed and *wanted*, the South offers a better field of opportunity than any other part of the country.” Southerners wanted “industrious northern” men to make their home in the South, Hale maintained, to such an extent that in many communities they would even give away land to such men “for the sake of the influence of his thrifty ways upon the whole community.” Even the planters, scions of the old South, Hale said,

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<sup>58</sup> Hale, “On the Way to Florida,” *The Hartford Courant* (2 March 1891), 3.

<sup>59</sup> Hale, “Notes from the South,” *The Hartford Courant* (22 Aug 1890), 2

“see and admit that they do not know how to work, plan and live as well as we of the North.”<sup>60</sup> There was “a great desire” throughout the South that the “thrifty Yankee people should come among them and show them ‘how to do things,’” Hale said, “for go where you will there is a wonderful respect for the thrifty, pushing Yankee.”<sup>61</sup> In other words, just by being who they were, northerners could invade confident in their benign influence on a benighted region. As oblique evidence of this respect for the pushing Yankee, Hale paid a visit to Andersonville, the infamous Confederate prison. Part of it was a large cotton field, while the rest was “grown up to woods of scrub oak.” One who was looking could find “traces of the stockade” and the “small, sluggish stream” where so many Union prisoners drank their death, but otherwise the place was abandoned — just as southerners and northerners alike had abandoned the acrimony of the sectional conflict.<sup>62</sup>

So when Hale claimed to like the southern people, he meant it in two ways. Some of them had earned his high regard with their progressive agriculture and sophisticated living. Others, the indolent and unimaginative who lacked “push” and “culture,” had left open the field of development to thrifty, well-capitalized northerners like himself. And to some extent, Hale was right: immigration campaigns and industrial expositions, with their fawning invitations to northern capital, attested to this welcoming attitude. But to leave the analysis here would be to imply that Hale was only thinking of white southerners, when in fact he said much more about the qualities of *black* southerners.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Hale, “Journey in the South,” *The Hartford Courant* (7 Aug. 1890), 3.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

Initially, Hale saw southern blacks as a curiosity. In Alabama he stayed with a prominent planter who ran his plantation with the descendents of the slaves who had worked it a generation earlier, feeding them with “hog and hominy” as before, living as the “old massa” with more than one hundred dark-skinned dependents. One night, Hale’s host took him to a “negro church” with more than five hundred “colored brothers and sisters.” They put on a performance to remember. Hale felt as though he were living in a plantation novella.<sup>63</sup>

It was just such an old time darkey meeting as you have read about, and I did wish I had a stenographer along that I might give you a verbatim report of what was said. Suuch [sic] exhortations, such wild, wierd singing, and such shouting I never heard before. And when my host asked them to make it a little more fervent, as I was a good Yankee friend from way up north, nearly all shouted “bress de Lord,” and after that the proceedings were “mighty interestin’” till we left near midnight.<sup>64</sup>

For all his powers of observation, though, Hale did not seem to grasp that the performance of his host’s black labor force was not limited to the church service. Uncritically, Hale observed that they were a “very happy and contented class of people” who loved the “old massa and missus” and were full of kindness. And yet these kind workers “stole” constantly, making themselves free with the planter’s livestock and “anything to eat.” It seemed beyond Hale’s comprehension that they might affect happiness strategically, and consider those “stolen goods” the just fruits of their labor.<sup>65</sup> Beyond Hale’s comprehension too was what he saw as the planter’s patient solicitousness. Not only did he provide food and clothing to these “happy negroes,” even the ones too old or sick to work, he also served as “their financial agent,” reining in their profligate spending in advance of the cotton harvest. “They are an over-confident people,” Hale wrote,

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<sup>63</sup> See Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900*, Civil War America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

<sup>64</sup> Hale, “Some Days in Alabama,” *The Hartford Courant* (30 July 1890), 3.

<sup>65</sup> See James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).



always expecting a bigger harvest than warranted, and the planter “had to hold them in check all the time” to keep them from piling up debt upon debt. Hale was impressed and puzzled. “I, for one, would not take the fatherly care he does of that crowd one year for the whole plantation.”<sup>66</sup>

Hale also saw the South’s black population as an apparently inexhaustible pool of the cheapest labor. “Negro labor is abundant and cheap,” he observed, averaging sixty cents for a thirteen-hour day, though he thought the workers were not quite as efficient as a good northern worker.<sup>67</sup> This judgment of the Negro’s laziness did not last long, however. Once Hale had become a landowner himself in the southern black belt, his praise for black labor became more effusive. In the summer of 1891, after he had purchased his old plantation but before he had put peaches in, he paid a visit to inspect progress on the cotton crop. His “negro hands” had plowed, fertilized, and cultivated the lands almost without supervision, and though Hale’s visit was a surprise he found them hoeing and cultivating at 6:00 a.m., in a 600-acre cotton field that was “in straighter rows and more cleanly cultivated than our own farm at home, where we have white labor and two owners to boss the job. The darkey may not know much about some things,” Hale surmised, “but in that part of Georgia he is a good cotton farmer.” It was just as if they had had a white foreman on the job, Hale concluded in amazement.<sup>68</sup>

Unfortunately for the black farmer, skill with cotton did not necessarily translate into profits. Hale understood this, the plight of the black tenant, and he made use of it. As early as 1892, when Hale was deciding what to do with the balance of his own cotton crop, he observed, “Short crop and low prices make the people of the South feel poor.” Black tenants had not made

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<sup>66</sup> Hale, “Some Days in Alabama,” *The Hartford Courant* (30 July 1890), 3.

<sup>67</sup> Hale, “Notes from the South,” *The Hartford Courant* (22 Aug 1890), 2.

<sup>68</sup> Hale, “A Short Run Down South,” *The Hartford Courant* (17 July 1891), 3.

enough that year to “pay out,” to cover the cost of their land rent, much less for the previous year’s fertilizer and rations. With no means of buying food and clothing over the winter, and no chance of obtaining another loan until the February plowing season, they waited for the sheriff to take away “the only working capital most of the darky renters have,” their mules, which had been mortgaged in the spring. Hale told this sad story to his *Courant* readers, but rather than slipping into melodrama he explained frankly how even this was, to an enterprising man like himself, a stroke of good fortune. He had wanted to buy five or six mules, and had expected to pay the market rate of \$125 or \$150 each. But with conditions as they were among black tenants, and with cash scarce among even the more prosperous middle Georgians, he could buy his mules at the auction block for \$30 to \$50 apiece.<sup>69</sup> Like the undercapitalized methods of his peach-growing neighbors, the poverty of his black neighbors opened a window of opportunity for a pushing Yankee.

Furthermore, the specific circumstances of the freedpeople’s poverty suited them for horticultural labor. There was widespread consensus among agricultural observers that emancipation had paved the way for perishable crops in the South. Freedmen moved frequently — “lookin’ for better all the time” — and they sought their own land on which to order their own time and labor.<sup>70</sup> These two actions of former slaves, albeit severely circumscribed by the eventual failure of Reconstruction to secure political or economic power, spelled destruction for some agriculture industries, such as lowcountry rice, which required large-scale production. Southern cotton production could be scaled down, and so it expanded in the late nineteenth

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<sup>69</sup> Hale, “On His Georgia Farm,” *The Hartford Courant* (28 Oct 1892), 7.

<sup>70</sup> See Louis Kyriakouides, “‘Lookin’ for Better All the Time’: Rural Migration and Urbanization in the South 1900-1950,” in *African American Life in the Rural South, 1900-1950*, ed. R. Douglas Hurt (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2011), 10–26.

century. Cotton depended on a mutually unsatisfactory compromise between former masters and former slaves known as sharecropping, a system which saw no less use for all the condemnation heaped upon it. As Berckmans and others recognized in the 1870s, this footloose but unfree population was available to power the gospel of agricultural diversification – in particular, to harvest fruit and vegetables. And workers may have preferred work in peach orchards to cotton work. The *Courant* reported in 1900, “The men who engage in orchard work include some of the best blood of the South.” That is, many who “could not be persuaded to enter a cotton field will take hold and pick peaches all through the season.”<sup>71</sup>

During his 1890 southern sojourn, Hale had parroted the common criticism of black workers as lazy, inefficient, or unintelligent, but his opinion changed as he grew more familiar with them. In 1892 he had acknowledged their skill with cotton. In 1893, he declared: “And for good honest field work give me ‘a nigger and a mule’ every time.”<sup>72</sup> They were up with a bell at 4:00 and in the fields with their mules until sundown. And their work was high quality. “I went South with the idea that the negro was a rather stupid creature, and could be used only in the grosser lines of work,” Hale declared in 1900, but his black belt labor force was “the best agricultural labor in America to-day.”<sup>73</sup>

What Hale had discovered, in other words, was that “the negro is very teachable.” He blamed cotton monoculture for the idea that “the negro could never become a skilled workman.” The South, in devoting itself to that crop, had shackled its workers to poverty and ignorance.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> “At the Hale Farm,” *The Hartford Courant* (7 Aug 1900), 4.

<sup>72</sup> Hale, “Life and Work on the Farm,” *The Hartford Courant* (15 July 1893), 5.

<sup>73</sup> “Testimony of Mr. J.H. Hale,” in *Report of the U.S. Industrial Commission on Agriculture and Agricultural Labor*, vol. 10 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1901), 382.

<sup>74</sup> Hale, “Farm Life and Work,” *The Hartford Courant* 8 October 1895), 11.

But when they were given a chance to work in more diverse fields, such as the difficult and precise knifework of budding fruit trees, his African American workers exceeded all his expectations. As he boasted in 1900 to a Congressional committee, “we have been growing one to three million trees a year, and they have been propagated and grown by negro labor,” some of whom could bud 2,500 buds a day — just shy of premium New England nursery help, who would bud 3,000 a day but wanted to be paid four times the wages of southern blacks.<sup>75</sup> To illustrate this point, Hale printed a letter to his vacationing superintendent John Baird, from Baird’s temporary replacement Henry Belle, one of his “old plantation darkies.” The letter described in detail the progress of their haying, barn building, plowing, and, most significantly, budding nursery stock. Hale boasted that many of his letters from New Englanders were not “half so intelligently written as this one, from an old time slave and a faithful, trusty man. Give the southern plantation darky a chance,” he concluded, “and he is a good deal of a man.”<sup>76</sup>

Hale may or may not have intended this double meaning, but either way it spoke volumes about the way he saw his black employees: they were more manly, less childlike, than he originally supposed, and therefore an exceedingly “good deal” for the employer. A story Hale liked to tell of laying out his orchard in Georgia made a similar point. He had hired a surveyor to lay out straight lines for the tree rows, for cultivation was easier with straight rows, and since he would be viewing the great expanse of trees from the cupola atop his packing shed, he wanted it to be in order. But before the surveyor had finished the job, one of the “old plantation darkies” came to him and boasted: “Lulu and I can do it a heap sight quicker, and I reckon about as well as dat ar man wid de machine.” And so Lulu the mule and Old Henry set to work with some

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<sup>75</sup> They wanted \$3-4 a day, in comparison to the average black wage of 60 cents to \$1 a day. See “Testimony of Mr. J.H. Hale,” 383.

<sup>76</sup> Hale, “Life and Work on the Farm,” *The Hartford Courant* (9 November 1893), 4.

poles. “The work was absolutely perfect,” exclaimed Hale, “and now with more than 250,000 trees in what I am often told is the best arranged orchard in America, I give due credit to the darkey and the mule for the orderly way in which the trees are planted.”<sup>77</sup>

Unfortunately, neither Henry nor Hale’s other southern employees are here to offer a different perspective – no voice emerged in the historical record to contradict his portrayal of a willing workforce. But the history of Fort Valley High and Industrial School (FVHIS) offers a counternarrative. Perhaps because of his experience with horticultural training for his black workers, Hale enthusiastically supported the establishment of FVHIS, a school for the industrial training of blacks along the lines of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Though African Americans technically ran and staffed FVHIS, for much of its early history it served the interests of the white southerners who tolerated it and the white northern philanthropists who funded it. And yet there was a kernel of emancipatory potential in the school.

FVHIS was the brainchild of Atlanta University graduate John W. Davison, who sought to bring the light of education to the black belt. He invested his own money in the school and relied on the meager support of the local black community. The school initially consisted of “one small shanty on four acres of land valued at \$800, against which there was a mortgage of \$1,000.”<sup>78</sup> There were two teachers for about one hundred students, who attended for the four months out of the year when the planters did not require their labor in cotton fields. True to his training at

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<sup>77</sup> Hale, “Peaches: A National Product,” 2174. Hale, “Peaches: A National Product,” 2174.

<sup>78</sup> James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 115. Much of the account of FVHIS that follows relies on Anderson’s, with additional information from Donnie D. Bellamy, *Light in the Valley: A Pictorial History of Fort Valley State College Since 1895* (Virginia Beach, VA: The Donning Company, 1996). FVHIS became known as Fort Valley Normal and Industrial School in 1932, Fort Valley State College in 1939, and later Fort Valley State University.

Atlanta University, Davison believed in education for citizenship, and oriented his curriculum by the star of the liberal arts.

This orientation did not last long. In 1895, as if to follow the advice of Booker T. Washington, who urged southern blacks to “cast down their buckets” where they were and seek a closer friendship with southern whites, Davison made FVHIS a state-supported institution. In 1896, as if to follow the example of Booker T. Washington, who cast down his financial bucket far from where he was in order to tap the deeper pockets of northern whites, Davison hired James Torbert as assistant principal and financial agent. Torbert canvassed northern cities seeking monetary nourishment for their fledgling institution, and by 1900 was raising \$3,000 to \$5,000 per year. He won the attention of some prominent industrialists: members of Philadelphia’s Blue Book, and most importantly, George Foster Peabody. It was Peabody who, in addition to giving his own money to the school, attracted the attention of the Rockefeller Foundation’s General Education Board (GEB). The members of the GEB were “particularly disturbed” by the absence of a Hampton-Tuskegee-style institution in Georgia, which was home to the largest black population in the South.<sup>79</sup> As Wallace Buttrick wrote to Peabody, “I quite agree with you that we ought to take hold of the Fort Valley work promptly.”<sup>80</sup>

And here surfaced a conflict that lay at the heart of late-nineteenth century northern philanthropy in the South. There was broad agreement on the need for improved education for southern blacks, but not as to the nature of that education. Many blacks, most prominently W.E.B. DuBois, believed that liberal arts education was preparation for citizenship and

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<sup>79</sup> Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*, 118.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

equality.<sup>81</sup> But to Buttrick and Peabody and other northern whites, and their allies such as Booker T. Washington, the liberal arts model seemed a wasteful extravagance. Why offer great books to southern blacks when what they still lacked food and clothing? The northern philanthropic imagination was in thrall to the Hampton-Tuskegee model of industrial education.

Indeed, the FVHIS story suggests that northerners were more adamant in their support for industrial education than southern whites. James Davison's heart was not in industrial education. He paid lip service to the Hampton-Tuskegee model because he knew that his northern supporters would approve, but the vocational component of FVHIS remained underdeveloped. The GEB learned of Davison's lack of commitment because they investigated the matter thoroughly. When Davison failed to produce results even after they sent him to special training at the Hampton Institute, the FVHIS board — now stacked with northern industrialists, courtesy of Torbert's fundraising efforts — pressured Davison to resign. He protested at first that his long record of personal sacrifice for the school should count for something, but in the end capitulated. In 1904 the board hired Henry A. Hunt, who pursued the GEB's agenda with vigor, firing teachers, replacing black trustees, and coercing less-than-enthusiastic students to enroll in his industrial education programs. By 1907 the transformation was complete.<sup>82</sup>

Hale, for his part, offered a hearty "amen!" to these developments. He had joined the board of FVHIS in 1895 as part of Torbert's wave of northern industrialists, and donated land and

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<sup>81</sup> See W.E.B. DuBois, "Of the Coming of John," in *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Chicago: H.C. McClurg and Co., 1903).

<sup>82</sup> See also Franklin E. Frazier, "A Community School: Fort Valley High and Industrial School," *Southern Workman* 54 (Oct. 1925):46; Joseph T. Porter, "The Fort Valley High and Industrial School," *Colored American Magazine* 11 (June 1906): 423-25; J.H. Torbert, "The Fort Valley High and Industrial School," *Colored American Magazine* 12 (June 1907): 447-57; W.T.B. Williams, "Fort Valley High and Industrial School," *Southern Workman* 14 (Nov. 1910): 627-631.

supplies to the school on a regular basis.<sup>83</sup> In 1910, he wrote to the *Courant*'s readers on behalf of "The Deserving School Down Among the Peach Orchards." Booker T. Washington was doing "splendid work," Hale acknowledged, but he knew of a "little Tuskegee" near his orchards that also needed the financial support of Connecticut residents. The school's principal (Henry Hunt) was "sacrificing his life and that of his family to this work when he could go it alone and make a fine living for himself," all for the sake of the "two or three hundred negro boys and girls" who desperately needed instruction in the "practical duties of life." Could the good people of Connecticut not sacrifice a few dollars for the sake of this good work? Hale then printed a letter to him from Hunt, which listed their "real and pressing need" for agricultural tools worth about \$540. He expressed confidence that if Hale could "do anything to help us," he would.<sup>84</sup>

In supporting this particular incarnation of black education, Hale framed it as a need for northerners to leave southern labor issues in the hands of southerners. "Help the negro to help himself in an industrial way," he wrote in 1895 after reading about Booker T. Washington's Atlanta speech, "and it seems to me the whole negro problem is settled." As Washington had said, southern whites were the best friends that the descendents of slaves had. Look at the way they fed and cared for former slaves too old to work, Hale argued: "They are not turned off to the poorhouse, or allowed to shift for themselves as are the laborers in many of our mills, factories or corporations."<sup>85</sup> Hale thus joined a chorus of northerners reassessing their opinion of southern whites in the 1890s. Whereas in the 1860s many northerners thought of themselves as the guardians of the freedpeople's destiny, a quarter-century later they were more pessimistic about

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<sup>83</sup> Bellamy, *Light in the Valley*, 13, 155.

<sup>84</sup> Hale, "Letters from the People: A Little Tuskegee," *The Hartford Courant* (22 Apr 1910), 8.

<sup>85</sup> Hale, "Farm Life and Work," *The Hartford Courant* (8 October 1895), 11.



the ability of blacks to “progress” and more willing to pay homage to the expertise of white southerners in handling “their” negroes. Such sentiment was part of a pervasive culture of the “whitewashed road to reunion,” to borrow Nina Silber’s felicitous phrase.<sup>86</sup>

This openmindedness toward southern ways was on display in a striking vignette for his *World’s Work* article. Hale noticed that despite the cool, airy atmosphere of the packing shed, the workers were “tired and languid by night” after so many long days. So, in 1898, he hired a “good six-piece string band” to play from two o’clock until dark every day: “soft, quiet music for an hour or two, and then quick lively airs until the finish — music all the time!” The effect, according to Hale, was immediate and gratifying. Not only were his workers rested and happy as they went home, but their output increased about thirty percent in the afternoons. This increase paid for the band, and then some. Music was henceforth “counted each season as one of the necessities of a profitable business.” Nor was it only among the white packingshed workers that Hale tried this strategy. He encouraged singing in the fields, too. “We aim to have one or more good singers with each picking gang,” he wrote, “singing, laughter, and shouting is encouraged.” Music made everyone “better natured” and more willing to work hard.<sup>87</sup> According to Maryland state entomologist W.G. Johnson, who heard Hale’s packinghouse band on a visit to Georgia in 1900, Hale-Georgia Orchards was a veritable utopia for workers. “There was something inspiring about the place,” he wrote for the *Rural New Yorker*, “everybody knew his place, and I heard no discord or grumbling, not even among the gangs of negro pickers . . . Everything goes like clockwork, and from sunup to sundown there is music in the air on the plantation of the ‘Peach King of America.’” And it was not the clockwork of coercion, not the bite of the lash that

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<sup>86</sup> Silber, *The Romance of Reunion*, chapter 5.

<sup>87</sup> Hale, “Peaches: A National Product,” 2178.

had once ruled that plantation. Hale, a “good general” of his harvest “forces,” ruled by *management*. He managed an otherwise lazy and discontented workforce into “the most perfect unison.”<sup>88</sup>

In light of this and other stories, Hale’s professed willingness to leave “the negro” in southern hands may seem ironic. He and other northerners were intimately involved with southern labor practices. But “ironic” is the wrong word. Disingenuous is more like it: he wrote as an outside observer when he was very much an interested party. For what Hale and other northerners discovered is that a political system that kept a large portion of the population in poverty was just fine for business. Sloughing off the nobler goals of Reconstruction was not just a matter of reform-fatigue, then. It was a sly move toward maximizing returns on investment by keeping the cost of southern labor low. The goals of northern philanthropy thus served the interests of northern investment: to make a cheap workforce better. “We cannot afford to lose the Negro,” Andrew Carnegie said in 1904, shortly after giving Tuskegee Institute its first endowment. “We have urgent need of all and more. Let us therefore turn our efforts to making the best of him.”<sup>89</sup> Northerners pushed for industrial education, not in deference to southern prejudice, but in accord with their own vision for the South’s modernization.<sup>90</sup>

This combination of northern financial interests, southern “tradition,” and black marginalization was on vivid display in Hale’s account of a northerners’ field day at his farm in

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<sup>88</sup> W.G. Johnson, “Peach King of America,” *Rural New Yorker*, reprinted in *The Hartford Courant* (13 Aug 1900), 4.

<sup>89</sup> Carnegie, “The Work and Influence of Hampton” (12 Feb 1904), 7; in Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 91-92.

<sup>90</sup> This is Anderson’s argument regarding the FVHIS case. The historiography says that northern educational reformers capitulated to southern prejudice in going the industrial education route and not challenging second-class citizenship. But in many cases it was the northerners who were the more aggressive promoters of industrial education. Davison had a number of prominent local whites intercede on his behalf, to no avail.

1896, which he wrote about in his 1897 catalogue. His Georgia orchard had boomed in 1895, and Hale continued to pursue expansion: a “fine large new hotel building” for his “leading workers,” a “complete system of water works,” and a spur track, courtesy of the Central of Georgia Railroad, which ran two miles from the trunk line, through the middle of Hale’s orchard and right up to his packing shed.<sup>91</sup> To celebrate these advances, and promote the quality of his product, he invited a number of railroad men, commission merchants, jobbers, and retailers for a tour of his operation. Hale was gathering together all the nodes in the peach supply chain, like a quarterback huddling up with his offense. “I believed they would be more faithful workers if they could know all about the fruit from start to finish,” he wrote.<sup>92</sup> He wanted them all on the same page — of *his* book. And, always the consummate publicist, Hale also took along some journalists, including the president of New York City’s *Fruit Trade Journal* and a representative from the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania Horticultural Catalogue. This fruiterati set out for Savannah, Georgia, by steamer, where they were met by representatives of the Central of Georgia railroad and escorted to Macon by special train. In Macon, several other railroad executives coupled their own private cars to the train, and they went south toward Fort Valley and the new spur track, thousands of trees heavy with ripening fruit stretching out on either side. At the packing shed the group inspected the “scores of bright young men and women” who sorted and packed the fruit, the refrigerator cars, all of this “tending toward perfection.”<sup>93</sup> Hale intended to make believers of the whole lot.

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<sup>91</sup> J.H. Hale, “Small Beginnings and Results Up to Date,” *Annual Catalogue of J.H. Hale Nurseries*, 1897, 3.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

Hale allowed this “general look about” to go on until dark, when he gathered the group at the old plantation’s big house. And then Hale’s description took on the air of a colonial expedition narrative:

When the shades of the soft Southern night had fallen the visitors gathered upon the broad veranda of the farm home, enjoyed the plantation songs and “break-down jigs” of the negro laborers, who had flocked in to do honor to our visitors. Later, when out among the fruit trees we sought our sleeping cars for a little rest, we were lulled to sleep by the quaint, low and sweet singing of the darkies, way off at some cabins, where they had congregated to talk over the events of the evening and wonder “what Marse Hale dun gwine to do next!”<sup>94</sup>

Hale had experienced this “picturesque” South himself only six years earlier, when his *Courant* letters detailed the quaint ways of “the negro.” Now he played the role of the showman, the narrator, giving his worldly New England guests a taste of the authentic South that they would not forget. And as was his wont, he spelled out the day’s lesson for his readers. “Think of the novelty of the situation,” he wrote:

a long train of parlor, sleeping and dining cars in the very heart of that great orchard, and in the stillness of the night, railroad presidents and other officers, fruit commission men and dealers all peacefully lying down together, after an interchange of talk and ideas, in the plantation of the old-time “victim!”<sup>95</sup>

Here, then, was Hale’s New South. The representatives of northern business, ambling through the peach trees to their private cars, resting on railroad tracks which themselves bespoke a vision of national integration. The Old South aristocrat with his verandas and great fields, now resurrected as a Yankee entrepreneur. The “darkies” performing the old plantation melodies and jigging to the expectations of those northern authenticity hounds, and then lulling them to sleep

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

with their charming wonderment, their “sweet voices” signifying their willing submission to the new regime.



*Figure 14*  
From Hale’s Lantern Slide  
Collection, Historical Society of  
Glastonbury, Glastonbury, CT

Perhaps not surprisingly, Hale also expressed admiration for a notorious and peculiarly southern form of labor recruitment: the convict lease system. In the summer of 1893 he hosted a camp of convicts on labor lease for the county highways. They slept in nearly airtight, wheeled cabooses, which made Hale wonder “how they stand it these hot nights.” Hale supposed that since they were all blacks, who did not “appear to need much air and are always happy when the weather is hottest,” and since he heard them singing and shouting in their prisons, they must be happy. And in any case, even if it looked “a little tough to see men with their legs chained together so they cannot run away, and with a guard over them rifle in hand,” Hale was impressed with their “mighty good work from sunrise . . . until dark.” Connecticut could learn a thing or two from Georgia, he thought, for it was “the best job of road work I have ever seen and at smallest possible cost.”<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Hale, “Farm Life and Work,” *The Hartford Courant* (6 July 1895), 7.

Hale was not the only northerner attracted to this southern way of life, growing a high-value, sophisticated crop with a servant class that was, because of their skin color, ready-made. The Yankees who had joined him in his orchard were “fully convinced that the half has never been told of Georgia,” according to the *Macon Telegraph*. The “star of empire,” they said, appeared to be “steadily moving southward.” They were, no doubt, impressed with the cheapness of the South’s resources and labor and Hale’s methodical use of such bounty. But they also professed admiration for southern culture and tradition. After visiting Hale, they rode down to Samuel Rumph’s Willow Lake estate in Marshallville, where Rumph “extended them a cordial welcome” to his home. There on the “broad veranda” before the “spacious hallway,” amid the botanical curiosities of Rumph’s pleasure grounds (“None of them had ever seen a pomegranate and few of them a magnolia tree”), Rumph entertained in grand style. Willow Lake “fulfilled the expectations of the New Englanders of an ideal Southern home.” Nature itself seemed hospitable: midway through their half-day visit, a mockingbird suddenly burst into “his most melodious roundelay,” and the chatter quieted to hear him “a dozen or more sweet warblers joined in the chorus.” It was as if the birds knew these well-heeled New Englanders had never heard such songs “in the freedom of their [the birds’] native home.” Little wonder that “the party was wont to linger” at Willow Lake. Here was a prosperity founded on steel-ribbed connections to bustling northern cities and filthy northern lucre, yet Rumph’s home was an idyllic country retreat. In an age of neurasthenia and hay fever and vague guilt about speculation and graft as a source of prosperity, southern horticulture must indeed have seemed an ideal business.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> “New Englanders Gone,” *The Macon Telegraph* (2 July 1896), 5.

The arrival of these northerners and the growth of the peach industry clearly earned a lot of press. It fit nicely with efforts to proclaim a “New South” of agricultural diversification and cultural sophistication. But words aside, what of their actions? Did Hale and his ilk represent a new regime? Was it a “New South” that peaches heralded? The short answer is yes – in a way. Northern investment changed the South in at least four respects: it drove the physical expansion of peach-growing, which changed the biological dynamics of middle Georgia, which led to different management methods and increased calls for governmental investment.

The physical expansion of peach cultivation from 1890 to 1920 was dramatic. Hale’s own farm doubled in size from his original 1,000-acre purchase. By 1904, the vastness of the place reduced a *Southern Cultivator* correspondent to a breathless series of numbers: “2160 acres, 350,000 trees, 43 miles of driveways, 250 cars shipped yearly, 800 employees encamped on the place.”<sup>98</sup> The costs of running the Hale orchard were, not surprisingly, astronomical. Over the course of a five-week season, Hale paid out \$135,000 for labor, supplies, freight, and selling expenses, not including the \$25,000 it cost to keep the orchard running through the year.<sup>99</sup> And Hale-Georgia was not the only new orchard in middle Georgia. Dayton, Ohio businessmen N.H. Albaugh and F.W. Withoft each had 75,000 trees in Fort Valley; the Ohio Fruit Land Company had about 100,000; the Tivola Fruit Company had 80,000 and the Oak Ridge Orchard Company 40,000 trees; and four other northern-owned stock companies held from 10,000 to 30,000 trees each.<sup>100</sup> All of these individual farms added up to a major boom in peach planting. There were 2.8 million trees in the state in 1889, 7.7 million in 1899, and nearly 15 million by 1924. Nor did

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<sup>98</sup> W.L. Hunnicutt, “The Nurserymen’s Convention,” *Southern Cultivator* 62, no. 14 (15 July 1904), 1. During the busiest week of all, over nine hundred workers were on the payroll. See “Hale’s Big Crops of Fine Peaches,” *The Hartford Courant* (10 Aug 1904), 6

<sup>99</sup> “Hale’s Big Crops of Fine Peaches,” *The Hartford Courant* (10 Aug 1904), 6.

<sup>100</sup> “The Peach Carnival,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (10 Jun 1895), 7.

the expansion take place in middle Georgia alone, for as the lands around Fort Valley went up in price, northerners found other centers, especially around Rome in northwest Georgia and Habersham County in the northeast.<sup>101</sup>

As in other times and places, the dramatic expansion of a single crop had serious biological consequences. Larger orchards of peach trees, mostly of the Elberta variety, were more attractive to pests. With so much invested in a single fruit basket, moreover, infestation could be personally and financially devastating. The biological hazard of monoculture is a well-traveled territory in agricultural and environmental history.<sup>102</sup> But the particular southern response to these particular biological problems is illuminating.

The first major pest crisis was the San Jose Scale. From a USDA entomologist it earned the Latin name *Quadraspidiotus perniciosus*, as it was the “most pernicious scale insect known in this country.”<sup>103</sup> At the time of its emergence in the eastern US, it seemed alien, monstrous. It wasn’t even a proper insect. It was “too small to be seen with the naked eye”; worse, it hid itself “beneath a waxlike coating” (hence “scale”). The female was a “wingless, legless, and eyeless insect, having a long whip-like sucker, or mouth, which once fastened never leaves the bark of the tree.” The male, mouthless, flew about the orchard mating; a pair could produce four billion offspring in a single season. Limbs, trees, then entire orchards of tens of thousands of trees,

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<sup>101</sup> “Hale’s Big Crops of Fine Peaches,” *The Hartford Courant* (10 Aug 1904), 6

<sup>102</sup> See for example Pete Daniel, *Breaking the Land: The Transformation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice Cultures Since 1880* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985); Mark Fiege, *Irrigated Eden: The Making of an Agricultural Landscape in the American West*, Weyerhaeuser Environmental Books (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999); Deborah Kay Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory: The Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture*, Yale Agrarian Studies Series (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Steven Stoll, *The Fruits of Natural Advantage: Making the Industrial Countryside in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>103</sup> C.L. Marlatt, “The San Jose Scale: Its Native Home and Natural Enemy,” in *Yearbook of the Department of Agriculture* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1902), 156.



succumbed rapidly to these “onslaughts by such a formidable pest.”<sup>104</sup> Appearing in California orchards in the 1880s, apparently as a stowaway with some Asian nursery stock, the scale had reached eastern apple and pear orchards by the 1890s. In 1895 it appeared in Georgia. With its capacity to level entire orchards in two or three years, San Jose scale inspired such fear that one entomologist believed the bug had induced more legislation than all other insect pests together.<sup>105</sup> This legislation included the Plant Quarantine Act of 1912, which paralleled the anti-immigration movement of the 1910s by severely restricting foreign imports and giving search and seizure powers to the USDA.<sup>106</sup>

Once U.S. entomologists accepted that San Jose scale would not be eradicated, they worked to establish chemical controls of the pest. Some treated the scale with whale oil emulsions or with a kerosene-water mixture. But whale oil proved to be ineffective, since the scale could rapidly repopulate if not entirely exterminated. Kerosene, on the other hand, interacted with southern atmospheric conditions in unpredictable ways and seemed to be particularly damaging to peach trees. The recommended treatment, therefore, was fumigation with hydrocyanic gas. This involved covering an infested tree with a conical tent twelve feet tall and ten feet in diameter, homemade with eight ounce duck canvas and hoops of gas pipe, and, in order to make it “as near air tight as possible,” sewn with close seams and painted with coats of linseed oil and lampblack. After placing the tent over the tree with a forked pole, an earthenware vessel with water and sulphuric acid was placed inside, and then cyanide ladled in under the edge

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<sup>104</sup> “State Fruit Growers,” *The Hartford Courant* (2 July 1901), 7.

<sup>105</sup> C.L. Marlatt, “The San Jose Scale: Its Native Home and Natural Enemy,” 155.

<sup>106</sup> In a dramatic demonstration of this sentiment, Bureau of Entomology chief Charles Marlatt inspected a lot of cherry trees from Japan – a diplomatic gesture from Japan to the U.S. government – and had the entire shipment destroyed. See Philip J. Pauly, “The Beauty and Menace of the Japanese Cherry Trees: Conflicting Visions of American Ecological Independence,” *Isis* 87, no. 1 (March 1, 1996): 51.

of the tent, and then dirt kicked over the edges of the tent immediately. A four-man team could handle twelve to twenty such tents, but only after training in handling these chemicals, which were “deadly poisonous.”<sup>107</sup> Attention to detail was critical.

In view of these difficult methods of extermination, P.J. Berckmans and the members of the GSHS proposed a stronger inspection law to the Georgia state legislature, one that would give the entomologist more enforcement power and offer stronger protections to growers. In 1898, as they were discussing this proposal, Hale interjected with his own strong opinion. Not surprisingly, he had little problem with such a laborious and expensive treatment regimen. He encouraged the GSHS not to “go too far” in pressing for state involvement in fighting insects, urging them instead to continue with their “campaign of education.” Then, in the cavalier manner typical of his addresses, Hale argued that “these scales and ‘fungusses’ and other ‘cusses’” were “grand blessings to horticulture.” He continued:

It is believed by some that you have only to plant trees and vines and get rich . . . and the angel of goodness has brought along scales and blessed them, and said if you don’t take care of your trees, we will wipe you off the face of the earth; so don’t be worried by these scales and ‘fungusses.’ Mr. President, they are blessings, just as weeds and grass are blessings. Many a farmer would not work half so hard to get rid of grass if it did not injure his crop. He would sit right down and do nothing, and I repeat that these things are blessings in disguise.<sup>108</sup>

But Hale’s optimistic belief in such an “economy of scales” did not earn the enthusiastic applause to which he was accustomed. John Stubbs, a Dublin-based lawyer for the Central of Georgia railroad, would not countenance such talk coming from the biggest grower in the state, and an outsider at that. Calling it “good talk for the men who are able with their thousands to combat these evils,” he began with a firm declaration of his own standpoint—“I was born a

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<sup>107</sup> Georgia State Horticultural Society, *Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society*, vol. 22 (Augusta, GA: Richards and Shavers, 1898), 71.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 22:82.

Georgian and expect to live and die a Georgian, and the life of horticulture is no new thing with me”—and continued with a hymn to the small farmer. “It is the small grower of Georgia that we should look out for,” he said. “Wherever you find prosperity in any country, you find it among the countries with small farmers.” He reminded listeners that treating the San Jose scale with hydrocyanic gas was beyond the reach of many fruit growers. “Men who are engaged in fruit culture with large capital have no right to monopolize horticultural interests in this State,” he complained. “It should be open and put in reach of the humblest citizen in the State of Georgia.”

Then, sadly, he reflected:

A little close thought on this subject for a few years has taught me that a different state of affairs exists now among the fruit growers of Georgia than existed when this Society was organized. I have discovered a great deal of selfishness among the members. A great many people think his neighbor is trying to get the better of him. . . . I want to go back as we were in the early history of this Society, like brothers.

Stubbs thus implied that Hale and other northerners had introduced this dissension to the society.

“I have now for the first time in my life learned that a pest was a blessing,” he marveled facetiously, “that we must not have any legislation to protect us, and literally it is a blessing.”

Then, pointing to California’s strict plant quarantine laws as an example, he urged members to lobby their legislators aggressively. “Let us get rid of [the scale],” he insisted. “We can get them back if we want them.”<sup>109</sup>

In time, the San Jose scale crisis passed, as a seasonal routine of California-style lime-sulphur washes curbed the insect’s destructive powers. The battle with pests brought on by the rapid expansion of peach acreage, however, had only begun. The plum curculio was the next attacker, and again J.H. Hale placed himself (at least rhetorically) on the front lines. And again, a labor-intensive, expensive treatment regimen became the standard.

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 22:82–84.

The plum curculio (*Conotrachelus nenuphar*) was a brownish-gray weevil — “not unlike the cotton boll weevil,” one horticulturist noted in 1919 — which, like the boll weevil, attacked the fruiting part of the plant. The curculio had a cosmopolitan taste in fruit, eating freely of native Chickasaw plums, apples, and, of course, peaches. In the southeast, as peach orchards multiplied and the long growing season allowed for multiple generations, the curculio quickly became the primary fruit-feeding (as opposed to leaf or bark feeding) pest of peaches. The adult weevils, with their piercing mouthparts, made round puncture wounds as they fed on the fruit. Worse, they laid eggs in the fruit, creating a crescent-shaped oviposition wound, and releasing “yellowish-white, legless larvae” which tunneled into the fruit toward the pit.<sup>110</sup> In the late nineteenth century, growers called curculios “Little Turks” for the crescent-shaped (and thus vaguely Muslim) wounds they left in the fruit. High curculio populations meant heavy green fruit drop, followed by an unmarketable crop. “Wormy fruit” usually meant curculio-infested.

The first treatment for curculio was a biological control: swine. Samuel Hape, in an 1888 address to the GSHS, cited pigs as the “best remedy” for curculio. “Turning hogs into the orchard is an economical way” of keeping the “Little Turk” at bay, he said.<sup>111</sup> Pigs cleaned orchards of fallen fruit, consuming with the “drops” the curculio larvae and pupae hidden inside — which did not eliminate the curculio, but at least kept down the population of the next generation. Hogs were not practical on the great peach plantations of the 1890s, however, and while some growers tried lime-sulphur sprays, they were not effective enough to commend widespread adoption.

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<sup>110</sup> Dan Horton, “Insects and Mites,” in Desmond R. Layne and Daniele Bassi, *The Peach: Botany, Production and Uses* (Cambridge, MA: CABI, 2008), 477–479.

<sup>111</sup> Samuel Hape, “Apples at the South,” in Georgia State Horticultural Society, *Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society*, vol. 13, 1888, 27.

The only effective treatment for curculio was picking off the insects by hand. In 1896, when Liberty Hyde Bailey visited the GSHS at their annual meeting in Griffin, he recommended this method. Bailey was a kind of dean of American horticulture with a comfortable position at Cornell University, and like Hale, he thought the curculio a kind of “blessing in disguise” for Georgia growers. “You say it is a good deal of work and expense,” he said. “I have yet to find a single insect who will come to you and ask to be killed.” And curculios demanded not only the energetic shrewdness of the hunter but also the fanatical hygiene of the sanitation engineer. “[Y]ou must pay attention to drainage, cultivation, and clean orchards,” Bailey urged: “don’t leave fruit to rot on the ground.”<sup>112</sup> Garland Ryals of Savannah replied emphatically – as if to make up for the disastrous impact of the curculio that year – that they were “going to fight these bugs to the finish.” The Georgia “cracker holds his own in Wall street,” he assured Bailey.<sup>113</sup>

Hale’s approach to the curculio again trumped the best efforts of his southern counterparts. He had noticed “some few” of the insects in 1895, and in consultation with his superintendent determined to “fight in the only sure way known at present,” by manually destroying the insects. Workers placed two semicircles of sheeting around the base of the tree, like an inverted umbrella, and then “jarred” the tree with rubber padded clubs. The startled weevils played dead, fell into the sheeting, and the workers gathered the “critters” into buckets, which were in turn dumped into barrels at the end of the rows. A wagon hauled barrels to the “crematory” where they were boiled along with all infested fruit. It was a slow and expensive process, and Hale claimed to have endured the ridicule of other growers who thought it could not be done in an orchard of 100,000 trees. Undaunted, Hale set his “‘bugologist’ Bryan and his gang of ‘white

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<sup>112</sup> Georgia State Horticultural Society, *Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society*, vol. 20 (Augusta, GA: Richards and Shavers and Georgia Department of Agriculture, 1896), 39.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, see also the District Reports p. 73-75, which noted the bad infestation of curculio.

winged darkey angels” to the task in late April, and this small “army” of forty to fifty people worked daily for seven straight weeks “at no small cost.” But Hale thought it paid off: in neighboring orchards that year, curculios destroyed from sixty to ninety percent of the fruit.<sup>114</sup> In this case, rather than relying on the chemical expertise that thwarted San Jose scale, Hale used a small battalion of his vast army of workers.

As these cases attest, the magnitude of the northerners’ peach operations had begun to change the environmental dynamics of middle Georgia. The altered conditions created by the larger growers also favored them, for Hale and other big growers had the capital and the labor to combat the pest insurgency. John Stubbs’ charges, then, rang true: the San Jose scale, by picking off lesser producers, could bless the growers with the capital to adopt the latest extermination technology. For larger growers especially, the best production years often brought little profit, while late frosts or insect infestations could yield handsome returns for those who still had some peaches on the market.

It was not just in pest control that methods became more expensive, but also in the processing of the fruit for market. Hale had demonstrated by 1896 the power of branding with his “red label” cars. In the early 1900s, he was also at the forefront of an effort to make pre-cooling the standard postharvest treatment. As a personal friend of G.H. Powell, the USDA pomologist in charge of refrigeration investigation, Hale used his influence to get a pre-cooling car down to Georgia. By 1911, the ICC agreed that Georgia fruit would *have* to be pre-cooled if growers expected to claim damages from railroads.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Hale, “Farm Life and Work,” *The Hartford Courant* (13 Jun 1896), 12.

<sup>115</sup> *Georgia Fruit Exchange et al v. Southern Railway Company et al*, Interstate Commerce Commission Case no. 3322, opinion no. 1550 (11 April 1911), 627. See also the correspondence of J.H. Hale and G.H. Powell in the

Hale and his fellow northerners changed southern peach culture in other ways, too. As planting accelerated, production increased (though unevenly). By 1902, Hale was already proclaiming the end of the peach boom. “With 13,000,000 peach trees now planted in Georgia, and more to go out next winter,” he wrote in the *Fruit Trade Journal*, perhaps hoping to discourage further northern involvement in Georgia growing, “the Georgia business is likely to join the cantaloupe business in an overdone trip up Salt River.”<sup>116</sup> The glutting of northern markets led growers to seek strength in numbers, and Hale was in the thick of the efforts to found the Georgia Fruit Exchange.

In the twentieth century, much of the expansion of southern peach growing took place in northern Georgia and the Carolinas. This in turn led to a campaign by the well-capitalized Fort Valley growers to claim the peach as their own: a series of lavish “Peach Blossom Festivals” and the creation of Peach County with Fort Valley as the seat. Hale was dead by this time, but his spirit lived on in the brash promotional style that characterized the festivals, as well as the public-private partnership that brought them into being.

The creation of Peach County was not the only political legacy of northern investment in the southern peach belt. Hale and other northerners also attracted the attention and funding of the Department of Agriculture and other state and federal agencies. P.J. Berckmans, for all his horticultural eminence, was unable to convince the Georgia state legislature to provide much in the way of funding for horticultural education, entomological investigations, or market research. But Hale, with his experience at the Census Bureau, with his access to the ears of folks like G.H. Powell, put Georgia peach orchards on the map. In 1921, the USDA established a peach research

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Records of the Bureau of Plant Industry, Soils, and Agricultural Engineering, Record Group 54, National Archives, College Park, MD.

<sup>116</sup> Hale, “Georgia Peach Movement,” *Fruit Trade Journal* (2 Aug 1902), 18.

laboratory in Fort Valley to investigate plum curculio and oriental peach moth, among other pests.

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The story of J.H. Hale's southern adventure is yet incomplete. For we must also consider how his southern experience changed his homeland. And for this part of the story we have a source from the perspective of a Hale employee: Joseph G. Pero, whose memoir "*Joey*": *My Mother's Favorite Son* purports to be the "true story" of his life, written in 1980 when Pero was eighty-six and afraid that he would lose his eyesight and memory before he had a chance to record his memoirs.<sup>117</sup> Pero's story illuminates Hale's in suggestive ways.

Joey Pero was born Secondo Guiseppe Pero in 1893 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, the third son of immigrants from Fubine, Italy. Shortly after his birth, his father Luigi migrated again, this time to the United States, where he had a friend in Portland, Connecticut. He arrived in the midst of the Panic of 1893 and was unable to find work in the city, but J.H. Hale was expanding his orchards, and through an Italian intermediary offered Luigi Pero a job digging stumps for fifty cents apiece, along with a primitive bed in a drafty and flood-prone shack.<sup>118</sup> Pero worked through the winter at this backbreaking labor, and Hale was so impressed with the man's work ethic that he offered him a regular job and a decent apartment if he would send for his family. Pero was soon one of Hale's foremen, and in 1900, at Hale's behest, became an American citizen. Though Pero's English was broken at best, Hale simply explained his wishes to Pero — "Louie, I am going to make you a citizen" — and to the judge: "Judge, I want this man made a citizen; he can read and write English." The justice read the oath, Pero said, "I do," and the stage

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<sup>117</sup> Joseph G. Pero, *Joey: My Mother's Favorite Son* (self-published ca. 1980).

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.



was set for Luigi Pero to become an anchor point in the great chain of turn-of-the-century Italian immigration.<sup>119</sup>

The Pero home became a hub of activity for a revolving cast of recent immigrants, some of whom wanted to work for Hale and others who sought their own farms and needed a place to stay in the meantime.<sup>120</sup> In 1903, when Hale decided to purchase and clear a new two-hundred-acre tract at a place called Chestnut Hill, he made Pero a partner and let him oversee the work.<sup>121</sup> Pero had discovered a good job; Hale had tapped into a deep well of cheap labor. Italian immigrants powered the expansion of Hale's Glastonbury operation.

Hale was proud of his Italian workers. In 1906 he took a reporter from the *Hartford Courant* on a tour of his Glastonbury orchards, where they encountered dozens of Italians picking fruit, directed by Italian foremen. "These Italians are natural fruit lovers," Hale explained glibly. "They don't have to be taught how to handle the peaches." He had 150 working in his orchards at the season's height, he said, many of them waiters from fine New York City restaurants — Delmonico's, Sherry's, the Waldorf — who according to Hale saw their work in his Glastonbury peach orchards as a country vacation. They enjoyed the "healthy exercise" and the fruit-heavy diet. "They love to be near the fruit," Hale maintained, pointing to what he called the "Waldorf-Castoria," a "long, low shack" where the workers slept. Hale talked as if he were running a summer camp for city kids, with wages just icing on the cake.<sup>122</sup> As evidence of their happiness, the correspondent reported that every Italian they met "spoke to 'de boss' with great

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<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>121</sup> Pero was very detailed in his memory of the food and beer and social scene of the Italian workers.

<sup>122</sup> See also *Ibid.* p. 17-19 on friends from the big New York hotels visiting them.

politeness.” Hale, for his part, relished his role as lord of the manor. “Yes,” he said, “I never employ any but Italians. . . . They give a lot of satisfaction.”<sup>123</sup>

Hale’s experiences with other workers only reinforced this positive assessment of his immigrant labor. In 1910, as the first full harvest approached for the Chestnut Hill tract, Luigi Pero hastened to build a new packing shed and accommodations for the pickers.<sup>124</sup> But he needed workers, so he traveled to New York City and found seventy-five pickers on the Bowery, a notoriously impoverished and crime-ridden Manhattan neighborhood. Joey Pero remembered them as “the riff-raff and scum of the country.” Even his vocabulary treated them like cattle. “They were tagged for identification and herded onto the river steamer” to Glastonbury, he wrote, “a tough looking lot” who needed “sobering up.”<sup>125</sup> And then about half-way through the picking operation, the workers struck for higher wages — according to Pero, a “mobster” named Vanzetti had “instigated” the incident. Luigi Pero called Hale, who brought in the local sheriff to arrest Vanzetti and ship him back to New York. Then Pero stood in the yard “with a substantial club” and asked the willing workers to step beside him. Grumbling and hesitating, the men did so. The harvest went on.<sup>126</sup>

Pero and Hale had learned their lesson, though. The following year, Hale ordered a steamship of sixty “young negroes” from his Georgia plantation, along with the Georgia plantation manager John Baird and the crew’s elderly black foreman Mr. Peevey. Many of them were college students earning money during their summer vacation. Peevey, Pero remembered, ruled “those black boys with an iron hand, but still he was very kind to them and they loved

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<sup>123</sup> “From New York to Pick Peaches,” *The Hartford Courant* (13 Aug 1906), 11.

<sup>124</sup> Pero, 17.

<sup>125</sup> Pero, 18.

<sup>126</sup> Pero, 19.

him.” This time, no mobsters reminded the workers of their paltry pay and low treatment. Instead, “the hills rang with the voices of those negroes singing spirituals all day.” And Pero joined a long tradition of presumption about the disposition of African American labor in arguing that the songs “proved they were happy.”<sup>127</sup>

The Hartford *Courant* concurred. “Hale’s Darkies a Merry Crowd,” read the headline beneath photographs of the workers “Enjoying Themselves During a Period of Rest” and “Keep[ing] Busy While They Work.” The presence of black men in Glastonbury was quite the novelty. The men picked peaches with great speed and skill — far better than any help Hale could get locally, said John Baird. They sang and gossiped throughout the workday. For their part, the workers claimed amazement at the hilly, rocky landscape — they were “lost in wonder,” said the *Courant*. Some gathered bags of “mineral formations” as keepsakes. The “best thing” about Connecticut, said one of the workers, was the ability to “go right into the woods anywhere and find nice ice water to drink. That’s mighty good to us.” They visited the Connecticut Fair and marveled at the lights, dancing, and music — ““Jes’ Hebben,”” said one, ““or at least de secon’ Hebben.”” And, the *Courant* reported with relief, they gave “no sign of possessing hookworms.” If they ever had, they left “these little animals” back in Georgia.

Hale felt all fatherly and sentimental at the sight. He remembered many of these strong young men as “pickaninnies,” children and grandchildren of the slaves who had loyally remained on the plantation after emancipation. These old men and women were still there in 1890 when Hale purchased the Georgia plantation. And now their descendants walked uphill and down through his Glastonbury orchards, deftly harvesting his late season peaches. The *Courant*

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<sup>127</sup> Pero, 23.

reporter undoubtedly repeated Hale's own words when he surmised, "They are part of the family."<sup>128</sup>

When Hale took stock of his success in 1902, he wrote:

The old corn-field [where he worked as a fatherless boy] is now a part of my farm; peach trees by the thousand cover the hills, and in the peach harvest, when seventy-five to one hundred happy Italians are joyfully singing as they gather the fruit, I do not feel so lonely as I did once on that same old hill!"<sup>129</sup>

Hale had learned from his southern career how to harness the energy of a marginalized class, and how to justify their marginalization with their "joy" in the kind of work he wanted them to do. Italians just loved fruit. "Darkeys" were born to labor in the fields, and just needed some direction from an authoritarian figure like himself. And yet the paths of the two workforces diverged sharply. The Italians — many of them at least — moved up. Some ended up owning the land they had cultivated for wages under Hale. In the South, despite the efforts of black extension agents and the year-after-year labor of sharecroppers, there was not much hope for moving up in agriculture.

The litany of changes wrought by northern investment in southern horticulture must be modified. Northern influence *accelerated* changes that were already underway in the southern environment and business culture. But they did little to fundamentally change the society.

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One way of drawing the meaning out of this whole episode is with recourse to the story of another Connecticut Yankee. Hank Morgan, the protagonist of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, was a fictional creation of Mark Twain, who lived about twenty miles north of Hale in the Nook Farm suburb of Hartford. There he was a neighbor of Charles Dudley Warner,

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<sup>128</sup> "Hales Darkies a Merry Crowd," *The Hartford Courant* (6 Sep 1913), 11.

<sup>129</sup> Hale, "Peaches: A National Product," 2173.

with whom he had coauthored *The Gilded Age*. Warner was an editor of the *Hartford Courant*, which published Hale's agricultural column. So Twain may have read Hale as he worked on *A Connecticut Yankee* in the 1880s; Hale seems to have read Twain.<sup>130</sup>

Hank Morgan is a Colt factory supervisor who takes a head shot in a bar fight and wakes up in sixth-century Camelot. Looking about at the beautiful, sleepy landscape and the simple-minded locals, Morgan determines to “boss the whole country inside of three months,” since he was “not a man to waste time after my mind's made up and there's work on hand.”<sup>131</sup> He does so by his engineering prowess, by his knowledge of nineteenth-century innovation, but also with a keen sense of salesmanship. He creates a Patent Office, a Department of Agriculture and Morality, newspapers, modern weaponry, telephones. He builds secret “man-factories,” where he trains the next generation as engineers and democrats. He gets the knights of King Arthur's round table to wear sandwich boards advertising soap, toothpaste, and other personal hygiene products. Morgan is on his way to accelerating the pace of development by about thirteen hundred years — if not for the church, a devastating civil war, and the destruction of all his work.

The novel became one of Twain's most popular, alongside *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*. It has never been out of print since it first came out in 1889, and along with Jules Verne's work helped to create the genre that would be called science fiction.<sup>132</sup> In keeping with Twain's own multifarious interests and ambivalences, *A Connecticut Yankee* offers paeans to American democracy, screeds against British monarchy, and scorn for southern slavery. But at the book's

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<sup>130</sup> See “Colonel Sellers,” *The Hartford Courant* (14 Dec 1893), 5.

<sup>131</sup> Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, Twain, Mark, 1835-1910. 1996. Works. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 36.

<sup>132</sup> Kurt Vonnegut, Introduction, in *Ibid.*, xxxii.

heart is a deep ambivalence about technology and progress. Twain was simultaneously optimistic about modern technology and industrial capitalism and pessimistic about the human ability to put those things toward healthful ends. If Henry Nash Smith is right, the fulcrum of Twain's ambivalence shifted toward pessimism during the years he was working on *A Connecticut Yankee* — which helps to explain some perplexing problems with the book's structure. The problem of the age was whether the old values of thrift, honesty, fidelity, integrity — the virtues associated with New England and with an agrarian society — had any currency in that age of industrial expansion and government corruption. As Smith poses it, the question was “whether the American Adam, who began as representative of a pre-industrial order, could make the transition to urban industrialism and enter upon a new phase of his existence by becoming a capitalist hero.”<sup>133</sup>

Twain seems to have imagined the South as he wrote *A Connecticut Yankee*. The landscape of Camelot bears a strong resemblance to the landscape of Twain's upbringing in Missouri. The descriptions of village poverty and slavery echo Twain's comments on Southern frontier poverty and the region's peculiar institution. And his mockery of Arthurian chivalry calls to mind his aside in *Life on the Mississippi* that the South had chivalry on the brain like a fever.<sup>134</sup> But most of all, *A Connecticut Yankee* is a story of “the transformation of men and institutions by rapid industrial development.” Camelot itself is “a backdrop designed to allow a nineteenth-century American industrial genius to show what he can do with an underdeveloped country.”<sup>135</sup> And that is exactly how the South appeared to many in the years Twain christened “The Gilded Age.”

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<sup>133</sup> Henry Nash Smith, *Mark Twain's Fable of Progress: Political and Economic Ideas in "A Connecticut Yankee"* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1964), 69.

<sup>134</sup> See Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1883), 468-469.

<sup>135</sup> Smith, *Mark Twain's Fable of Progress*, 36.

Like Morgan, who rose from lowly rural origins to be the superintendent of a Colt factory and then Boss of a kingdom, Hale scrapped his way to pomological greatness in Glastonbury before extending his power in the sunny South. Like Morgan, who founded secret “man-factories” in Camelot in order to train up the next generation in the ways of business and technology, Hale believed in the educability of his workers. Like Morgan, who expressed a guarded admiration for his sixth-century countrymen while simultaneously seeking to transform them, Hale praised southern race relations even as he criticized its business practices. “Yet there was something very engaging about these great simple-hearted creatures,” Morgan said of Arthur’s knights, in words that could have been Hale’s own, “something attractive and lovable. There did not seem to be brains enough in the entire nursery, so to speak, to bait a fish-hook with; but you didn’t seem to mind that, after a little, because you soon saw that brains were not needed in a society like that, and, indeed would have marred it, hindered it, spoiled its symmetry — perhaps rendered its existence impossible.”<sup>136</sup>

Twain’s story ended with the destruction of everything Morgan had built in Camelot and the slaughter of tens of thousands of knights. It is a disturbing conclusion, a military horror show that foreshadowed the trench madness of World War I. And like that madness, the violent conclusion of *A Connecticut Yankee* expressed a certain pessimism about the possibility of peaceful development in a rural place, about the compatibility of the new American capitalism with older American values.

Hale’s end came more quietly, but like Morgan, he was deeply changed by his experience in another land. He died in 1919 after a long illness, with his family about him. Hale Georgia Orchards passed to John Baird, its manager all these years, who had adopted the planter’s

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<sup>136</sup> Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, 43–44.

aristocratic mien despite his New Jersey heritage.<sup>137</sup> And despite Hale's homage throughout his life to the centrality of the home to a man's happiness, his own home was in pieces. For years, he had carried on a not-so-secret affair with his secretary, fathering a child with her, and at his death he left one of his Connecticut fruit farms to her. The family was outraged, and there was a messy court battle for control of the property. His children never did much with the fruit business — Stancliff died young, while Moseley had a reputation for fast living that led him away from the farm.<sup>138</sup>

Meanwhile, Hale's legacy was already fading from view. In 1903, an article in the *Fruit Trade Journal* praised the "Emancipation of the South" where "Cotton Is Not King." It was a striking interpretation of "emancipation," one that repurposed the word to fit the spirit of the times: North and South together in the cause of Progress. The black southerner was not even in the picture anymore. It was "the peach which emancipated the Georgia farmer," declared the article, for it "won him from cotton and poverty to fruit and vegetables and prosperity." Then the article excerpted an essay by the Central of Georgia's Land and Industrial Agent, titled "The South at the Dawn of the Twentieth Century":

A new spirit has come over the dreams of the Georgia planter. Low prices in cotton year after year drove him to diversify. The large plantation was divided up into small farms, and these farms were closely and carefully cultivated. The growing order was reversed. Instead of great combinations and large systems, as followed in industrial lines, the farmer drew in his limits and commenced to build up his orchards, lay out his truck gardens and improve his wheat field. Fruit farms sprang up in beautiful profusion, and acres were planted with new and prolific varieties of peaches, pears, plums and strawberries, while vineyards developed as if upon the slopes of Italy or the sunny hills of France. From Atlanta to Fort Valley and far below, the fruit belt has been extended, and one hears very little about King Cotton, but a great deal about the all-conquering Elberta.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> "Ramblings of a Horticulturalist," *American Fruit Grower* (Aug. 1947), 28; Pero, 30-32.

<sup>138</sup> Pero, 31.

<sup>139</sup> Quoted in "Where Cotton Is Not King: The Emancipation of the South Emphasized Nowhere More Than in



The passive voice in the first part of the paragraph, intentional or not, is telling. For the author gave the impression that southerners had looked about them and begun to diversify of their own accord, with no need for northern capital or immigration. The article was typical of southern claims on the Georgia peach, as folks like Hale faded into the background and folks like Rumph emerged as the face of the industry that had become the face of the South. The story of J.H. Hale's southern peach empire suggests otherwise. The peach industry depended on northerners to become what it was.

And, as it turns out, it also depended on northern markets.

## CHAPTER 5

### ROT AND GLUT

It's 1908. A peach, still firm and slightly green, hangs from a branch in a Georgia orchard.

Someone on the low end of the agricultural ladder plucks the fruit from the branch and deposits it in a wooden basket. The peach leaves some of its fuzz to irritate the picker's sweat pores, but it is on its way to the packinghouse, pulled by a mule. It is the hottest part of the year in a very hot region; the temperature may be 110 degrees. Humidity varies depending on rainfall, but there's a good chance the peach already has the makings of brown rot or mildew on its skin. At least, if the picker was careful, the peach is free of curculio worms. The subtropical South is a lovely environment for a cornucopia of peach-eating organisms.

Upon arrival the packinghouse, the peach's body temperature is probably about eighty degrees. Strong hands dump the fruit from the orchard basket onto a table, or if the packinghouse is well-capitalized, a conveyor belt. There nimble fingers sort the fruit into first or second or cull quality, other hands pack them into half-bushel crates, with several hundred other peaches, and — if this is one of the packing sheds large enough to employ a USDA inspector — the peach is examined by a clean cut man with a clipboard. Again strong arms lift the peach into a waiting refrigerator car, where it waits, along with about 20,000 pounds of hot fruit, for the five or ten tons of ice to cool it all down to a keeping temperature of forty or fifty degrees. But that takes many hours, and in the meantime the peach is traveling on in the hot sun, and that cool air from the ice bunkers is sinking to the bottom, which means that if the peach is in the bottom three

rows it will probably arrive in decent shape, but if it's in the top tier or two, it might well be too soft to sell by the time the train gets to Philadelphia or New York. And if the peach is not simply overripe, there's also a fair chance that brown rot was somewhere in the car, and has spread from peach to peach — especially if the weather was humid and the refrigeration incomplete.

After a few icing stops, the car arrives at Jersey City, where it is loaded onto a barge and floated across the river to one of the piers operated by the Pennsylvania Railroad, number 27, 28, or 29 in lower Manhattan. If the railroad has done its work properly, the carlot arrives in time to be carted to a wholesale market — Washington on the Westside, Wallabout in Brooklyn — where jobbers take lots of fruit for reselling in the city. Once purchased in the wholesale market, the peach might make its way to the belly of a consumer via a restaurant, a retail grocery, a public market, or — if its final destination was the tightened and malnourished belly of one of the city's working poor — via a pushcart peddler.

Or, if indeed brown rot fungus had spored its way through the carlot, the fruit might be visited by a New York City health inspector and condemned. In which case the peach might find its way to a New York City belly via a Hudson River fish, or an oyster, bringing its grower no profit.

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Thus far, the defining places of this story have been landscapes of production: a nursery, a home and garden, a plantation. In the early twentieth century, however, Georgia's fruit growers began to imagine and explore places of distribution and consumption, at the same moment that consumers were tracing similar pathways back to the farm. Places like refrigerated cars and urban markets were also critical to the story of the Georgia peach.

Today, grocery shoppers think readily of the farm. The phenomenon of the “supermarket pastoral,” along with the rising popularity of farmers’ markets and pick-your-own operations, has heightened consumer awareness of sites of production.<sup>1</sup> These direct sales, however, still make up less than one percent of the food purchased in the United States.<sup>2</sup> Most of our food still travels a dark and circuitous path from field to table.

A century ago, a similar spotlight shone upon the darker places of the food system. It was a time when producers and consumers alike demanded to know what happened to food during transit. Why were farmers getting such low returns? Why were housewives paying such high prices? For producers’ and consumers’ groups alike, middlemen were the obvious target, and in the early twentieth-century, carriers, merchants, jobbers, retailers, and peddlers faced unprecedented scrutiny from journalists, lobbyists, and government agencies. The cooperative movement of producers and the cost-of-living movement of consumers are well-traveled territory for historians, but not many have walked the bridge between the two historiographical terrains.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (Penguin, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Steve Martinez, “Local Food Systems: Concepts, Impacts, and Issues,” ERS Report Summary (May 2010), 1. Accessed on 16 August 2011 at [http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/ERR97/ERR97\\_ReportSummary.pdf](http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/ERR97/ERR97_ReportSummary.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> On cooperative movements, see Hal S Barron, *Mixed Harvest: The Second Great Transformation in the Rural North, 1870-1930*, Studies in Rural Culture (Chapel Hill, N.C: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991); Tracey Deutsch, *Building a Housewife’s Paradise: Gender, Politics, and American Grocery Stores in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Mark Fiege, *Irrigated Eden: The Making of an Agricultural Landscape in the American West*, Weyerhaeuser Environmental Books (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999); Susanne Freidberg, *Fresh: A Perishable History* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009); Douglas Cazaux Sackman, *Orange Empire: California and the Fruits of Eden* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); John Soluri, *Banana Cultures: Agriculture, Consumption, and Environmental Change in Honduras and the United States* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005); Steven Stoll, *The Fruits of Natural Advantage: Making the Industrial Countryside in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Helen Tangires, *Public Markets and Civic Culture in Nineteenth-Century America*, Creating the North American Landscape (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); Victoria Saker Woeste, *The Farmer’s Benevolent Trust: Law and Agricultural Cooperation in Industrial America, 1865-1945*, Studies in Legal History (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Suzanne Wasserman, “Hawkers and Gawkers: Peddlers and Markets in New York City,” in *Gastropolis: Food and New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 153–173.

This chapter does so, following the Georgia peach as it traveled from farm to plate, and taking in the perspectives of growers, carriers, merchants, and consumers along on the way.

The market loomed large for peach producers, so untangling the commodity chain is an essential part of their story. But it is also worth doing because a close examination of a crop so perishable heightens the drama of what, in the early twentieth century, producers called “the market problem.” The nature of the problem, of course, depended upon whether one saw it from the perspective of the consumer or of the producer. On behalf of consumers, a generation of progressive reformers wrung their hands over food that was unsanitary, nutritionally bankrupt, and, most importantly, expensive. Underlying all these concerns was a fundamental conviction that the nation’s food supply was plagued by maldistribution — that healthful, sanitary, affordable food would be readily available if not for inefficiencies in the supply chain.

At the opposite end of that chain, southern peach growers and other producers reached the same conclusion. The solution they all settled upon, though in varying forms, was *information*. Growers, consumers, and middlemen all undertook privately to collect and distribute better market information, and they all petitioned local, state, and federal governments to do the same. It was as if they set out to prove the famous caveat of capitalism: free markets provide just returns for producers and satisfactory goods for consumers *if information flows freely*. The most voluble characters in this story imagined a world in which a balance was possible: where growers sold for a profit and consumers bought at an affordable price, with enough margin to provide a living for honest carriers, jobbers, and consigners as well.

To create that world, they needed better information. Mary Jones needed to know how fresh Pineus Polanofski’s cucumbers were and whether four cents was too much to pay; the Fruit Growers’ Express needed to know how many refrigerator cars to have ready for Lamartine

Hardman on July 13; commission merchants Smith and Holden needed to know if Manchester, Georgia was going to have a big crop this year, and when, and which grower had a reputation for wormy fruit; C.J. Hood needed to know whether prices were better in Youngstown or Bridgewater, whether the North Carolina sandhill growers had started shipping yet, and whether the W.L. Brown Co. would tell him the truth about conditions on the market. And the councils and bureaus and exchanges and offices and departments created to collect and disseminate this information did so with vigor. Numbers sped across telegraph wires, tumbled out of radios, scattered across bulletin boards. Production by state; shipments by state, district, county, billing station; monthly, weekly, and daily shipments and unloads by producing state and principal market; shipping point and jobbing prices: they made a dizzying array.

But they did not solve the market problem.

In part the failure of information was a matter of the physical environment. A crop as perishable as peaches, grown in a climate as unpredictable as early twentieth-century Georgia's, shipped in the heat of summer — such a crop could not be made thoroughly reliable. Wheat poured together in a seemingly endless stream in Chicago's great elevators, where its particular place of origin ceased to make any difference. Fruit breathed and perspired. The mark on the crate, and the conditions under which it was grown, harvested, and packed continued to affect its price until the day it was sold. One speaks today of "the market" as the disembodied meeting point of the abstract forces of supply and demand, a medium calling forth the ghosts of producers and consumers for parley.<sup>4</sup> But space, time, and the weather mattered a great deal in the marketing of peaches, and so did the biological processes of the fruit itself — growth, ripening,

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<sup>4</sup> Karl Marx once promised: "Capital by its nature drives beyond every spatial barrier." See Notebook V, in *The Grundrisse* (New York: Penguin, 1973), accessed on 20 July 2011 at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch10.htm>.

decay – each of which were often accompanied and abetted by other organisms. Miles and minutes and atmospheric conditions made perfect decision-making impossible, though this did not stop growers, marketers, and government agents from trying.

Market information was not just imperfect because of unpredictable weather, but also because it was personal. Early twentieth-century marketing of perishables took on the character of its characters — it depended on the personalities of the housewife who haggled with the peddler, the merchant who hoodwinked the shipper, the grower who brought suit against the railroad. Prices were the product of relationships. Over the course of the twentieth century, prices became less personal, as the messy negotiation that once characterized each interaction in the supply chain gave way to a kind of order and control. But that transition took a very long time.

The organizers of cooperatives and government agencies dreamed of the free flow of information. This chapter privileges the *actual* character of that information: disjointed, doubtful, overwhelming. It returns repeatedly to three locations from which attempts to comprehend the market system were mounted: Georgia, where producers and shippers tried out cooperative marketing; New York City, where merchants and municipal officials sought to deliver better information to consumers and to bring order to municipal distribution; and Washington D.C., where young officials within the USDA tugged the great bureaucracy toward the problem of markets.<sup>5</sup>

### *New York City, 1906*

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<sup>5</sup> I chose New York for three reasons: 1) it was and is the largest fresh produce market in the nation, 2) it was the primary marketing point for Georgia peaches for most of this period, and 3) the sources on New York markets are better than most.

In the early twentieth century, New York City was in the awkward situation of dealing with market gluts and inadequate food supplies at the same time. New York's population grew by 400 percent between 1840 and 1880 and by another 260 percent between 1870 and 1920.<sup>6</sup> By the early twentieth century, city officials and progressive reformers feared — whether for humanitarian or political reasons — a municipal famine, an actual shortage of affordable food for the city's working class. One might picture the problem, as one USDA official did, as a matter of shapes: “We have piled our people up in cities twenty stories high in great communities such as have never existed before . . . and those communities produce not one thing they eat.” To feed this vertical population, the city's horizontal hinterland stretched further and further — like a root system expanding toward the horizon as the tree reaches toward the sky. In the nineteenth century, local hinterlands had supplied most of the city's food needs; indeed, cities fed themselves to a great extent, with kitchen gardens along sidewalks and livestock in the streets.<sup>7</sup> But by the 1920s, the average produce item traveled 1,500 miles to the great city, prompting one pamphleteer to boast: “ALL THE WORLD FEEDS NEW-YORK.”<sup>8</sup>

Practically, the twin increases of vertical population and horizontal supply chain put an immense strain on the marketing facilities of the city. If all the world fed New York, much of the world's produce would have to come through a few blocks along the Hudson River in Lower Manhattan. And with produce as perishable as peaches, when hours rather than days made the difference between ripe and rotten, those few blocks could be dangerous territory. It was this

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<sup>6</sup> The NYC population increased from 400,000 in 1840 to 2 million in 1880, and from 1.5 million in 1870 to 5.5 million in 1920.

<sup>7</sup> Mary Pennington, “The Proper Handling of Foodstuffs from Farm to Market,” in New York (N.Y.). Market Commission and Cyrus Chace Miller, *Report of the Mayor's Market Commission of New York City: December, 1913* (J. J. Little & Ives, 1913), 252.

<sup>8</sup> Walter P. Hedden, *Produce Terminal Requirements in the New York Area* (New York: Port of New York Authority and the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, 1925), 4.



passage from terminal to table — not the passage from orchard to terminal — that most occupied the attention of city officials. They sought to illuminate the paths of produce from carload to kitchen in the hope that those paths could be made shorter and cheaper. But to untangle the twisted ends of the supply chain, they needed first to understand them.

Oddly enough, the link of the chain that first caught the attention of officials was the pushcart industry: hucksters who roved the city, singing out their wares through labyrinthine neighborhoods, gripping the handles of two-wheeled carts, propping them on a stick when they thought they made a sale. They sold the cheapest goods; they were the most marginal of distributors; yet they provide a window into the chaotic world of the New York produce markets. Pushcarters performed two crucial functions: relieving market gluts by buying surplus produce, and providing fresh food for the residents of tiny apartments in increasingly dense neighborhoods.

Street vending exploded in the 1860s and 1870s as peddlers trolled the city's burgeoning wholesale markets seeking odd lots and overstocks. Peddling became an important source of income for many, especially recent immigrants, some of whom in the 1860s and 1870s became surprisingly wealthy. The majority, however, especially from the 1880s on, were self- and family-exploiting small businesspeople, working long hours for modest returns. As the twentieth century opened, the number of pushcart operators expanded rapidly, from 2,073 licenses in 1900, to 6,747 in 1904.<sup>9</sup> In 1906, ninety-seven percent of those licenses belonged to immigrants, especially Hebrews, Italians and Greeks.<sup>10</sup> They were especially important for Jewish and Italian communities on the Lower East Side, where pushcarts coagulated into stationary markets on

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<sup>9</sup> *Report of the Mayor's Push-cart Commission* (City of New York, 1906), 11.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

Hester Street, Ninth Street, Grand Street Market, and Orchard and Rivington Street Markets.<sup>11</sup> In these locations, pushcarts served the same function as the open air markets that many immigrants had known in Europe.

The pushcart peddler's counterpart was the haggling housewife. Until the rise of the supermarket in the 1930s and 1940s, when consumers took over the cart-pushing, food procurement was demanding work. Women purchased from a range of sources, not just peddlers but also public markets and local grocers, as well as growing some of their own in gardens. They "bartered, negotiated, demanded personal attention, and submitted themselves to the canny gaze of food sellers — when they were not scavenging or stealing." Though not peaceful or convenient, the task of food shopping was necessary and honorable.<sup>12</sup> And, more to the point here, it was intensely personal. Peddlers won favor from women because their goods were often fresher and cheaper than the local grocer, and, since their carts could navigate even back alleys of tenement neighborhoods, much more accessible.

As a means of distribution, pushcarts were simultaneously more direct and disorganized than other retailers. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the work of distribution was a matter of legs and lungs. For food to get from the pier on the Hudson River to the distant boroughs, someone had to navigate the streets and cart it to the consumer, with their own strength or the strength of their horses. By the 1910s a number of grocers had simply given up selling perishables because the work required was too strenuous. Peter Peckich, who owned a grocery in the Bronx, gave up selling green goods, subletting his storefront to an Italian who, when he wanted to sell berries, would leave at 10 pm on his horse for Washington Market, spend the night at the market, purchase his fruit first thing in the morning, and bring it back to the store

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<sup>11</sup> Wasserman, "Hawkers and Gawkers: Peddlers and Markets in New York City," 155. Wasserman, 155.

<sup>12</sup> Deutsch, *Building a Housewife's Paradise*, 13.

by 10 am.<sup>13</sup> If a grocer declined to spend the night, he would have to be at the market by three or four in the morning and then stay up late packing it away nicely so it would be saleable the following day.

Pushcart peddlers thus performed a service many grocers were unable or unwilling to do, but in so doing they made themselves an object of progressive concern. The so-called “Pushcart Problem,” or, more ominously, “Pushcart Evil,” earned official attention in 1905, when Mayor George McClellan appointed a commission to make a special investigation of the matter. Which is why, at 11 a.m. on Thursday, May 11, 1906, some two hundred New York City police officers descended upon the congested area east of Broadway and south of Fourteenth street, armed with street maps, stacks of survey cards, and friendly demeanors. One by one, methodically, they accosted pushcart peddlers. William J. Regan, an officer of the 28<sup>th</sup> precinct, caught up with a cucumber peddler on Suffolk Street between Hester and Grand. The man’s name was Pineus Polanofski, a Jew who had been in the US for seven years and had held a pushcart license for two. He rented a cart for ten dollars a day, bought goods from “several” dealers, and on that Thursday sold cucumbers that Regan would willingly have purchased and served to his children.<sup>14</sup> By five o’clock, Regan and his fellow patrolmen had conducted more than 2,500 of these interviews.

After a series of similar surveys and a public hearing, the mayor’s commission delivered their report in 1906. They acknowledged that pushcarts added “materially to the picturesqueness of the city's streets,” imparted an “air of foreign life which is so interesting to the traveler,” and lent “an element of gaiety and charm to the scene which is otherwise lacking.” Yet “the practical

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<sup>13</sup> Testimony of Peter Peckich, in Commission and Miller, *Report of the Mayor’s Market Commission of New York City*, 244–245.

<sup>14</sup> *Report of the Mayor’s Push-cart Commission*, 110.

disadvantages from the undue congestion of peddlers in certain localities are so great as to lead to a demand in many quarters for the entire abolition of this industry, if it may be dignified by that term."<sup>15</sup> So although peddlers were an essential part of the New York streetscape, they also represented the dark forces of disorder and chaos. Peddlers impeded traffic, which was a hazard not only to commerce but to fire engines — the drivers professed a “constant fear” of smashing into a pushcart or peddler. They didn’t clean up properly or maintain sanitary conditions. They took up space needed by children for play. And they contributed to the corruption of city life: the commission discovered pushcart cartels — as many as 160 carts owned by a single “padrone,” who profited at the expense of his less savvy countrymen. They were all supposedly licensed, but the commission also found that there was an active trade in pushcart licenses, so that enforcement was little more than a “farce.” The commission counted 4,500 pushcart peddlers in the city, thirty-seven percent of whom sold fruit, more than any other single item.<sup>16</sup> This number was probably an underestimate; the Italian Pushcart Peddlers’ Association claimed there were fourteen thousand pushcarts in the city, nine thousand with licenses.<sup>17</sup>

Pushcart peddlers did not undergo this investigation quietly. Indeed, one of the surprising findings of the commission was that most peddlers belonged to one of several well-organized associations: the United Citizens’ Peddlers’ Association of Greater New York, the Push-cart Vendors’ Association of Harlem, the Italian Pushcart Peddlers’ Association, and the Brooklyn Peddlers’ Association. In their testimony before the commission, they portrayed themselves as honest businessmen with their eyes on the twin prizes of citizenship and a more stable

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 218.

occupation, and in the process providing a public utility.<sup>18</sup> Just think, said an Italian representative, if pushcart peddlers collectively made \$28,000 a day, that represented 2,800,000 pennies — because “their money is made in cent sales, cent by cent” — which represented “more than one million clients . . . who daily go to the push-carts.”<sup>19</sup> For the most part the peddlers claimed to agree with the need for more regulation — distributing the carts more evenly about the city, or requiring licenses with photographs. But many vehemently opposed the creation of central markets: “To congregate the peddlers in one or ten places in all the city,” the Italian interlocutor explained, “would mean destruction for the class, and starvation for 14,000 families.”<sup>20</sup>

After much study and deliberation, the pushcart commission came down on the side of this pushcart lobby. Central public markets, they concluded, “will not solve the push-cart problem, cannot be self-supporting and would be an unwarranted burden to the taxpayers.”<sup>21</sup> They opted instead for changing the licensing rules to allow fresh-off-the-boat immigrants to peddle, enforcing a more even distribution of pushcarts on certain crowded streets, but otherwise leaving the system as it was. The pair of photographs that opened the report, along with the diagram that concluded it, encapsulate the sort of reform they hoped to see: traversable streets that retained an air of the picturesque.

The 1906 study was just the first of many. In 1913 and in 1914, other groups repeated the conclusions of the 1906 commission; and in 1917, a third study argued that in the decade since the 1906 report, “the pushcart problem has not changed materially.” That is, “conditions as to

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 85-86.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 218.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 90.

pushcart peddling” remained “deplorable by reason of the congestion of traffic, the accumulation of filth in the streets and the payment of tribute by peddlers to officials and private individuals.”<sup>22</sup> Every decade of the twentieth century saw attempts to regulate the pushcart markets; in 1992, yet another special committee reported on the “tremendous problems” created by the city’s 17,000 licensed and unlicensed peddlers.<sup>23</sup>

Gradually, reformers recognized that fixing the “pushcart evil” was just one step on the way to overhauling the entire market system. “Of the many pressing problems demanding immediate solution,” Manhattan Borough president Marcus Marks explained in 1915, “there is none more important than the development of a proper market system.”<sup>24</sup> For many reformers, one clear answer to the cost-of-living-*cum*-overproduction-*cum*-distribution problem was in the creation of wholesale terminal markets such as the one in Berlin and other modern metropolises. Each of the nine railroads and twenty-three steamship lines had its own point of sale on the piers of lower Manhattan; once purchased by jobbers and commission merchants, food then traveled by truck to retail markets and corner groceries. It was an inefficient and indecipherable muddle. But if the city split the stream of all incoming and outgoing produce into five separate wholesale produce markets, this muddle could be transformed into a clean, bright machine. As the first step in this decentralization plan, advocates proposed a twenty-eight acre complex in the Bronx.

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<sup>22</sup> Leonard M. Wallstein, *The Pushcart Problem in New York City: Progress Toward Its Solution and Need for Prohibition of Pushcart Peddling in the Vicinity of the Williamsburg and Manhattan Bridge Markets* (New York, N.Y.: Commissioner of Accounts, 1917), 4.

<sup>23</sup> Coy M. LaSister, *New York in Transition: Itinerant Peddlers and Vendors Everywhere* (New York, N.Y.: City of New York, Department of Business Services, 1992), I.

<sup>24</sup> Marcus M. Marks, *Reports on Market System for New York City and on Open Markets Established in Manhattan* (New York: Borough of Manhattan, City of New York, 1915), 54, 16, 13.

Properly equipped terminal markets, they believed could make the city's food supply safer, cheaper, and easier to control.<sup>25</sup>

The terminal market idea was not the only one circulating in the 1910s. One reformer proposed a system of city-run experimental markets, like Seaman Knapp's demonstration farms for the General Education Board/USDA, would would display modern sanitation and thrift and shame the corrupt ignorance of the average store owner. Another argued that New York had proved itself an inept manager of its nineteenth-century system of public markets, so why should it be trusted with a new terminal market? Pushcarts and open-air markets could distribute food with remarkable efficiency, if the streets were freed of excessive regulation.<sup>26</sup> Marcus Marks proposed a more controlled system of open-air markets, but argued along similar lines. "Markets are not built," he said, "they grow."<sup>27</sup>

In the end, New York City built. Officials broke for the grand gesture, beginning construction of the Bronx Terminal Market in 1918 and finishing almost ten years later. The complex became a sinkhole for public funds. Originally estimated at \$7 million for land and building, the land alone exceeded that figure, and the full bill came to \$22.5 million.<sup>28</sup> And it was not exactly state of the art, either. Officials in the Department of Markets complained about the location of its freezing rooms — on the sixth floor where they would have to use a maximum amount of energy to pump brine and maintain low temperatures.<sup>29</sup> Annual revenue to the city,

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<sup>25</sup> Tangires, *Public Markets and Civic Culture in Nineteenth-Century America*, 196–198, citing New York (City), Mayor's Market Commission, Report, 49-54.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 199. Thomas Libbin offered the first proposal; the second was by AFL editor J.W. Sullivan.

<sup>27</sup> Marcus M. Marks, *Reports on Market System for New York City and on Open Markets Established in Manhattan* (New York: Borough of Manhattan, City of New York, 1915), 37, x-devonthink-item://8DE1D014-7DB2-498D-9BB3-729E019536B7.

<sup>28</sup> Tangires, *Public Markets and Civic Culture in Nineteenth-Century America*, 200; New York City Department of Markets, *Annual Report*, 1934, 12.

<sup>29</sup> New York City Department of Markets, *Annual Report*, 12–13.

which the original proposal had estimated at upwards of \$1.3 million, in 1934 amounted to \$67,000 — barely enough to pay operational expenses exclusive of electricity.<sup>30</sup> And having built a market, still *the market* did not move. The Bronx facility became an “efficient and useful secondary” market, but Lower Manhattan continued to receive nearly all produce.<sup>31</sup> “I do not know of any human foresight or power that can establish a Market,” said one of the commission merchants who testified for the 1913 study that originally proposed the terminal market. “It is a matter of growth and of a great number of circumstances which no man can foresee.”<sup>32</sup> The same might have been said of the Georgia peach in New York City. The biology of the fruit and the organisms that accompanied them to market interacted with the local market environments in unpredictable ways.

So completion of the Bronx Terminal Market did not mark the end of chaos for New York City Markets. Pushcarters peddled. Housewives haggled. Railroads shipped to the same old Manhattan piers. At every point, reformers tried to step in and make their arrangements more “scientific.” And in the 1930s, reformers would again take aim at the idiosyncrasies of New York marketing methods.

### *Georgia, 1908*

Idiosyncratic was exactly how many described the methods of the Georgia growers who shipped their peaches to those aging New York piers. And just as outside observers attempted to relieve the housewife and the peddler of their unscientific negotiations, so too did outsiders step into the relationship between the grower and his seller, to try and bring some method to their

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>31</sup> Department of Public Works, *Preliminary Studies for a Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Wholesale Produce Market New York City*, vol. 1 Factual Data (New York, N.Y.: Department of Markets, 1946), 26.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.



madness. For growers, *organization* was the primary means of their search for order. Their most dramatic efforts came at the end of the 1908 season.

That was the year that Georgia growers lost their faith in the New York City market. The season transported Georgia growers into New York City in a way that previous seasons had not, forcing them to peer into the places where their fruit actually changed hands. For the first twenty years of Georgia's commercial peach industry, Georgia growers faced almost no competition in the eastern markets, at least early in the season. Consequently, growers and their organizations had focused on production and transportation as their primary concerns. They were growers and shippers, not marketers. In the early days, market advice was limited to a few topics. First, send high quality, unblemished fruit; and second, pick a reliable merchant to sell your fruit, someone with a reputation for honesty. Georgia peaches had been celebrated and amply rewarded in New York City. Demand seemed automatic. There was always someone to blame for problems with the peach markets: one year it would be the railroads, another commission merchants. But in 1908, it was no one's fault but the growers themselves. Suddenly growers understood that the market for their fruit was a set of market *places* — locations with physical limitations.

Of course Georgia growers did not know what was coming, though some feared it. From their perspective, 1908 promised to be a great season for peaches. There were more than ten million trees ready to bear in Georgia, up from two and a half million only two decades before. The 1907 season had seen less production than normal — just over a million bushels — and according to the Department of Agriculture, only 37 percent of the national peach crop had survived.<sup>33</sup> Growers knew that orchards tended to bounce back after a low year, and Georgia's orchards had not yet produced at full capacity.

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<sup>33</sup> "Fruit Plentiful This Year," *The Washington Post* (Jun 13, 1908), 10.

As growers looked for increased production, they sought to prepare for the year organizationally. In February, members of the Georgia Peach Growers' Association (GPGA) were at the Interstate Commerce Commission court in Washington D.C., negotiating a lower rate with the big railroads. They had lost this same battle just a few years before, in 1904, when they had insisted that they could not ship 20,000 pounds of peaches in a refrigerator car without damaging the fruit. The railroads demurred, impressively, with well-paid attorneys, and the ICC had concluded that the roads already provided exceptional service for a fair rate. Rates remained the same; the GPGA acquired only a \$500 legal debt.<sup>34</sup> In 1907 they had managed to revive the question, and GPGA officers were confident of a positive decision.<sup>35</sup> "We have not yet reaped our reward," president Dudley Hughes acknowledged at the 1906 annual meeting. "But, gentlemen, fruit-growers of Georgia," he continued, "if you exercise your rights by combined action, you will get your dues. Organization will yet win the day for justice, for equity and for right."<sup>36</sup> A victory in the ICC court would vindicate the wisdom of joining together in an organization like the GPGA, which included about three hundred growers in 1906.<sup>37</sup> They could stand up to the railroads and win concessions. They could compete in the world of heartless corporations.

There was some concern, though, that the GPGA was not powerful enough. On March 23, members met in Atlanta's Piedmont Hotel to consider a stronger combination of growers. Carl Albrecht, manager of the Cincinnati-based National Produce Distributing Company, was on hand to propose the organization of something he called the "Southern Peach Growers' Exchange,"

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<sup>34</sup> Georgia Peach Growers' Association, *Minutes of the Fourteenth Annual Session*, vol. 14 (Macon, GA: Anderson Printing Company, 1906), 9, x-devonthink-item://3EFC45A2-DD09-4163-9249-8702DFE11C74.

<sup>35</sup> "Peach Growers Ask Reduction," *The Atlanta Constitution* (Feb 9, 1908), 2.

<sup>36</sup> Georgia Peach Growers' Association, *Minutes of the Fourteenth Annual Session*, 14:2.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 14:13.

which would market its products through his company. National Produce had commissioners in all the large cities, Albrecht explained. They could place fruit on the market “without glutting it at any point.” But the growers declined to organize, professing confusion at the details of the plan, though a few signed up with Albrecht’s company individually.<sup>38</sup> John D. Cunningham, one of Georgia’s larger growers, later explained that National Produce was not the well-established company that Albrecht claimed it to be. They had no experience with Georgia peaches and only \$5,000 in capital rather than \$1 million.<sup>39</sup> Georgia growers had evidently smelled a rat and had decisively voted down the proposition.

In the meantime, growers anticipated to one of their biggest production years yet. By April 25, the *Constitution* proclaimed that 1908 could be the best year ever. “The peach crop this season is the heaviest and most perfect in ten years,” a correspondent from Concord, Georgia, wrote. “They went through the blooming process under summer skies and without any rain, and the weather has been favorable for their development so far.” The reporter’s predictions spilled off the page: seven million trees, producing a crate each, at fifty cents a crate above expenses, 14,000 carloads — nearly three times as much as the state had ever produced — and a collective profit of \$3.5 million, not to mention the home orchards which would “furnish many thousands of dollars’ worth of the most palatable and healthful food.”<sup>40</sup>

This larger crop would require careful cooperation. In May, to prepare for this great crop, Fort Valley grower and GPGA president H.A. Matthews invited all peach growers to meet in Atlanta. “The prospect is now for an excellent crop of good peaches throughout the state,” Matthews wrote, inviting not just growers, but railroads, crate makers, commission houses, and

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<sup>38</sup> “Peach Growers Hold Meeting,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Mar 24, 1908), 7

<sup>39</sup> J. D. Cunningham Talks Of Growers' Meeting *The Atlanta Constitution* (Mar 25, 1908), 5

<sup>40</sup> Peach Crop May Break Record *The Atlanta Constitution* (Apr 25, 1908), 9.

canning outfits to the meeting. Making a plan for the season together, Matthews concluded, “cannot fail to be of mutual benefit.”<sup>41</sup> The growers were excited on the day of the meeting, and why not? Raising peaches had proved to be a perilous activity. Late freezes sometimes wiped out the entire crop. Hailstorms damaged on a more localized basis. San Jose Scale infestations required growers to destroy entire orchards to prevent its spread. Curculio infestations, or lack of rain or too much could render the fruit unmarketable. So when it looked like they would finally produce a good crop, the sense of psychological release was powerful. They were “A Busy Crowd,” buzzing rapidly between important topics for the upcoming season. “Every Phase Talked Of.”<sup>42</sup>

In all of this talking, though, consensus was hard to find. The peach growers devoted more than two hours, for example, to a discussion of “how a cannery might be established, the cost of conducting one and how one might be sustained in a community or section.” Preservation had long been one of the primary hopes of those who hoped to even out the production of Georgia’s fruit. If surplus crops were readily canned, growers might not be so eager to dump all their fruit on unprofitable markets. This discussion of preservation led naturally to the question of distribution. How could they dispose of their crop most advantageously? But before they could address this issue adequately, they found themselves sliding into a discussion of “the price that should obtain during the coming selling season.” Some growers argued for selling freight-on-board (f.o.b.) — cash in hand for the crop, and let the merchant worry about the market. Others favored the “large concerns who accept consignments” for the chance of making a higher rate than f.o.b. Others thought they should be branching out to foreign markets — shipping under

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<sup>41</sup> Peach Growers Meet On May 13 H A Mathews; J W Ewing *The Atlanta Constitution* (May 1, 1908), 9

<sup>42</sup> Peach Growers A Busy Crowd, *The Atlanta Constitution* 1881; May 14, 1908), 14.

heavy refrigeration to London, perhaps. At the end of the discussion, the minimum and maximum prices suggested varied so widely that the GPGA “declined to place itself on record.”<sup>43</sup>

To complete the confusion, growers heard from three representatives of companies who offered service from orchard to market: Arthur Rule, of the Pittsburgh commission merchants Crutchfield & Woolfork, a “young man of good appearance” and “clever in his presentation”; John D. Cunningham, the “old Georgian” and “successful peach grower” who represented the American Fruit Union out of Cincinnati and, “in his usual pleasant manner” offered the “advantages of his company;” and a representative from a D.C. area consignment merchant. At this time, each grower made his own arrangements for the season. Smaller ones frequently allied themselves with a local produce broker, who collected full carloads by purchasing fruit from a number of small growers. Others shipped with a national company like John Cunningham’s American Fruit Union, or contracted directly with commission houses in major city. Having heard from the marketers, the GPGA got around to that great business of all associations: appointing committees. There was a committee on transportation to confer with the railroads, a committee on commission houses to compile a list in various cities of houses “that have proven reliable,” and then “a number of committees” for “various works.”<sup>44</sup> If only the railroads would not leave them in the lurch this year as they had in the past.

A week later, it seemed that even the railroads had gotten on board. They were sprinkling the countryside with refrigerator cars, with more than 1,300 already in place. The roads were promising prompt service. And well they might: they were under increasing pressure to improve their shipping performance over previous seasons. In an effort to assign responsibility for debacles like the 1907 season, when the small crop had languished in orchards and

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

packinghouses for lack of cars, Georgia's General Assembly had passed a law holding the railroads responsible for furnishing refrigerator cars sufficient to the crop at hand; meanwhile, the ICC had promised to hold the originating railroad accountable for the condition of the product at the market.<sup>45</sup> Just in case, many growers were experimenting with on-the-farm canneries — canneries were quite the “fad” in 1908. “All schemes that can be devised for avoiding losses on a glutted market” were being implemented in that season -- a hint that some recognized the difficulty of marketing such a large crop.<sup>46</sup>

If observers knew what was coming, they did not let on in interviews with newspaper reporters. Rather, they grew more enthusiastic as the shipping season approached. The crop would be “a prize winner,” the *Constitution* promised, “large in size, luscious in taste and profitable in the amount of returns it will bring.” An American Fruit Union agent estimated 7,000 carloads of fruit “in better condition than I have ever known it.” As the fruit began to roll to market, the Southern railroad's commercial agent was impressed: “I have never seen so many nor so fine quality of fruit.” By June 20, the *Constitution* was convinced. “This is going to be a banner year with the peach men.”<sup>47</sup>

If the market held, it could indeed have been a “banner year.” As it turned out, that was a big “if.” In late June, a prominent north Georgia grower warned that organization would be essential in full crop years like 1908. “We have reached the point,” he said, “where, unless some definite steps are taken for the protection of the industry, the Georgia peach crop is likely to

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<sup>45</sup> “Peach Growers Here Tomorrow,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (12 May 1908), 7.

<sup>46</sup> “Peach Growers Are Given Cars,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (May 21, 1908), 10.

<sup>47</sup> Georgia Crops Will Be Large *The Atlanta Constitution* (Jun 10, 1908), 5; “21,000,000 Baskets, Georgia's Peach Crop,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Jun 13, 1908), 3; “Forty Cars of Peaches Pass Through Nightly,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Jun 18, 1908), 7; “Many Peaches Shipped,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Jun 20, 1908), 8.

prove a liability instead of an asset.”<sup>48</sup> Georgia growers had no such organization, and in Fort Valley growers were already scaling back their shipments and sending fruit to canneries because they were not making enough — only ten to twenty-five cents per crate above expenses.<sup>49</sup>

In July, everything seemed to ripen at once. More than half of Georgia’s peaches typically went to New York and Philadelphia, and these markets were simply overwhelmed. In about two weeks in late June and early July, New York City absorbed nearly 700 carloads of Georgia peaches, not to mention North Carolina, Virginia, and Arkansas.<sup>50</sup> More than 300 cars were unloaded in Manhattan in the course of two days. About 150 of those sold at transportation cost; the rest were condemned by the New York board of health and dumped into the bay.<sup>51</sup> Fifteen million once-lovely Georgia peaches bobbed in the dirty water of the Hudson River.<sup>52</sup> This image appeared several times in stories about the 1908 season, and it must have pained Georgia growers to imagine it. Their fruit had been the earliest and largest in the New York City markets, and had always commanded the highest prices in New York markets. When a commission merchant rejected a load of peaches they could always imagine that the merchant was dishonest. It was more difficult to argue with the New York Board of Health. The growers had done the deed themselves.

It was not just the condemned fruit — which only affected a few growers — but also the thoroughly mediocre prices that yielded a harvest of “depression” among growers, especially

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<sup>48</sup> “Peach Growers Must Act To Make Crop An Asset,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Jun 28, 1908), A2.

<sup>49</sup> “Some Inside Facts about Georgia's Fruit Industry,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Jun 28, 1908), A2.

<sup>50</sup> “‘Thumbs Up!’ or ‘Thumbs Down!’” for Development of Georgia's Great Peach Growing Industry,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Aug 9, 1908), 7.

<sup>51</sup> Forrest Crissey, “Cooperation Close to the Soil,” *Everybody's Magazine*, September 1909, 408.

<sup>52</sup> I calculated this number by estimating 200 peaches per crate (which varied, of course, by the size of the peach), 500 crates per railcar, and 150 cars.

smaller ones.<sup>53</sup> The discouragement was so “pronounced,” the *Constitution* reported, that many advocated cutting down trees “by the wholesale” in order to raise prices.<sup>54</sup> The close of that 1908 season, then, presented a golden opportunity for those who thought something much stronger than the Georgia Peach Growers’ Association was needed.

No entity was a more determined proponent of such an organization than the *Atlanta Constitution*. Following the 1908 season, the newspaper ran a full page spread on what it saw as the central problem revealed by the low prices that season: inadequate communication and “unscientific” distribution. “At present,” an Atlanta commission merchant complained, “the four or five or seven thousand cars of peaches Georgia produces each year are shot out of Atlanta at random, the growers in many instances literally guessing whether they will find a market at the point of destination, and trusting to luck that their next door neighbor has not glutted the market by shipping peaches to the same locality on that very train!”<sup>55</sup> What the growers, needed, said *Constitution* favorite A.M. Kitchen, was a kind of peach tsar: “Concentrate authority, equip one man, thoroughly competent, with power to supervise the distribution of the state’s crop and the problem will be very near solution.”<sup>56</sup>

In September, much to the *Constitution’s* delight and partly due to the newspaper’s continual prodding (or so the editors liked to proclaim), some two hundred growers gathered to organize the “Georgia Fruit Exchange.” The two-day convention had a revival-like atmosphere. It featured a confession of their sins of disorganization: “*The growers all told of the hardships undergone during the season just closed, by glutting the market.*” It provided a forum for their

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<sup>53</sup> “Georgia Fruit Crop,” *Wall Street Journal* (Oct 7, 1908), 6

<sup>54</sup> Turning Point Of A Great Industry. *The Atlanta Constitution* (Aug 9, 1908), A4

<sup>55</sup> “Marketing Peaches By A Game Of Guess,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Aug 16, 1908), 7.

<sup>56</sup> “One Year of Cooperation Would Convince the Grower,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 28, 1908, 9.



profession of their faith in the new organization: “*They admitted that the exchange was the only solution of the problem.*”<sup>57</sup> And they selected a leadership committee of twenty-one major growers, who were sent out like evangelists to “canvass the state” for subscribers.

This committee met in late September to make up a plan and left “feeling certain that the days of market glutting and inadequate returns to the fruit growers will be in the near future a thing of history.”<sup>58</sup> As the crisp days of October and November signaled the coming winter and the need to provide for the coming season, these men rode the rails, called meetings at depots, drummed up pledges. By early November the committee claimed to have wrapped up forty percent of the coming year’s peach crop, and sent a packet to known peach-growers who had not yet signed up. The packet contained a letter, a leaflet describing the organization, and a pledge card with a stamped envelope, so that growers could provide an estimate of how much they would ship through the exchange along with a check “for such an amount as you care to advance toward the preliminary expenses.”<sup>59</sup>

H.C. Bagley organized this vanguard. He was a plump, mustached man with a career as a partner in a major Atlanta insurance firm. Insurance work occupied him the first three days of each work week; Thursdays and Fridays he farmed his 6,000 acres in Sumter and Macon County. In 1911 he sold his 2,100-acre “old home place” for \$126,000 — a record price of \$60 an acre, and four times what it was worth when he inherited it — and the *Atlanta Georgian and News* observed the obvious: Bagley was “a good example of the business man-farmer.”<sup>60</sup> To complement Bagley’s corpulence and his connections in the world of capital, the committee

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<sup>57</sup> “Georgia Fruit Exchange Organized By Growers,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Sep 11, 1908), 1.

<sup>58</sup> “Fruit Growers Plan Campaign,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Sep 26, 1908), 2.

<sup>59</sup> “Peach Growers Respond To Call,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Nov 9, 1908), 5.

<sup>60</sup> “Georgia Plantation Sells,” *Atlanta Georgian and News* (27 May 1911) 5.

hired clean-cut Ian M. Fleming, a gaunt, hook-nosed man from Augusta, Georgia who had, for the last ten seasons, coordinated the distribution of Armour refrigerator cars for the entire southeast. His perch in Armour's Atlanta office gave him an eagle's view of the Georgia peach movement, and the *Constitution* praised him as a man of "rare ability" and "unquestioned integrity."<sup>61</sup>

As the personnel suggested, the Georgia Fruit Exchange was geared toward making a *business* of the peach movement. Just as agricultural scientists had preached businesslike methods on the productive end of farming — record-keeping, precision spraying, labor-management — promoters of cooperatives held up business as the model for agricultural marketing as well. Cooperative marketing, American Farm Bureau representative Herman Steen would later write, signaled "the application of business methods to farm marketing." It replaced "dumping" with "merchandizing."<sup>62</sup> As a later Exchange president said in 1912, "individuals might have hesitated in taking advantage of a railroad's error, but the Georgia Fruit Exchange is a corporation, just as soulless as any railroad corporation."<sup>63</sup>

Thus, in the shifting and uneasy relationship that American agriculture had with the radical and anti-capitalist heritage of the cooperative movement, the Exchange fell squarely on the corporate side. Its charter admitted as much. "The object and purpose . . . is pecuniary gain and profit to shareholders."<sup>64</sup> Members of the Exchange spoke the language of cooperation — the Exchange did "not exist for profit, but for service," a president claimed in 1916 — but occasionally they made revealing slips. After its first, successful season, the directors rather

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<sup>61</sup> "The Georgia Fruit Exchange," *The Atlanta Constitution* (Dec 10, 1908), 8.

<sup>62</sup> Herman Steen, *Coöperative Marketing: The Golden Rule in Agriculture* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1923), v.

<sup>63</sup> "Georgia Fruit Exchange Saves Its Members \$80,000," *The Atlanta Constitution* (Jan 18, 1912), 3.

<sup>64</sup> Georgia Fruit Exchange, *Charter and By-Laws* (Atlanta, GA: Georgia Fruit Exchange, 1917), 4.

sheepishly agreed to reduce their cut of sales from ten percent to eight percent. They aimed, they said, “to make the organization more of a cooperative and less of a dividend-paying proposition.”<sup>65</sup> In 1917, as if the Exchange’s success had rendered discretion unnecessary, a gushing editorial acknowledged: “While not essentially a mutual concern, there are so many special clauses in its contract in favor of the grower that it is virtually co-operative.”<sup>66</sup>

*Virtually co-operative.* As this phrase suggests, the Georgia Fruit Exchange, like the cooperative movement at large, nodded simultaneously to the democratic producerist model of Rochdale-style cooperation and to the no-responsibility-but-profit model of the modern corporation. Rochdale cooperation in the United States held to four tenets: at-cost services, democratic control, limited dividends, and patron ownership, thus converting “the private corporation into a public, nonprofit collective.”<sup>67</sup> But new cooperatives, most notably the California Fruit Growers’ Exchange, were often stock corporations, and they made no secret of their ambitions for monopoly control of crop sales. Proponents of this California-style cooperation claimed that the methods of modern business — especially monopoly control — were the only way for farmers to maintain their independence in a market system that was stacked against them. Of course monopoly control and the attendant ability to set prices smacked of hypocrisy, since farmers had spent the last several decades complaining of middlemen who did the same thing. But fire needed to be fought with fire. So although the rhetoric of barn-raising stayed with the movement, the means and methods became less radical and utopian over

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<sup>65</sup> “Fruit Growers Name Officers,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Nov 9, 1909), A2.

<sup>66</sup> “Georgia Fruit Exchange Proves Boon to State’s Peach Growers,” *The Atlanta Constitution* Sep 26, 1917; , 68.

<sup>67</sup> Woeste, *The Farmer’s Benevolent Trust: Law and Agricultural Cooperation in Industrial America, 1865-1945*, 20.

time.<sup>68</sup> Cooperatives allowed farmers to use the tools of big business without becoming big businessmen themselves.

As these new cooperatives went, however, the GFE was not a terribly powerful one. On the Pacific coast, the California Fruit Exchange enforced standardization at the packinghouse and pooled oranges from all affiliated growers under the Sunkist brand. The GFE, however, did neither. Instead, the GFE focused its efforts on changes in two areas: distribution and sales. A grower who signed up with the GFE consigned his fruit directly to the Exchange, who shipped it to the Potomac or Cincinnati yards and then reassigned it to whichever market seemed likely to have the best price at that moment. Once sold, the balance was returned to the individual grower, less the commission, which was split between the commission merchant and the Exchange. If a commission house was not among those selected but still wanted to sell Georgia peaches, it had to purchase them f.o.b. directly from a Georgia grower. The grower paid a five percent commission to the Exchange for these f.o.b. sales. At the end of the season, the Exchange paid dividends to its shareholders, put some money in reserve, and then gave each grower a rebate calibrated to the amount each grower shipped for the season.<sup>69</sup>

To keep up with all these calculations during the season, the Atlanta office was a busy hive. On a floor of the Atlanta, Birmingham and Atlantic building, Ian Fleming had gathered a small staff of experts in the ways of railroad traffic. The transportation room featured a large blackboard which somehow managed to contain information on all of the major market centers, amounts of fruit at shipping points, in transit, and in markets.

One of the office's many telephones rings. A grower from Fort Valley has a carload ready to ship; where should he send them? They look at the great blackboard in the transportation

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 32–33.

<sup>69</sup> Steen, *Coöperative Marketing*, 72.

room. *Supplies are low in Boston. Bill your car to the Potomac yards.* The grower agrees, gives the operator the number of the car, which is dutifully entered on the blackboard. At each re-icing point — Atlanta, Charlotte, and Potomac yards — the car is inspected by a GFE representative, and the information goes up on the blackboard. Once the car reaches Potomac, the GFE staff reconsiders its destination based on reports from its fifty market men, who inspect shipments and report on conditions — young men like W.H. Beckham, professor at the high school in Dallas, Georgia.<sup>70</sup> That night, all this information collated, the GFE staff issues instructions to the railroad men at Potomac yards, using the telephone line that the GFE leases by the hour for this purpose. Fruit moves toward New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Newark, Providence, or Pittsburgh, in the wee hours of the morning, in order to be on time for market hour in the various cities.

And just so, the *Constitution* claimed, “congestion is eliminated.” With such a well-oiled system in place, with such a corporate brain for the peach industry, it was “manifestly impossible for the market to be clogged.” At its corporate headquarters, GFE staff monitored every carload as it wended its way across the blackboard and the nation.<sup>71</sup>

Too bad no photograph survives of the blackboard in the Exchange’s Atlanta transportation room. In a way, it *was* the Exchange: the organization claimed *information* as its *raison d’être*. Other organizations had emphasized fraud protection, by litigating with railroads and merchants, or keeping members in line with fines or even physical intimidation. But “the big, the distinctive thing” about the GFE was its “broad and intelligent scheme for collecting and classifying the information necessary to a sound and shrewd allotment of the crop” on a daily basis, even “when the rush of the shipping season is greatest.” Before the first shipping season,

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<sup>70</sup> “Will Inspect Georgia Fruit,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (May 30, 1909), 4.

<sup>71</sup> “Fine Organization to Market Peach,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Jun 26, 1910), E5.

Ian Fleming's envoys were already gathering data from every actual and potential market, in a "great statistical campaign" designed to provide just the right kind of knowledge for decision-making in the "busiest moment of the actual crop-moving season." The information would keep flowing in during the season, and these "special reports from all the principal markets" would give the management "a daily bird's-eye view of the market situation the whole country over."<sup>72</sup>

Even with all this data, the GFE office was not entirely immune to the chaos of the peach season. In 1912, at the height of the season, a few men were still in the office at three o'clock in the morning. Emmett Hight, a real estate agent and scion of a prominent Atlanta family, stopped by the Exchange offices for a drink, alcohol being hard to come by at other locations at that time of the night. GFE clerk R.Z. Upchurch, also a well-connected Atlantan, poured him a few, until "some impulse" moved him to tell Hight "just what I thought of him, and I didn't beat around the bush while I was doing it." "You seem to be talking a little big, don't you think?" Hight said, rising from his chair. "I am a big fellow." Upchurch replied. He ordered Hight out of the office. As Hight was leaving Upchurch pushed him, then kicked him through the door. The men tussled, Hight pulled out a revolver, and in the confusion a bullet ripped through Upchurch's abdomen, narrowly missing the man's heart. Unfazed, Upchurch continued to pummel Hight, until the night watchman intervened.<sup>73</sup> This was not a very businesslike way to run a business, but the intensity of the shipping season could affect even a dronish clerk.

In 1909, though, the plan worked beautifully. About sixty percent of the state's acreage shipped through GFE. Happily for the Exchange, the crop was short and of rather poor quality: 1909 would be a dry run, free of the difficulties of marketing a bumper crop. About forty percent of the crop still went to New York, but Georgia peaches went to smaller markets identified by

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<sup>72</sup> Crissey, "Cooperation Close to the Soil," 410.

<sup>73</sup> "Two Men Hurt In Night Fight," *The Atlanta Constitution* (Jul 3, 1912), 18.

the GFE, places like Schenectady (six cars), Youngstown (one car), and Milwaukee (two cars). At the same time, track and orchard sales were on the rise. Fleming reported f.o.b. sales as early as mid-May, which indicated to him that money would be “in the hands of the growers before it leaves the shipping station.” It appeared that the GFE’s strategy of limiting consignments to only a few commission houses was having the desired effect: commission houses were “alarmed as to their source of supply” and were “flocking to Georgia” to buy up fruit on the track.<sup>74</sup> In one season, Georgia peach growers went from almost no track sales to nearly half: 1,012 cars of a 2,062 crop.<sup>75</sup> GFE-affiliated growers cleared \$11,000 on the season.<sup>76</sup> Observers gleefully pointed out that the 1909 crop earned about as much (\$1.5 million) as the 1908 crop, even though it was only one-third the size.<sup>77</sup>

Of course some commission merchants — the ones not chosen by the GFE at the beginning of the season — cried foul. All this direct shipping and f.o.b. purchasing cut into their business, for not only did it force many to pay for the fruit up front, it also took away some of the smaller markets which they had dominated. A merchant who had profited by buying Georgia fruit in New York City and reselling in Elmira, New York, for example, found his market swept away in 1909 when GFE shipped directly to Elmira. Fleming was not sympathetic: “All of this advantage gained to the grower is of equal disadvantage to someone, and if, in the evolution of the trade, the New York commission man happens to be the one who is hurt, it is unfortunate for him.” After all, *Collier’s Weekly* pointed out, growers had long seen diminishing returns at the

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<sup>74</sup> “State Growers To Meet Here,” *The Atlanta Constitution* 1881; May 17, 1909), 1

<sup>75</sup> “Peach Growers Here In Atlanta,” *The Atlanta Constitution* Sep 19, 1909), B3

<sup>76</sup> I.M. Fleming, “The Benefits Which Have Been Derived From The Work Of The Fruit Exchange,” in Georgia State Horticultural Society, *Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society*, vol. 33 (1909), 92-93; “Dividend Paid to the Growers,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Sep 9, 1909), 5.

<sup>77</sup> Georgia State Horticultural Society, *Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society*, vol. 33 (1909), 10.

hands of commission merchants, who cited “various pretexts” for the low returns to the grower — glutted markets or rotting fruit — while pocketing the difference.<sup>78</sup> According to muckraking journalist Forrest Crissey, “robbing the hand that feeds” was the order of the day in the produce trade; it was standard practice to “mark down” the fruit, sell to themselves at a lower price. The occasional honest commission merchant was the exception that proved the rule.<sup>79</sup> Reform, then, would not come from within the produce trade. No, Fleming insisted: “the grower must take care of himself, instead of working from a sentimental standpoint in favor of some commission house which has led him to believe, in the past, that his fruit is already sold to a discriminating trade before it is out of the bloom.”<sup>80</sup>

If commission merchants were less than enthusiastic about these marketing changes, Exchange advocates were ecstatic. They were putting the peach industry on an “established paying basis,” the *Constitution* said. No more gambling, no more up-and-down speculation, just reliable returns year after year.<sup>81</sup> Forrest Crissey, a writer for *Everybody’s Magazine*, chose the GFE as an example of what he called “Cooperation Close to the Soil” — the solution to the problem of the corrupt commission merchants he had skewered in his earlier piece, “Robbing the Hand that Feeds.” Finally, Crissey wrote, farmers were acknowledging their need to “Get together and stand together!”<sup>82</sup> The GFE and similar organizations represented to Crissey and other boosters the firstfruits of a great harvest of rural prosperity.

This harvest would require unity in the fields, however. And for Crissey, unity was exactly what made the GFE’s success so remarkable. Its membership included both large and small

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<sup>78</sup> “Georgia Peach Growers” (from *Collier’s Weekly*), *The Atlanta Constitution* (Oct 5, 1909).

<sup>79</sup> Forrest Crissey, “Robbing the Hand that Feeds,” *Everybody’s Magazine* vol. 20, no. 6 (June 1906), 762.

<sup>80</sup> Fleming, “The Benefits,” 93.

<sup>81</sup> “State Growers to Meet Here,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (May 17, 1909), 1.

<sup>82</sup> Crissey, “Cooperation Close to the Soil,” 416.



growers, who were really a bunch of noble dreamers when it came down to it. “Settler after settler,” Crissey wrote, “has looked into the future and dreamed of a peach orchard upon the slope of his little farm,” sacrificing present income and precious acreage to an orchard that might one day “reward his nursing and his sacrificing with a lifted debt and freedom and plenty.” And the large orchards? The miles of unbroken rows of peach trees under the supervision of Georgia’s big men? They had “the same history,” Crissey claimed, “the old-time plantation passing to younger generation who saw the commercial possibilities of peach growing.”<sup>83</sup>

And then came that fateful 1908 season, when the “keen generals of the big and lesser markets” oversaw a “slaughter” of the growers’ fortunes, when the Georgia peaches sunk to the bottom of the Hudson River by the millions. Think, Crissey invited the reader, of the “men and women who had nursed those peach trees almost as tenderly as their own children.” For all their dreaming and toiling and sacrificing to produce such a beautiful and delicious product, they received “NOTHING!” Oh, the “disaster and heartache” in the “little cabins and the larger houses” in Georgia’s peach districts.<sup>84</sup> Small and large growers experienced this pain together, and together they organized into the Georgia Fruit Exchange.

Some growers — thirty to forty percent of them — chose not to affiliate. Fleming could not understand the men who held back on such a progressive organization. They appeared to be “intelligent” and “broad-minded men,” and they clearly benefitted from the Exchange’s market research. But they refused to commit their crop or pay the fees.<sup>85</sup> “Such things might be business in this money-mad world,” the *Southern Ruralist* scolded, “but the man who will take advantage of the good markets made by his neighbors . . . and not help them in their organized effort is not

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 408.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 410; Fleming, “The Benefits,” 94.

to be considered the best citizen in the community.”<sup>86</sup> Fleming claimed that he would not really want the entire crop of Georgia peaches; seventy-five percent would allow him to control the market but keep him from having to market the crop of “the undesirable element who do not keep up their orchards and are careless in their packinghouse methods, and will always remain a menace and drawback to the progressive growers.”<sup>87</sup>

Enter the question of size and means. Why were Crissey and the *Constitution* so intent on counting small growers in the number of Exchange advocates? Both knew that the participation of smaller growers was essential to the survival of the Exchange; perhaps too, both wrote for an audience of small growers, to convince them. Their formula was straightforward: The GFE was natural, it resulted from the discontent of *all* Georgia fruit farmers, it benefited *all* Georgia growers. Yet Herman Steen told the story fifteen years later with a different twist, which had the big growers scheming to get their markets back. “The big growers of Elberta peaches in Georgia once believed that they were big enough to develop their markets and hold them,” Steen wrote. But the “grief encountered [in 1908] demonstrated that the volume of fruit from small growers was sufficient to smash the big growers’ markets, and that disorganization would continue as long as Georgia peaches were dumped on a few markets.”<sup>88</sup> Steen acknowledged, in other words, a class division.

One can confirm this version of the story by looking at the organizers of the GFE campaign. There were over four thousand growers in the state, but only a couple hundred went to the initial meeting, and only six hundred joined the exchange in 1908.<sup>89</sup> The organizing

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<sup>86</sup> “Georgia Fruit Exchange,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Oct 20, 1909), 8.

<sup>87</sup> Fleming, “The Benefits,” 95.

<sup>88</sup> Steen, *Coöperative Marketing*, 71.

<sup>89</sup> The number 4,000 comes from “Growers Meet to Sell Stock,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Sep 21, 1908), 3.

committee included Judge George Gober, A.W. Kitchens, H.C. Bagley, E.P. Dobbs, A.O. Murphy and W.H. Harris, L.M. Heard, and A.J. Evans.<sup>90</sup> At their initial meeting they read letters from “many large growers indorsing [sic] the exchange,” growers who had “suffered long from the glutting markets and the consequent low prices of fruit.”<sup>91</sup> Judge George C. Gober of Marietta, was known as the “largest peach grower . . . in the world.”<sup>92</sup> H.C Bagley owned 250,000 trees; W.H. Harris was the president of First National Bank in Fort Valley and owned 78,000 trees; C.J. Hood of Commerce owned 20,000; J.M. Hunt of Round Oak owned 30,000 trees.<sup>93</sup> A.M. Kitchen was “one of the largest growers in the north Georgia peach belt.”<sup>94</sup> And of course J.H. Hale controlled some 200,000 trees and Samuel Rumph around 150,000. They were big growers. They were well-capitalized.

As was the case in New York City’s search for order in the pushcart markets, Georgia peach growers’ search for order was less a universal cry for reform than a persuasive campaign run by one coalition of interests. The organizers of the GFE thought they had a plan that would make marketing problems — in the mortal words of the *Constitution* — “a thing of history.”<sup>95</sup> But history’s things have a way of hanging around, and market gluts and low prices were no exception. Especially when the success of their plan depended not just on the provision of

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<sup>90</sup> The full list of 21 grower: H.C. Bagley, chair, A.O. Murphy, Barnesville, A.M. Kitchen, Baldwin, P.J.A. Berckmanns, Jr., Augusta. Judge George F. Gober, Marietta, J.O. Booton, Marshallville, J.W. Frederick, Marshallville, W.H. Harris, Fort Valley, Judge W.H. Felton, Macon, F.A. Ricks, Reynolds, E.M. Heard, Middleton, J.H. Hale, Fort Valley, J.T. West, Thomson, J. Scott Davis, Cave Springs, A.J. Evans, Fort Valley, W.F. Summerour, Dalton, E. Rumble, Goggins, J.H. Baird, Fort Valley, Mr. Veatch, Adiardsville, Ed McKenzie, Montezuma, W.W. Stevens, Mayfield — See “Million Trees in the Bureau,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Oct 11, 1908), A5.

<sup>91</sup> “Fruit Growers Plan Campaign,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Sep 26, 1908), 2.

<sup>92</sup> “Georgia Fruit Exchange Organized by Growers,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Sep 11, 1908), 1.

<sup>93</sup> “Peach Growers Hold Meeting,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Mar 24, 1908), 7.

<sup>94</sup> A.M. Kitchen, “‘Organization,’ Keynote to the Peach Industry,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 13, 1908, 3.

<sup>95</sup> “Fruit Growers Plan Campaign.”

information but the power to control two notoriously unstable and conspiratorial groups: small farmers, and that collusion of weather, dirt, and organisms known as “the environment.” For the moment, though, the Georgia Fruit Exchange appeared to be the beginning of a great movement.

### *Washington, D.C., 1913*

If a movement was underway, Wells Alvord Sherman was in charge of staffing it. In 1914, the canny Virginian was forty-four years old and living in hotels. He was, for the moment, an itinerant talent broker for the newly-created Office of Markets, assessing on location the gallant young men who were the Office's prospective clerks and field agents. Every few days, he fired off letters to his chief, Charles Brand, reporting on their prospects. “Steece is not a big, robust fellow,” he confided to Brand on June 16, 1914, from Chickasha, Oklahoma, explaining that the twenty-two-year-old had “periodic attacks of billiousness” which sometimes “left him looking a little drawn.” Steece was “not aggressive in the least nor especially forceful, but open and straightforward with a touch of gentleness in voice and manner.” His father, an “energetic businessman,” had made a “good clerk of him” but now hoped that his son could “make good” in agriculture or “confess himself a failure.” Sherman thought this parental expectation would make Steece a determined worker, and recommended him as “clean, earnest, intelligent and anxious for a chance to be useful.”<sup>96</sup> The next day, Sherman was in Van Buren, Arkansas, comparing Steece to Collins, a twenty-five-year-old Arkansan with “no southern blood and nothing slow about him,” a “clean cut, animated, acquisitive chap.” Collins, however, demurred: “the whole question of distribution would be new to him,” so his first choice was a job in the Bureau of

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<sup>96</sup> Wells A. Sherman to Charles Brand, June 16, 1914, Records of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, Record Group 83, National Archives, College Park, MD.

Plant Industry.<sup>97</sup> Whether or not Sherman won the loyalty of these men, he hired many like them. The tone of Sherman's letters and the characteristics for which he seemed to be looking give credence to a later assessment of the Office (later Bureau) of Markets as a "very virile Bureau."<sup>98</sup>

Sherman and Brand would need a veritable flood of young blood to counteract the calcified inertia of the USDA's production fixation – its mission (to borrow a famous formulation) of making two blades of grass grow where only one grew before. "The Department of Agriculture was conservative, even to the point of being reactionary, in its attitude toward the pressing problems of marketing and distribution," wrote historian James Malin. "It was quite unprepared to assume leadership in this new field."<sup>99</sup> When asked about agricultural marketing problems in a hearing before the House Committee on Agriculture, Bureau of Statistics Chief Victor Olmsted professed ignorance ("Well, now, that is an economic question that requires considerable study"), before admitting that it could be done ("if you provide that bureau with the sinews of war . . . if I had the means"), all the while protesting that it was not really in his line of work ("It is a commercial question. It is not, per se, an agricultural question.")<sup>100</sup> But farmers — as evidenced by efforts by the National Grange, the Farmers' Union, and California's fruit producers — had recognized their vulnerability in markets for decades before the USDA offered to do anything about it.

In fact, according to Wells Sherman, it was a Georgian who was responsible for getting the initial market division off of the page and into the office. Senator Hoke Smith, who, when he

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<sup>97</sup> Wells A. Sherman to Chalres Brand, June 17, 1914, Records of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, Record Group 83, National Archives, College Park, MD.

<sup>98</sup> Lloyd S. Tenny, "The Bureau of Agricultural Economics. The Early Years," *Journal of Farm Economics* 29, no. 4 (November 1, 1947): 1019.

<sup>99</sup> James C. Malin, "The Background of the First Bills to Establish a Bureau of Markets, 1911-12," *Agricultural History* 6, no. 3 (July 1, 1932): 128.

<sup>100</sup> Hearings before the House Committee on Agriculture, 19 Dec. 1911, on agricultural appropriations bill for fiscal year ending June 30, 1913, cited in Malin (1932), 123-125.

rose to defend the idea of a Market Division within the Department of Agriculture, supposedly drew inspiration from the “recent disastrous experience of the peach growers of Georgia in attempting to market within a few weeks one of the largest crops which had ever been produced” — perhaps he, too, saw in his mind’s eye the millions of yellow-red orbs turning to mush in the dark waters of the Hudson. “The waste which takes place between the producer and the consumer is startling,” Smith declared. He cited an article in the *Saturday Evening Post* which estimated a total of \$13 billion spent on farm products in 1912, and \$2.76 billion of that wasted: \$2.76 billion going to no one, profiting neither farmers nor railroads nor merchants, \$2.76 billion rotting in the rivers and vanishing into the air. This “enormous waste,” Smith insisted, if “properly studied by a department of the Government equipped for the work, can be saved.” Divided between producers and consumers, the savings would amount to an average of \$200 per family per year.<sup>101</sup>

Smith’s portrayal was a shrewd one, for it was this cost-of-living question that finally put markets on the Department of Agriculture’s agenda. Prices for consumers rose steadily in the early 1900s, while prices for farmers dropped. Secretary of Agriculture James Wilson crystallized a common sentiment in 1911 when he asked, “The consumer pays a dollar for food; the farmer gets less than 50 cents for it. Who gets the rest?”<sup>102</sup> The peach growers who organized the Georgia Fruit Exchange were posing the same question. So even if Hoke Smith had in mind the beleaguered Georgia peach grower when he argued for a Market Division, what made his argument convincing was the general sense that something had to be done about high prices. It

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<sup>101</sup> Hoke Smith, *Market Division for Farm Products Speech of Hon. Hoke Smith, of Georgia, in the Senate of the United States, Feb. 27, 1913* (Washington: G.P.O., 1913), 4.

<sup>102</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture *Yearbook* (1911), 10, cited in J. T. Horner, “The United States Governmental Activities in the Field of Agricultural Economics Prior to 1913,” *Journal of Farm Economics* 10, no. 4 (October 1, 1928): 449.

was the plight of the consumer, rather than the producer, that moved legislators and bureaucrats to act.<sup>103</sup>

As a result of the advocacy of Hoke Smith and many others, Congress appropriated \$50,000 for a kind of Market Division pilot program, a study of the current situation and a prospectus for future activity. In May 1913, the USDA created the Office of Markets, under Charles J. Brand, who had cut his bureaucratic teeth in the USDA's program for cotton marketing. As an Office chief, Brand reported directly to the Secretary and so avoided some of the red tape that constrained the actions of Divisions within Bureaus. An Office would be less "hampered by tradition and custom . . . more flexible, more susceptible to readjustments, and therefore . . . well adapted for the trying-out of this important line of work."<sup>104</sup> The next year Congress quadrupled the Office's appropriation to \$200,000, which was why Wells Sherman found himself in June 1914 collecting virile young men for Brand's proud new organization.<sup>105</sup>

The marketing work grew rapidly. In 1915 Congress gave it \$390,000, in 1917 nearly \$1.2 million, and in 1918 \$14.2 million. By then the Office had been rechristened the Bureau of Markets, and, in addition to inspecting shipments and disseminating market news, had taken on the work of grain standards, warehousing, cotton futures, and the wartime distribution of nitrate of soda. It employed 2,289 workers at 108 permanent branch offices. In just five years, the Bureau of Markets became not just one of the largest bureaus in the Department, but "probably . . . the best known and most widely praised."<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> This is Malin's argument. See Malin, 126.

<sup>104</sup> Caroline B. Sherman, "History of the Bureau of Markets (As Traced through Official Publications)" (Mimeograph, Bureau of Markets, 1920), reprinted in Wells Alvord Sherman, *Merchandising Fruits and Vegetables; a New Billion Dollar Industry* (Chicago: A. W. Shaw, 1928), 157.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 159-161.

The vertiginous rise of the Bureau of Markets represented an important shift in the USDA, and not only because of the effect it had on farmers – Sherman claimed a “complete revolution in many phases of marketing.”<sup>107</sup> More importantly, this shift – from teaching farmers how to produce to teaching them how to market – suggested that the Department of Agriculture embraced the idea that a farmer should have a notion of “the economy” as a self-contained system in order to fully participate in it.<sup>108</sup> The Bureau of Markets was part of a more general movement in the Department. It sloshed around with the Bureaus of Crop Estimates, Statistics, and Plant Industry; the Rural Organization Service; and the Office of Farm Management, until the Bureau of Agricultural Economics emerged in 1922 as a sort of elephantine synthesis — “because,” former BAE chief Lloyd Tenny observed in 1947, “an elephant is rather unwieldy and sometimes does not know just where he is going.”<sup>109</sup> The “young and well-trained men” who staffed the Bureau of Markets resisted this consolidation at first, both because it was a plan hatched in secret by outside economists, and because they thought it unseemly that the Bureau of Markets — larger, better known, energetic — “was being beautifully swallowed up by a group that many in the Bureau never knew existed.”<sup>110</sup>

Whether as a separate Bureau or as a division of the BAE, however, the Markets men stayed true to their mission. And that mission was, in a word, *information*. They later offered services to growers — most notably, shipping point and terminal market inspections — but even these services were primarily forms of information. They piled study upon study, issued daily, weekly, monthly reports of carlot unloads, published immense tables, drew impressive charts and

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<sup>107</sup> Sherman, *Merchandising Fruits and Vegetables; a New Billion Dollar Industry*, 148.

<sup>108</sup> Timothy Mitchell points out that the notion of “the economy” was an invention of the new discipline of econometrics in the 1930s and 1940s. See Timothy Mitchell, “Fixing the Economy” *Cultural Studies* vol. 12, no. 1 (1998), 82-101.

<sup>109</sup> Tenny, “The Bureau of Agricultural Economics. The Early Years,” 1017.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 1019–1020.



graphs. They had full confidence that information would empower the grower and consumer alike to make better decisions at the marketplace.

In other words, the Bureau of Markets barreled down the path pioneered by organizations like the Georgia Fruit Exchange. They provided reports of loads at shipping points and unloads at market cities; they provided a man on the ground at both ends of the shipment to sign off on the quality of the fruit. The Exchange still made shipping decisions and took responsibility for the product in transit, and they still made claims against railroads when negligence led to loss, but the information function became less central to the Exchange as the Bureau grew.

Before the market news and inspection services were up and running, however, the Office of Markets dedicated itself to understanding the problem. And that meant studying both sides of the supply chain. When Office of Markets Chief Charles Brand laid out his agenda in 1913, he listed seven “works,” including market grades and standards, cooperative marketing, supply and demand and consumer organization, methods and costs of distribution, transportation problems, perishable produce market news, and cotton handling.<sup>111</sup> Thus, the Office proposed to study, on the one hand, markets as they appeared from America’s fields — as a vague point where cash and crops changed hands — and, on the other, the marketplaces themselves.

It was in this latter work that the new Office joined municipal authorities. In 1913 Charles Brand traveled to Philadelphia for a special symposium on “Reducing the Cost of Food Distribution,” sponsored by the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences. There Brand joined with other USDA officials, editors of trade magazines, railroad employees, municipal authorities, business school professors, public market managers, and state-level bureaucrats to lament the sorry state of food distribution and to propose reforms. “The farmer

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<sup>111</sup> Brand, Project Statement, Office of Markets (1913), printed in Sherman, *Merchandising Fruits and Vegetables; a New Billion Dollar Industry*, 167–168.

very rarely, or perhaps never, actually overproduces a given crop,” Brand insisted. “Our distributing machine is so imperfect that we fail to deliver the surplus product to those markets where there is no glut. In fact what we call glutting at the present time, is not really glutting at all.”<sup>112</sup> *No glut!* Brand was speaking the language of the farmer who quickly wearied of charges of overproduction. For how could the farmer be blamed for overproduction when consumers complained of excessive prices? Brand refrained from blaming “the middleman,” though he acknowledged that some made excessive profits, and that as a whole they may not have been the most efficient of distributors. The merchant, just like everyone else, wanted to increase his profits and lower his expenses.<sup>113</sup> Brand pointed in a different direction. “The problem as a whole,” he explained, “is one of articulation.”<sup>114</sup>

Charles Brand must have won some applause with that turn of phrase. It deftly opened up an expansive field of operations for Brand and his young men — someone would have to get to the bottom of this problem of “articulation,” and who better than the Office of Markets? At the same time it put the Office of Markets on the right side of history, and against no party in particular. *We just need to get everyone speaking the same language*, he seemed to say. And that implied standardization and reams of information.

### ***Georgia, 1924***

Like the Bureau of Markets, the Georgia Fruit Exchange’s star continued to rise through the 1910s. It wasn’t until 1917 that the organization really hit its stride, Herman Steen later observed.<sup>115</sup> And in his 1918 annual report, Exchange president W.B. Hunter gleefully

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<sup>112</sup> Charles J. Brand, “The Office of Markets of The United States Department of Agriculture,” in Clyde Lyndon King, *Reducing the Cost of Food Distribution* (American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1913), 257.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>115</sup> Steen, *Coöperative Marketing*, 71–72.

proclaimed that the larger-than-ever 8,025 car crop had been “distributed without a hitch.” The opening sally of that annual report is worth experiencing first-hand, if only to feel with Hunter the triumphant wind that seemed to be blowing:

Confronted at its inception with a crop representing one-third of all the cars of peaches moving in the United States, a crop two and one-half times larger than the average of the preceding five years, and, with one exception, almost double that of any other year since its organization; faced by unknown, and as yet unsolved transportation problems, due to the taking over of the railroads by the government; meeting in the midst of the season an ice shortage, the Georgia Fruit Exchange yet finished its fiscal year of 1918 with the greatest record of its history, and demonstrated beyond peradventure its existence is absolutely necessary to the welfare of the industry of the State.<sup>116</sup>

Bluster aside, Hunter had reason to be pleased. The 1918 season was, like 1908, unprecedented in terms of production. But unlike 1908, a wider distribution and higher rate of f.o.b. purchases had earned the growers a tidy profit. In 1908, Georgia peaches had only gone to forty cities; in 1918 the GFE had arrangements with 254 cities, and shipped to 191 of those. In 1908, f.o.b. sales were almost unheard of; in 1918 merchants purchased seventy-six percent of the crop “on Georgia soil,” and in Cincinnati — a city which had up to 1917 purchased Georgia fruit on consignment only — the f.o.b. figure was closer to one hundred percent.<sup>117</sup> The GFE could plausibly claim some credit for these fine figures: they had shipped eighty-two percent of the crop, or 6,615 cars.<sup>118</sup>

Flush with its success, the GFE had begun to branch out. In 1915 it offered the same distribution services to other growers of perishable products — melons, strawberries, market

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<sup>116</sup> W.B. Hunter, *Annual Report of the Georgia Fruit Exchange* (1918), 3.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>118</sup> Thomas Hubbard McHatton, “The Peach Industry of Georgia” (Ph.D., Michigan State University, 1921), 42. McHatton (1925), 42. McHatton lists the following figures: 1915 4,468 cars total; GFE 2,997 or 67.1%. 1916 3199 cars, GFE 2278 or 78.2%, 875 sold in East, 12% in West, and 1% in South. 1917 3869 cars, GFE 2789 or 72%, 134 towns, 28% to West and 72% to East. 1918 8052 cars, GFE 6615 or 82%, 191 markets and 76% f.o.b. 1913-1917 GFE averaged 61% of crop, so this was a banner year. 1919 7403 cars, GFE 5429 or 73%. 1920 6087 cars, GFE 4553 or 75%, f.o.b. 65%.

vegetables. The Exchange, had “solved” “the Marketing Problem,” a 1917 advertisement boasted. It had “perfected a system which both distributes the fruit where demand for it is greatest, and guarantees to them the market-price proceeds of the sale.”<sup>119</sup> The president of Georgia’s Chamber of Commerce pronounced the move revolutionary. “I sincerely believe,” he said, “it will mark an epoch in the perishable products industry in Georgia.”<sup>120</sup> A few years later, though, W.B. Hunter admitted that this offer had not “resulted in any appreciable business” aside from the asparagus crop of Marshallville and Fort Valley.<sup>121</sup>

In 1920, returning to its money crop, the GFE tried a few advertisements in major market newspapers. “Peaches that fairly drip with JUICE!” crowed one such ad in the *New York Times*, as a set of female hands neatly split a wet mess of a peach. The hands were a closeup of a housewife, smiling blithely in her apron as the peach in her hands poured a puddle onto a plate, “and such delicious juice it is,” the text continued. “The luscious, distinctive juicy flavor found only in GEORGIA PEACHES . . . the best for eating, the best for canning” — and a recipe in smaller print told how “To Can Peaches *Without Sugar*.” But remember, the advertisement urged, “the season doesn’t last very long — so be sure to get YOURS at once.” Then it reminded the consumer that Georgia peaches were grown by the members of the Georgia Fruit Exchange and sold, in New York, by only three produce merchants.<sup>122</sup>

The 1920 advertising campaign, however, appears to have been a rearguard attempt to shore up the GFE’s waning power. In fact, the GFE was having trouble at the markets. The 1919 season had not built on 1918’s success. Instead, heavy rains produced a better crop of curculios

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<sup>119</sup> Display Ad 45 -- No Title, *The Atlanta Constitution* (Sep 26, 1917), 51.

<sup>120</sup> “Will Help Market Georgia Products,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Feb 25, 1915), 1.

<sup>121</sup> Hunter, 10.

<sup>122</sup> Display Ad 42 -- No Title, *New York Times* (Jul 16, 1920), 8.

and brown rot than of peaches, so even though f.o.b. sales were high, the fruit “did not carry,” and buyers lost money — and confidence. Feeling burned, in 1920 buyers added clauses to the contracts that the fruit must make it to market intact, and a warm winter and wet spring yielded a “main crop so full of worms and brown rot that it could hardly get out of Georgia before it was unsalable.”<sup>123</sup> In 1922, with f.o.b. purchases on the wane, the GFE tried auction sales in New York City, which forced commission houses to compete with one another in the moment and thus drove up prices. Commission houses protested, sending an open letter to the *Constitution* in 1923 which affected outrage at the way the auction was “depressing private sales prices and causing the growers heavy losses.”<sup>124</sup> In his public reply, GFE manager J.G. Carlisle played down the issue, claiming it was standard practice on New York City’s produce docks.

Carlisle’s calm demeanor notwithstanding, the GFE also faced increasing internal dissension. It never again shipped more than eighty percent of the Georgia crop as it had in 1918, dropping to seventy-three percent in 1919 and seventy-five percent in 1920. In 1922, apparently convinced that the Exchange had branched out too far, peach growers attempted to move the central office closer to the center of the peach industry in Macon, Georgia. Despite the fact that the “overwhelming majority” of growers favored this move, GFE President W.B. Hunter summarily dismissed it as “inadvisable and inexpedient at this time,” since their trained office staff was all based in Atlanta. Undaunted, middle Georgians then began organizing a competing Exchange.<sup>125</sup>

As the 1923 season came to a close, Carlisle agreed with the erstwhile usurpers. “A stronger organization is necessary,” he admitted, “one that could provide “more protection in the

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<sup>123</sup> McHatton, “The Peach Industry of Georgia,” 47–48. McHatton, *The Peach Industry ...* (1925), 47-48.

<sup>124</sup> “New York Fruit Dealers Protest Peach Auctions,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Jun 10, 1923), 2

<sup>125</sup> “Atlanta to Keep Fruit Exchange,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Feb 11, 1922).

marketing of their product.”<sup>126</sup> Growers gathered in Macon on August 30, where they proceeded to dissolve the GFE and reconstitute it as the Georgia Peach Growers’ Exchange (GPGE). The new organization was a true cooperative, organized according to the requirements of the 1922 Capper-Volstead Act, which granted limited anti-trust exemption to groups of farmers who marketed their products together.<sup>127</sup> Like the California Fruit Growers’ Exchange, the GPGE included only peach growers and had full control of sales and distribution. Observers praised the move as yet another “new era” in the history of peach growing. “The peach industry is being revolutionized,” W.B. Hunter proclaimed with characteristic bombast. “From now on dates the freedom of the Georgia peach growers.”<sup>128</sup> The organizers embarked again on an energetic membership drive, exerting “tremendous pressure” on the state’s growers — and signed up only sixty percent of the crop. The season that followed, according to a later manager, was “disastrous in the extreme.”<sup>129</sup>

The GPGE tried its best. They launched a monthly journal known as *The Georgia Peach* which featured articles with titles like “What’s the Use of Standardization?” and “Necessity of High Quality Grade and Pack,” “Serving the Consumer Through Co-Operation,” and “Less Fruit But More Money”<sup>130</sup> They formulated a comprehensive marketing plan for the entire state that they boasted would permit no gluts. They arranged for government inspection of the fruit at shipping point, which they expected to increase the number of culls and open up more

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<sup>126</sup> “Peach Growers Seek Protection,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Aug 26, 1923), 3.

<sup>127</sup> USDA Rural Business and Cooperative Development Service, “Understanding Capper-Volstead,” Cooperative Information Report 35 (June 1985).

<sup>128</sup> “Georgia Peaches To Be Marketed Cooperatively,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Aug 30, 1923), 7.

<sup>129</sup> W. C Bewley, *Georgia’s Twenty-Five Million Dollar Peach Industry* (Macon, Ga, 1932), 6.

<sup>130</sup> “What’s the Use of Standardization?” *Georgia Peach* (June 1924), 3 and; “Necessity of High Quality Grade and Pack,” *Georgia Peach* (July 1924), 3, 4; “Serving the Consumer Through Co-Operation,” and “Less Fruit But More Money,” *Georgia Peach* (August 1924), 5, 10.

opportunities for canneries and other by-product industries.<sup>131</sup> They engaged an Atlanta marketing firm to create a professional ad campaign that would tell “the story of the excellence and quality of the Georgia peach . . . in every consuming center in the United States.”<sup>132</sup> And they adopted a standard six-layer peach pack, which had promised to improve the value of the Georgia crop.<sup>133</sup>

But eighteen thousand carloads — sixty percent of that ripening in twenty-one days — was simply too much for the new organization to handle. For the first time, the GPGE resorted to court injunctions to keep its own members from breaking contracts and selling directly to buyers. The post-season meeting of the board of directors promised to be a “stormy session,” the *Constitution* reported, with at least one director supposedly ready to dissolve the organization.<sup>134</sup>

The GPGE did not dissolve after that first season, nor did it prosper. The following year brought something of a rebound: new manager W.C. Bewley boasted that in 1925 “not a shipment has been made at a loss to the grower.” But the last few years of the decade saw larger and larger crops and less and less profit.<sup>135</sup> Because of the “disastrous” 1924 season, many growers found it necessary to seek financing from commission merchants and other private distributors, which left a large portion of the crop in private hands. In 1926 the GPGE controlled only thirty-five percent of the crop, the rest divided between half a dozen marketing agencies and several hundred growers who marketed independently.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> “Plan to Coordinate Marketing of Peach Will Be Developed,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Mar 23, 1924), 16.

<sup>132</sup> “Peach Growers Adopt Standard for 1924 Packing,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (May 20, 1924), 4.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> “Peach Exchange Appeals to Law,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Aug 3, 1924), 9.

<sup>135</sup> “Millions Brought to Peach Growers as Season Ends” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Jul 26, 1925) 9.

<sup>136</sup> Bewley, *Georgia’s Twenty-Five Million Dollar Peach Industry*, 7; E.F. Savage, “History of the Georgia Peach Industry”, 1984, 130. Bewley, *Georgia’s Twenty-Five Million Dollar Peach Industry*, 7.

By 1932, the once-ebullient Bewley sounded positively bitter. Look around, he pled in that year's annual report. The "wave of co-operative marketing is sweeping over the country," and "industries of all kinds are being consolidated."<sup>137</sup> August figures in American politics, business, and agriculture had endorsed cooperative marketing, Bewley continued, quoting Calvin Coolidge, Herbert Hoover, Wells Sherman, and other leaders. Even the "history of civilization," Bewley maintained, "has largely consisted of attempts on the part of man to co-operate."<sup>138</sup> And would Georgians find themselves outside of this great history? Bewley hoped not. "Surely, our people are as intelligent, as fair, and as unselfish as those in other sections," he reasoned.<sup>139</sup> Yet in Georgia "peach growers are worse divided than ever before" and in "worse financial condition than ever before."<sup>140</sup> Despite Bewley's pleading, the GPGE never regained the kind of influence it had known in the 1910s, though it continued to operate until the 1960s.<sup>141</sup>

In explaining the organization's failure to fulfill its promise, GPGE officials acknowledged two factors: nature and individualism. "[N]ature is to be blamed," said GPGE president J.L. Benton following the 1924 season.<sup>142</sup> By nature Benton really meant the weather, which had caused the crop to ripen "over a shorter period than ever known in the history of our industry." Hileys and Georgia Belles overlapped with the Elberta season, causing what Bewley called "a very abnormal and excessive movement": more than eight thousand cars in twenty-one days. Bewley protested that this was simply too much for "the Exchange or any other human agency"

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<sup>137</sup> Bewley, *Georgia's Twenty-Five Million Dollar Peach Industry*, 7.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 16–17.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>141</sup> Savage, "History of the Georgia Peach Industry," 130.

<sup>142</sup> "Peach Exchange Appeals to Law," *The Atlanta Constitution* (Aug 3, 1924), 9.



to process adequately.<sup>143</sup> The peach crop of 1924 was larger than ever, to be sure. To call it “abnormal,” though, implied the existence of a “normal” season. There was no such thing. Variation was the rule in peach production.

Normal production was impossible to measure for at least three reasons. First, acreage expanded steadily from 1880 through 1930, so predicting the size of a crop year to year depended on precise knowledge of who had planted what in years past, how many trees would be coming into bearing that year, and how many would be nearing the end of their productive lives. The Census of Agriculture surveyed too infrequently (every ten years; every five starting in 1925) to be much help in this regard, and the Bureau of Markets *cum* Bureau of Agricultural Economics did not gather exhaustive statistics on peach production until 1926.

Second, even if such comprehensive numbers had been gathered, they would have had to account for geography. That is, it wasn’t just that more peach trees came into bearing each year, but also that more areas came into bearing: north Georgia grew rapidly in the early decades of the twentieth century, and so did North Carolina, Arkansas, Texas, and somewhat later, South Carolina. Nineteen twenty-four was a booming year production-wise for Georgia, but it was also a good year for these other areas. And whereas in 1923 Georgia’s crop had run its course by the time growers in other states began shipping, in 1924 they overlapped for four solid weeks.<sup>144</sup>

Which brings up the third obstacle to predicting the peach crop: the weather. Varieties ripened at different times and in varying quantities each year, according to the particular location and its particular weather patterns. In 1920, the peak of carlot shipments came during the last week of July and the first week of August; in 1921 the first and second weeks of July; in 1922

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<sup>143</sup> Bewley, *Georgia’s Twenty-Five Million Dollar Peach Industry*, 7.

<sup>144</sup> M.R. Cooper, “Findings of the Peach Survey in Georgia,” Address delivered at the Nineteenth Annual Farmers Week, Georgia State College of Agriculture, Athens (January 28, 1926), 6.

the second week of August.<sup>145</sup> Today scientists know much more about the need for a certain number of chilling hours for proper bloom and fruit development, but they still cannot predict the timing of blooms and harvest — especially in the southeast, where winter and spring temperatures vary considerably year to year. It appears, though, that there is an exponential relationship between the amount of cold weather and the amount of warm weather needed for budbreak in a given season. A season with a lot of cool weather might, paradoxically, result in earlier blooms, if warming came suddenly in March. Blooming time varies by cultivar, of course, but also from top to bottom of a tree, and even on a single twig in the controlled environment of a laboratory refrigerator. Each bud has its own chilling and heating requirement. The complexity is mindblowing.<sup>146</sup>

This intricate dance between peach trees and the local environment would have made the work of any grower organization difficult, but Bewley and other Exchange advocates were even more concerned with the problem of grower individualism. In their view, the problem was not the unpredictability of the weather but the way that growers “played” the weather, using its capriciousness as the set of dice with which they challenged other growers. *It will be a big year for me if a freeze takes out those Manchester growers.*

The organization of the Georgia Fruit Exchange had treated the question of grower independence with some delicacy. The GFE was primarily an information agency, allowing growers to make their own arrangements if they sold f.o.b. When it came to the distribution of the crop, the GFE advised rather than controlled. But there was an inherent tension between their two strategies of reshaping distribution and increasing f.o.b. sales. Limiting the number of

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<sup>145</sup> Cooper, “Findings of the Peach Survey,” 6.

<sup>146</sup> W. R. Okie and B. Blackburn, “Increasing Chill Reduces Heat for Floral Budbreak in Peach,” unpublished paper, c. 2011.

commission merchants who could sell on consignment pushed many merchants into the f.o.b. market. The growing f.o.b. market, in turn, undercut the Exchange's powers of distribution by allowing speculators to glut markets. In order to control the Georgia peach market, in other words, the Exchange would have had to control *all* sales, not just consignments.<sup>147</sup>

The GPGE was an effort to capture this kind of control — to sell all GPGE fruit *as* GPGE fruit — but Georgia growers were not prepared to relinquish it. Their “shortsightedness is something beyond my comprehension,” Bewley sighed. He would have been ashamed of a fifteen-year-old boy who displayed such selfishness.<sup>148</sup> But selfishness and disloyalty does not fully explain the reluctance of growers to affiliate with the GPGE. Compared with California's fruit cooperatives, the GPGE lacked police power — it was unwilling or unable to force the compliance of small growers with violence.<sup>149</sup> And whereas in California the long distance to population centers made organization and standardization a precondition of commercial fruit growing, in Georgia advocates of organization ran into a deep-rooted culture of independence. Many — perhaps most — of Georgia's growers prided themselves on making their own arrangements. When pondering the structure of the original Georgia Fruit Exchange, Fort Valley grower W.H. Harris insisted on preserving this independence. “I believe that the transactions between grower and merchant should be rigidly separated from any work of a central bureau,” he told the *Constitution*. “The actual sale would be between the merchant and the orchardist.”<sup>150</sup> Given this tradition in Georgia, pooled marketing represented a radical shift in practice. Joining

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<sup>147</sup> Steen, *Coöperative Marketing*, 72. Steen, 72.

<sup>148</sup> W.C. Bewley, “Preservation of Georgia's Peach Industry,” Georgia State Horticultural Society, *Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society* 50 (1926), 62.

<sup>149</sup> Sackman, *Orange Empire: California and the Fruits of Eden*; Woeste, *The Farmer's Benevolent Trust: Law and Agricultural Cooperation in Industrial America, 1865-1945*.

<sup>150</sup> “Marketing Peaches by a Game of Guess,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Aug 16, 1908), 7

with the GPGE, in other words, meant giving up *reputation*. And it was a short step from the sacrificing of one's reputation to the diminishing of one's manhood.

Here the example of Lamartine G. Hardman is instructive. Hardman was no hidebound traditionalist. As a medical doctor, hardware merchant, dairy farmer, owner of one of the South's largest cotton mills, and governor of the state of Georgia from 1926 to 1930, Hardman personified southern business progressivism. When he was in his sixties, in the 1910s, he planted or acquired several hundred acres of peaches, and ultimately owned some ten thousand acres of orchard land in seven different counties. But peach-growing was not a central part of his public persona. It was another business opportunity for a man whose appetite for such opportunities was well nigh insatiable.<sup>151</sup>

Yet judging by his correspondence with his New York commission house, Smith and Holden, Hardman devoted himself personally to the new enterprise. On the morning of July 23, he ordered a refrigerator car from the Southern Railway for his first shipment; the car was in place by 9:00 p.m. and loaded by midnight. The next morning Hardman telegraphed Smith and Holden in New York with the news that his first car was on its way to Potomac yards with 476 crates of Elbertas; Smith and Holden replied cheerily that they expected "a good healthy situation here tomorrow."

Smith and Holden seemed to use comparisons with Hardman's neighbors to motivate him. On July 27, Smith wrote to Hardman that the peaches of C.J. Hood led all others in prices at \$3 a crate. Hood lived in neighboring Habersham County; the two were undoubtedly acquainted personally. So it must have brought some color to Hardman's face when Smith and Holden rated his first carload as "very good, not as good as the best, but better than most" due to the presence

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<sup>151</sup> David Chapman, "Lamartine G. Hardman," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, accessed 21 July 2011 at <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-2133>.

of some mildew spotted fruit. They sold the largest fruit for \$2.50 a crate and the majority of the car for \$2.25 — 50 to 75 cents less than Hood. Hardman was not pleased. He dashed off a letter to Smith and Holden on July 30. “The remainder of my peaches are going to be just as good as any on the market,” he promised. “I certainly hope you will get a better price.” And then, just to be sure Smith and Holden understood, he named names: “I do not believe that J.B. Hardman’s nor C.J. Hood’s peaches will bring any better price than mine.”

To elevate the reputation of his “mark,” Hardman separated mildewed or otherwise subpar peaches and packed them in unmarked bushel baskets. In the crates stamped with his name, however, he packed only his best fruit — a practice in keeping with Smith and Holden’s recommendations. In reply to Hardman’s letter, they observed that Hood’s peaches had a fifteen year reputation behind them, while Hardman’s 1922 crop had been only mediocre. “You have got to demonstrate to the buyer that you have something as good as the ‘Other Fellow,’” they explained. “[W]hen you once accomplish that you have not as much trouble to induce him to pay the top price.” Far from dismissing Hardman’s concerns, Smith and Holden played to them. “We have unloaded here today the nicest car of peaches from you we have had this season,” Smith wrote on August 1.

Before the season is over we hope to make your best Elbertas on some day at least outsell Hoods [sic] mark if we can. I might say that our dock manager was talking with Mr. Hood this morning and he apparently is not at all desirous of having your mark outsell his in any way. Perhaps what we want to accomplish as mentioned above may take place tomorrow or Friday. We will get there as soon as possible.<sup>152</sup>

Two days later, they did just that, outselling Hood by twenty-five cents on one lot. “I guess this is about all that you could expect of us,” the firm wrote. “So we will not comment any

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<sup>152</sup> Smith and Holden to Lamartine G. Hardman, 1 August 1923, Lamartine G. Hardman Sr. Collection, Richard B. Russell, Jr. Library for Research, The University of Georgia, Athens, GA.

further.”<sup>153</sup> One can imagine a delighted Hardman picking up the phone or riding down the road to confront his rival with the news. *Just as good as any on the market, Mr. Hood!*

Given this highly competitive relationship between two men in the same district, it is not hard to imagine the difficulty that the GPGE experienced trying to recruit eighty-five to ninety percent of the crop each year. Asking Hardman to pool his peaches with Hood, and vice versa, was tantamount to asking the kind of self-denial that people liked to think came naturally to farmers. *Good neighbors help each other out, right? Farmers raise each other's barns and whatnot.* The GPGE publication, *The Georgia Peach*, reminded its readers incessantly of this tradition, however tenuous its relationship to history. Interspersed with advertisements for chemical sprays, bank financing, and crate and box companies, inspirational blurbs exhorted the reader to keep the faith. “The life of duty, not the life of mere ease or mere pleasure,” they quoted Theodore Roosevelt; “that is the kind of life which makes the great man as it makes the great nation.”<sup>154</sup> The next month they offered some original drivel: “Co-operation means standing with your neighbor, for your neighbor and sharing equally with your neighbor the burdens and blessings of life.”<sup>155</sup> Forrest Crissey had conjured similar imagery for his articles on cooperation and commission merchants: the farmer as a noble peasant, one who “bends his back and bears the heat of the sun that the world may be well and pleasantly nourished.”<sup>156</sup>

But for peach growers, “sharing equally with your neighbor” sounded a lot like settling for the lowest common denominator. And sharing a reputation with the little guy down the road who employed his drunken cousin Jimmy to supervise the harvest did not sound noble enough to

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<sup>153</sup> Smith and Holden to Lamartine G. Hardman, 3 August 1923, Lamartine G. Hardman Sr. Collection, Richard B. Russell, Jr. Library for Research, The University of Georgia, Athens, GA.

<sup>154</sup> *The Georgia Peach* (July 1924), back cover.

<sup>155</sup> *The Georgia Peach* (August 1924), 17.

<sup>156</sup> Crissey, “Robbing the Hand that Feeds,” 761.

make the consequences worthwhile. For growers to accept the terms of the Exchange required great faith in the honesty and integrity of the system. It also required an acceptance of middling terms for the duration of their careers. It was a company job.

And so, beset by environmental instability and internal dissension, the Exchange fell to the back of the cooperative movement in the South. But the marketing focus of the period from 1908 through the 1920s did produce some important changes. First, the Exchange abetted a wider distribution than ever before, which may have cemented the national reputation of Georgia peaches. Second, the Exchange's campaign for standardization eventually resulted in the creation of peach grades and government inspection, but only after the Exchange had ceased to be an influential force in the industry. Instead, a government-sponsored Marketing Order brought it about.

### *Washington D.C., 1937*

As the Georgia Peach Growers' Exchange fell on hard times, the marketing work of the USDA was just picking up steam.

In 1922, Charles Taylor's Bureau of Farm Management had swallowed up the Bureau of Markets and been rechristened the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, but the Market division remained an important part of the Bureau's mission. The agency continued to pump out daily market reports, weekly market reviews, semi-weekly shipping reports, weekly summaries of carlot shipments, field station report summaries, monthly market stories, and annual season summaries.<sup>157</sup> And all this was just the normal output of the Market News Service. Officials also

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<sup>157</sup> Wells A. Sherman, Report on Market News Service, 1919, 15, Records of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, Record Group 83, National Archives, College Park, MD.

produced studies on, for example, the New York City produce markets, the peach situation in the southern states, and the “merchandising” of fruits and vegetables.<sup>158</sup> The volume was staggering.

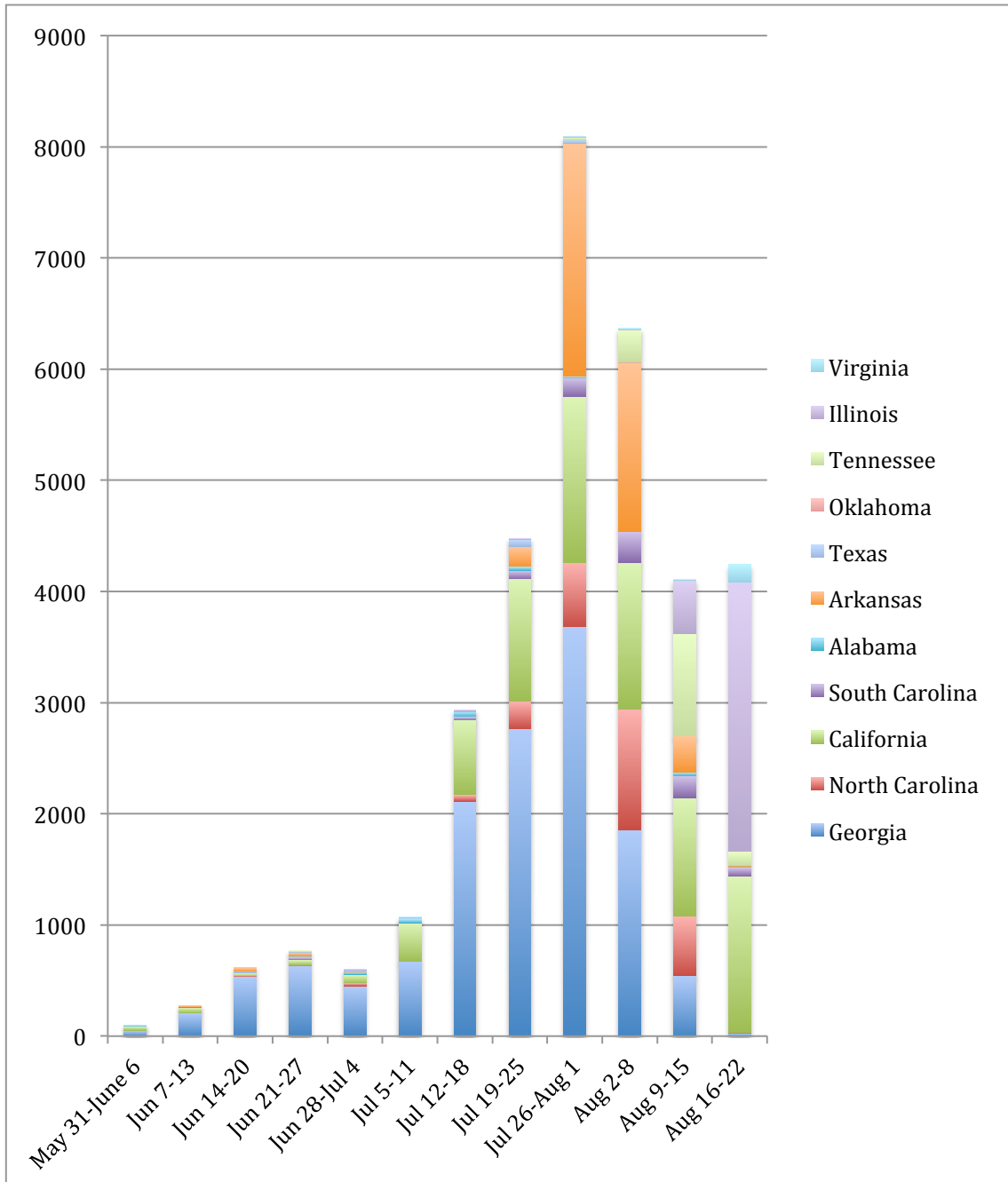
Some of this research appeared in USDA circulars as efforts to apply the BAE’s statistical acumen to the problems of the farmer. M.R. Cooper’s and J.W. Park’s 1927 “The Peach Situation in the Southern States,” for example, took as its starting point “the difficulties encountered in marketing recent peach crops.” It offered a series of graphs intended to answer questions about the future prospects and “most practicable things” to be done in order to “stabilize the industry in the shortest possible time.”<sup>159</sup> One set showed rapidly increasing carload shipments from Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina, Arkansas and Texas; another illustrated the overlapping seasons of the same states; a third compared the drastically reduced prices of the 1926 season with the nearly equal costs of picking and packing; a fourth projected future production levels based on the age of southern peach trees in 1925 (production peaked at 8-9 years and then dropped off quickly); several mapped the distribution of southern peaches (eighty-five percent of Georgia peaches went to population centers of 100,000 or more); another showed the competition of southern peaches with other fruit such as apples and melons (it was getting worse); a telling graph illustrated how constant shipping and marketing charges made for exceedingly poor returns on poor quality fruit; and a final series of charts and tables showed how different varieties fared on the market (the Belle was near the bottom, the Elberta continued to hold its own, and early varieties were the best). By flipping through the bulletin and looking at the pictures, a grower could easily ascertain the thrust of its argument. The peach situation in the southern states was, in a word, bad.

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<sup>158</sup> Harry S. Kantor, *Factors Affecting the Price of Peaches in the New York City Market* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, 1929); M. R. Cooper and J.W. Park, *The Peach Situation in the Southern States*, USDA Circular 420 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1927), 1.

<sup>159</sup> Cooper and Park, *The Peach Situation in the Southern States*, 1.

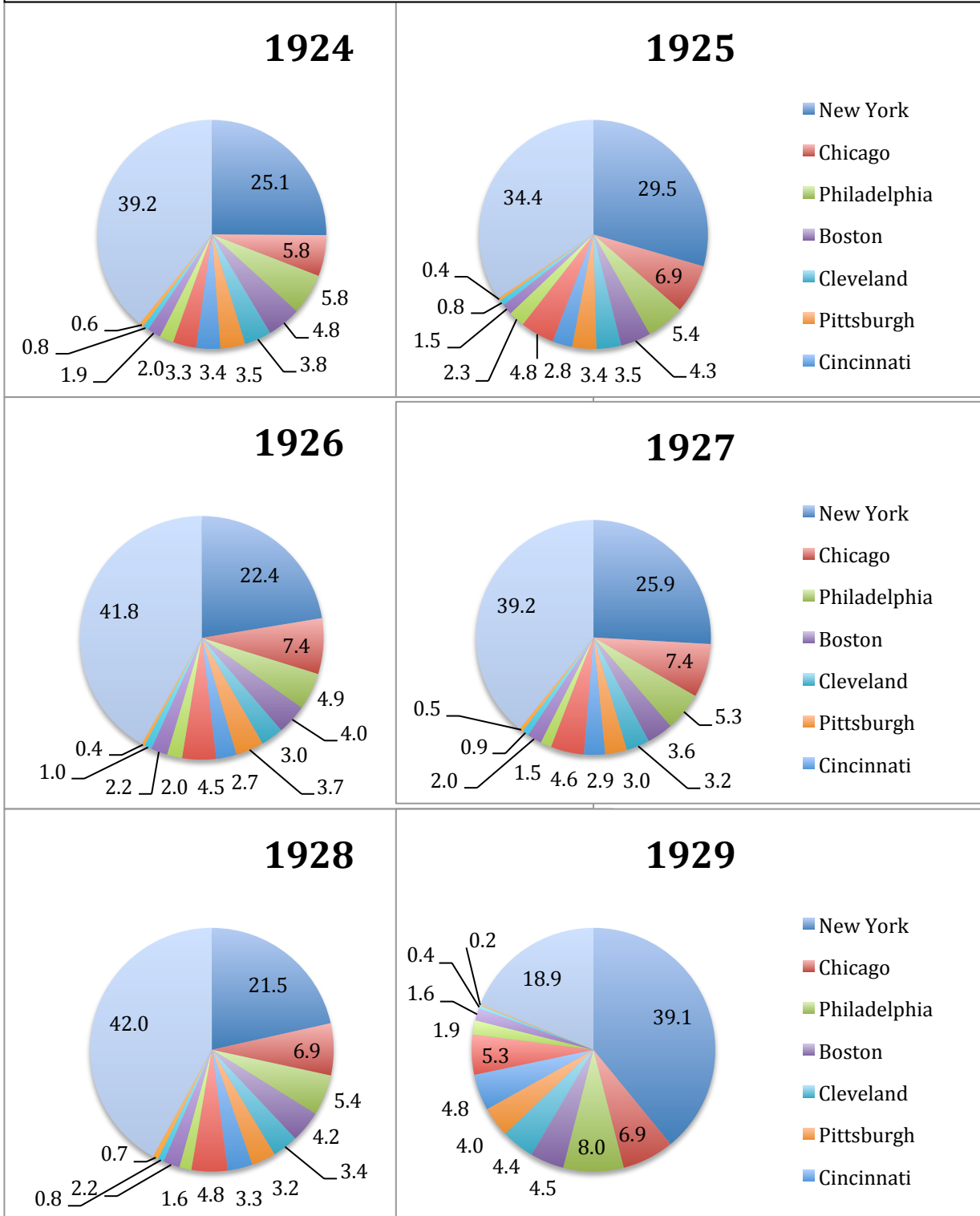


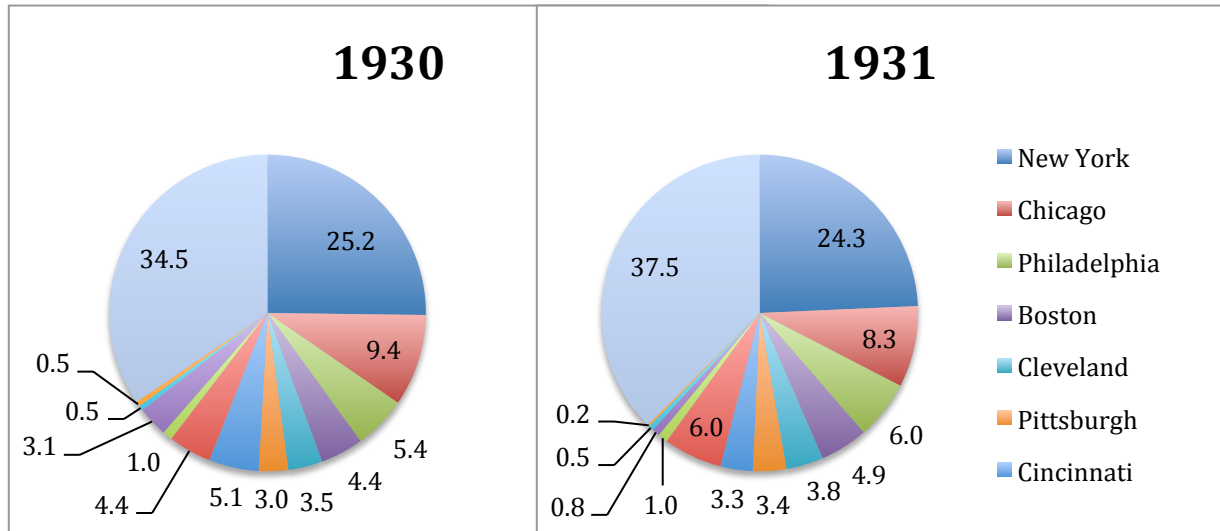


*Figure 15*  
 Weekly Carlot Shipments of Peaches from Principal States, 1929-1931. R.E. Keller, *Marketing the Georgia Peach Crop: Summary of the 1931 Season* (Washington, D.C.: Market News Service on Fruits and Vegetables, March 1932), 11.

Figure 16

Percentage of Georgia Peach Shipments Unloaded in Various Cities and Georgia Peach Shipments by Year, 1924-1931. See J.W. Park, "Market Distribution of Car-lot Shipments of Fruits and Vegetables in the United States," USDA *Technical Bulletin* no. 445 (1934), Table 13. Accessed at [http://naldr.nal.usda.gov/NALWeb/Agricola\\_Link.asp?Accession=CAT86200439](http://naldr.nal.usda.gov/NALWeb/Agricola_Link.asp?Accession=CAT86200439) July 2011.





Any grower still standing after the 1926 season could have articulated this without the charts and graphs. Cooper and Park had the additional virtue of taking up some of the prevailing myths and cutting them off at the knees. New markets and better distribution would bring remunerative prices! Not likely, said Cooper and Park: the growing production in other states had pretty much saturated the markets. Elbertas will always be America's favorite peach! Perhaps, said Cooper and Park, but prices for the variety had "declined severely." Putting all this together — booming production, tightening competition from other states and other fruits, saturated markets, the dulling reputation of Elbertas — the advice that Cooper and Park offered in conclusion was terrifically banal: "An orchard of good trees of standard varieties, well-located with respect to soil and site, should be the aim of the grower," they wrote, for such an orchard would be more profitable than a large orchard of "poor trees, of inferior varieties, poorly located, or indifferently managed."<sup>160</sup> In other words, as though aping Voltaire: Go tend your garden, and hope (against hope) for the best.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 23.

If circulars were the appetizers of the BAE, offering numbers in palatable quantities, technical bulletins were BAE main courses, a feast for the statistically astute. Harry S. Kantor's 1929 "Factors Affecting the Price of Peaches in the New York City Market" built on some of the same research as Cooper and Park, but it was a tabular tour de force, a display of unadulterated expertise. It featured twenty-nine pages of fairly readable narrative interspersed with price curves and bar graphs of unloads, followed by thirty-five pages of "detailed tables." And again, the conclusion underwhelmed. Peach prices, Kantor affirmed, varied "from day to day, from week to week and from year to year, and for different lots on the same day" according to variety, size, condition, grade and pack. Therefore: Grow "the most desirable varieties." Ship only the larger peaches. Pack them properly.<sup>161</sup> An almost word-for-word recitation of advice given to growers at GSHS meetings in the 1880s.

### *New York City, 1940*

At the same time, the confidence of government statisticians in the power of information competed with a groveling humility before the mysteries of market psychology. To a terrifying degree, the prices of perishables were patently not products of the "immutable law" of supply and demand. Prices seemed to be, as Wells Sherman put it, "what we make them."<sup>162</sup> The going rate depended on the impulsive decision of a merchant to raise his price a few cents on a given day, or unfounded beliefs about future supply, or discouragement in the face of persistent low returns, or the whim of a housewife. Sherman and others saw an opportunity for government action in the subjective nature of the market. Given the solid reputation of the BAE for the objective character of its inspection and news services, might not the government offer the

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<sup>161</sup> Harry S. Kantor, "Factors Affecting the Price of Peaches in the New York City Market" USDA Technical Bulletin No. 115 (April 1929), 29-30.

<sup>162</sup> Sherman, *Merchandising Fruits and Vegetables; a New Billion Dollar Industry*, 374.

service of “recommending an opening price or basic price level”?<sup>163</sup> Or at the very least, perhaps some government agency could offer guidance to the consumer? Coax that notoriously flighty creature, the housewife, down to solid ground?

Yes. But it was a municipal agency, operating with federal support, that brought this idea to fruition.

*Good Morning Housewives!*

The radio crackles with the authoritative voice of Frances Foley Gannon, the familiar sound of the New York City Bureau of Consumer Services. It’s 8:25 a.m., time for the daily market report. What should the housewife look for on this hot July day?

*Right now peaches are dominating the fruit market. Georgia, our greatest peach producing state, is now enjoying the height of its season and abundant supplies are rolling in to the City by rail and fast freight, supplemented by liberal contributions from Maryland, New Jersey, and the Carolinas, and prices are very low indeed. . . .*

*It goes without saying, that this is good news for the homemaker of this City, as the peach is one of the most popular of all our fruits.*

All peaches are not equal, however. The housewife would need to be discriminating.

*When purchasing peaches, select those that have a fresh appearance. See that the flesh is at least fairly firm and free from blemishes. The surface background should be either whitish or yellowish and sometimes combined with a red blush, depending on the variety. Avoid any that are soft or overmature, unless they are to be used for immediate consumption.*

*As the peach is a very perishable fruit, you should watch carefully for bruised spots and signs of decay.*

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 404.

And what would the housewife do with all these cheap peaches? The voice on the radio anticipates her concern.

*The cooling fragrance, exquisite flavor, and tempting coloring of the peach makes it ideal for warm weather desserts. It is especially good when served just sliced with the addition of cream, milk, or oranges. Furthermore, it offers endless possibilities for the homemaker seeking variety. For example, peach cobbles, shortcake, dumplings, mousses, ices, and salads.*<sup>164</sup>

How many New York City housewives huddled close to the radio? How many made shopping lists based on Gannon's advice? Did they race out to their local grocer, or one of the city's public markets, or a passing pushcart peddler? Were they cured of their irrational buying habits?

Perhaps Gannon's cheerful admonitions fell on deaf ears. Why was she telling women what to buy? As if they had no idea what a good peach looked like, or what to do with it once they brought it home. As if they could not tell cheap fruit from expensive.

Whether thanking or resenting this market report, the New York City housewife would have had a hard time avoiding the Bureau of Consumer Services. The market report was in the newspapers, for at the close of the broadcast, Bureau staff summarized Gannon's five minute talk and telephoned it to an automatic printer at City News Services, which forwarded the text to all New York City dailies. The Bureau also ran cooking schools at some of the markets, so the women might run into them there. They established a Speakers' Bureau, so that women who were members of one of New York City's three thousand women's organizations might hear further advice from the Bureau. And the Bureau published a consumers' magazine meant to

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<sup>164</sup> New York City Writers' Project, "Feeding the City," (1940).

reach the few women who attended no women's meetings, heard no radio reports, and read no newspaper summaries.

And all this on a budget of \$200! How did they do it? With a lot of “free labor” from an early Works Progress Administration program called the Civil Works Administration (CWA). A group of ninety-six “college trained” CWA employees created a 3-million-word “Food Reference Library” that analyzed about 380 “raw food products” in order to buttress the Bureau's market information with historical and nutritional anecdotes — such as the “poisonous love apple” that modern listeners knew to be the “highly nutritious” tomato — that were supposed to “stimulate the digestive juices.”<sup>165</sup>

Elita Lenz was the CWA writer assigned to cover peaches; she consulted a *World Book Encyclopedia*, U.P. Hedrick's *Cyclopedia of Hardy Fruits*, a book called *Orchard and Small Fruit Culture*, a peach wholesaler on Washington Street by the name of William Turino, and her own observations in the lower Manhattan markets.<sup>166</sup> Lenz reported that while Darwin thought the peach was a Persian modification of the almond, the Chinese had for “39 centuries” used the fruit as “a symbol of long life,” suggesting that China was the native home of the *Prunus persica*. She observed that peaches were sixth in “unload importance,” that they suffered from certain bedeviling diseases, that Elbertas were the dominant variety, and that New York had enjoyed 145 million pounds of them in 1939.<sup>167</sup> This information was then reshaped into snappy radio talks and newspaper articles like the one that floated into New Yorkers' apartments on July 17, 1940.

The Bureau of Consumer Services, under the administration of Fiorello LaGuardia, who won the mayoralty in 1934, was dead set on changing the food buying habits of the New York

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<sup>165</sup> New York City Department of Markets, *Annual Report*, 23–24.

<sup>166</sup> New York City WPA Writers' Project, “Feeding the City,” (December 1940).

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

City consumer. In 1934, Department of Markets Commissioner William Fellowes Morgan, Jr. explained that he wanted to “bring a psychological change in the housewife’s attitude toward food. Instead of waiting until the last minute and throwing meat, potatoes and a vegetable together,” he continued:

I wanted to arouse her interest in the appetizing preparation and serving of food. I knew there were times when string beans were beyond the pocketbook of the average housewife, yet the market would be flooded with kale; that within the short space of twenty four hours the price of strawberries might drop from the luxury class to the range of the poor man's budget; that while meat prices might soar, there would that day be a million pounds of fresh fish flooding the wholesale markets. I decided that housewives would like to know early every morning what fruits, vegetables, meats and fish were most abundant in the current day's market.<sup>168</sup>

In short, the new Bureau of Consumer Services was determined to remedy municipal, state, and federal neglect of consumers, to teach the housewife the “only method of intelligent and economical purchasing,” as Gannon put it: *scientific buying*.<sup>169</sup>

By their own account, the Bureau of Consumer Services achieved some success. Consumers loved Frances Gannon’s market report: the audience was estimated at a minimum of 100,000 listeners, and, according to Commissioner Morgan, Gannon once received 860 letters on a single day and averaged about 250.<sup>170</sup> The head of the Consumer Council of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration was so enamored of New York City’s efforts that he sent three assistants to study the program so that it could be replicated in other towns.<sup>171</sup> Their 1934 “Fish Tuesday” campaign increased fish consumption fifteen to twenty percent on that day.<sup>172</sup> *Time*

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<sup>168</sup> New York City Department of Markets, *Annual Report*, 23.

<sup>169</sup> Frances F. Gannon, “New York City’s Consumers Service1,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 173, no. 1 (April 1, 1934): 144.

<sup>170</sup> New York City Department of Markets, *Annual Report*, 26.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*



magazine noted that the market report “once drove down an artificially sustained egg market four cents a dozen in a single day.”<sup>173</sup>

Gannon and the Bureau of Consumer Services represented a local manifestation of a national campaign that sought to educate women on the best buying practices as well as increase their purchasing power through local, state, and national government action. During the mid 1930s, the American Association of University Women published a guide titled *Scientific Consumer Purchasing*, and a range of other organizations combined similar exhortations to the consumer with lobbying for purchasing power legislation. This era was a high point of what one historian has termed “pocketbook politics.”<sup>174</sup>

The consumer-education activities of these groups also indicated a turning point in the way the consumer “housewife” procured food. “Scientific buying” intertwined with a movement in the grocery industry toward supermarkets: cavernous self-serve stores where the tagline was not personalized service but low prices. Where once women dealt in sometimes contentious but usually face-to-face interactions with sellers, they were growing more comfortable in supermarkets; they were transitioning from sharp-witted hagglers to happy shoppers.<sup>175</sup> The grocery store offered more predictable prices while scrubbing some of the grittiness out of traditional food buying strategies.

And the peddlers with which those housewives had negotiated? Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia’s rise to power in New York marked the beginning of a new enclosure movement. He spearheaded a bizarrely single-minded campaign to, as LaGuardia wrote to his new

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<sup>173</sup> “Radio: Significant WNYC,” *Time*, February 24, 1941. Accessed 10 September 2011 at <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,789971,00.html>.

<sup>174</sup> Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 133.

<sup>175</sup> See Tracey Deutsch, *Building a Housewife’s Paradise: Gender, Politics, and American Grocery Stores in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

commissioner of markets, “remove all pushcarts . . . from the streets and enclose them in suitable market buildings.”<sup>176</sup> Despite protests organized from peddler organizations and sympathy from the press, LaGuardia pressed on: he seemed to regard the anti-pushcart campaign as a personal crusade. At the opening of one of his WPA-financed indoor markets, LaGuardia looked around at his audience of vendors wearing “crisp white coats” and declared: “I found you pushcart peddlers. . . . I have made you MERCHANTS!”<sup>177</sup>

LaGuardia may have targeted peddlers because of his own immigrant background, as one colleague suggested, but the campaign was also part of a larger mission to eradicate racketeering from the food business.<sup>178</sup> LaGuardia’s approach to the high cost of living problem, in other words, was to blame it mostly on corruption. He once appeared at the Bronx Terminal Market, announced a “serious and threatening emergency,” and banned the sale, purchase and possession of all artichokes. The mob had kept prices artificially inflated, he said, costing consumers \$100,000 a year. Prices went down, and the ban was removed the next year.<sup>179</sup> Beyond breaking the power of mobsters, said LaGuardia’s commissioner of markets William Morgan, a cleaned up system would mean lower prices across the board. “I am convinced that within the next year,”

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<sup>176</sup> Benjamin Koenigsberg, “Essex Street Market Location,” Commissioner William Fellowes Morgan to *East Side Chamber News*, December 9, 1936, 8. Cited in Wasserman, “Hawkers and Gawkers: Peddlers and Markets in New York City,” 160.

<sup>177</sup> Newbold Morris, *Let the Chips Fall: My Battle Against Corruption* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1955), 119-120. Cited in Wasserman, 163. The 1934 Annual Report professed a similar goal: “that ultimately the open air markets will be supplanted by a system of enclosed markets scattered throughout the city, changing the pushcart peddler of today into the small merchant of tomorrow.” See New York City Department of Markets, *Annual Report*, 37.

<sup>178</sup> Wasserman, “Hawkers and Gawkers: Peddlers and Markets in New York City,” 163; New York City Department of Markets, *Annual Report*, 1.

<sup>179</sup> Christopher Gray, “Streetscapes/Bronx Terminal Market: Trying to Duplicate the Little Flower's Success,” *New York Times* 8 May 1994. Accessed 24 July 2011 at <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/05/08/realestate/streetscapes-bronx-terminal-market-trying-duplicate-little-flower-s-success.html>

he boasted, “the results of our endeavors will be felt to such an extent that the housewife will find . . . that she will be given more for her money.”<sup>180</sup>

In 1930s New York City, then, the old chaos was being squeezed into order from multiple directions, as consumers and retailers changed the standards and methods of food purchasing, and as municipal officials worked to reorganize distribution between terminal and market. Pushcart peddlers and consumers were, for the most part, oblivious to the travails of Georgia growers. They cared only that the fruit continued to flow into the city, the more the better for the sake of lower prices. But the movement toward standardization of product and prices mirrored the one going in the South under the auspices of the Exchanges. And as the federal government brought this about on the market end, it also brought about standardization on the production end.

### *Georgia, 1942*

When standardization finally came to Georgia in 1942, it was in the form of a USDA-sponsored arrangement called a “Marketing Agreement and Order.” The federal Marketing Agreement Act of 1937 gave monopoly-like powers to farmers, permitting them to control supply and quality with government backing.<sup>181</sup> In Georgia a group of growers known as the “Industry Committee” would set certain parameters on the size, quality, and maturity of Georgia peaches that were sold across state lines. Based on these guidelines, the Secretary of Agriculture would issue “an Order based upon the recommendations which has the force of law.”<sup>182</sup> The

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<sup>180</sup> New York City Department of Markets, *Annual Report*, 55.

<sup>181</sup> Ben C. French, “Fruit and Vegetable Marketing Orders: A Critique of the Issues and State of Analysis” *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, Vol. 64, No. 5, Proceedings Issue (Dec., 1982), 916.

<sup>182</sup> Georgia Peach Industry Marketing Order, *Annual Report* (1942), 1.

USDA's Agricultural Marketing Administration's investigative division then enforced the order.<sup>183</sup>

The standards changed every year, with the committee meeting in the late spring to send their recommendation off to the USDA. In a high production year, the standards were stricter, in a lower production year, they were more relaxed. Whatever did not meet the standards set for interstate shipment — one government scientist estimated that forty percent of peaches, on average, did not — was sold in-state, at roadside stands and canneries, wineries and farmers markets.<sup>184</sup> In this way, the Marketing Order had achieved what generations of progressive growers had been urging on Georgia's peach growers: standardization. It gave a small class of growers control over the entire crop. It was telling that they had to draw on the coercive power of the federal government to do so.

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**Table 1: Peach Acreage and Farms in Georgia, 1889-1949**

Year	Peach Acreage	Number of Farms Reporting Peaches	Number of Farms	Percentage of Farms Reporting Peaches
1890	27,875	n/a	171,071	n/a
1900	76,686	22,708	224,691	10.1%
1910	106,090	33,278	291,027	11.4%
1920	120,470	n/a	310,732	n/a
1925	149,690	92,656	249,095	37.2%
1930	92,200	66,075	255,598	25.9%
1935	75,245	75,641	250,544	30.2%
1940	85,870	77,506	216,033	35.9%
1945	69,380	84,331	225,897	37.3%
1950	53,360	49,003	198,191	24.7%

*Source: US Census of Agriculture*

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The Marketing Order, by tightening standards for marketed fruit, increased the state's collective cull pile. It appears to have done the same for the growers themselves. For while the

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<sup>183</sup> Savage, "History of the Georgia Peach Industry," 41.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

program was praised as an advance for the peach industry in terms of the national reputation of Georgia fruit, it also marked the beginning of a steady decrease in the number of growers in the state. The number of farms reporting peaches had ranged from 92,656 to 66,075 since 1925; in 1945 the census reported 84,331 farms with peaches. In 1950, the number was less than 50,000, not quite a quarter of all farms (see table). Like the first sorter on the packing line, marketing standards took a rough cut out of the grower population in Georgia; in coming years, a restive labor force and a mysterious disease would take out most of the rest.

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In the early 1920s, South Carolinians Clement and Catharine Ball Ripley bought land in the North Carolina sandhills in order to find a better life than the one of office work and bridge parties they knew in Charleston. They pinned their hopes on a tidy little peach farm. By 1931, they had fled peach growing for good. Reflecting on their career as farmers, Ripley wrote: "I never happened to know a farmer in real life who genuinely loved the soil as they are supposed to do in fiction, but I knew plenty who loved the gamble of planting crops. Even the small tenant farmer feels this way. He can get a safe job in the cotton mill with a good house, amusements and medical attention, but it is a humdrum job. There is no chance of a lucky break and his wages shooting up sky-high. . . It's hard to believe you are going to fail," she concluded, "when you need to win so desperately."

Ripley and her husband Clem had not found the "system of life" they sought when they bought their peach farm, but they did learn "to gamble, the pleasantist life in the world."<sup>185</sup> In the midst of the difficult process of extricating themselves from their unremunerative sandhill peach business, the Ripleys visited the farm that had inspired them nearly a decade earlier. As they

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<sup>185</sup> Katharine Ball Ripley, *Sand in My Shoes* (New York: Brewer, Warren & Putnam, 1931), 330.

watched the packing line run, the superintendent of that farm explained why he was still in peaches:

“You remember what I told you eight years ago standin' in Raphael Pumpelly's packhouse? I told you, there ain't a thing to this peach business. Any God damn fool can raise 'em and it ain't worth a damn fool's time to do it. I told you that eight years ago standin' there in Pumpelly's packhouse.” He hesitated. “But I'll tell you something else, Clem. I'd rather stay here and go broke raising peaches than make a fortune not raising them. This way you get some excitement anyhow.”<sup>186</sup>

In the 1930s, peach growing became less of an adventurous investment and more of a family business, and although the excitement and unpredictability of the peach season remained, standardization and technological sophistication had pushed all but the largest operators out of business. Peach growing still provided “some excitement anyhow,” but it was not a business for scrappers anymore. Growers had to invest more and more capital in sprays, packing machinery, and pre-coolers, and they had to submit their work to a government inspector in order to grow the fruit commercially.

The same pattern held for other characters in this story. The housewife exchanged haggling for shopping. Pushcart operators exchanged peddling for merchandising. Merchants exchanged speculative consignments for sober-minded redistribution. Until the early twentieth century, prices were a very localized and negotiable sort of information. The price of a peach in New York City resulted from a series of face-to-face arrangements between grower and shipper, shipper and merchant, jobber and peddler, peddler and housewife. It depended not only on abstract forces of supply and demand but also on the personal power wielded by a particularly canny consumer, or an unscrupulous merchant, or a politician-turned-peach-grower. Into these relationships stepped organizational actors — the Georgia Fruit Exchange, the Bureau of

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 331.

Agricultural Economics, the New York City Department of Markets — who attempted to make the price universal, to define the “going rate.”

This movement toward standardization may seem inevitable to twenty-first century eyes. But the fact that so many growers rejected the terms offered by the Exchange — and “voted with their feet” after the Marketing Agreement set the standard for the industry — suggests that alongside the rhetoric of agrarian stability we must also place the language of the lottery. The possibility of striking it rich in some sort of freakish year beckoned constantly to farmers, none more than those growing peaches, a crop for which freakish years were the norm.<sup>187</sup>

Businesspeople, bureaucrats, consumer advocates, and sometimes farmers as well assumed that instability and disorder were obstacles to be overcome. But this story suggests that the instability of sites of production and consumption alike could also be welcomed, at least in good years.

In the 1910s and 1920s, the Georgia peach industry found itself caught up in a wider web of distribution and marketing agents. As Georgia peach growers sought by cooperation and business organization to make this wider world more predictable and amenable to their prosperity, they also turned their attention toward consolidating a stronger local identity. And having established greater control over the economics of peach-growing — albeit temporarily — they then moved to consolidate their control over local politics. If the aughts and teens saw the industry’s attempt to prune stray branches and strengthen existing limbs, the teens and twenties saw an attempt to deepen roots. In words and in actions and in municipal blueprints, they made a place in middle Georgia.

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<sup>187</sup> Mark Fiege made a similar point in his study of Idaho potato and alfalfa farmers. See Fiege, *Irrigated Eden: The Making of an Agricultural Landscape in the American West*.

## CHAPTER 6

### MABEL WITHOFT WRITES A SONG

On a Tuesday evening, January 13, 1925, Fort Valley's elites gathered at the Harris House hotel for "Peach Products Day," a local celebration of the state-sponsored "Georgia Products Day." The participants had just won a nine-year campaign to create Peach County, with the town of Fort Valley at its center, and the mood was bright. Mabel Swartz Withoft had written a song for the occasion to the tune of "Maryland My Maryland." And so the victorious new county advocates filled the rooms of the Harris House with Peach County's praise:

Oh long our hearts have sought for thee, County Peach, my County Peach  
And truly have we wrought for thee, County Peach, my County Peach  
We yearned for thy protecting care,  
Desired thy lovely name to share,  
We longed to breathe thy perfumed air, County Peach, My County Peach.

Oh, County Peach, thou hast my heart!  
From thee I never will depart;  
For thou the crown of counties art, County Peach, my County Peach

We visioned thee in wistful dreams, County Peach, My County Peach,  
And now thy truth but lovelier seems, County Peach, My County Peach;  
We gave our best to make thee true,  
We toiled as loyal men will do,  
And here we pledge our hearts to you, County Peach, My County Peach.<sup>1</sup>

The earnestness of the evening did not confine itself to the county anthem. Schools superintendent Ralph Newton addressed the audience on Peach County's "spirit," which he likened to the people of France "following the white plumed Knight of Navarre" and "the white

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<sup>1</sup> Mabel Swartz Withoft, "My County Peach," *The Fort Valley Leader-Tribune and Peachland Journal* (19 March 1925), 19.



robed Joan of Arc” in their struggle for religious and political freedom; and to the people of England, “molding the Saxon Heptarchy into the United Kingdom and by sheer genius in government” creating a worldwide empire; and to the people of Belgium, “least among the tribes of the earth” yet “bravely” fighting the “German hordes” at the borders of France. “Peoples in their collective capacities have souls,” Newton declared, the new county of Peach no less than the nations of Europe. Other Georgia counties had been formed out of convenience, or out of dealings within the state legislature. But Peach County was a true democratic movement, “born of the desire of the whole people — a desire that rose stronger after each defeat — a desire that knew no limits of sacrifice,” a desire rooted in “the age-old love of the Saxon peoples for local self-government.”<sup>2</sup>

The evening’s other speaker was the sister of festival organizer C.L. Shepard, Jennie Vance, took Newton’s argument a step further. Peach County was “a living organism with a soul,” she said, but one that must be trained and reared, a “veritable infant in arms!” Their dreams for this new county, she admitted, were “Utopian.” They envisioned a polity “without graft or dishonesty,” with officeholders elected on the basis of merit, a beautiful court house (“for we want nothing shoddy and inadequate”), a “small but modernly equipped jail,” and — for Vance at least, the crown jewel of their plan — a “Kind Farm.” Poor farms were usually shabby affairs, designed to stigmatize as well as provide some feeble support for the impoverished. But Peach County’s Kind Farm would live up to its name: “attractive looking buildings with the loveliest of lawns, flowers and vegetable gardens” tended by the inmates. In short, it would replace the “sting of shame” with the “happiness of a home.” Vance concluded by warding off scoffers with fervent social gospel idealism: “Heaven is higher than the stars, more wonderful

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<sup>2</sup> Ralph Newton, “The Spirit: Substance of Address at 1925 Peach Products Dinner,” *The Fort Valley Leader-Tribune and Peachland Journal* (19 March 1925), 19.

than the universe and far more beautiful than our minds can conceive; nevertheless, that is the goal we strive to attain.”<sup>3</sup> Practically, the “Peach County Program” was fourfold: better schools, good roads, industrial and agricultural development, and common sense county government. Peach County would be, if not a little slice of heaven on earth, at least a Progressive-era “wonder county.”<sup>4</sup>

The exalted sentiments and utopian ambitions of 1920s Peach County patriotism may seem absurd today, in an era when sincere loyalty to a state – let alone a *county* – is hard to imagine. And there is nothing particularly spectacular about Peach County. It is one of the smallest in the state (155th out of 159 counties), middling in population (65<sup>th</sup>) and per capita income (75<sup>th</sup>). Yet in the 1910s and 1920s advocates of Peach County sustained their campaign for the better part of a decade, and then celebrated like they had accomplished something on the order of the American Revolution. What do we make of this?

First, the creation of Peach County demonstrates in a powerful way how places are made: with stories and visions, with physical labor, with political wrangling and cartography. Second, the content of these stories and visions *matters*. Human narratives about places shape (and are shaped by) the environmental dynamics and political power that obtain in a given locale.

At first blush it may seem odd to speak of making places. Places *are*, no one makes them. And on one level this objection makes sense, for any given place has certain biophysical elements — temperature, geology, vegetation — that give the place its special character. On closer inspection, of course, humans are everywhere involved in the making of places.

Biophysically, we warm the globe, build cities, cultivate gardens and fields. We turn fertile

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<sup>3</sup> Mrs. Frank Vance, “Our Aims: Ever Upward, Fair, Without Spot or Blemish,” *The Fort Valley Leader-Tribune and Peachland Journal* (19 March 1925), 19.

<sup>4</sup> Homer J. Avera, “The Peach County Program,” *The Fort Valley Leader-Tribune and Peachland Journal* (19 March 1925), 11.

plains into deserts — without ever laying eyes on those plains — simply by driving cars and plugging our tablet computers into wall outlets charged with coal-fired electricity. In just a few generations, we transform a marshy meeting place known mainly for its wild garlic population, *Chigagou*, into a major metropolis, *Chicago*.<sup>5</sup> We shape our surroundings by rearranging plant and animal populations. We burn forests to create deer parks; we plant tobacco among the stumps; we turn swine out to forage in the surrounding woods.

But humans also make places culturally. Places exist independently of us, and we play our own part in reshaping their biological and topographic features, but we also create places with our imaginations. We envision, remember, and praise. We sometimes develop deep attachments to these hybrid locales. We experience *topophilia*, the “affective bond between people and place.”<sup>6</sup> We wreath them in stories.

The making of Peach County exhibits each of these elements. Its physical location on Georgia’s “fall line” — the ancient coastline — endowed the place with a wealth of rich topsoil, as well as a topographical advantage over lower areas to the immediate south when it came to freezing temperatures. And the region’s white settlers built up the “geography of capital” as well.<sup>7</sup> Starting in the 1850s with the Georgia Southwestern railway, and continuing through the 1880s with the Georgia Florida railway, Fort Valley became an important way station for trains passing through Georgia.

Taking advantage of both the geography of nature and the geography of capital, middle Georgians planted millions of peach trees in just a few decades. The profusion of peach trees

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<sup>5</sup> See William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (Columbia University Press, 1990), 4.

<sup>7</sup> The geography of capital vs. geography of nature framework comes from Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*.

attracted a profusion of insects and pathogens that had hitherto lived on the margins, if they resided in middle Georgia at all. The residents of Fort Valley called for federal research into the insects, fungi, and microorganisms that beset their trees and fruit. They built a factory, Woolfolk Chemical Works, which made pesticides and fungicides to keep the attackers at bay and eventually became a superfund site. People, plants, and pests thus collaborated to reshape the middle Georgia environment again. In some places the change was dramatic. Two million peach trees grew in the immediate vicinity of Fort Valley in the early twentieth century. In March at blossom time, middle Georgia became a “sweet riot of pink beauty.”<sup>8</sup>

The story at hand took place when a certain set of middle Georgians came to love this landscape they had helped to create, the whitewashed streets of their “progressive little town” in the midst of this “rosy sea.”<sup>9</sup> In the 1920s, these Fort Valley residents launched a campaign to inscribe their *topophilia* on official maps, to register their identity in the state constitution. Over the better part of a decade, they proposed lines for their own county, called it Peach, and waged a furious battle in statewide elections to make their vision a reality. Part of this battle was a series of ornate “Peach Blossom Festivals,” which dramatized the development and progress that peach cultivation represented. Peach County was the fulfillment of official *topophilia*, a landscape shaped, revered, and demarcated by the business elite of Fort Valley.

This chapter narrates this attempt at place-making. It is a story of folks who started from environmental premises — that peaches grew consistently on the Fort Valley plateau, that the land was rich enough to support local economies of production — and then carefully shaped a cultural imaginary for their place via festivals and the press. The advocates of Peach County

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<sup>8</sup> Lucy Hamilton Howard, “The Peach Blossom Festival,” *The Fort Valley Leader-Tribune and Peachland Journal* (19 March 1925), 9.

<sup>9</sup> Ralph A. Graves, “Marching Through Georgia Sixty Years After,” *The National Geographic Magazine* Vol. 50, no. 3 (September 1926), 274.

carved a new, progressive place out of the belly of the old South, but their vision of progress excluded non-whites almost entirely — and was therefore fatally weak. Subsequent decades would show the folly of a community development project that left out half the community.

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Fort Valley's elites presented the idea of Peach County as an innocent effort to make administration more efficient in middle Georgia. A new county, proponents argued, would make for better roads, more responsive government, and stronger schools. Houston County was simply too large to be administered effectively. In order to create their new county, they would need a constitutional amendment to pass in the General Assembly allowing for the creation of Peach County, and they would also need to win the battle at the popular level, convincing a majority of voters to approve the Peach County amendment. And their campaign did not proceed without controversy. The rural areas of old Houston and Macon counties staged a successful counter-campaign to keep the new county measure off the ballot and then to rally opposition to the measure when it went up for popular referendum. The fact that Peach County emerged only after a bitter fight suggests that something more than efficiency was at stake. The "New County Question" was a question of power.

The new county campaign started with a 1914 meeting at the home of Alva B. Greene in Fort Valley. The luminaries of the peach industry and of local politics were there: A.J. Evans, D.C. Strother, Max L. James, J.E. Davidson, and C.L. Shepard. "These men had vision," Mrs. C.N. Rountree recalled, "and recognized the possibilities of a new county if the large area in the northern part of Houston County should be free to develop properly and normally." In sketching out the new county's borders, the group almost unanimously agreed to include as much of the "center of the great and growing peach industry" as possible. The new county's name would not

honor a “favorite son or historic event in Georgia,” therefore, but the product that had won them national fame: the peach.<sup>10</sup>

In doing so, they joined a long, almost humorous Georgia tradition of dividing up the polity into ever tinier units. In 1832, Georgia had 89 counties; by 1875, there were 137. The new state constitution of 1877 prohibited the creation of new counties — until 1904, when the General Assembly amended the constitution to allow for eight new counties. In 1906, residents of Wilcox and Irwin counties carved out Ben Hill County with an additional amendment to the state constitution, and a popular referendum to make it so, which kicked off another flurry of county-making. By 1924, the year Peach County was created, Georgia had 160 counties, more than any state in the union except for Texas. Almost half of those had been created since the 1850s.<sup>11</sup>

Georgia’s county surplus was not necessarily a point of pride. One letter to the editor of the *Atlanta Constitution* complained that small counties were inefficient, and that Georgia’s residents should be merging and consolidating, not subdividing. “The power of organization is destroyed by over organization,” he argued, “then stupidity, indigence, and mendacity begin, and the organization at once has crassitis.”<sup>12</sup> Another linked the “excessive number of lynchings in Georgia” to the “excessive number of counties,” since public officials in small counties were more personally beholden to the county’s residents and were therefore less likely to punish

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<sup>10</sup> Mrs. C.N. Rountree, “With Creation of Peach, Georgia Has 161 Counties,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (January 1, 1925); Ned McIntosh, “Capitol Gossip: New County Now Proposed to Bear the Name ‘Peach,’” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Jun 2, 1916), 3.

<sup>11</sup> Ed Jackson, “A Brief History of Georgia Counties,” *GeorgiaInfo, the Digital Library of Georgia*, 2012, <http://georgiainfo.galileo.usg.edu/countyhistory.htm>.

<sup>12</sup> W.E. Wimpy, “Creation of New Counties Hampering Efficient Enforcement of Law,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (16 July 1916), B4.

vigilantes.<sup>13</sup> The *Constitution's* editorial staff agreed. “If we would only throw off the new county menace and base the county organization upon purely business principles, making for efficiency,” the editorial concluded, “it would greatly contribute to the state’s institutional progress.”<sup>14</sup>

The Peach County advocates addressed this new county critique head on. In June 1916, Alva Greene and Emmet Houser set up office in Atlanta in order to lobby the state assembly from closer range.<sup>15</sup> In a letter to Governor Nat Harris on Peach County letterhead emblazoned with a full color peach, Alva Greene appealed to their shared friendship — an oblique reference, probably, to Greene’s work on Harris’ behalf in Fort Valley — but spent the bulk of his letter turning the efficiency argument on its head. New counties need not be a product of petty politics, he claimed. The General Assembly would not be increased in this case, since Houston, Macon, and Peach would all have one representative each. It was precisely in the interests of “Good business judgment,” not politics, that the Peach County campaign was organized. It was old Houston County that was inefficient, Greene argued. It had been laid out “years ago” as an “undeveloped territory” and Perry, the county seat, was situated near the center of the county. But northern Houston had developed so rapidly that now “10,000 people find themselves so situated that they are at a great distance from the county seat, which can be reached only over a branch railroad twelve miles long, requiring a whole day for the trip there.” Houston County was simply “too large to be handled in anything like a businesslike way,” he wrote, complaining that “sections of the county have failed to have their roads worked for years at a time.”<sup>16</sup> Elsewhere

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<sup>13</sup> William B. Ahlgren, “Responsible for Lynching Evil,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (16 July 1916), B4.

<sup>14</sup> “New County Madness!” *The Atlanta Constitution* (16 July 1916), B4.

<sup>15</sup> “Boosters Work Hard for “Peach” County,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Jun 18, 1916), 11.

<sup>16</sup> Alva B. Greene, letter to Gov. Nat E. Harris, 10 June 1916, Gov. Nat Harris Collection, Record Group 001, Georgia Archives, Morrow, GA

Greene called Houston a “vast empire,” as though he hoped to associate it with the Ottoman realm then being dismantled in Europe.<sup>17</sup>

The new county, in contrast, would be a tidy, compact, businesslike proposition, purposely laid out with no resident more than eight miles from the Central of Georgia railroad. Furthermore, since the entire section was “devoted to the peach industry,” the county government could be more responsive and aid the “further development” of the place. Houston County, once separate from Fort Valley, would also “advance with more substantial progress.”<sup>18</sup> Citing no data to support his claim, Greene argued that new counties “immediately” produced “wonderful improvement. Better roads, better schools, lower taxes.”<sup>19</sup> In an intriguing, handwritten postscript to his letter to Governor Harris, Greene clarified that he was not asking for an official expression of support “for manifest reasons” but only that the governor “help us in your own quiet way.” And then a final plea: “our needs for a new Co. are greater by far than Barrow Co. was. You know the situation.”<sup>20</sup> Although it’s not clear to what “situation” Greene referred, the fact that he felt the need to append this oblique appeal to personal knowledge suggests that the official reasons for the new county — greater administrative efficiency and more rapid economic development — was not the entire story. Their public argument was so banal — who would disagree with efficiency in 1916? — that there must have been a more complicated story underneath for opposition to develop as stiffly as it did.

Whatever the unofficial reasons for the new county, certain assumptions about nature and governance underlay their public campaign. Houston County had been laid out in the 1830s as a

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<sup>17</sup> A.B. Greene, “Says Peach County Comes Under the Exceptional Classification,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (18 July 1916), 8.

<sup>18</sup> Greene, letter to Gov. Nat E. Harris, 10 June 1916.

<sup>19</sup> Greene, “Says Peach County Comes Under the Exceptional Classification.”

<sup>20</sup> Greene, letter to Gov. Nat E. Harris, 10 June 1916.



cartographical abstraction. No one could foresee the way the county would grow. But lo, some enterprising farmers planted peach pits in the northern part of the county, and behold, a new progressive industry supporting some 10,000 residents with its natural beneficence. The goal of county government, then, was simply to redraw the lines to reflect this natural growth. It would be unnatural to keep Houston County together, an artificial bond destined to produce an unhappy marriage. Creating Peach County was simple submission to what nature had already dictated.

But the proto Peach County was also a place its residents had *made*. Fort Valley was a “progressive little town,” comprising northern transplants and liberal-minded southerners alike. Having made the orcharded landscape, in other words, they now sought to register their accomplishments in official maps; having instantiated the business progressives’ best visions of the New South — beautiful landscape, harmonious race relations, business-oriented governance — they now sought to avoid kowtowing to the Old South elites in Perry. If the members of Fort Valley’s New South alliance had their way, they would answer only to themselves.

These ambitions notwithstanding, new county advocates underestimated the determination of their opponents. There was a “mass meeting” in Perry to rally opposition in June of 1916, just after the official launch of the new county campaign. Representatives from Byron claimed that a new county would require an immediate tax hike in order to build a courthouse and jail.<sup>21</sup> Houston County ceded a strip of land to Macon County, apparently to shore up opposition since “many citizens of Marshallville had their names stricken from the Peach county proposition and signed the counter petition.”<sup>22</sup> Failing to get the Peach County proposal on the legislative agenda in 1916, its backers promised that in 1917 the proposal would be “right on hand again, as fresh and smiling as the beautiful product of its proposed territory and from which it derives its

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<sup>21</sup> “Mass Meeting At Perry Opposes ‘Peach’ County”, *The Atlanta Constitution* (June 10, 1916), 10.

<sup>22</sup> “Planned To Give To Macon County Strip Of Houston”, *The Atlanta Constitution* (June 17, 1916), 7.

name.”<sup>23</sup> They redrafted the proposed county so that the boundary ran three miles north of Marshallville, leaving Marshallville to Macon County. And since many had opposed Peach County because the name “lacked dignity,” they suggested “Wilson County” to honor the U.S. president.<sup>24</sup> The initiative again failed to pass.

The new county issue received little further attention until 1920, when it became the central debate in Houston County’s legislative elections. The victory of the so-called new county ticket — Emmet Houser and Charles Jackson as representatives, and Joe Davidson as state senator — set the stage for a reinvigorated campaign in 1921.<sup>25</sup> Under Joe Davidson’s supervision, the new county bill passed rapidly through the Senate. Confident in their cause, Peach County advocates “marked the roads entering the proposed new commonwealth with new and gayly [sic] signs that read ‘Welcome to Peach County.’”<sup>26</sup> The bill stalled in the House, though. Jules Felton of Montezuma provided the “sensation of the session” when he condemned the bill as “contrary to democratic principles. “This amendment,” he charged, “was passed through the senate without a hearing despite the fact millions of dollars in property and hundreds of people were involved.”<sup>27</sup> Despite the opposition, and the unfavorable report of the Constitutional Amendments Committee, the House voted to put the Peach County measure on the legislative agenda in August 1922.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> “Peach County Will Be Strongly Urged At Regular Session,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (March 22, 1917), 9.

<sup>24</sup> “Denny Withdraws From Presidency Race,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Jun 26, 1917), 12.

<sup>25</sup> “Proposed New County Big Issue In Houston,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (May 25, 1920), 18.

<sup>26</sup> Fuzzy Woodruff, “Flivver Trip Thro’ Georgia Is Like Liberal Education,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (July 24, 1921), C6.

<sup>27</sup> “Bill To Create County Of Peach Meets Setback: Jules Felton, Of Montezuma, Declares Georgia Is Opposed To Addition Of Counties” *The Atlanta Constitution* (July 21, 1921), 1.

<sup>28</sup> “First Fight Won By Supporters Of Peach County: House Votes Down Adverse Report Of Committee By 69-37 And Places Measure On Calendar,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (August 1, 1922), 1.

The debate in the House that August was bitter. Representative Dykes of Dooly County — which shared a border with south Houston — trotted out figures purportedly demonstrating that the new county would rob a majority of Houston’s population and taxable property, leaving only, in Dykes’ words, “swamps, niggers, and mules. You will cut off the cream of the county if you pass this measure,” he protested. Representative Emmett Houser of Houston countered that the new county was the only way to reconcile the divided interests in middle Georgia. The measure passed by a bare two-thirds majority.<sup>29</sup>

The popular campaign that followed this legislative victory was even more rancorous. In October, opponents held mass meetings in Perry, Marshallville, and Montezuma; a reporter predicted one of “the hardest fights ever staged in this state.”<sup>30</sup> A week later, the “Citizens of Macon and Houston Counties” placed an advertisement in the *Constitution* urging Georgians to “Vote AGAINST ‘Peach County.’” The authors first couched their opposition in familiar themes: new and smaller counties were inefficient, politically-motivated, unbusinesslike, and all-too-common in Georgia. “The whole state is tired of new counties.” But the ad went on to attack the new county advocates for their “unworthy motives” and “unworthy methods.” It was a “pernicious” lobby that had “infested the halls of our legislature.” Ultimately, the argument concluded, Macon and Houston residents — “we, whose ox happens to be gored at the present moment” — opposed the new county on behalf of the whole state. “FOR YOU,” the ad intoned ominously, “MAY BE MARKED NEXT FOR THE SLAUGHTER.” In fact, they alleged, the insidious “Whisky Lobby” was planning to add three more counties after Peach.<sup>31</sup> A week later, a similar advertisement used the term “Big Lobby” to explain the presence of the proposal on the

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<sup>29</sup> “Victory In House Won By Friends Of Peach County: Notice Is Given, However, That a Reconsideration of Measure Will Be Sought Next Week”, *The Atlanta Constitution* (August 12, 1922), 1.

<sup>30</sup> “Mass Meetings Oppose Forming County Of Peach” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Oct 18, 1922), 20.

<sup>31</sup> Display Ad 6 -- No Title, *The Atlanta Constitution* (Oct 23, 1922), 5.

ballot. “Whisky Lobby” apparently referred generally to government corruption, the ability of wealthy parties to buy the votes of otherwise good men, which had beset Georgia politics “since the golden days of liquor.”<sup>32</sup>

According to its opponents, then, the new county campaign was an attack on the southern ideal of self-determination. “What would you say to a proposal that Georgia be chipped away to form new states?” the ad began. “No one would be so foolhardy. UNLESS THERE WERE MONEY IN IT.” The ad warned that the “Big Lobby” was doing just this, on a smaller scale but “with equal impudence.” New county proposals — there were currently three of them in process — were a money-maker for this “Big Lobby,” the ad charged, though it did not specify how. And what would happen to “old Houston County” as a result, if the “Big Lobby were to earn its fees”? It would limp on, a mere “PART of a county. A COUNTY SHUT IN. A COUNTY WHOSE VITAL ROADS WOULD CROSS NEGLECTED CORNERS OF OTHER TERRITORIES. A county of a few white scions of the hardy folks who made it, and of a dominating multitude of their slaves’ descendents.” Thus appealing to the racial and economic fears of Georgia’s white voters — of being shut off from commerce and dominated by a black majority — the “Citizens of Houston and Macon County” begged fellow citizens to “decree [the] end” of this campaign.<sup>33</sup>

A month later, Peach County advocates responded in kind, calling the anti-new-county campaign a “vicious lobby” full of “pernicious . . . untruths.” Those “wreckers of common justice” were trying to “destroy an enterprising community” fighting for “the right to grow and become something for the state.” The new county opponents were standing in the way of progress. In a somewhat calmer tone, the authors then presented “the facts.” Look, they soothed,

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<sup>32</sup> “Vote AGAINST ‘Peach County,’” *Thomasville Times-Enterprise* (31 Oct. 1922), 6.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

Houston was still going to be a big county, greater in area, population, and tax values than seventy-five others. Macon County, meanwhile, had actually gained a few acres on the deal, since Houston had given it 40,000 acres earlier. Look, they murmured, we didn't illegally stuff the ballot box to get the new county on the docket. Sure, Peach County would have more registered voters than Houston County (1,305 to 863) but that was only because, in the two years since women had won the right to vote, "The good ladies of our community have qualified themselves as voters under their rights and duty as citizens." In fact, more women (637) were registered to vote in Peach County than men (632). In Houston, on the other hand, only 89 women were registered. In other words, they *legally* stuffed the ballot box by registering more women. "As to negroes," they added, "Peach County will have more than old Houston; but we think the least said about this the better for boh [sic] sides."<sup>34</sup>

These arguments notwithstanding, the 1922 referendum defeated the new county measure. Church bells rang in Perry, and children were dismissed from their schools to march to the music of brass bands.<sup>35</sup> Proponents of Peach County somewhat sheepishly admitted that the strength of the opposition had caught them by surprise. If they had known that the opposition would be "so extensive and vigorous" they could have rallied their forces and set the matter before a larger number of people. It was, after all, "a small number voting throughout the state" on November 7; the issue was "the only lively thing about the election," so the low turnout was not surprising.<sup>36</sup> Surely if more voters had heard the "facts" of the new county case, they would have passed the measure. "Fort Valley," the *Times-Recorder* opined, "may take the county site and be content, and it may not. They may even vote to change the name of the county to Peach and they may not.

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<sup>34</sup> Display Ad 10 -- No Title, *The Atlanta Constitution* (Nov 6, 1922), 8.

<sup>35</sup> "Houston Rejoices Over Rejection Of Peach County," *The Atlanta Constitution* (Nov 10, 1922), 3.

<sup>36</sup> C.E. Martin, "No Hard Feelings," *Thomasville Times-Enterprise* (28 Nov 1922), 2; *Thomasville Times-Enterprise* (14 Nov 1922), 2.

They may try it all over again and they may not.”<sup>37</sup> Or they could have held a local referendum to move the county seat to Fort Valley, since the town could certainly “poll votes enough within their own strength” to win such an election.<sup>38</sup> But in any case, the editorial concluded, “We expect to hear more from Peach county.”<sup>39</sup>

The Peach County campaign finally triumphed in 1924, and the numbers from the first census after the split sheds more light on the claims of Peach County advocates. The new division did divide the population approximately in half, as the Peach County campaign argued. The starkest difference is rurality: Peach County’s population was almost half urban, living in towns of 2,500 people or more. Not surprisingly, they had more foreign-born whites (thirty-three in Peach; nine in Houston), and their rates of property ownership were slightly higher.

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**Table 2: Comparing Houston and Peach County in 1930**

	Houston County	Peach County
Total Population	11,280	10,268
% Black	67.3%	63.2%
% Female	49.9%	53.3%
% Urban	0.0%	44.4%
Total Number of Families	2,574	2,392
% White Owners	31.4%	35.6%
% Black Owners	8.0%	13.1%

Source: 1930 Census, Social Explorer. Social Explorer Dataset (SE), Census 1930, Digitally transcribed by Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research. Edited, verified by Michael Haines. Compiled, edited and verified by Social Explorer.

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Sociologist Arthur Raper’s observations would confirm this portrayal of wealth separating from poverty. The author of several important investigations of the South’s socioeconomic problems, Raper noted in 1936 that six out of seven Georgia counties with the most overseers

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<sup>37</sup> “The New County Question,” *Thomasville Times-Enterprise* (14 Nov 1922), 2.

<sup>38</sup> “Peach County May Yet Become Reality,” *Thomasville Times-Enterprise* (15 December 1922), 8.

<sup>39</sup> “The New County Question,” *Thomasville Times-Enterprise* (14 Nov 1922), 2.

and farm managers were in middle Georgia. As overseers and managers were typically found only on the largest farms of 500 or more acres, this statistic indicated an unusual concentration of wealth and power. Raper contended that this concentration was “accounted for largely by the peach, melon, asparagus, and pecan industries.” Peach County, like Bleckley County in 1913, “was called into being . . . by a group of large planters who wanted a county of their own.” In fact, Raper noted, in 1925 only two Georgia counties exceeded Peach in the number of managers and overseers.<sup>40</sup>

The rhetoric of the new county advocates conjured a simple little community that wanted freedom from old imperial privilege. A more accurate picture, however, may be of Fort Valley trimming away its rural hinterland like a heavy garment, tailoring a government that fitted its own interests more closely. Indeed, the festivals that new county advocates staged in the midst of the Peach County campaign communicated a number of visual and textual arguments for the singularity of Fort Valley, but the overriding message was quite simple: *We're rich!*

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Lori Scott: *Do you remember the peach blossom festivals?*

Nanette Crosby: Oh yes. I don't know whether it was childhood memories or fantasies. I would say that it was one of the best organized and elaborate things. It's hard to describe, but it was almost unbelievable that something that big would take place and the costumes were just out of this world, and there were so many in it I don't know who could have organized it, I don't know who did. It was just a beautiful thing that nobody would ever forget.

LS: *During the peach festivals, what was it like during the peach festivals, what was it like having so many people come to Peach County?*

NC: Well, it was so crowded. I can't remember what they did about the situation, but I remember walking down a wide road with the festival at the end, if I remember it was just so beautiful, you just can't imagine all the color, all the peach blossoms. The

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<sup>40</sup> Arthur Franklin Raper, *Preface to Peasantry: A Tale of Two Black Belt Counties*, Southern Classics Series (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), 107.

dresses that all the girls wore were the color of peach tree blooms. It was just a wonderful experience.”<sup>41</sup>

Memory may be untrustworthy, but Nanette Crosby’s seventy-five year-old impressions of Fort Valley’s peach blossom festivals are revealing. Vivid yet indistinct — even she is unsure which parts were “fantasies” and which memories — her recollections suggest the power with which the festival’s organizers made their point. She remembered the power, if not the point, which is telling, for the power *was* the point. *Unbelievable. Out of this world. A beautiful thing that nobody would ever forget. Crowded. Color. Peach blossoms. Dresses. A wonderful experience.* The peach blossom festivals, which ran for five stunning years from 1922 to 1926, were meant to be a swirl of color and beauty and food and wealth. They were designed to dazzle. And the folks who designed these pageants were the same ones who ran the campaign for Peach County. The architects of political realignment were also the crafters of “the world’s peach paradise.”

The first festival was in March 1922, the year of the initial Peach County referendum. It featured an “Auto Ride through Pink Paradise of Houston County”; a parade of fanciful floats from local towns, counties, and companies; a ten-thousand-plate barbecue luncheon, addresses by “prominent Georgians”; and a “beautiful flower spectacle” created by the Fort Valley Community Service.<sup>42</sup> After lunch, with pulled pork and brunswick stew swilling in their stomachs, an audience of about 12,000 listened to Governor Thomas Hardwick praise the peach industry. “The one crop idea,” he said, “had to be removed from the minds of the farmers if they were to go forward instead of backward in their battle for prosperity.” Peaches had “done more

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<sup>41</sup> Nanette Crosby, interview with Lori Scott, 4 December 1991. Transcript in Local History Collection, Thomas Public Library, Fort Valley, GA.

<sup>42</sup> Souvenir Program, Annual Peach Blossom Festival (1922), 4,



in aiding crop diversification than any other one thing in the state.” So much so, said Hardwick, that all Georgians were “indebted to the Fort Valley people” for the “great service they have rendered in this line.”<sup>43</sup> If audience members then perused their souvenir programs, they saw a similar argument laid out on page three. Fort Valley, they read, was already a bustling town of 3,600; with the “many profitable business possibilities in this section,” that number was sure to grow. It had “a train service superior to any city of its size in the state.” And its territory grew more than a third of Georgia’s peaches, making it a “Mecca for the commission men” who handled peaches. Three-quarters of the peach commission agents who worked in Georgia made Fort Valley their seasonal headquarters. And since Fort Valley had the highest elevation of any point along the Central of Georgia, its health was “unsurpassed.”<sup>44</sup> This advertisement had multiple purposes, but clearly one of them was, like Hardwick’s address, to bolster their claims to independence.

If Hardwick and the souvenir program made the formal case for Fort Valley’s claim, the pageants provided the imagery and storyline. In 1922 the pageant was a relatively modest affair, a drama written in 1916 by Constance D’Archev Mackey, “The Sun Goddess: A Masque of Old Japan.” It featured a fascination with the exotic and Oriental that would pervade all of the festivals. Otherwise, 1922 was simple entertainment.<sup>45</sup> Roderick Houser, the *Constitution’s* emissary to the fete, described it as “a sight for the gods to see.” And not just gods, he might have added, but Yankees, too. License plates on some 1,500 automobiles showed a diverse attendance: California, Illinois, Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Virginia. One

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<sup>43</sup> Governor Thomas Hardwick, speech given at First Annual Peach Blossom Festival (March 14, 1922), quoted in Roderick Houser, “Peach Festival Draws Thousands to Fort Valley: Visitors From Many States See First King and Queen Crowned Amidst Celebration,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (March 15, 1922), 7

<sup>44</sup> Souvenir Program (1922), 3.

<sup>45</sup> “Peach Blossom Festival,” 14 March 1922. Document in Local History Collection of the Thomas Public Library, Fort Valley Georgia.

Chicagoan who had seen the Swiss Alps and the canals of Venice saved his highest praise for Fort Valley: “I really and truly believe that I saw the prettiest sight of my life when I looked on the peach orchards in full bloom just at sundown Tuesday afternoon.”<sup>46</sup>

In reaction to losing the new county bid, the organizers of the festival determined to go bigger and bolder. In 1923, they sent invitations not only to residents of New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Indiana, Oregon, Michigan, but also to President Warren Harding and his cabinet.<sup>47</sup> This year, rather than present a pageant written by an outsider, they composed their own. This year, their meaning would be unmistakable. As a headline in the *Progressive Farmer* had it, the “Peach Festival Depicts Development.” The festival would be full not just of inspiration but of “instruction.”<sup>48</sup>

The 1923 pageant, “Georgia’s Crowning Glory: A Pageant of Peachland,” featured the creative efforts of the three women that would shape the festivals — and craft the narrative of progress by peaches — for years to come. Etta Carrithers, the “live-wire secretary” of the Fort Valley Community Service organization, had the idea. Pauline Eaton Oak staged the play. She was a director and actor from Maine who worked in New York City for the post World War I agency the National Community Service, and went on to direct a well-regarded theater company in Washington D.C.<sup>49</sup> And Mabel Swartz Withoft provided the words.

A native of Dayton, Ohio, Withoft had moved with her husband Frank Withoft to Fort Valley around 1890, where he managed several large northern-owned peach farms. They blended

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<sup>46</sup> Roderick Houser, “Peach Festival Draws Thousands to Fort Valley: Visitors From Many States See First King and Queen Crowned Amidst Celebration,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (March 15, 1922), 7.

<sup>47</sup> “President and Cabinet May Attend Celebration,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Feb 26, 1923), 3.

<sup>48</sup> J.H. Reed, “Peach Festival Depicts Development,” *The Progressive Farmer*, undated clipping (ca. April 1922), Local History Collection of the Thomas Public Library, Fort Valley, Georgia.

<sup>49</sup> “Theater-Going Public to Share Army 'Short' Aimed at Intolerance.” *The Washington Post* (1923-1954), Jul 03, 1946.

into middle Georgia society rapidly. As a pitcher for Fort Valley's "invincible" amateur baseball club, Frank was "equal to professionals," and in his first years in Fort Valley the team went on an unholy tear, going 77-3 from 1891-1894. He became a prominent member of the Georgia State Horticultural Society, and helped organize Fort Valley's first Kiwanis Club in 1922. Mabel, for her part, was a blur of social and quasi-political activity. Along with her work for the BWMU, where she served as vice-president for the west central district, she was also a state officer of the Women's Christian Temperance Union and president of the Fort Valley History Club. As president of the Fort Valley Women's Club — a local chapter of a national organization — she lobbied for better teacher pay.<sup>50</sup> The Withoft's son Frederick died of pneumonia fighting in France in February 1919.<sup>51</sup> In response, Mabel Withoft, "not yet released from the burden, sacrifice, and grief of recent war," presented a resolution at the BWMU annual conference that the U.S. "act definitely and permanently as our God in heaven shall guide you, in making less armament and none of war, to secure for our dear land the peace which is the right of the followers of Jesus."<sup>52</sup> As a "Gold Star Mother" whose son was buried in Arlington, Mabel Withoft became national president of the Service Star Legion in 1930.<sup>53</sup> As all this activity suggests, the Withofts made themselves at home in Fort Valley.

In light of Mabel Withoft's status as a transplant, the themes of the 1923 pageant are all the more striking. After an opening coronation, which seated the "King and Queen of Peachland" on their thrones for the viewing of the pageant, the "Spirit of Georgia" appeared, played by a local woman wrapped in the colors of the Georgia flag and carried on a litter by "Nubian" slaves.

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<sup>50</sup> "Teachers of Our Children Must Be Paid, Say Women." *The Atlanta Constitution (1881-1945)*. Atlanta, Ga., July 20, 1913, sec. F.

<sup>51</sup> "Fort Valley Soldier Is Dead in France," *The Atlanta Constitution*, Atlanta, Ga., (March 16, 1919), a12.

<sup>52</sup> "Baptist W.M.U. in Annual Convention in Macon"

<sup>53</sup> "Mrs. F. W. Withoft To Be Honored." *The Atlanta Constitution (1881-1945)*. Atlanta, Ga., October 14, 1930.

Georgia then bade “her handmaiden” history to “present her scenes” and remind the audience of “Georgia’s glorious past.” First up: a troop of buckskin-clad “Indians,” barefoot, faces browned with makeup, heads crowned with awkward feathered things intended to be headdresses. Dave C. Strother, a prominent peach-grower and camellia enthusiast from Marshallville, wore white buckskin as the tribe’s chief. DeSoto and his Spaniards marched through Georgia’s forests, leaving nothing “but an occasional name” to Georgia. James Oglethorpe then appeared to make a colony in Georgia. “We owe our speech, our breeding, and our pride / To these who sailed across the Atlantic deep.” The “joyous” colonial days that followed gave way to “Oppression” which occasioned the revolutionary war, where Georgia’s sons somewhat predictably “rallied to the right.”

But here Withoft’s text varied from standard accounts, giving an entire stanza to Nancy Hart. “But there were women, too, who fought,” she reminded the audience. The next section likewise paid tribute to Wesleyan College, in 1836 the nation’s first women’s college.

“Wonderful, how sweet they were, / Those first fair gentle maidens, pioneers / In College halls.” Her stanza for the State University was by the comparison rather faint praise: “great/ Her past; splendid her present; brilliant / Her future.”

The Civil War came next, as something that *happened to* the South, not something that southerners perpetrated intentionally. The “days of beauty and romance” of the antebellum period were “Shocked into stillness by the guns of war.” Reconstruction, not surprisingly, was a time of “dark days” when Georgia bowed her head and “suffered awhile.” But then “came an eerie host / To right her wrongs; with fiery cross upheld / And flashing blades, they rode; nor rode in vain.” The Ku Klux Klan, in other words, had liberated Georgia from the oppressive rule of northerners and blacks. In giving credit to the KKK, however, Withoft made clear that its

moment was gone. The “eerie host” purchased peace with violence, but violence was unnecessary now, for “with peace came progress.” Georgia’s cultural heroes Sidney Lanier, Joel Chandler Harris, Crawford Long (a surgeon who pioneered the use of ether), Ty Cobb, and — Withoft’s political views peaking out again — “Mistress Felton! Quite the peer of man!” Here she referred to the efforts of Rebecca Latimer Felton, Georgia’s foremost advocate for women’s suffrage.

History’s scenes closed with veterans of the Great War, Red Cross volunteers, and the Boy Scouts promenading before the King and Queen of Peachland, and History placed “the jewel of a high and noble past” on Georgia’s breast. Georgia then summoned Industry, who placed a jewel in Georgia’s crown and made way for Ceres, the goddess of agriculture. Ceres commanded the Sun, Rain, and Wind to bring Blossoms, Birds and Butterflies; these seven characters then joined with Georgia’s agricultural products — including asparagus, radishes, tobacco, and pecans — to present a “beautiful dance scene, in group and solo.”<sup>54</sup> “Terrible Pests” — curculios, boll weevils, spotted lady bugs, pecan borers, click beetles, peach tree borers, devil’s riding horse, grasshoppers, locusts, and soldier bugs — attacked the crops, but the “Farmer Boys” came to the rescue and subdued these “Destructive Forces.” The way cleared again for progress, a cluster of Peach Blossoms appeared to dance for the King and Queen, “Fairy-like, airy-like, merry-like . . . Bursting with beauty.” The pageant closed with Ceres placing upon Georgia’s head a crown of peach blossoms, “the rich emblem of thy mightiest wealth.”<sup>55</sup>

Like the more explicit arguments for Peach County, the pageant thus portrayed the peach industry as the final step in an inexorable progression: from savage-inhabited wilderness, to frontier settlement, to agrarian society, to horticultural civilization. Why stand in the way of

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<sup>54</sup> Reed, “Peach Festival Depicts Development.”

<sup>55</sup> Peach Blossom Festival Program (1923). Thomas Public Library, Fort Valley, GA.

progress by denying a political entity to these worthy farmers? Indeed, after enjoying such splendid hospitality — a three-mile table of barbecue, free for all comers — how could one deny Fort Valley its due?

With each successive year, festival organizers refined and sharpened the storyline. In 1924, the pageant internationalized the story of Peach County for an audience of 35,000 with “Peach of the World: A Pageant of the Peach Country” Whereas in 1923 the peach industry was Georgia’s “crown of glory,” in 1924 the middle Georgia peach industry was the zenith of global history. Born in China some two millenia before Christ, the peach visited with Japan, India, and Persia; Greece, Italy, and France; England, Belgium, Holland, and Spain; and sixteenth-century Mexico; only to choose America (whose “red soil / Seems strangely homelike to the buried seed”), then Georgia (where “Each generation blossoms / Into some rarer, rosier, sweeter form”), then Fort Valley (“Diana-like, / Young, splendid, thrilling with fine enterprise”) as her permanent home. Having portrayed the past and the present of the fruit, the pageant then unveiled the Future: a “rosy sea” of “pinky petals.” The uninhibited expansion of peach growing, with the “Brightness of eyes, the coloring of health” and other “delights” of civilization, courtesy of horticulture.<sup>56</sup> This year, the festival appeared in the *New York Times* “Rotogravure Picture Section.” Alongside photos of Babe Ruth driving a golf ball off the mouth of fellow Yankee Joe Bush, the new sheik of Turkey, Mustapha Fevsi, and an auction of the Former Crown Prince of Germany’s personal effects, Miss Frances Felton as Miss Montezuma and Helen Hume as Queen of Peachland attested to the festival’s widening reputation.<sup>57</sup> Hume wore a robe lent to her by

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<sup>56</sup> Peach Blossom Festival Program (1924). Thomas Public Library, Fort Valley, GA.

<sup>57</sup> “Rotogravure,” *New York Times* (6 April 1924), RP2.

movie star Mary Pickford, a \$32,000 pearl-inlaid outfit for the 1924 costume drama “Dorothy Vernon of Haddon Hall.”<sup>58</sup>

The pageant portrayed peaches as a progressive crop for a progressive place, but it stopped short of implying that agriculture must give way to industry. The state’s “mightiest wealth” was in peaches. Its society would retain its rural character, though with the help of modern science. Horticulture offered the South a middle place between a fully agrarian society like the antebellum South and a fully industrialized society like the contemporary northeast. Such a society had access to all the “delights of civilization” – including the expensive duds of movie stars – but on its own terms.

Whether because of the ornate winsomeness of the festivals or because of back room negotiating with Macon and Houston County opponents, the new county campaign finally triumphed in 1924. The prominence of women in the pageant may have been a sly way for Pauline Oak and Mabel Withoft to promulgate their political views, but it was also part of the Peach County campaign’s official strategy. In November 1924, when the amendment again went before the voters of the state, forty “women workers from the peach-raising area of Georgia” arrived in Atlanta to “plead their cause personally to the voters.” The new county campaign was not an attack on Houston County, they promised. It was merely a matter of “Good roads and good schools” and “the coming into the peach belt of manufacturing plants.”<sup>59</sup> Georgia’s voters agreed, apparently, approving the measure 77,952 to 31,211.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> “Wielding a Sceptre of Peach Blossoms,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (30 March 1924), 12A; Deborah Nadoolman Landis, *Dressed: A Century of Hollywood Costume Design* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 40.

<sup>59</sup> “Forty Women Workers Will Advocate New Peach County at Atlanta Polls Today.” *The Atlanta Constitution* (November 4, 1924).

<sup>60</sup> C.N. Rountree, “With Creation of Peach, Georgia Has 161 Counties,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (1 Jan 1925).

The victory celebration was long and sustained, beginning with the singing of “My County Peach” at the Peach Products Day in January and continuing through March’s Peach Blossom Festival. The organizers expanded it to two days, running the same program each day in order to accommodate more visitors. They added an evening fireworks show and planned to charge for admission to the pageant and for the barbecue luncheon. *National Geographic* and several film studios sent photographers to the event.<sup>61</sup> An estimated 60,000 visitors came.

Those visitors who purchased the one-dollar ticket to the pageant saw a lavish victory celebration for the new county campaign. The “Trail of Pink Petals” followed the Mount Olympus trope of 1924, with Pomona’s five daughters competing for the goddess’ favor. The Grape’s “clinging tendrils” and delicate fragrance seemed graceful, but since “Bacchus claims thee for his revels wild!” Pomona could not choose her. The Cherry failed to charm completely. The Orange, the color of the sun, “dost compensate our loneliness” in winter, but “alien art thou still.” The Apple was “daintily demure” but carried from the Garden of Eden a besmirched reputation: “Eve’s sore heart was never comforted / By wearing apple blossoms in her hair!”<sup>62</sup>

And then came the peach,

Thou darling of the gods!  
The sun has dowered thee with liquid gold;  
The singing rain prepared thy perfumed bath,  
And filled with nectar thy translucent bowl!

The peach was, in fact, too lovely to remain at Olympus; she would surely arouse Juno’s jealousy. Instead, the peach would have to seek “a home upon the gracious earth.”<sup>63</sup> So again the peach set off on a journey looking for her true home, though this year Pauline Oak and Mabel

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<sup>61</sup> Marilyn Neisler Windham, *Peach County: The World’s Peach Paradise*, Images of America (Dover, N.H.: Arcadia, 1997), 85–91.

<sup>62</sup> Mabel Swartz Withoft, “The Aeneid of the Peach,” *The Fort Valley Leader-Tribune and Peachland Journal* (19 March 1925), 7.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*



Withoft were careful to note the religious pluralism of her pilgrimage: Buddhist China, Hindu India, pagan Persia and Greece, Catholic Europe, Aztec Mexico. The Peach is a kind of a New Woman in these scenes, amused by the attentions of these “foreign eyes” and eager to be taken by the next suitor whether “mighty Persian” or “resistless” Spanish Don. Finally, the peach arrives in America to choose a state, and watches, unmoved, as they parade before her. And then, “rich Georgia, versed in rural art, / Knowing the longings of a Peach’s heart,” whispers in her ear of his “favorite son” whose home was “prepared for such a lovely bride,” who would “cherish her through years of good or ill.” Who was this favorite son?<sup>64</sup>

“Behold!” Fort Valley! A tall twenty-four-year old from Powersville named Arthur Vinson, clad in a blinding white suit and shoes, with Sam Rumph, Jr. at his side as his best man. Wasting no time with flirtation, “with lovelight in his eyes,” Fort Valley gets straight to the point, and “woos and wins Pomona’s richest prize!” And that temperamental child of the gods, the Peach, “She yields, — she blushes, — oh! how sweet is Spring! / She plights her troth with good Pomona’s ring!” His conquest is final: the Peach would no longer be a sexual adventurer but a contented wife, “settled down in Georgia’s happy state!”<sup>65</sup> Reading the “Aeneid of the Peach,” it is easy to forget that Mabel Withoft was a devoted Baptist who approved the strict moral code of the denomination’s mission schools.

By ending in matrimony, Withoft followed a familiar romantic storyline — few authors take the risk of boring their audiences with the day-to-day dynamics of married life. But in so doing she also made an argument for permanence. No matter the peach’s past history of fleeing lover to lover, here in Fort Valley the union would be secure. This idea of permanence was critical to the vision of rural development presented by the festivals. And like the suitor who

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

thinks he will be the one to settle the wayward woman, this idea of peach-based permanence was not terribly realistic.

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The sense of local attachment that emanated from the Peach Blossom Festivals must have resonated with John Donald Wade of Marshallville. Most famous for “The Life and Death of Cousin Lucius,” his contribution to the so-called agrarian manifesto, *I’ll Take My Stand*, Wade was also an English professor at the University of Georgia, the founding editor of the *Georgia Review*, and a devoted son of middle Georgia.<sup>66</sup> In a 1949 letter to the editor of the *Montezuma Citizen-Georgian*, he commended the life of Andrew Houser Clarke as a model of local citizenship. Clarke had held more positions of “public trust and of private trust in our middle-Georgia nation” than any other man, Wade wrote. He lived all his life on a farm equidistant from “his four most cherished capitals: Fort Valley, Marshallville, Montezuma, and Perry.” Clarke was not only related to much of the citizenry by blood or marriage, he was “in a manner of speaking” related as well to “our Middle Georgia earth itself.”<sup>67</sup> The Nashville Agrarians have been accused of being southern nationalists or neo-confederates, but Wade’s ultimate loyalties were not even that expansive. He counted himself a member of the “middle Georgia nation” as well.

Within middle Georgia, Wade loved Marshallville most of all. The town is the setting – and in some ways, a central character – of his contribution to *I’ll Take My Stand*, “The Life and Death of Cousin Lucius.” Long after his literary career had been eclipsed by more prominent

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<sup>66</sup> John Donald Wade, “The Life and Death of Cousin Lucius,” in *I’ll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1930), 265–301.

<sup>67</sup> John Donald Wade, Letter to the Editor, *Montezuma Citizen-Georgian* (23 April 1949), typescript in John Donald Wade Papers, MSS 2945, Box 6, Folder 20, Writings, Editorials, Hargrett Manuscripts Library, The University of Georgia.

members of the Agrarian set – Robert Penn Warren (author of *All the King's Men*) and John Crowe Ransom (founder of the *Kenyon Review*) among them – Wade dedicated himself to making Marshallville more livable and lovely. He believed that if the South were to retain its distinctiveness in a modern, industrial world, southerners would have to venerate Southern tradition, establish Southern literature, physically reside in the South, and cultivate “the physical beauty of the Southland itself.”<sup>68</sup> In 1930, the year *I'll Take My Stand* hit the shelves, Wade helped to plant three thousand crepe myrtles, three thousand camellias, and three million daffodils in Marshallville, which along with spring peach blossoms and summer peaches created in Marshallville what he called “a really very gorgeous pageant of the seasons.”<sup>69</sup> A few years later he wrote to his friend and collaborator Donald Davidson that the peach blossoms had interrupted his literary work. “It was the peach orchards that floored me,” he wrote. “You know how the landscape acts with them.”<sup>70</sup>

Wade loved the landscape of peach orchards, but he was ambivalent about the effects of the peach industry on the local culture of middle Georgia. On the one hand, he praised Marshallville’s adoption of peaches (and asparagus and pecans as well) as an early proof of the wisdom of diversification. On the other hand, he recognized that different crops did not really change that much about the southern economy. In 1926, he wrote a letter to Henry Grady in “New Atlanta, Erehwon,” as a kind of update on the effects of Grady’s New South “doctrine,” which he defined as a call for people to “stop talking about the past, and set to work earnestly to

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<sup>68</sup> Gerald J Smith, “The Agrarian Thought of John Donald Wade” (Master’s Thesis, University of Georgia, 1971), 28.

<sup>69</sup> John Donald Wade, “Marshallville: Where Peaches Started,” Typescript in John Donald Wade Papers, MSS 2945, Box 6, Folder 16, Writings, Hargrett Manuscripts Library, The University of Georgia.

<sup>70</sup> John Donald Wade to Donald E. Davidson, 10 April 1934, in Gerald J Smith, ed., *Agrarian Letters: The Correspondence of John Donald Wade and Donald Davidson (1930-1939)* (Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 2003), 81.

make something tolerable out of the present” by setting up an economic system similar to “say, Ohio.” But efforts to realize the New South, said Wade, had some “distressing possibilities” which Grady had not anticipated. Agricultural diversification, for example, had not answered the problems of the southern farmer. Even in Wade’s “home village” where they had diversified, “the farmers do not prosper,” nay, “most of them are constantly in debt.” One son stays on the farm to work, and the other “regretfully” goes to Atlanta to work to support the farm – but is inevitably corrupted by the commercial values of the city, and comes home in a “big automobile” which tempts the other son to leave as well. Wade lamented this “farm exodus” of whites and blacks alike. Even worse than the depopulation of the rural South, for Wade, was the “hidden despiritualizing” of place that accompanied the decline of the South’s farms. Industrialism, for Wade, was fine for “reliability and worth,” but it had no answer for the necessity of “warmth, and color, of whimsical lightness and spontaneous irrepressible humor.”<sup>71</sup> As a packing shed supervisor, for instance, Wade feared that the introduction of machines had, in the interest of efficiency, dehumanized a signature Southern industry.<sup>72</sup>

For all the shortcomings of the neo-agrarian vision, Wade articulated an important critique of the diversification gospel. The idea that a southern farmer could escape poverty by planting something other than cotton assumed that the crop was the problem. That is, it assumed that cotton begat ignorance just as peaches sowed intelligence, that although the cotton market may have been controlled by unscrupulous profiteers, peaches could be sold directly to regular people. In other words, the gospel of diversification left aside the question of political and

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<sup>71</sup> John Donald Wade, “Georgia: John Donald Wade to Henry W. Grady” (25 June 1926), Typescript in John Donald Wade Papers, MSS 2945, Box 6, Folder 14, Writings, Hargrett Manuscripts Library, The University of Georgia.

<sup>72</sup> Gerald J Smith, “John Donald Wade: A Critical Biography” (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Georgia, 1977), 191. Smith cites a letter from Wade to Donald E. Davidson, 2 July 1953.

economic power. Peach growers had begun to recognize in the early 1900s their need for more influence over distant places like urban markets – they had organized associations in order to exert the power of production over the power of distribution. But their organizing efforts were flagging by the 1920s. The new county campaign and the festivals represented a kind of retrenchment in defense of the local. Having fought their battles at far flung markets, they dug in to the Fort Valley plateau.

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Like John Donald Wade, Mabel Withoft acknowledged in the final peach blossom pageant that agricultural diversification might bring trials rather than triumphs. “The Prodigal Peach” was a remarkable parable of place, agricultural identity, and science. As in years past, the pageant began with Pomona, the Goddess of Fruit, who is enchanted with her loveliest daughter and resolves to keep the Peach with her forever at Mount Olympus. But little Peach grows up, as children always do, and “feels a longing to visit Earth” and to consort with her sister fruits. Pomona refuses; little Peach escapes and flies down to Earth. But where to settle? First, “dark-eyed Asia” attracts her, and he “summons his minions” China, Japan, India, Persia to welcome her. But with them also come the “Mediterranean Fruit Fly, the Oriental Peach Moth and the Lacanium Scale.” Little Peach escapes again, this time to Europe, where “armored Knights receive her into the court of Nations.” Their armor cannot protect her from Hail, Rain, and Wind, though, and she casts her lot with “America, who carries her away in his big ship.” Of all the forty-eight states who beckon, she chooses Georgia. But again, all the old enemies and some new ones creep in. “Frost with his chilling breath, the Locust, the Peach Borer, the San Jose Scale, the Plum Curculio the Shot-Hole Borer Beetle, the Brown Rot, the Peach Scab, the Peach Leaf Curl.” But no — Georgia has a “moment of inspiration” and “calls Science to her aid.” Science

comes at the head of an army” and does battle with all her foes, until they are vanquished and he has won the heart of little Peach. They walk “hand in hand into the home Georgia has built for them.”<sup>73</sup>

The Peach did not live happily ever after. The peach industry in Georgia began a long decline at the end of the decade, in some places disappearing altogether. Three changing dynamics proved especially vexing. First, the problems that threatened the fruit at the end of the “Prodigal Peach” continued to bedevil growers, and “science” did not always offer effective solutions. A series of severe freezes and pest infestations made profits harder to come by. After World War II, a mysterious syndrome known as Peach Tree Short Life caused large numbers of trees in the old peach districts to wither and die before fruiting.

Second, the Peach proved to be a flighty partner, moving easily to other U.S. states. North and South Carolina in particular offered serious competition in the coming decades. By mid-century South Carolina’s growers had overtaken Georgia’s, and they routinely outproduce their southern neighbor today.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the laborers on which peach production depended had by the 1920s begun their long walk away from the fields. Between 1900 and 1922, 151,438 blacks left Georgia. In 1923, a USDA survey showed that 13% of black farm workers had moved north in 1922. The “situation in Georgia,” the survey observed, “is much worse than is generally realized.” Whether or not Fort Valley’s business elites realized the severity of the “situation,” they certainly feared it. In 1926, Fort Valley’s License Tax Ordinance levied anywhere from \$10 to \$75 on 162 types of businesses, but “Immigration Agents” had a license fee of \$26,000. Agent

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<sup>73</sup> Peach Blossom Festival Program (1926), 6-7. Thomas Public Library, Fort Valley, GA.

or no agent, the migration was already underway. In the 1920s, Georgia's black population decreased by 135,233, while the white population increased by 147,907.<sup>74</sup>

The peach blossom festivals did not acknowledge the crucial role of African American labor, but the lack of attention is in itself instructive. Local blacks appeared in the pageants as “Nubian” porters, carrying a princess in a litter; as Arabian grooms, tending to the festival King's horses; and as slaves, representing the harmony of the Old South. Their symbolic roles in the festival imagination were as foreign and historic curiosities.

African Americans' *actual* roles in the festival were just as telling. The photographs in which blacks appeared most prominently were food-oriented. Black men, under white supervision, stand guard over acres of barbecue pits and steaming cauldrons of brunswick stew; black women peer at the camera over great pots of coffee.<sup>75</sup> White chroniclers of the festivals often cite the quantities served as points of pride — the Brunswick stew in 1924, for example, required six hundred pounds of salt, two cases of celery, four barrels of vinegar, sixty gallons of canned corn, eighty gallons of tomatoes, eighteen gallons of English peas, fifty pounds of onions and twenty bushels of potatoes — but the labor that produced this feast is invisible. The humans sweating in the sun over smoking sides of pork and steaming vats of brunswick stew made the photographs, but not the written accounts.

The defenders of southern places could have portrayed a more inclusive South, even on unequal terms. Robert Penn Warren did so in his contribution to *I'll Take My Stand*, “The Briar

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<sup>74</sup> Donald L Grant and Jonathan Grant, *The Way It Was in the South: The Black Experience in Georgia* (Secaucus, N.J.: Carol Pub. Group, 1993), 295. In July 1923, the USDA said that 60% of those who left were skilled workers.. 1920-25, black farmers in GA down 35.4 percent, from 130,000 to 84,000. [This will probably have to be a BIG footnote at some point, citing great migration literature and statistics.]

<sup>75</sup> Windham, *Peach County: The World's Peach Paradise*, 71.

Patch.”<sup>76</sup> The great southern expositions of the 1890s included blacks, albeit patronizingly. The organizers of the Peach Blossom Festivals could have acknowledged the presence of Fort Valley High and Industrial School; they could have praised the institution’s own rural development campaign. Instead, as with so many early twentieth century reform movements in the South, whiteness won out. Just as segregation appealed to southern progressives as a “clean solution” that allowed neither “disturbing private violence” nor “exceptions for individuals,” the peach blossom festivals scrubbed away the rural black population like the dark loam on which their prosperity depended.<sup>77</sup>

In the heat of the new county campaign, Peach County proponents had admitted that the new county’s black population would be larger than Houston’s. But “the least said about this,” they wrote, “the better for boh [sic] sides.”<sup>78</sup> The peach blossom festivals bore out this agreement of silence. They imagined the peach industry in escapist terms, as an exotic endowment from Persia or China, a gift of the gods and entirely apart from the ragged cotton culture that propelled Georgia’s rural economy.

John Donald Wade’s own attachment to place betrayed similar contradictions. In the 1940s and 50s he turned increasingly to landscape beautification as a kind of non-confrontational, practical agrarianism. He wrote in 1939, for instance, that he was “a good deal excited about

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<sup>76</sup> Robert Penn Warren, “The Briar Patch,” in *I’ll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1930), 246–264.

<sup>77</sup> Mark Schultz, *The Rural Face of White Supremacy: Beyond Jim Crow*, First Illinois paperback ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 68. On southern progressivism and segregation, see Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998); Jack Temple Kirby, *Darkness at the Dawning; Race and Reform in the Progressive South*, Critical Periods of History (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1972); William A Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); George Brown Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945*, vol. 10, History of the South (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967); C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, New and rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957).

<sup>78</sup> Display Ad 10 -- No Title, *The Atlanta Constitution* (Nov 6, 1922), 8.



cassia as a shrub and lantana as a perennial” along Highway 49.<sup>79</sup> On his private land, meanwhile, Wade started a “Garden of the World,” that he thought at some time might actually draw Florida-bound tourists to Marshallville and thus inject some of industrialism’s excess income into the little town’s economy.<sup>80</sup> One dry summer, the garden required constant watering, and Wade, biographer Gerald Smith wrote admiringly, was “daily at the task of manual irrigation.” But when Smith goes on to describe the work, it turns out that only Wade’s black employees were actually doing much labor: “T.J.” drove a tractor with water barrels while a dozen “small Negro boys” dipped water on the plants. Wade, accompanied by his rat terrier, followed in his car to observe and give instructions.<sup>81</sup>

In the 1920s, white middle Georgians – Wade, Withoft, the new county advocates and festival organizers – sought a “peach paradise” of progressive agriculture and genteel culture. They crafted this world with their imaginations, their work with plants and landscapes, and their political campaigning. But their visions of place-making were fundamentally flawed. They would not, or could not, acknowledge the ways their imagination of community simultaneously depended upon and excluded their black neighbors. This blindness became painfully obvious with the story of labor in the peach orchards. The workers under the trees rarely earned public comment, but the success of the industry depended on them – and on the oppressive political economy that made them available. Growers would pay public attention to their labor force only when its disintegration was painfully obvious.

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<sup>79</sup> John Donald Wade to Davenport Guerry, 2 September 1939, John Donald Wade Family Papers MS 837, Box 18 Macon Chamber of Commerce – Marshallville Highway Commission, Folder 1 Macon County Planning, Hargrett Manuscripts Library, UGA.

<sup>80</sup> John Donald Wade to Claude W. Frederick, 24 March 1950, John Donald Wade Family Papers MS 837, Box 18, Folder 10 Marshallville Garden Corporation, Hargrett Manuscripts Library, UGA.

<sup>81</sup> Smith, “John Donald Wade,” 193.

## CHAPTER 7

### FRIEDRICH DRÜNER PACKS A PEACH



*Figure 17*

Photograph of Dewey Bateman's German Crew, July 1945, Oliver Bateman Private Collection.

World War II had been over for almost a year when Dewey Bateman received a curious letter. It was the standard half-size envelope of the Prisoner of War Post, addressed only to

Mr. Bateman  
Bateman Co. Farms  
Walden, Georgia, U.S.A.

The sender was Friedrich Drüner at Camp 707 in Great Britain. Opening the envelope, Bateman found the following, written on a narrow piece of lined paper in ink that began bold and ended faint, as though Drüner had used the last of his ink ration on his postscript.

England, May 13, 1946

Dear Mr. Bateman,

Right now I'm thinking of our big time we had one year ago. You remember the days in the Packing-house. Don't you? Wasn't it a wonderful time? Well, we had to work hard but how often we laughed about Oscar, Otto or somebody else. I promised you not to forget this time, and I keep my promise. In Jan 46 when we said Good-bye each other, we thought we go back to Germany, but we didn't. We went to England. I got separated from my Uncle Otto, Paul and all the others. I have got to find my way alone, now. We have a lovely camp over here among blossoming apple-trees and green grass, but I'm still missing the time we had with you.

With my best wishes to you, including Mr. Holland, Mr. ? and Tom (I'm very sorry but I forget the name. In any case: he wears eye-glasses), Jimmy and Jonny, and all the girls working in the packinghouse, I remain ever yours sincerely

Fritz

P.S. Before my mind's eyes I see them peaches rolling. Oh! Why I cannot be there?<sup>1</sup>

Fritz Drüner had been a prisoner and the interpreter for a group of about twenty German prisoners of war detailed to Bateman's farm during 1944 and 1945, where their "big time" had included not only picking and packing peaches but harvesting peanuts, packing sweet potatoes, and canning peaches. Almost a year had passed since Drüner and Werner Volkmann had presented Bateman with a photograph of thirteen members of the crew, posing in front their barracks at Camp Wheeler. They stand in the midst of sunflowers and low shrubs, a garden meant to soften the camp's otherwise stark aspect. For prisoners living and working under armed guard, they seem relaxed, even content. One of the men holds a black-and-tan dog; another wears huarache sandals. They look steadily at the camera, or smile at each other. On the back of the

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<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Drüner to Dewey Bateman, 13 May 1946, Oliver Bateman Private Collection.

photograph, Volkmann and Drüner wrote, “We never forget the ‘peach-season.’” As if to assure Bateman of their sincerity, they included a separate note: “Dear Mr. Bateman, Whatever will happen to us — we never forget you. Thanks for everything.”<sup>2</sup>

*Thanks for everything.* This prisoner of war labor arrangement might seem like another in a long line of particularly southern abuses of labor, from slavery to convict lease systems. Working under armed guard, forbidden to fraternize with locals, constantly scrutinized for signs of residual fascist sympathies, paid in camp canteen credit and a measly eighty cents a day which they could take with them only upon release — from the workers’ perspective, it was far from ideal. Yet these prisoners continued to think of Bateman as a friend and ally for years after they left his farm. They collectively sent him at least twenty letters between 1945 and 1948, in which they uniformly remembered the peach season with fondness. To be sure, they hoped for some gift or help from Bateman, but their trust that he would be sympathetic suggests that their middle Georgia sojourns were relatively pleasant.

The presence of prisoners of war in Georgia’s orchards during World War II marked a turning point in the peach industry’s labor history. Although the Germans and Italians filled in for two or three seasons at most, they represented a larger transition away from the local, black labor that had sustained southern agriculture for generations. Increasingly, farmers would rely upon an ever-widening labor circuit: urban African Americans, Caribbean migrants, undocumented Latinos, and, most recently, Mexican guestworkers under the auspices of the federal H-2A program. In the 1890s, J.H. Hale proclaimed black southerners the finest — and cheapest — agricultural workers in the nation. By the 1970s, peach growers sang a more doleful tune, lamenting the lack of good workers. What middle Georgia growers had taken for granted in

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<sup>2</sup> Photograph, July 1945, Oliver Bateman Private Collection.

the nineteenth and early twentieth century became, by the late twentieth century, an anxious and uncertain quest.

It was appropriate, then, that Drüner and Volkmann and the other prisoners had their photograph taken at Camp Wheeler. The peach industry's signature landscape of the latter half of the twentieth century was the labor camp, which, compared to the fanciful pageantry of the Peach Blossom Festivals, was a rather unidyllic scene. For all their talk of permanence and beauty, the makers of the "world's peach paradise" built their prosperity upon a decidedly transitory and unattractive labor system. For many years, this dependence was hard to see. But when African Americans left the countryside and/or refused to work in southern orchards, they revealed the labor camp as the ugly counterpart to the beautiful orchards and whitewashed streets of Fort Valley. The Georgia peach, shining dream of the horticulturists, gilded triumph of the Fort Valley bankers, did not fall off the tree into the packing crate. It moved thanks to a swarm of the vulnerable: blacks, women, children, prisoners, undocumented immigrants, and state-sponsored "guests." Considering the labor supply reveals the peach industry's dependence upon the violence of the cotton economy and the power of the federal government.

But the POW episode, brief as it was, also points to another important feature of the labor regimes of the Georgia peach. Like the more ornate celebrations of the new county campaign, the peach harvest was also a festival. Labor in peach orchards and packing sheds not only filled an important niche in the rural economy but was also, at times, downright fun — a "big time" as Drüner put it. Power is a significant part of the story, but it is not the whole story. What is more interesting here is how peach work drew upon an ancient tradition of harvest festivities that infused otherwise harsh labor regimes with an element of levity. The peach harvest as festival made a certain amount of sense within a rural community, even one riven by inequality. As rural

people decamped for cities after World War II, the festive atmosphere that had softened some of the harder edges of labor relations also fell apart. The “time of troubles” that characterized the 1960s and 1970s was an eye-opening period for growers especially, as it became clear how nakedly their labor practices depended on the poverty of their neighbors.

In the last few decades, Georgia’s peach growers have regained a bit of the harvest *joie de vivre* they enjoyed early on — but it hangs on the thin thread of federal support for a legal guestworker program that draws temporary workers from impoverished communities in Mexico. Rural Georgia and rural Jalisco now share an overlapping labor supply, a translocal rural community to replace the local community lost to outmigration. This is the global labor arrangement upon which the “perpetual summertime” of fresh fruits and vegetables depends.

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In its early days, the peach labor system was what we might call neighbor labor: it was composed of local people and dependent on a core of tenants who lived on or near the land of the big growers and who had few other options during peach season. As long as the South had such a population, wages remained low; as long as wages remained low, African-Americans picked cotton by hand; as long they picked by hand, the tenant system of production continued. And as long as the tenant system continued, the South had a seasonal labor surplus—that is, plenty of peach pickers.

The seasonal work of peach growing has remained fairly constant. In January, workers pruned the leafless trees into the upside-down-umbrella shape familiar to any traveler through the rural South. In April, depending on how severely late frosts had affected the blossoms, workers thinned the small green fruit, leaving plenty of space for the fruit to grow to the largest possible size. June through August was the busiest season, the time of the year when the

workforce ballooned to as much as eight times its normal size. Pickers and packers alike worked long days. In the orchards, the pickers moved through the trees with bags or buckets or baskets, straining both their arms and their backs, since ripe fruit sometimes hung high on the tree and were supposed to be placed, not tossed, in the basket. The fruit ripened over the course of several pickings, which means that the picker had to literally pick through the tree, not reap indiscriminately and thereby save time and mental effort. It was hot and humid, of course, but workers wore long sleeves and kerchiefs, or dusted themselves with talcum powder and flour, because peach fuzz mixed with sweat to create a maddening itch, like working with fiberglass insulation.

Packing operations could be as simple as a few tables set up under an oak tree, but most middle Georgia farms of any size had their own shed. Early packing sheds were long, open-sided buildings, built a wagon-height off the ground to make unloading and loading less strenuous. On two tables, one on either side of the shed, workers sorted the peaches by size and quality, culling green, overripe, or otherwise unmarketable fruit. Graders sorted into containers, which were passed to the packers on the opposite side of the table, who carefully placed the fruit in baskets. The packers arranged the baskets into crates and took them to inspectors, who checked the quality and then nailed the crates shut. If the shed was large enough to have its own spur track, workers loaded the crates onto a waiting train car. Although this system now includes automatic conveyor belts, sizing machines, hydrocoolers, PLU machines, and cardboard boxes, the sorting and packing work is remarkably similar to what it was a century ago. Some time in late August or September, the harvest ended. Year-round labor cleaned up while the seasonal help returned to their homes. Growers and managers headed to the beach for an extended vacation. The work would begin again in October and November, as orchards wanted cleaning or replanting.

The seasonal needs of peach growing were critical to its success in maintaining a labor force. In the early years of the Georgia peach industry, growers used labor left over from cotton work. “You had to diversify to keep the labor,” Crawford County peach grower Bob Dickey explained. “You had to pay ‘em, I mean, a subsistence, so peaches were an obvious thing . . . It was something for your labor to do year-round. That was the whole concept.”<sup>3</sup> In the cotton belt, peach season was agricultural serendipity, as far as growers were concerned. *Prune peaches, plant cotton. Thin peaches, chop cotton. Pick peaches, pick cotton.* The seasonal tasks of the two crops were perfectly aligned.

By the time Georgia had established its reputation for peaches in the 1910s, the fruit filled a crucial temporal niche. In 1912 a correspondent for the *Wall Street Journal* visited Fort Valley and found that peaches, along with asparagus and watermelons, contributed some five million dollars to the middle Georgia economy in just six weeks, at a time when cash and credit reserves were at their lowest and cotton represented only a potential income. Railroads, bankers, and merchants found the peach crop a “timely relief.” And workers, too, were glad of a little “special income” in the heat of summer: \$1 to \$1.75 a day with room and board.<sup>4</sup> Nick Strickland, whose father ran a store in downtown Fort Valley, remembered peach season as the high point of the year. “You could tell the difference,” he declared. June, July, and August could carry a storekeeper through the year. On Saturdays, his father woke at 7:00 a.m. to open the store, and kept it open till midnight to accommodate the farmers and mostly black hands from the rural areas coming into town in their two-ton trucks. “During peach season, when those people came into town, they had money in their pockets,” Strickland recalled. “If they made twenty-five

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<sup>3</sup> Robert L. Dickey II, interview with the author, July 28, 2008, Musella, GA.

<sup>4</sup> “Moving Georgia's Peach Crop Brings Large Midsummer Income.” *Wall Street Journal* (Jul 6, 1912), 3.



dollars, they spent every damn cent of it. I mean *every penny*.”<sup>5</sup> And peaches sustained not just Strickland’s store, but the dry-goods economy of the entire town: talcum powder, bandanas, glue, brushes, Coca-cola, Pepsi, Nu-grape, chewing gum, tobacco. “Somebody been smokin’ a pack of cigarettes,” Strickland explained, “peach season get here he smokes two packs ‘cause they could afford to buy it.” Others waited for peach season to put new tubes and tires on their cars. “It was something that was tremendously noticeable,” Strickland concluded. “Everybody looked forward to it.”<sup>6</sup>

This theme of the peach harvest as a festival shows up consistently in grower recollections. Katherine Ripley, who ran a small peach growing operation in the North Carolina sandhills, remembered the harvest as an intense, stressful time. She hired “mostly men and women from isolated clay farms” who came as families, the men to pick and the women to pack who, if “rubbed the wrong way” were “entirely capable of simply walking off.” For the grower, peach season was serious. “You must humor, you must coax, you must make concessions.” For the workers, however, it was a different story.

They look on the peach season as the big holiday of their year, the next best thing to a revival. It's different from the routine of farm work. They work in gangs. They eat quantities of soft peaches. The men fight among themselves and make love to the girls. It's all a frolic to them.<sup>7</sup>

As an example of this dynamic, Ripley cited the story of her field boss, who interrupted the orchard lovemaking of a “light yellow girl in a short frock” and “a lithe black boy.” Needless to say, the field boss got little work out of them the rest of the day: “‘she was just a-snappin’ off the peaches and throwin’ ‘em on the ground behind my back,’” he said.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Nick Strickland, interview with the author, 9 July 2009, Fort Valley, Georgia.

<sup>6</sup> Nick Strickland, interview with the author, 9 July 2009, Fort Valley, Georgia.

<sup>7</sup> Katharine Ball Ripley, *Sand in My Shoes* (New York: Brewer, Warren & Putnam, 1931), 258.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

Ripley's description of the peach harvest as a "frolic" is instructive, because it obscures the desperate poverty that made many of these dirt farmers available for peach growers. Perhaps some of her workers came out of boredom, but the majority came because they needed the money, and no one save the peach growers was paying for miles around.

Like Ripley, some Fort Valley growers recognized their vulnerability early on. C.W. Withoft warned that "negroes were getting scarce," for they had found employment in turpentine, cross ties, and railroads.<sup>9</sup> Increased peach tree plantings, Withoft observed, meant that in a few years, they would need "an army of pickers" — and they could not harvest with machines as corn and wheat growers did. Thinking of these impending "shortages" perhaps, growers occasionally raised the idea of immigration: bringing in Europeans or northerners to do the work that African-Americans had done. But Guy Stewart, a railroad agent, argued that they would have to pay much more in the future if they were to have such a workforce. Southern growers offered northern workers "fifteen dollars a month, . . . a shack and . . . rations of bacon and corn bread." But immigrants wanted more money, and they wanted to own their own farms.<sup>10</sup> As this was not a viable option, few early twentieth-century immigrants chose to settle in the South.

For the moment, though, middle Georgia grower peach growers operated from a position of power. John David Duke's packing shed in Fort Valley had its own internal economy. Like the other packing sheds, he ran a commissary, but his was big enough to use company scrip. According to *Fortune Magazine*, Duke paid "his 300 cheerful Negroes with his own aluminum

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<sup>9</sup> C.W. Withoft, "A Few Trials of the Fruit Grower," Georgia State Horticultural Society, *Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society* 31 (1907), 24.

<sup>10</sup> Georgia State Horticultural Society, *Annual Proceedings of the Georgia State Horticultural Society* 30 (1906), 14.

coin, negotiable not only at his own commissary, but at stores in Fort Valley.”<sup>11</sup> For Nick Strickland, who worked as a boy in Duke’s shed, the owner was clearly an impressive figure. Asked what he remembered about “Mr. John David,” Strickland painted a surprisingly detailed portrait. Duke drove up to the shed “in a big automobile, probably a Buick.” He strode up to the shed, standing over six feet in height with a “barrel belly” and a belt that Strickland estimated at 46 inches worn “right around the middle” so that he appeared “stately, stand up straight, white hat, white suit, white shoes, walkin’ in the packinghouse.” Strickland paused. “But he was a man, now, when he walked in everyone came to attention.”<sup>12</sup> *Fortune* concluded that Duke and the other Georgia peach growers were not “industrialists” like their California counterparts, but “planters.”<sup>13</sup> Their power was personal and unchallenged.

The *Fortune* magazine article also made this revealing observation: “Under the trees in peach season burr-headed Negro pickers pass, and a day later the Georgia peach lands in New York at the Peach Dock wearing just the complexion that every girl in Macon envies.”<sup>14</sup> Thus in an almost poetic couplet the correspondent captured the relationship between the image of the fruit – a young white maiden – and the reality of its production. African Americans were off the stage, or perhaps part of the scenery, in the mythology of the Georgia peach, an illusion made possible by the geographical separation of production and consumption.

But these representations do not capture the day-to-day lives of African Americans in the peach belt. The public pronouncements of whites vastly outnumber those of blacks during this period, and they often presented labor relations with this kind of veiled language, drawing upon

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<sup>11</sup> “The Peach . . . Has the Complexion of Georgia,” *Fortune*, February 1932.

<sup>12</sup> Nick Strickland, interview with the author, 9 July 2009, Fort Valley, Georgia.

<sup>13</sup> “The Peach . . . Has the Complexion of Georgia.”

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

familiar tropes. African Americans as cheerful, hapless spendthrifts, glad for a little extra cash in between times.

Because of this slanted evidence, the story of Fort Valley High and Industrial School provides a crucial example of black activity – even activism – in a very tight spot. In this light, the example of Hal Lowman is instructive. Lowman is a retired technician at the USDA research laboratory in Byron, where he worked for thirty-four years. In his eighties now, he walks with a limp and a slight stoop, the product, he tells me, of arthritis in his ankle and a pinched nerve in his spine. But his eyes remain keen, and his delivery is decisive, opinionated, and abrupt. Did he ever work in the peach orchard? Only as a boy, he says. He never missed a day of school to do any kind of farm work, he notes with pride — in other words, his family was never desperate enough to pick peaches. Instead, they set up a stand on their land along Highway 341 and sold fruit to tourists traveling south to Florida. No, neither he nor any of his five siblings missed school for work. They all earned their educations (many from Fort Valley State College) and retired from professional jobs (the postal service, nursing, the USDA). Nine of their ten children have graduated from college, and the tenth is taking courses. His eyes shining, Lowman tells me that if a father never has to go to the morgue to identify his child, never to the jail to pick up his child, never to court to testify for his child, that he is blessed. And then, curious about his family's success and stability, as well as his knowledge of farm work, I ask:

TO: So did you grow up on a farm?

HL: We owned our own.

TO: You had your own farm?

HL: Yes. My father had his own farm, so hallelujah! I never stayed out of school one day to work on nobody's farm. And I never plowed a mule.

The Lowman family's stability, in other words, was rooted in the 250 acres of Crawford County soil they have owned since his enslaved grandfather managed to save enough to purchase

a small parcel. Lowman's father inherited the land and raised "the usual things" such as cotton, although "one time they had peaches, hallelujah!" Like several neighboring black families in Crawford County, they held on to their farmland, even though it no longer supports them. For they also owe their success to hard work *off the farm*. Neither Lowman nor his siblings made their living as farmers. Like many others of their generation, they found work at local industries like Blue Bird Bus, Robins Air Force Base, and Woolfolk Chemical Company. There seemed to be little future for blacks in agriculture, and as Lowman puts it, "Thirty-five cent an hour was a lot better than two or three dollars a day on the farm, you understand? . . . There's something wrong with you if you don't want to do better."<sup>15</sup>

Lowman is a latter day embodiment of the dream of Henry Hunt and Otis O'Neal of Fort Valley High and Industrial School: an independent landholder able to work alongside local whites, an educated farm worker at home in the modern world. In 1904 Hunt and his chief financial agent — and hatchet man — J.H. Torbert issued a leaflet to prospective donors that laid out the school's renewed direction: in a word, *work*. The cover set the tone with a photograph of blacks in a peach cannery, with a caption explaining that many students worked in the canneries during their summer vacation. Above the photograph, boldfaced letters advertised FVHIS' "Work in the Black Belt of Southwest Georgia" where "Within a Radius of 50 Miles 200,000 Negroes Can Be Reached" with the school's message: "To Teach the Head to Think, the Heart to Love, and the Hands to Work."<sup>16</sup> Inside, the leaflet explained that every student took agricultural classes, since the school aimed "take hold of the young men and women from the country districts" and "to give to them the ability and skill to cope with conditions as they exist." FVHIS

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<sup>15</sup> Hal Lowman, interview with the author, 20 July 2009, Fort Valley, Georgia. Audio recording in possession of the author.

<sup>16</sup> James Torbert and Henry A. Hunt, *Work in the Black Belt of Southwest Georgia: Within a Radius of 50 Miles 200,000 Negroes Can Be Reached* (Fort Valley, GA: Fort Valley High and Industrial School, 1900), 1.

was producing the “real teachers and leaders” of the rural South. Images throughout the leaflet showed students in fields, at sewing machines, on construction sites, reading Bibles on the porches of poor tenants. The message was unmistakable. *We are rural, and we work.*<sup>17</sup>

This talk of modest rural revitalization through hard labor was more than donor-pleasing rhetoric for Henry Hunt. Raised in Hancock County, Georgia, by literate and moderately successful parents, Hunt had studied at Atlanta University, worked as a carpenter, and taught at Biddle University in Charlotte, North Carolina. His classically-oriented Atlanta University training notwithstanding, he appeared to truly believe, as political scientist Willard Range put it, that “agriculture was the only way out of distress for the Georgia Negro.” In short, “The mantle of Booker T. Washington was upon him.”<sup>18</sup> His commitment to rural blacks is all the more noteworthy because, as W.E.B. DuBois noted after Hunt’s death, he could have passed as a white man. He “chose to be Negro” and in the same way that Atlanta University’s John Hope was “the Moses of the urban Negro of Georgia,” Hunt sought to become “the patriarch of the rural masses.”<sup>19</sup>

Henry Hunt spoke directly to what he saw as the problem of black outmigration in 1919, when he delivered an address on “rural conditions of labor” to the NAACP’s tenth anniversary conference in Cleveland. “I have yet to find a place where there is not prejudice against the Negro,” he observed. But black leaders were also to blame for the low position of their people. In their concern with “exploiting the people, taking care of the sick and burying the dead,” they had neglected the “development of the living.” Rural blacks had little idea of their “rights and

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>18</sup> Willard Range, *The Rise and Progress of Negro Colleges in Georgia, 1865-1949* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1951), 183.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Donnie D. Bellamy, *Light in the Valley: A Pictorial History of Fort Valley State College Since 1895* (Virginia Beach, VA: The Donning Company, 1996), 28. Range, *The Rise and Progress of Negro Colleges in Georgia, 1865-1949*, 185.

privileges.”<sup>20</sup> Hunt was confident, however, that “common men” were ready to follow “sound leaders.” The “scales are falling from the eyes,” he argued. “Labor on account of its scarcity is becoming more and more free.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, migration had improved conditions for those who stayed.<sup>22</sup>

But if those who had not already left would be persuaded to stay, rural life would have to be more tenable. Henry Hunt tried a variety of programs to make it so. In 1931, under the sponsorship of the Julius Rosenwald Fund, he traveled to Denmark to study rural cooperatives. His comments upon returning exhibited the typical way he implicitly challenged the racial and economic order without overt confrontation. “There are practically no very wealthy people in Denmark and only a very few poor ones,” he observed. “The Danes accepted many years ago the theory that the people of the country are happiest when there are few who have too much and fewer still who have too little.”<sup>23</sup> Inspired by Denmark’s cooperative profusion, Hunt helped to organize a rural cooperative farm under the auspices of the Resettlement Administration in 1936. Initially slated as “Fort Valley Farms” in Peach County, local white opposition pushed the project into Macon County. There “Flint River Farms,” 10,653 acres owned and cooperatively farmed by 106 black families, achieved modest success in terms of standard of living before coming under attack from Georgia’s anti-New Deal congressmen and senators.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> D.D. Bellamy, “Henry A. Hunt and Black Agricultural Leadership in the New South,” *The Journal of Negro History* 60, no. 4 (1975): 473.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in William Anthony Aery, “Nationwide Organization of Negroes,” *The Southern Workman* vol. XLVIII, no. 9 (Sept 1919), 430.

<sup>22</sup> See also Mary G. Rolinson, *Grassroots Garveyism: The Universal Negro Improvement Association in the Rural South, 1920-1927* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 168.

<sup>23</sup> “Denmark’s Co-Operative Movement Wins Praise of Professor H.A. Hunt,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (6 October 1931), 6.

<sup>24</sup> Donald L Grant and Jonathan Grant, *The Way It Was in the South: The Black Experience in Georgia* (Secaucus, N.J.: Carol Pub. Group, 1993), 349–350.

Hunt also believed in agricultural education, and so in 1914 he hired Otis Samuel O’Neal. Born in 1891 in Upson County, Georgia, O’Neal attended FVHIS from 1902 to 1908, taught briefly in the agricultural school at Forsyth, enrolled at Tuskegee Institute in 1910, and returned to Fort Valley in 1914 to become the second black County Agent in Houston County, and one of only two black male agents in the entire state.<sup>25</sup> He did not complete his B.S. at Tuskegee until 1937, but his work in Fort Valley showed the marks of his training under George Washington Carver. According to one account, because O’Neal arrived at Tuskegee without money, he slept initially on a cot in Carver’s office. As he neared the end of his course of study, he told Carver that he wanted to “help my people just as you and Mr. Washington have done.” Carver peered into young O’Neal’s eyes and replied: “Otis, you can do it! Go back to your own folks and show them how to make a good living from the soil.”<sup>26</sup> And so O’Neal returned to middle Georgia and “plodded from farm to farm on foot” preaching his “four-point formula: ‘Buy your own farm and keep it improved. Find out what the soil will produce best. Raise chickens and pigs. Grow all your own food.’” Like Carver, O’Neal started his public lectures with singing and prayer before delivering the exhortation of the hour. Like Carver, he took over the coordination of his institution’s biennial farmers’ conferences.<sup>27</sup> And like Carver, he believed in providing concrete examples. He held meat-curing demonstrations and had his “lead farmers” in local communities display their homegrown eggs, cured meat, and canned fruit on their porches.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> W. B. Mercier, “Extension Work Among Negroes, 1920,” U. S. Department of Agriculture, Circular No. 190 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1921), 7.

<sup>26</sup> Jettie Irving Felps, *The Lost Tongues* (Corpus Christi, TX: Christian Triumph Press, 1945), 86.

<sup>27</sup> “White Educators Address Negroes,” *The Atlanta Constitution (1881-1945)* (United States, Atlanta, Ga., 1913), 14.

<sup>28</sup> Felps, *The Lost Tongues*, 83. On Carver, see Mark D Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation: An Environmental Biography of George Washington Carver*, Environmental History and the American South. (University of Georgia Press., 2011), 114–119.



The Ham and Egg Show followed logically from these demonstrations. O’Neal had puzzled for two years over the problem of rural blacks’ low-protein diet before he hit upon a solution. “It came to me,” he later explained, “that I could get all the farmers who had meat to bring it every year to one central place so that those who hadn’t any could see and be inspired. People were having flower shows, horse shows and dog shows so that prettier flowers and better horses and dogs, would be raised; why not have a Ham Show?”<sup>29</sup> Initially a simple agricultural fair designed to demonstrate the black belt’s “material progress,” it later featured talks by extension specialists and, by the 1940s, concerts by blues musicians.<sup>30</sup>

The Ham and Egg Shows and the rural mission of FVHIS orbited around an eminently practical vision of rural development. O’Neal and Hunt hoped to establish a black yeomanry in the cotton belt, an educated class of smallholders with the roots of their prosperity firmly in the soil. With conferences, clubs, loans, education, O’Neal hoped to see his people “rise from almost starvation to home owners and comfort.” A profile of O’Neal toward the end of his career claimed that “anyone can see the effects of his work in painted houses, improved roads, better farms, with cattle and pigs and poultry.”<sup>31</sup> Similarly, when the NAACP named Hunt their 1930 Spingarn Medalist — a prestigious award that had also been given to James Weldon Johnson, George Washington Carver, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Carter G. Woodson — the tribute in *Crisis* called Hunt the “Civilizer of a Race!”<sup>32</sup> In words that may as well have described a missionary to Africa’s “heart of darkness” — appropriately so, since Hunt apparently considered going to

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<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Bellamy, *Light in the Valley*, 34–35.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>31</sup> Supposedly, incomes were up 400 percent, only 10 percent of that from cotton, and homeownership had increased from 8 to 60 percent. Felps, *The Lost Tongues*, 85.

<sup>32</sup> Frank Horne, “Henry A. Hunt, Sixteenth Spingarn Medalist,” *Crisis* (August 1930), 261. Hunt was chosen by a committee that included then-governor of Puerto Rico Theodore Roosevelt, director of the Jeanes and Slater Funds Dr. James H. Dillard, Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois, president of Atlanta University Dr. John Hope, and editor of the *Nation* Oswald Garrison Villard.

Africa after graduating from Atlanta University<sup>33</sup> — author Frank Horne credited Hunt with the fact that “the gleam of civilization has caught another spark in the dark hinterlands of the Black Belt of Georgia.”<sup>34</sup> His “heroic” and “self-effacing” hard work had transformed a “barren wilderness” into a modern, beautiful, progressive campus, “the hub of a gigantic wheel” of rural modernization, which “radiat[ed] its influence into a vast community of 300,000 Negroes.” Local blacks were healthier because of the school nurse and hospital (a pet project of Henry Hunt’s wife Florence Johnson Hunt); they were better farmers because of Otis O’Neal’s farm demonstration work; they were more educated because of the forty-five teachers and workers at FVHIS; they were even confident voters because of Hunt’s “upright, fearless, straight-forward” approach to politics. Hunt, according to this article, had not only won over white residents, he had transformed a population of “ignorant, sodden, disinterested blacks” into “an upright, self-respecting, voting community.”<sup>35</sup>

The *Atlanta Constitution* also praised Hunt’s accomplishments, though with the clear subtext that Hunt was teaching blacks to be productive second-class citizens. Hunt instructed middle Georgia’s “ignorant, underfed, lazy-going, sleepy blacks” not how to stand up for themselves, said reporter Willie Snow Ethridge, but how to *work*. “A negro who has learned to be punctual, honest, and dependable is not ignorant,” Ethridge wrote. “Though he does not know how to read and write, he is educated for he has mastered those subjects that count for most in life.” For Ethridge, Hunt’s influence in the black community was primarily moral rather than political or economic: he emphasized the presence of a “colored missionary” who went out to African American homes “on the peach orchards” in order to encourage Bible reading and

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<sup>33</sup> Willie Snow Ethridge, “Amazing Achievement of Prof. H.A. Hunt, Winner of Coveted Springarn Medal, 1930,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (6 July 1930), 13A.

<sup>34</sup> Frank Horne, “Henry A. Hunt, Sixteenth Spingarn Medalist,” *Crisis* (August 1930), 261.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

church attendance. Ethridge also chronicled Hunt's efforts to "reach the young negro boys who hang around on street corners every summer between the closing of the peach season and the beginning of the cotton picking season," entertaining them with baseball and contests "so that their idle hands will not find evil work to do."<sup>36</sup> No voting or landowning here; indeed, it takes just a little reading between the lines to see Ethridge's portrayal as an attempt to calm white fears about mobs of "young negro boys" amid a generally restive black population.

Comparing these two profiles of Henry Hunt and FVHIS suggests that the local nickname for the school — the "light in the valley" — could be taken in either of two ways, depending on where one thought the darkness emanated from. For local blacks, FVHIS appeared to represent a kind of quiet liberation from the oppressive darkness of white socioeconomic dominance. For local whites, FVHIS seemed to be about the business of training a "punctual, hard-working, honest and dependable" labor force.<sup>37</sup>

By the 1940s, the Ham and Egg show had earned a national reputation, appearing in *Reader's Digest* and *Life* magazine. *Life*'s profile noted the Ham and Egg Show's "usual carefree hours filled with laughing, singing, dancing and storytelling." But it also observed how attuned the event was to the importance of food production during the war. A full-page photograph showed Otis O'Neal delivering the keynote address. He stood under a "Food for Victory" placard, behind a whole smoked pig, and completely surrounded by "more than 300 fine, meaty, juicy hams." The small farmer is vital to winning the war, O'Neal insisted, "pounding away" at

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<sup>36</sup> Willie Snow Ethridge, "Amazing Achievement of Prof. H.A. Hunt, Winner of Coveted Springarn Medal, 1930," *The Atlanta Constitution* (6 July 1930), 13A.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* In 1935, blacks worked 61,681 acres on 772 farms in Houston County — and owned about ten percent (7,081 acres (11.4%) on 70 farms (9.1%). In Peach County they owned 1,874 acres on 25 farms (5.1%), out of 10,027 acres (18.7%) of 492 farms that they operated. Together, blacks of the two counties owned just 12% of the land they farmed and only 7.3% of the farms. See Asa Gordon, *The Georgia Negro: A History*, 236. On black landowning in the South, see Mark Schultz, *The Rural Face of White Supremacy: Beyond Jim Crow*, First Illinois paperback ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 45–56; Loren Schweninger, *Black Property Owners in the South, 1790-1915* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990).

his two main points: crop diversification and “the importance of farmers staying on their land,” despite the temptation of high-paying jobs in wartime industries.<sup>38</sup>

The entertainment in 1943 in some ways offered a more compelling critique of the way things were in the South. Special guest Bus Ezell belted out the show’s theme song, “Roosevelt and Hitler (Strange Things are Happening in the Land),” his eleven-stanza wartime hit that covered everything from Jesus’ prophecies of earthquakes, to Franklin Roosevelt’s reluctance to commit troops to fight Hitler, to the role of the Negro soldier.<sup>39</sup> Predictably, *Life* quoted from Ezell’s patriotic verses about Roosevelt trying to live in peace with Hitler:

But Hitler he’s destroyin’  
Every vessel he could see.  
He’s treatin’ us so mean  
With his dreadful sub-marines.  
There are strange things a-happenin’ in this Land.

But the song was subtler than the single verse might suggest.

We have read also of famines,  
That shall come in this land.  
But if you notice closely,  
You can see and understand.  
Provisions are so high,  
'Til we can't hardly buy.  
There are strange things a-happenin’ in this Land.’<sup>40</sup>

As if to underscore this contemporary application of biblical famine prophecies, a local 4-H troop dramatized the mission of the Office of Price Administration. Alphonsa Jessie, a young man dressed as Uncle Sam in stars and stripes and a top hat, gesticulated toward jumper-clad Emily Jones, who wielded a kitchen knife in one hand and a placard labeled “OPA” around her

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<sup>38</sup> “Ham and Egg Show,” *Life* (22 Mar. 1943), 20-21.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> “Roosevelt and Hitler,” *The Peachite* Vol. 2, No. 2, Folk Festival Number (March 1944), 5. Accessed 12 Dec 2011 at [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/ftvbib:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(mss059\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/ftvbib:@field(DOCID+@lit(mss059))).

neck. Jones held her knife threateningly over a recalcitrant Pearlie Brown, who played the part of “Prices.” Uncle Sam was giving the OPA the power to “slash” Prices.<sup>41</sup>

This drama highlighted one solution to the lack of purchasing power occasioned by wartime inflation. The OPA represented the zenith of twentieth century “pocketbook politics,” the alliance between a housewife-led consumer movement and labor unions. The OPA was itself a “radical model of management” that “challenged the right of private industries to set their own prices and sell their items freely.”<sup>42</sup> One could also argue, as did many in urban areas did, that wages needed to increase as well.<sup>43</sup> In rural areas, however, the solution to the rising cost of living presented by O’Neal and Hunt was to forego buying in favor of raising provisions at home. And this was the burden of the Ham and Egg festival: to convince farmers that they could be more self-sufficient. It was a campaign of progress by protein. As O’Neal explained in 1945, “Give a hard-working man a good slice of home-cured ham in a sandwich. Let him eat it and he can work all day and never get hungry and never need food. You can't do it with beef, you can't do it with fresh pork, you can't do it with lamb. But ham's got everything a man needs.”<sup>44</sup> Nutritional self-sufficiency, in other words, made for better work. One could interpret O’Neal’s explanation as an acceptance of low status for rural blacks, relegating them to the laboring classes, but such an interpretation would not do justice to the vision of O’Neal and Henry Hunt for African American self-sufficiency and landownership. The protein campaign was part of an overall agenda of keeping rural blacks rural.

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<sup>41</sup> “Ham and Egg Show,” *Life* (22 Mar. 1943), 21. On the OPA’s role during World War II, see Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>43</sup> See *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Paul Warwick, “Ham and Egg Show Again Big Success,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (11 March 1945), 4.

This agenda, of course, was problematic in several ways. Thanks to New Deal subsidies and increased access to farming equipment, landowners were more willing and able to push their black tenants off the land. At the same time, African Americans were leaving the South in large numbers. Cotton could be mechanized, and in a few years the mechanical cotton picker would practically eliminate the need for hand labor in cotton fields. But peaches could not. And so, as in the days after emancipation, growers scrambled to find the labor they needed to harvest their crops. And as they had seventy-five years before, they turned to the federal government for help.

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In 1945, Dewey Bateman's son Oliver was home on leave from his military service in the European theater. As they had in the past, father and son climbed in an old pickup truck and drove around the farm, which comprised several thousand acres across Bibb, Houston, and Jones counties. They stopped at a store for bread and milk, and then his father pulled up to one of Bateman's tenant houses. Oliver assumed his father was bringing food to a tenant laid up at home, fulfilling the two-edged southern tradition of neighborly *and* paternalistic care. But not in this case. Instead, a tall white man, apparently a trained carpenter, was repairing the cabin, and Dewey Bateman was providing his lunch. The man spoke no English, and his work clothes were emblazoned "P.W." "It always came as a shock to me when we came in there," Oliver remembered, "and here was this big, nice-looking German" — his erstwhile enemy.<sup>45</sup>

Two years later, the tall German wrote to Oliver's father. "Dear Mister Batemann!" he began. "I am Paul the joiner. . . . Do you remember?" After a long journey through several camps in the U.S. and in England, Paul Spieckermann was back in Germany with his wife and children, who were "in a state of good health." And as a joiner, furthermore, Spieckermann had

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<sup>45</sup> Oliver Bateman, interview with the author, 29 July 2008, Macon, GA.

“much to do” — but only because his land lay in ruins. “I can not say how old people look out here in Germany,” he wrote. Like Drüner, Spieckermann was “thinking of the good time in your factory of apricots” and thanked Bateman “for all what you had done for me.”<sup>46</sup>

World War II marked a period of great anxiety for southern farmers, who saw the flight of rural southerners, especially blacks, to wartime industries as an ominous indication that their labor-intensive ways could not continue indefinitely. Gripped by what one government official called “farm labor shortage hysteria,” many worried that mechanization could not proceed rapidly enough to make up for the loss of workers.<sup>47</sup> From 1943 to 1945, as rural economies wrestled with one paradox of success — a revitalized national economy meant manpower shortages in some rural areas — the Allied forces wrestled with another, as their victories in the European theater left them with hundreds of thousands of German and Italian prisoners of war to feed and house. Ultimately, some four hundred thousand German and Italian POWs lived in the U.S. during World War II.<sup>48</sup>

Despite widespread anti-German and anti-Italian sentiment among Americans, farmers and their allies eagerly sought these workers. “We are in desperate need of farm help if we are to keep our land in production,” wrote Julia Lovejoy Cuniberti to the Provost Marshal General Allen Guillon. Cuniberti managed Town Point Farms in California, Maryland. Would two Italian prisoners of war be available for “such work as they are able to perform?”<sup>49</sup> From San Francisco,

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<sup>46</sup> Paul Spieckermann to Dewey Bateman, 14 January 1948, Oliver Bateman Collection. I cannot say for certain that Spieckermann was the carpenter Bateman saw during his visit home, but the details fit.

<sup>47</sup> T.G. Standing to Conrad Taeuber, 12 May 1942, box 243, Farm Labor, Louisiana, General Correspondence, 1941-1946, Records of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, quoted in Pete Daniel, “Going among Strangers: Southern Reactions to World War II,” *The Journal of American History* 77 (December 1990), 889.

<sup>48</sup> Jason Morgan Ward, “‘Nazis Hoe Cotton’: Planters, POWs, and the Future of Farm Labor in the Deep South,” *Agricultural History* 81 (Fall 2007), 471-472.

<sup>49</sup> Julia Lovejoy Cuniberti to Major General Allen Guillon, 27 March 1944, Records of the Provost Marshal General, Record Group 389, National Archives, College Park, MD. The answer in Cuniberti’s case, was no. Guillon replied that Italian POWs were no longer going to be available for such work.

Ambrose Gherini telegraphed his “DESPERATE NEED OF RANCH LABOR” to Secretary of War Henry Stimson, and explained his situation in a letter sent the same day. “We cannot win any war without food,” he reminded the Secretary. “We absolutely must wake up before it is too late.”<sup>50</sup> Representative John S. Wood of the ninth district in northeast Georgia explained to the Provost Marshal General that the citizens of this region — boasting some of the “largest peach producing plantations in the South” — had such an “acute manpower shortage” that they were willing to host the prisoners at their own expense, at sites with water, sewage, electricity, and housing.<sup>51</sup> Prisoners of war represented an attractive option for farmers frustrated with high wartime wages, the headache of recruiting local workers, and the possibility of strikes and walkouts. The military would set wages, discipline unruly workers, and in many cases house and feed them as well.

In all, about two-thirds of the prisoners of war who were stationed in the U.S. worked on southern farms.<sup>52</sup> And although POWs may have been too few and their sojourns too brief to offer a permanent solution to peach growers’ labor needs, it may have suggested that impermanence *was* the solution. The program set an important precedent: federal protection of agricultural employers from labor market fluctuations.<sup>53</sup> Dewey Bateman used this “big, nice-looking German” to repair the home of his tenant just as many growers used POWs to shore up the increasingly unstable farm labor system in middle Georgia

Compared to some places, such as the Mississippi Delta, middle Georgia used relatively few POWs in its fields and factories. The Peach County Extension Agent claimed in 1944 that

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<sup>50</sup> Ambrose Gherini to Secretary of War Henry Stimson, 24 March 1944, Records of the Provost Marshal General, Record Group 389, National Archives, College Park, MD.

<sup>51</sup> John S. Wood, to Provost Marshal General, 25 April 1945, Records of the Provost Marshal General, Record Group 389, National Archives, College Park, MD.

<sup>52</sup> Ward, “Nazis Hoe Cotton,” 471-2.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 471



only two peach growers needed POW labor, and these “used them very little.” Local residents picked peaches as part of the war effort, and out of loyalty to growers, reported the agent. Taking advantage of dry weather to “get their own crops in good shape,” local farmers left their work to help the peach growers. “A fine spirit of cooperation existed,” wrote the satisfied agent. Packing sheds opened at night to allow people who worked during the day to pitch in. The agent visited schools and asked for help from teachers and students: “there is no way to estimate the work done by school children,” the agent wrote. “The majority of workers were children.” And yet POW availability had “a tremendous psychological effect on local labor in this and surrounding counties,” the agent said.<sup>54</sup> Prisoners represented the threat of replacement, but they were also working for lower wages. The commanding officer of Camp Wheeler, Lt. Col. Ralph Patterson, suspected that eighty cents a day was not really the “going wage” — it was only the cash amount farmers paid to their tenants, who also had access to land, housing, and “perhaps cows.” The real rate of total compensation was probably close to two dollars a day, the inspector said. This observation apparently landed on deaf ears, as eighty cents remained standard for POW labor. Middle Georgia farmers were getting a fabulous deal.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Peach County Extension Agent, Annual Report (1944), reprinted in Virginia Greene, "Survey of Peach County and Fort Valley Georgia," a Term Paper for Huntingdon College. Thomas Public Library Local History Room, Fort Valley, Georgia.

<sup>55</sup> Earl L. Edwards, Inspection, 10 September 1943, Records of the Provost Marshal General, Record Group 389, National Archives, College Park, MD.



*Figure 18*  
 “Central Avenue, Compound No. 1” A  
 Photo of the POW Camp as constructed in  
 1943. Records of the Provost Marshal  
 General, Record Group 389, National  
 Archives, College Park, MD.

While many of Georgia’s peach harvesters lived on the growers’ property, the home away from home for these prisoners was Camp Wheeler, about seven miles southeast of Macon, Georgia. A 21,000-acre training camp during World War I, Camp Wheeler was rebuilt at the start of World War II to house around 25,000 U.S. troops. In 1943, the military made space for two thousand prisoners of war.<sup>56</sup> The prisoner of war camp was on the southeastern end of the larger installation, “on a slope which stretches down to a forest” just above the Ocmulgee River.<sup>57</sup> It had, an inspector noted in December 1943, a “very pleasing appearance,” with its barracks painted white and a number of “home-like” touches by individual prisoners. Prisoners maintained a small garden for “vegetables suited to their national taste” which yielded about \$2500 worth of produce, and they also baked their own bread in a field bakery. The camp commander showed regular motion pictures on an outdoor projection screen, a theater program produced plays for camp entertainment, and each Sunday night a prisoner orchestra gave a “Legitimate show.” Each compound had a library, and the prisoners had also laid out tennis

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<sup>56</sup> Memorandum from Command of Lt. General Schievell for the Chief of Engineers, 4 October 1942, Records of the Provost Marshal General, Record Group 389, National Archives, College Park, MD.

<sup>57</sup> Mr. Cardinaux, Report of Inspection of Camp Wheeler, 9 June 1943, Records of the Provost Marshal General, Record Group 389, National Archives, College Park, MD.

courts, soccer fields, bocce alleys, and boxing rings. The attitude of guards toward prisoners was “excellent,” with fraternization “apparent.”<sup>58</sup>

This sunny picture notwithstanding, this was no summer camp. Four guard towers stood around the stockade, staffed continuously by three “very alert” men each, one on duty and two “as reserves in case of trouble.” In three of these towers machine guns provided an “excellent field of fire” around the perimeter and into the stockade. Around each compound, the standard double fence of hog wire topped with an overhang of barbed wire, with a “dead line” marked by white stakes six feet inside the fence.<sup>59</sup> Soldiers inspected the fences daily for signs of cutting, and drove a heavy truck around the perimeter once a week to check for tunneling.<sup>60</sup>

Inspectors reported that the Italians who first inhabited the prisoner compounds at Wheeler seemed, on the whole, content. When representatives from the International Red Cross lunched with the prisoners and camp commander in June 1943, they had spaghetti — the cooks had arranged for extra flour in order to make the noodles — boiled beef, vegetables, salad, bread, lemonade, and milk. “The prisoners are well satisfied with the quantity and the quality of the food,” the inspector reported. “They especially like the American white bread, which they can eat as much of as they wish.” Prisoners printed a weekly camp newspaper and attended Italian mass every Sunday. Over four hundred worked outside the camp in agriculture, including 150 in a peach packing shed where the owner provided lemonade and cigarettes to his workers. They

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<sup>58</sup> Record of Visit to Camp, 22-24 December 1943, RG 389, Enemy POW Information Bureau, Reporting Branch, Subject File 1942-1946, Inspection and Field Reports, Warner to Woltevs, Box #2675

<sup>59</sup> Earl L. Edwards, Inspection, 10 September 1943 RG 389, Enemy POW Information Bureau, Reporting Branch, Subject File 1942-1946, Inspection and Field Reports, Warner to Woltevs, Box #2675

<sup>60</sup> Record of Visit to Camp, 22-24 December 1943, RG 389, Enemy POW Information Bureau, Reporting Branch, Subject File 1942-1946, Inspection and Field Reports, Warner to Woltevs, Box 2675.

took “great interest” in the packing shed work, and the proprietors were “well satisfied” with the quality of their labor.<sup>61</sup>

Conditions on middle Georgia farms were not always up to the military’s standards of order and security, however. In 1943, Lt. Col. Ralph Patterson, the commanding officer in charge of Camp Wheeler, issued a memorandum to all contractors about the transport of prisoners. The memo began in high tones — “There has been more or less difficulty with the transportation facilities” — and then laid out a new set of rules, which in composite, spoke volumes about the interaction of the military with the local rural culture. Contractor trucks should be:

- driven by “a competent chauffeur”
- “in good mechanical condition, especially brakes and tires”
- in good bodily condition, “including the sides and floor”
- equipped with a “tail gate securely fastened” and a “canvas to cover the body in case of cold weather or rain”
- able to transport guards separately from the prisoners
- driven no faster than 35 miles per hour, especially not around curves and turns
- stopped completely at railroad crossings
- allowed to transport no more than the number of prisoners loaded at the gate, especially no civilians, and no one on the outside of the truck “at any time.”<sup>62</sup>

In other words, Patterson banned trucks with no brakes, tailgates, or covers, trucks with flat tires, incompetent drivers, or rusted-out beds. Read in reverse, his instructions suggest the kind of employer he dealt with: folks who drove their disintegrating vehicles above the speed limit, who took their corners too fast, who picked up passengers along the way, and packed their trucks like sardine cans.

According to the Red Cross inspector in 1943, Patterson had the welfare of the prisoners “very much at heart” and did not “cease to improve the living conditions of the camp,” to

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<sup>61</sup> Mr. Cardinaux, Report of Inspection of Camp Wheeler, 9 June 1943.

<sup>62</sup> ”Memorandum from Lt. Col. Patterson, Camp Wheeler, 1943, to All Contractors using Prisoner of War Labor, regarding Transportation Facilities for Prisoner of War Labor, Records of the Provost Marshal General, Record Group 389, National Archives, College Park, MD.

“organize new activities,” and to “know each prisoner individually.” The prisoners, consequently, all held him in high esteem.<sup>63</sup> In early 1944, the Italians’ tenure at Camp Wheeler ended on a high note for Patterson, as about 95 percent signed an agreement in which they agreed to be incorporated into the U.S. army as noncombatants. The signers were transferred to a transport repair shop in Atlanta. The War Office reassigned the non-signers to other camps, and cleared the camp for occupation by German prisoners.<sup>64</sup>

Lt. Col. Patterson remained in command of the now-German POW camp, but only a few months into the new arrangement, inspectors noticed a disturbing lack of discipline among the German prisoners. In June, there had been three escape attempts already, and Patterson “did not seem to have the necessary authority.”<sup>65</sup> In July a delegation found that the situation had worsened, with an “undue amount of slacking and a disposition to strike” and an overall attitude of belligerence. The inspector noted the presence of a number of “indoctrinated National Socialists” and trend toward belligerence after the invasion of France in June — a “psychological (mental) resistance of the prisoners in acknowledging frankly to themselves that Germany is being defeated.” Seven prisoners had escaped and been recaptured, three of them by local police who had, contrary to the Geneva Convention, flogged and handcuffed the prisoners. About twenty percent of the guard personnel were classified as “psychoneurotics.”<sup>66</sup> Life at Camp Wheeler was, in a word, bad.

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<sup>63</sup> Mr. Cardinaux, Report of Inspection of Camp Wheeler, 9 June 1943.

<sup>64</sup> Mr. M. Peter, Report of Inspection of Camp Wheeler, 5 April 1944, Records of the Provost Marshal General, Record Group 389, National Archives, College Park, MD.

<sup>65</sup> Report of Inspection of Camp Wheeler, 23 June 1944, Records of the Provost Marshal General, Record Group 389, National Archives, College Park, MD.

<sup>66</sup> Rudolf Fischer and Parker Buhrman, Report of Inspection of Camp Wheeler, 11 July 1944, Records of the Provost Marshal General, Record Group 389, National Archives, College Park, MD.

By December the situation had worsened. Upon the arrival of the inspecting team (a representative from the State Department and from the Swiss Legation) Patterson hastened to explain why he “found it impossible” to subdue a group of prisoners who defied his orders to be segregated and “held out for three days.” Later during the visit, workers returning from detail passed headquarters “lustily singing.” Patterson, perhaps feeling a bit sheepish, told the inspectors that he simply “liked to hear them sing.” With further probing, he admitted that he “could not well cross” the prisoners, or they would refuse to work their contracts — and this he understood to be his “big duty at present.”<sup>67</sup> A few days after this visit, Major Shanahan called the office of the Prisoner of War Operations Division to report that discipline at Wheeler was “terrible,” that Patterson was incapable of enforcing discipline for fear of the consequences if his son, then fighting in France, should be captured by Germans. Anytime someone brought up the subject of POW discipline, Col. Patterson “immediately brought up the subject of his son.” Rather than risk the German black list, Shanahan reported, he did nothing. No disciplinary action taken against a prisoner who had installed a short-wave radio. No “interior improvement” of the camp facilities. No “initiative, system, or imagination.” It didn’t help that the Special Projects Warrant Officer Martin Wallis — who was in charge of the prisoners’ re-education — “hadn’t used any tact.” He told all the officers of his secret mission, demanded that the prisoners throw out censored materials, and broke “every possible regulation that exists.”<sup>68</sup> To one prisoner,

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<sup>67</sup> Report of Inspection of Camp Wheeler, 13 December 1944, Records of the Provost Marshal General, Record Group 389, National Archives, College Park, MD.

<sup>68</sup> Robert Kunzig, Memorandum to the Director, Prisoner of War Special Projects Division, 7 March 1945, Records of the Provost Marshal General, Record Group 389, National Archives, College Park, MD; Memorandum to the Director, Prisoners of War Operations Division, re: phone call from Major Shanahan to Director, 16 December 1944, Records of the Provost Marshal General, Record Group 389, National Archives, College Park, MD..

Wallis declared, “I’ll be drinking beer with you soon in Berlin.”<sup>69</sup> His approach to reeducation, in other words, was to rub it in. *Germany is falling apart, so get with our program.*

Against this contentious backdrop, the harmony of the Bateman packing crew is all the more striking. In letter after letter they detailed the things they remembered about their time in his service. Matthias Jakobs had a “beautiful Panama hat” — given to him when Bateman named him supervisor of the prisoner crew — which he kept as a “dear souvenir.”<sup>70</sup> Julius Winter, an Austrian postmaster was apparently also an amateur naturalist: he returned to Vienna with the “chafer” — colorful scarab beetles common in Georgia — “and snakes” Bateman had given to him as a reminder of the “beautiful U.S.A.”<sup>71</sup> Bateman may or may not have shared his fascination with beetles and reptiles, but in any event he sent Winter a C.A.R.E. package.<sup>72</sup>

Beyond the physical artifacts of their time in Georgia, the prisoners also recalled the social scene. Officially, contractors were forbidden to “fraternize” with prisoners or to allow other locals to do so.<sup>73</sup> Lt. Col. Patterson feared that if he allowed his prisoners “limited parole” in the town, they would “get into a great deal of trouble in attempting to satisfy their physical needs”<sup>74</sup> — indeed, the camp’s officers believed that the prisoners (at that time Italians) were “willing to agree to anything in order to gain liberty and to have dates with various women in town.”<sup>75</sup>

Bateman’s German prisoners may not have been on parole, but they certainly had opportunities

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<sup>69</sup> Memorandum to the Director, Prisoners of War Operations Division, re: phone call from Major Shanahan to Director, 16 December 1944.

<sup>70</sup> Matthias Jakobs to Dewey Bateman, 21 January 1947, Oliver Bateman Private Collection.

<sup>71</sup> Julius Winter to Dewey Bateman, 16 January 1946, Oliver Bateman Private Collection.

<sup>72</sup> Julius Winter to Dewey Bateman, 16 January 1946, Oliver Bateman Private Collection.

<sup>73</sup> Guidelines for Labor Contractors, Records of the Provost Marshal General, Record Group 389, National Archives, College Park, MD.

<sup>74</sup> Capt. Edward C. Shanahan, Report of Inspection of Camp Wheeler, 22-24 December 1943, Records of the Provost Marshal General, Record Group 389, National Archives, College Park, MD.

<sup>75</sup> “Classification by G-2 Officer of Italian Prisoners,” Memorandum, 24 December 1943, Records of the Provost Marshal General, Record Group 389, National Archives, College Park, MD.

to acquaint themselves with middle Georgians. Gunther Krohm worked for Bateman from December 1944 through October 1945, in his sweet potato packinghouse, peanut farms, and peach orchards, before moving to the peach packinghouse in May. “I forgot the name of that village,” Krohm mused, “I think Avondale, beside the Air Field. O yes, Cocran [Cochran] Field. There we were a long time, together with the American girls, women, and boys,” and Krohm fraternized enough to learn “a little English” as well as “the name of a girl,” though he had since lost the slip of paper with her address. “I think of that time,” he wrote, “as if it never were.” In a postscript, Krohm begged Bateman to greet the “family Hallaway (Elberta).” If Elberta Hallaway was the girl he had known in Byron, then this German prisoner had flirted with a real Georgia peach — or one who shared a name with Georgia’s most famous fruit cultivar.<sup>76</sup>

But what the former prisoners remembered most of all was the taste of Georgia. The “nice milk form [sic] the 'red oak' farm and the wanderful [sic] cake and coca-cola and all other things;” the “generous supper every night at 12 o'clock p.m: sandwiches and a bottle of ice chocolate or milk . . . the peaches, peaches, peaches! How many I ate I don't know: tons!”<sup>77</sup> “How was ist [sic] nice,” Franz Reitbaur remembered, “when the big crop was brought in and we had everything we wished.”<sup>78</sup> Heinz-I. Adeneuer remembered the “lots of foods and smoking material” — since “There is nothing to smoke over-here and that’s damm’ bad.”<sup>79</sup>

This memory of abundance was all the more powerful because of the devastation that greeted the Germans upon their return to their homes. Matthias Jakob’s hotel-restaurant had been destroyed, and with no business and no work, he had little to eat. Julius Winter’s two children

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<sup>76</sup> Gunther Krohm to Dewey Bateman, 10 September 1947, Oliver Bateman Private Collection.

<sup>77</sup> Matthias Jakobs to Dewey Bateman, 21 January 1947; Julius Winter to Dewey Bateman, 16 January 1946, Oliver Bateman Private Collection; Rüdolf Bergmaier to Dewey Bateman, 29 March 1947, Oliver Bateman Private Collection.

<sup>78</sup> Franz Reitbaur to Dewey Bateman.

<sup>79</sup> Heinz-J Adeneuer to Dewey Bateman, 24 December 1946.



likewise suffered hunger. Gunther Krohm's home in East Prussia belonged now to Russia, "separated from Germany for eternity," and so he and his family lived in the countryside near Hanover as refugees. The rural setting was little comfort, he wrote, for "we have got to suffer" from coldness and disease and cold. His family was fortunate not to be homeless, but the five of them lived in a tiny room where he and his father slept on the floor. He walked seven miles to and from work every morning and evening and his shoes were wearing thin; winter was coming and they had no overcoats; and his little ten-year old sister was "the poorest of all. . . . She knows no better times." Like many of the other prisoners, Krohm asked Bateman for "anything you can do without."<sup>80</sup>

But Krohm took his supplication a step further and also asked if he could join Bateman at the farms if he were able to leave Germany. "I remember," Krohm wrote, "you asked sometimes if we would return to America and to you, if we had a bad life at home. Now I should like to come."<sup>81</sup> And Krohm was not alone in this request. Werner Volkmann also wrote of his dream of staying with Bateman permanently, and Fritz Druner proposed a kind of indentured servitude for himself and his nephew: a period of labor for no pay in exchange for passage to America.

For all the "big time" workers claimed to have had on Bateman farms, Dewey Bateman later described it as a time of "troubles," when he was "forced" to rely on POWs and transient laborers.<sup>82</sup> The system the POW workers represented, however, foreshadowed the solution the industry would settle on some fifty years later, and pointed toward a more direct reliance on federal labor recruitment. World War II brought not only POWs to American agriculture but Mexicans through the Bracero Program and Caribbeans through the British West Indies

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<sup>80</sup> Gunther Krohm to Dewey Bateman.

<sup>81</sup> Gunther Krohm to Dewey Bateman.

<sup>82</sup> Dewey Bateman, quoted in Neal, "When Georgia Peaches Pay Off," 22.

Temporary Alien Labor Program (BWITALP).<sup>83</sup> The federal H-2A guest worker program, established in 1986, built upon these earlier efforts and paralleled the POW system in some striking ways: the federal government's role as labor padrone, the insulation of farm wages from the free market, and the worker's circumscribed position.<sup>84</sup>

The POW labor system and these other "labor camp" regimes only make sense in light of the African American labor force these systems replaced. The rural development program of Fort Valley High and Industrial School's Henry Hunt and Otis O'Neal sought to establish a rural black yeomanry in the cotton belt through agricultural education and organization. They made some modest gains in this work: evidence suggests that Peach County had a significant minority of black landowners and voters in the early twentieth century. But blacks left the rural South in ever increasing numbers, and World War II was a watershed in this migration. Even as Otis O'Neal mouthed his homage to rural self-sufficiency, African Americans across the South were abandoning this dream and finding work in cities and factories across the country. By the 1960s, FVHIS had become a center not of rural self-sufficiency but of civil rights activism in middle Georgia.

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Nick Strickland gave up his hardware store in downtown Fort Valley when the second Wal-Mart moved into the area in the 1980s. In the 1990s, though "retired," he started working for Lane Packing Company as a tour guide. He drives a golf cart through the orchards and worker housing as a recording informs passengers about the various parts of the company, interspersed with songs that capture the spirit of the place: Alabama's "Song of the South," Alan

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<sup>83</sup> David Griffith, *American Guestworkers: Jamaicans and Mexicans in the U.S. Labor Market* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 32.

<sup>84</sup> See Cindy Hahamovitch, *The Fruits of Their Labor: Atlantic Coast Farmworkers and the Making of Migrant Poverty, 1870-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

Jackson's "Where I Come From," Gladys Knight and the Pips' "Midnight Train to Georgia," and of course Ray Charles' "Georgia On My Mind."

Strickland has given this tour countless times, but he remembers one particular group of African-Americans who came through in 2006 or 2007.

And of course the children, the young people were asking about, how you, you know, "can you get a job?" And the parents were saying, "You want to go to college," which is what they should have said. "You want to go to college. You don't want to pick peaches." . . . They said, "Mr. Nick, how much do these people make?" I said, "The best pickers we have out here can make one hundred dollars a day." Well that blew their minds, because they had been told that you pick peaches all day long for two dollars, you know. . . . But when they realized they could make a hundred dollars a day, those kids, seventeen years old, they couldn't get a job anywhere making a hundred dollars a day, I don't care where it was. But boy, strong resistance from the adults. "You want to go to college." Well that's the way it ought to be. They are absolutely right. Go to school. Get away from across the tracks.<sup>85</sup>

The generational conflict captured in this conversation is a heritage of the post-World War II activism of African Americans in middle Georgia. In increasing numbers, they found work in more remunerative occupations, and at the same time they fought more boldly for political and economic equality. The labor supply for peach growers, as a consequence, diminished steadily.

Agricultural mechanization and outmigration proceeded hand-in-hand in the South. While wheat and other crops yielded easily to mechanical planting and harvesting, cotton's mechanization was slowed by a harvest bottleneck: as long as cotton farmers needed labor for the harvest, there was little point in mechanizing the rest of the operation. Some southern farmers had begun to mechanize their operations in the 1930s with support from federal New Deal programs, but the process did not kick into high gear until after World War II.<sup>86</sup> Middle Georgia was home to just 534 tractors in 1939; by 1954, the number had increased nearly five-fold, to 2,495. As cotton farming used less hand labor, planters took over the operations of sharecroppers

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<sup>85</sup> Nick Strickland, interview with the author, 9 July 2009, Fort Valley, Georgia.

<sup>86</sup> Melissa Walker, "Shifting Boundaries: Race Relations in the Rural Jim Crow South," in *African American Life in the Rural South, 1900-1950*, 107.

and other tenants themselves. Georgia's 225,897 farms in 1944 had dwindled to 83,366 by 1964.<sup>87</sup> In 1960, ten percent of Georgia's cotton was harvested mechanically; by 1969, less than ten percent was still hand-harvested.<sup>88</sup> The South's rural workers had been finding other opportunities since the first Great Migrations in the 1910s; by 1970s, cotton farmers no longer needed them.

Peach growers still needed workers, however. The fruit's soft, porous skin, its quick ripening after harvest, and the premium placed on visual appeal in northern markets all made mechanization impractical. Postwar peach production saw changes in the pesticides available and their method of application as well as more refined machines in the packinghouse, but peach harvests still required human hands and eyes. And with tenant agriculture in decline, their ready pool of African American labor diminished. So growers turned to labor contractors, who gathered workers, who gathered fruit. If southern horticulture had been able to muster crops other than peaches, this transition might have been somewhat easier for growers. In California, a profusion of perishable crops sustained an extensive and nearly year-round circuit for migrant workers. Southern fruit growers, however, were at the mercy of the peach season. The unpredictable southern environment made labor control more difficult.

Farmers in some parts of Georgia were already feeling pinched in the late 1940s. Although farm wages had risen dramatically since 1939, industrial jobs had lured many hands out of rural areas, and farmers worried about losing their crops. Some growers resorted to off-shore labor to bring in the peach harvest: according to one newspaper, there were some four hundred West

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<sup>87</sup> Tractors, of course, are not the only measure of mechanization, but they are one of the only constants in the agricultural census from 1920 through 1978. U.S. Census of Agriculture (Washington: GPO, 1920-1978).

<sup>88</sup> Craig Heinicke and Wayne A. Grove, "'Machinery Has Completely Taken Over': The Diffusion of the Mechanical Cotton Picker, 1949-1964," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 39:1 (Summer, 2008), 70, 72. See also Holley, Donald, "Mechanical Cotton Picker," *EH.Net Encyclopedia*, ed. Robert Whaples (16 June 2003), accessed 16 October 2009 at <http://eh.net/encyclopedia/article/holley.cottonpicker>.

Indians in the state in 1947, probably brought in under the auspices of the British West Indies Temporary Labor Problem – a kind of *bracero* program for the Caribbean.<sup>89</sup> After World War II, planters effectively “cut loose” African-Americans from the sharecropping system; many migrated northward.<sup>90</sup> With a smaller population on the land, agricultural employers found it harder to get local blacks into the fields.

Tellingly, growers reported no serious problems finding white workers for their packinghouses. Dewey Bateman, for one, was satisfied with the arrangement shortly after the war: “Now we've got fine help,” he told an Atlanta reporter; “women and youngsters from nearby farms, and high school students.”<sup>91</sup> His packinghouse boss was a math teacher at a Macon high school, who claimed he had a list of 200 available workers. Middle Georgia's school systems pitched in by letting students out earlier than other counties. Together, the teacher boasted, “we have the peach situation pretty well under control.”<sup>92</sup> This use of local white youth and women in the packinghouse during the summer continues up to the present, although Mexican women are increasingly common.

It was quite a different story with African-American field workers. In middle Georgia, instead of relying on tenant families to do the bulk of the peach harvest work, growers began entrusting their field labor recruiting to “crew bosses” — locals with connections to the black

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<sup>89</sup> John Mebane, “Labor Deficiency Perils Year's Crops,” *The Atlanta Journal* (22 June 1947), 10-B.

<sup>90</sup> Kyriakoudes, “‘Lookin’ for Better All the Time,’” 26. Census statistics reveal a dramatic decrease in the number of tenants in the postwar South: from 942,655 white and 506,638 black tenants in 1939 to 118,153 and 18,235, respectively, in 1969. See Daniel, *Breaking the Land: The Transformation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice Cultures since 1880* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 248.

<sup>91</sup> Dewey Bateman, quoted in Neal, “When Georgia Peaches Pay Off,” 23.

<sup>92</sup> W.M. Brake, quoted in Neal, “When Georgia Peaches Pay Off,” 23.

communities of the surrounding areas.<sup>93</sup> As middle Georgia's black population grew increasingly urban, Macon became an especially important source of field crews.<sup>94</sup> "People would come and say, 'I can bring you a crew of twenty-five,' or 'I can bring you a crew of twenty,'" Bob Dickey recalled; in exchange, they were paid a commission above the normal wage. The best of these crew chiefs according to Dickey were black preachers who could talk their congregations—or at least the women and children within their congregations—into coming to the fields.<sup>95</sup> Several growers furnished schoolbuses to "highly reliable people," as Oliver Bateman remembered them, who "knew all the children, knew all the families."<sup>96</sup>

Growers recognized that this local contracting system represented a serious loss of control over the labor supply. By the 1960s, some orchards around Atlanta let their peaches rot on the trees for what they called a lack of labor. "They stand in the streets, they won't work," a Jackson farmer grouched about his urban labor force. "They won't even come give it a try."<sup>97</sup> Another complained that adult workers waited until the trees were really heavy with fruit before coming to the orchards to work. These "deadbeats . . . only live for today and let tomorrow take care of itself," he declared, threatening to give up the business altogether.<sup>98</sup> Growers' buses filled with younger and younger workers, and Bateman remembered the contractors complaining that adults refused to come, sending their children—out of school and at loose ends—in their stead.<sup>99</sup> In

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<sup>93</sup> Joseph H. Baird, "Is Georgia 'Peached Out'?" *Atlanta Constitution Magazine* (6 June 1971), 36; Steve Oney, "Peaches: Picking Through Facts and Fantasies About Georgia's Famous Fruit," *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution Magazine* (1 July 1979), 10.

<sup>94</sup> U.S. Population Census (Washington: GPO, 1930-2007). Bibb County is home to Macon, the largest city in middle Georgia. The rural counties included are Crawford, Houston, Macon, Peach, and Taylor.

<sup>95</sup> Dickey, interview with the author, 28 July 2008.

<sup>96</sup> Bateman, interviews with the author, 22 February 2008 and 29 July 2008.

<sup>97</sup> R.M. (Jack) Smith, quoted in Hugh Park, "Red-Gold Peaches Big for Picking," *The Atlanta Journal* (22 July 1965), 1.

<sup>98</sup> W.B. Wood, quoted in Park, "Red-Gold Peaches Big for Picking," 23.

<sup>99</sup> Bateman, interview with the author, 29 July 2008.

1971, Fort Valley grower Bill Wilson called the peach industry's dependence on crew bosses "one of our biggest problems."<sup>100</sup> Their protestations aside, these growers were actually describing ordinary behavior. Unless one was fairly desperate for extra cash—as school-age children evidently were—the job offered few attractions. As picker Rosa Mae Lucas told a reporter in 1984, "It ain't too much out here to like about it. It's too hot. It's just as bad as it looks."<sup>101</sup> And of course it made sense to pick only at the height of the season, when one could fill a bucket quickly. Furthermore, the availability of packinghouse labor suggests that African-Americans had additional reasons for refusing the seasonal labor in the orchards: fieldwork was not only physically unpleasant but demeaning. "When we were doing that work," Fort Valley city councilman Marvin Crafter explained in 1993, "our prayers were that our children not have to be subjected to the 100-degree work of the peach orchard. Migrants are now doing what we no longer want to do."<sup>102</sup> Hal Lowman never worked in a commercial peach orchard after childhood, and although he evaded the question of why blacks stopped working in agricultural jobs, his evident pride in his family spoke volumes about that transition. "If you could do better, and you didn't, there was something wrong with you," he said, boasting that he and his siblings never missed school to do farm work. Black farm workers found work in industries like Woolfork Chemical (founded to produce pesticides in 1920), Blue Bird Bus Company (1935), Robins Air Force Base (built in nearby Warner Robins in 1942), or one of Macon's many factories. They

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<sup>100</sup> Bill Wilson, quoted in Baird, "Is Georgia 'Peaches Out'?" 34-35.

<sup>101</sup> Rosa Mae Lucas and Anola Jordan, quoted in Rob Levin, "Georgia's peach crop hot prospect for pickers," *The Atlanta Constitution* (20 June 1984), 7A.

<sup>102</sup> Marvin Crafter, quoted in Hollis R. Towns, "The enduring peach: flourishing fruit still packs punch as a symbol," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (15 August 1993), D8.

went north. Or, like Lowman and his siblings, they went to college in Fort Valley and found professional jobs. There was no moving up on the farm.<sup>103</sup>

At the same time, political activism in the middle Georgia black community seemed to develop rapidly in the 1960s and 70s. In 1969 a local group affiliated with the Atlanta-based Voter Education Project, the Citizenship Education Commission (CEC), published a weekly newsletter called “Information that Black Folk Should Know.” Typed on letter-sized paper in two columns, the newsletter eschewed the more traditional “Negro” for a capitalized “BLACK” and referred to white folks as “Whitie.” The lead editorial in the August 28, 1969, edition for example, decried the continuing opposition of “some dark skin people (with white minds)” and called on readers to insist on being addressed as “Mr. and Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_” by the white community, for the “the treatment given to the least of us BLACKS by whitie represents his true feelings for us all.”<sup>104</sup>

That summer, the CEC was spearheading a voter registration drive and boycott of a local store, Young’s Superfoods, which served a predominantly black population (80-90%) but did not employ African American cashiers. When the CEC demanded that proprietor Marshall Young hire a black cashier, he refused, claiming in his defense that his store was a family business, and that his wife and sister were the only cashiers. The CEC responded with a boycott — at the height of peach season, which would have been a key moment for the store’s overall profit margin. “It seems they would rather close their stores,” the CEC wrote, “than let BLACK beautiful hands go in their cash registers.” For six weeks, CEC volunteers picketed the store, followed the delivery truck to make sure it went to no black homes, gave names and addresses of

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<sup>103</sup> Hal Lowman, interview with the author, 20 July 2009, Fort Valley, Georgia.

<sup>104</sup> Citizenship Education Commission, “Information That Black Folk Should Know,” vol I, no. 3 (28 August 1969), 1-2, copy in possession of author. Thanks to Zachary Young for sharing this document and his interview with his grandfather Marshall Young.



African Americans who ignored the picket, and disclaimed responsibility for “anything that happens to these people [or] their foodstuffs.”<sup>105</sup> One black dietician from Fort Valley State College continued to patronize the store, even going so far as to publicly rebuke the picketers on her way into Super Foods. That night, activists smashed her car windows and shredded the interior. Young’s Super Foods survived the boycott, not only because of these divisions within the black community, but also because of the solidarity of the white community. As Marshall Young recalls, white patronage increased dramatically during the weeks of the boycott, more than making up for the lost sales to the black community. Fearing this local civil rights agenda, whites from Fort Valley and neighboring towns went out of their way to shop at Young’s Super Foods. “I’ve never had such good business,” Young marveled.<sup>106</sup>

The Young’s Super Foods campaign was part of a broader political mobilization in Fort Valley organized by professors and students at Fort Valley State College.<sup>107</sup> Voter registration drives followed the 1965 Voting Rights Amendment, and Fort Valley elected its first black officials in 1970.<sup>108</sup> Political scientist Lois Banks Hollis, who studied Peach County in the early 1970s, discovered that federal Office of Economic Opportunity programs had begun to change social dynamics in the area, as black leaders became “brokers” of federal funding for their local economies.<sup>109</sup> Blacks who registered to vote need not fear, the CEC maintained: “Whitie will not

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Marshall Young, interview by Zachary Young, Fort Valley, Georgia, 12 March 2010. Partial transcript in possession of the author.

<sup>107</sup> Lawrence J. Hanks, *The Struggle for Black Political Empowerment in Three Georgia Counties* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1987), 98.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 100

<sup>109</sup> Lois Banks Hollis, “The Political Orientation of Blacks in Three Bi-Racial Predominantly Rural Counties in Georgia: The Cases of Brooks, Burke, and Peach Counties” (PhD diss., Atlanta University: August 1975), 167.

cut off your welfare check or anything else, and by voting you can make sure that he doesn't think of telling you that, by electing BLACKS to the welfare board."<sup>110</sup>

By 1972, the African American community had registered enough voters to mount a serious challenge to white control of city offices. Six blacks vied with eleven whites for various places in the city government, including the schools superintendent, utilities commissioner, state legislator, and county sheriff. Two of the black candidates taught at Fort Valley State College, and four were alumni, and they counted on the votes of 500 to 1,000 of the school's students. In the end, only two of the black candidates won — electrician and plumber Roosevelt Arnold to the Utilities Commission and businessman Rudolph Carson to the city council — but collectively they represented an ill omen for the white power structure of Peach County.<sup>111</sup>

Determined not to take the challenge lying down, Fort Valley whites sued for the desegregation of Fort Valley State College. It was a striking inversion of the previous forty years of desegregation litigation. Complaining that the “voting strength” of the “white minority electors” in Fort Valley had been “diluted” by the presence of FVSC — that indeed Fort Valley's whites had been “substantially disenfranchised” — the suit called for an injunction requiring FVSC to admit no more African Americans than the University System as a whole, and to expedite plans for converting FVSC into a “racially unidentifiable school” and “to insure a meaningful white presence on the campus.”<sup>112</sup> These were astonishing requests. African American enrollment in the University System then stood at fifteen percent, thanks in large part to the three historically black colleges within the system. Only twenty-six of FVSC's 139

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<sup>110</sup> CEC, “Information,” 2.

<sup>111</sup> Donnie D. Bellamy, “Whites Sue for Desegregation in Georgia: The Fort Valley State College Case,” *The Journal of Negro History* 64, no. 4 (October 1, 1979): 319.

<sup>112</sup> Wilbutr K. Avera v. W. Lee Burge, et al., Civil Action Number 2732, “Complaint,” U.S. District Court, Middle District of Georgia, Macon, 4-5, quoted in *Ibid.*, 320.

professors and fifteen of its 2,300 students were white. To limit FVSC's black enrollment to fifteen percent was tantamount to denying black Georgians admission to state institutions — a right that had only been practically in place since the integration of the University of Georgia in 1961.<sup>113</sup>

In the end, the court accepted a compromise plan presented by the Board of Regents which maintained FVSC's racial identity while promising greater diversity in the student body and staff. But the suit served the larger purpose of discrediting the college and channeling a “wave of white resentment against the idea of sharing political power with blacks.”<sup>114</sup> Court proceedings examined not only the racial composition of the school but the supposed academic inferiority of the school. In his opinion, Judge Owens recommended that “well-meaning educators” read Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery* so that they could understand that “to give Negro students what does not prepare them and what they do not really earn is doing them an injustice.” FVSC, he charged, “naturally” attracted black students who were “unprepared for the real college contest.”<sup>115</sup> Thus Judge Owens helped create a stigma of low expectations and low performance that remains with the school to this day in some quarters.

When asked about the civil rights movement today, growers claim no particular memories of activism in middle Georgia. Their recollections about this period, however, betray a sense of their dwindling power. They seemed surprised and dismayed at the paucity of workers eager to work long, hot hours for low pay. Government programs made payroll more complicated, they said. The payroll office could no longer be a sack of change in a pickup truck. Standards established by the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) were an

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 320, 323.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 335.

<sup>115</sup> Jack R. Hunnicutt *et al.* v. W. Lee Burge, *et al.*, Civil Action Number 2754, "Order" (23 March 1973), 16-19, quoted in *Ibid.*, 329.

administrative headache. And they blamed the government's "war on poverty" for making people lazy. "They didn't want to work," Robert Dickey remembered with exasperation, "and welfare came in, hell they started paying them to have children and all this kind of stuff."<sup>116</sup> The workers who depended on their government checks—who were "double dipping," to use Oliver Bateman's words—grew more reluctant to work lest their benefits be revoked.<sup>117</sup> Tapping into a renaissance of anti-statist thought in the 1970s, peach farmers interpreted this kind of behavior as simple laziness: the government, in their view, was paying people to lie around and procreate.

At annual conferences of the National Peach Council, held most years from 1942 on, growers from around the country portrayed themselves as humble farmers beleaguered by environmentalists and other liberal "do-gooders." Peach growers around the nation were acutely aware of farmworker unionization campaigns, for example. As early as 1956, a representative from the American Farm Bureau Federation warned growers that the AFL-CIO merger portended more unionization activity among farmworkers, and urged them to join other perishable crop growers in opposing unionization.<sup>118</sup> In 1968, the NPC passed a formal resolution opposing a farm labor relations bill then before the Senate. "Unionization of farm labor," they insisted, "could pose a possible death threat to the peach industry as we now know it."<sup>119</sup> The 1973 convention featured a talk on labor management by a Colorado grower who berated the "lazy portion of our society" and offered up a sarcastic prayer for the seasonal workers he employed: "for short term employment let me say 'Thank God for the wineo' or we wouldn't get

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<sup>116</sup> Dickey, interview with the author, 28 July 2008.

<sup>117</sup> Bateman, interview with the author, 22 February 2008.

<sup>118</sup> John C. Datt, "National Legislation of Interest to Peach Growers," *National Peach Council Proceedings* (20-22 February 1956, Cairo, IL), 47.

<sup>119</sup> Resolutions adopted, *National Peach Council Proceedings* (18-21 February 1968, Charleston, SC), 11.

our job done.”<sup>120</sup> By 1975 many South Carolina growers were turning increasingly to migrant labor, mixed in with “all the local people we can employ.”<sup>121</sup> And in 1981 a former United Farm Workers organizer advised growers that they could forestall unionization with a simple maxim: “love your employees to death.”<sup>122</sup>

There were even calls to count farm workers as farmers rather than workers, to include them in a new agrarian order. One Pennsylvania tomato farmer admonished peach growers to “honor” farm labor “as a valuable and worthwhile task rather than to degrade the performance of this work as menial labor.”<sup>123</sup> Peter Martori, a citrus labor coordinator from Arizona, charged that growers had taken “great advantage” of undocumented Mexican workers, whose “people are starving to death.”<sup>124</sup> He challenged peach growers to stave off the “illegal alien habit” by creating a long-term, stable agricultural workforce. They could do this, he said, by appealing to the “essentially natural” character of agriculture. The picker who dealt with “the problems nature puts forth” — the location of the fruit, the condition of the ground, the weather, humidity, and so on, “has a much greater feeling of satisfaction than someone who has managed to put on 45 bolts an hour instead of 37.”<sup>125</sup> Wishful thinking? Yes. For without living wages and in a rural society increasingly removed from the seasonal rhythms that had given the peach industry a certain logic in the early twentieth century, picking peaches could not offer much “feeling of satisfaction.”

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<sup>120</sup> Oscar Jaynes, “Labor and Labor Management,” *National Peach Council Proceedings* (25-28 February 1973, Washington, D.C.), 104.

<sup>121</sup> Gwen Bulman, “Woodrow Cash, Sons and Daughter,” *National Peach Council Proceedings* (23-26 February 1975, Myrtle Beach, SC), 113; and in the same year, “H.T. and L.F. Holmes, Sun Ridge Peaches: A Family-Oriented Peach Factory,” 115.

<sup>122</sup> Antonio G. Mendez, “How to Discourage Union Organization,” *National Peach Council Proceedings* (16-19 February 1981, Phoenix, AZ), 77.

<sup>123</sup> Keith Eckel, “Reform, Eradicate Government Regulations Now,” *National Peach Council Proceedings* (16-19 February 1981, Phoenix, AZ), 59.

<sup>124</sup> Peter Martori, “How Do We Kick the Illegal Alien Habit?” *National Peach Council Proceedings* (19-22 February 1979, Las Vegas, NE), 95.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

Growers' dissatisfaction with labor at this point is all the more striking because this was the period with the least governmental support for peach growers' labor needs. Though the state had not intervened directly in labor relations before (with the exception of the POW labor program), legal segregation limited options for African-Americans. Civil rights legislation in the 1960s removed many of the official obstacles to upward mobility. Almost simultaneously, the cotton picker all but replaced hand-harvesting in Georgia. By the late 1970s and early 80s, the labor situation for peach growers was "just about impossible," and many turned to the east coast migrant stream. Oliver Bateman, for instance, tried a Haitian crew who had been working for a timber company near Monticello, Georgia. When Bateman arrived the day they were to pick, he found that, due to a drunken brawl the night before, all of the workers had fled. He never employed Caribbean workers again.<sup>126</sup> For his part, Bob Dickey rued the day he was forced to use migrants. "Over half of them were derelicts," he lamented. "I mean they were alcoholics, and the crew chiefs that brought them, hell they would cheat us and cheat them. It was a terrible situation."<sup>127</sup>

When a reporter for the Atlanta newspaper visited Big Six Farms in 1979, Al Pearson expressed similar frustrations. He described finding a woman in his orchard who dropped her peaches into the bucket, "bruising the hell out of them." When he instructed her to bend over and set the peach down gently, she sat down and quit, explaining that he was not paying enough for that kind of care. Pearson was appalled. His father would have been furious, he said, and "kicked all their butts off the place. But I can't just run 'em off," he protested. "Workers are harder to

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<sup>126</sup> Bateman interview, 29 July 2008. Cindy Hahamovitch has documented the long history of the east coast migrant stream in Hahamovitch, *The Fruits of Their Labor: Atlantic Coast Farmworkers and the Making of Migrant Poverty, 1870-1945*; Cindy Hahamovitch, *No Man's Land: Jamaican Guestworkers in America and the Global History of Deportable Labor*, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011).

<sup>127</sup> Dickey, interview with the author, 28 July 2008.

find now. The good ones end up in factories.” He concluded, “I’m at their mercy. I’m at everyone’s mercy.”<sup>128</sup> Where peach growers had once had the leverage to “kick all their butts off the place,” they were now “at their mercy.” Soon, as they had during World War II, Georgia’s peach growers would cast themselves on the mercy of the state to bolster their labor supply.

What these growers left unsaid is that peach picking was not much of a job. Al Pearson used to complain that he could not “get anybody to work” – until his father-in-law retorted, “Well you don’t have a good job.” Pearson paused, his feelings a little bruised. “Well I never had thought about it that way, but I don’t.” Picking peaches has always been seasonal work, Pearson acknowledged, “and last time I checked people have to eat year-round.”<sup>129</sup> Pearson’s peach-growing counterparts in Edgefield County, South Carolina, meanwhile, had become “rather notorious” for labor abuses. In the span of three years, *The New York Times*, *The Boston Globe*, *The Progressive*, and *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* all ran exposes on the crew bosses employed by the growers of that county. Workers charged that crew leaders had cheated them of wages, beaten them, housed them in overcrowded tin shacks with no running water, sold them alcohol and crack-cocaine, and held them in debt peonage for transportation, housing, and food expenses. One worker said his crew leader attacked him with a cement block when he complained.<sup>130</sup> This “Peonage for Peach Pickers,” as the *Progressive* dubbed it, had replaced the peach harvest as festival. For those accustomed to thinking of peaches as a warm, bright spot, it was a deeply disturbing image.

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<sup>128</sup> Al Pearson, quoted in Oney, “Peaches,” 14.

<sup>129</sup> Al Pearson, interview with the author, 22 February 2008, Lee Pope, Georgia.

<sup>130</sup> “Carolina migrant workers speak out,” *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (9 July 1990), B-2; Frank Heflin, “‘Sickest of the sick . . . poorest of the poor’,” *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (19 August 1991), A-3. Diane Alters, “Crack lures, holds workers to S.C. camp,” *The Boston Globe* (21 August 1989), 1; Peter T. Kilborn, “Days of Fruit Tramp’s Painful Harvest Fade,” *The New York Times* (14 July 1990), 1; Ron Chepesiuk, “Peonage for Peach Pickers,” *The Progressive* 56, no. 12 (December 1992), 22-24.

Once the harvest had been a festival. In 1947, Marshallville native Inez Parker Cummings wrote an essay for the *Georgia Review*, which described a typical harvest scene:

To say that the shipping season is the most fervid time of a grower's year gives a dim picture of the actual color and whirl of activity that goes on in even the tiniest peach village—for the peaches are ready today, today, today, and tomorrow they will be past ready. Life moves at an amazing tempo for everybody, mainly, of course, for the “natives,” white and black, but also for many visitors, New York buyers, government spotters and checkers, and so on. Trucks rumble over back-orchard lanes and main highways to city markets, all day and all night. It is truly, as a Negro worker commented, “the merriest time of the year.”<sup>131</sup>

The “labor problems” of the 1960s and 70s appeared not only because of cotton mechanization, urban migration, and civil rights activism, but also because Georgia growers lost the ability to make the peach harvest “the merriest time of the year.” They were unable to make up in wages what they lost in atmosphere. Without the community cohesion and relative cash influx that had characterized the harvest in the early twentieth century, peach picking became simply another low-paid job — an economic rather than a social and cultural arrangement. The neighbors that had powered the “neighbor labor” system had become more and more estranged from the power structure and the rural rhythms of the peach harvest. And so, with less power over the local black community, and with fewer neighbors willing to work, Georgia peach growers turned to strangers, aliens.

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“Freezes and pests come and go. It is what it is. But the number one problem for growers today is labor.” Lawton Pearson, a sixth generation peach grower, has invited me to ride with him as he manages field operations. His truck is full of peaches, picked at some time to examine for ripeness, or evidence of curculio, or stink bug, or mildew, and now overflowing the caddy in

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<sup>131</sup> Inez Parker Cumming, “Sweet with Bitter: Georgia’s Peach”, *Georgia Review* II, no. 4 (Winter 1948), 484-485.



between the seats and clattering across the floor when we take a corner. He has just finished complaining about infestations of stink bugs, insects that descend upon orchards at random and puncture the fruit in such a way that the wound only shows up as rot as the fruit speeds to market. “A bug you can’t kill, making damage you can’t see. *That’s a nightmare.*” But it’s nothing compared with the “labor problem,” he says.

Stopping at an orchard, Pearson hastily gathers “la muestra” — the sample — a dozen peaches that demonstrate the size and ripeness he wants that day. His field Spanish is rough but effective with the narrow range of topics he must address. “If you put me down in Mexico and told me to find a bathroom,” he says, “I would be totally lost.” After Lawton talks, showing the peaches he wants, the foreman reiterates Lawton's instructions and the workers snap on their picking bags and disappear into the lush foliage. This same crew has picked this orchard the whole season, an arrangement that encourages the crew to pick carefully, since they will earn more over the course of the season. They reappear frequently, one by one, to dump their half-bushel of peaches into the twenty-bushel bin, which is pulled slowly by a tractor through the orchard. These workers are being paid by the piece, so with each bagload, the picker bends his head to the checker, who rides the wagon with an electronic pen and scans the pen across the tag the picker has on his hat. At the end of the week, Big 6 Farms cuts checks to the workers, who cash them at local banks. Pearson smiles. “If you are Hispanic, you could make a lot of money by cashing checks at local banks.”

Pearson makes the decisions about what and when to pick, but the management of the labor is really up to Israel Aguilar, a prominent member of one of the original Mexican families in middle Georgia. The Aguilars together manage nearly every picking operation in middle Georgia. Most of the workers come from Jalisco or Nayarit; some mine opal in the off-season. At

the season's peak, he has about one hundred workers on the farm, all of them working through the federal H-2A program. Aguilar runs a tight ship, says Pearson. Anyone who drinks too much, or complains about low wages, or quarrels with other workers forfeits his return invitation for the following year, if he's not shipped home immediately.<sup>132</sup>

Mexicans are relative newcomers to Georgia's peach orchards. While undocumented workers from Latin America had been common for some time in other industries, it was not until the 1980s that a combination of factors connected Georgia growers to the global South as well. In Florida, killing freezes every other year from 1981 to 1989 put citrus producers out of business and moved the industry's center of gravity southward toward Miami. Mexicans and Mexican Americans who worked in the orange groves suddenly found themselves jobless.

Meanwhile, in Georgia, over one thousand invitees helped celebrate the dedication of Byron's "Big Peach" in December 1987. Towering one hundred feet over Interstate 75, the twenty-nine-foot steel and vinyl replica would advertise to the nearly forty million travelers who passed by each year that they had reached Peach County. And to all those who had seen the "Peachoid" watertower that had since 1981 hovered over Interstate 85 at Gaffney, South Carolina, Byron's Big Peach came like a retort: *this* is the Peach State. As local businesswoman Helen Rhea Coppedge exulted, "Everybody will know where the best peaches in the United States are grown."<sup>133</sup>

As it turns out, the Big Peach did become an important advertisement for middle Georgia's fruit industry—although not, perhaps, in the manner its promoters expected. The "Ochoa" family, fleeing the destruction of Florida's orange groves, saw the Big Peach and turned off the highway. This family, according to sociologists John Studstill and Laura Nieto-Studstill, who

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<sup>132</sup> Lawton Pearson, interview with the author, 10 July 2009, Lee Pope, GA.

<sup>133</sup> Helen Rhea Coppedge, quoted in "Georgia Peach dedicated," *Fruit South* 9 (1988), 6.

have studied the region, “became the nucleus of a Latin community” in Peach County.<sup>134</sup> Within a few years of the Ochoa’s arrival, Oliver Bateman received a call from a friend in Florida citrus. “I’ve got some Mexicans,” the friend said, explaining that they were “fine people” without work because of the freezes. Would Bateman have a place for them in his peach orchard? Bateman said he would, and Robert Carrazco and nine members of the Carrazco family showed up in May, ready to pick under two conditions: they did not want to work alongside African-Americans, and they wanted to use picking bags. “Praise the Lord!” Bateman exclaimed. “I had tried picking bags one time, and they all bitched and moaned . . . So I was tickled to death.” This request probably reflected experience in Florida groves, where picking bags would have been standard equipment for citrus workers.<sup>135</sup>

The other request, to work apart from blacks, may also have reflected the Carrazcos’ experiences in the rough-and-tumble world of Florida migrant labor, where Mexicans and southern blacks mixed with West Indians, Cubans, and Haitians in unpredictable ways. When Bateman told this story nearly thirty years later, he made no comment on the Carrazcos’ first request, though whether his reticence reflected ignorance or some deeper knowledge of the Carrazcos’ reasons is impossible to know. But this Latino family also needed to demonstrate their superiority; they would have been acutely aware of their position as replacements. In interviews with the Studstills, middle Georgia Latinos made four observations about race relations in the area. First, there was no overt hostility. Second there may have been “some

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<sup>134</sup> John D. Studstill, Laura Nieto-Studstill, “Hospitality and Hostility: Latin Immigrants in Southern Georgia,” in Arthur D. Murphy, Colleen Blanchard, and Jennifer A. Hill, *Latino Workers in the Contemporary South*, Southern Anthropological Society Proceedings (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 73. Ochoa is not the family’s real names, and the authors refer to Peach County as “Fruit County” and Fort Valley as “Peachtown” throughout the piece. The author’s dates are unclear – they say the Ochoas came northward in 1981, but the Big Peach was not constructed for six more years, suggesting either that the Ochoas came up much later (perhaps after the 1989 freeze); that the family invented the Big Peach part of their story later; or that there was an earlier version of the Big Peach, perhaps a painted water tower.

<sup>135</sup> Bateman, interview with the author, 22 February 2008.

jealousy” at the closeness of the Latino crew leaders to the growers. Third, Latinos thought blacks were less willing to work hard, sweaty, low-paying jobs. And fourth, no Latino would work for a black man.<sup>136</sup> They did not elaborate on their reasons.

The Carrazco crew exceeded Bateman’s expectations. They started just at daylight, while it was still cool. They worked as an orderly unit, systematically going through the rows instead of scattering, as Bateman put it, “all over hell,” randomly choosing and skipping trees. They were efficient: the nine of them picked two thousand bushels in the same amount of time it took forty-five of Bateman’s local help. They selected good quality fruit instead of leaving it to the graders to throw out half the pickings because they were too green or bruised. And they did not complain about the heat or the work. “It didn’t take an idiot,” Bateman concluded, “to see that [it] was a vast improvement.” The next year he hired two crews and was just as pleased with the results. Although Bateman gave up his peach operation in the mid-1990s, the Carrazcos continued to visit him occasionally. “They’ve become something like family,” Bateman sighed.<sup>137</sup>

Thus, the Latino labor that began trickling haphazardly into the South in the early 1980s had by the 1990s almost entirely replaced black picking crews. Local growers were universally enthusiastic. Chop Evans, who had some 2,500 acres of peaches in the early 1990s, told an interviewer that the migrant laborers were the “key to success” for his company. He credited his crew leaders with the turnaround, as they had become more professional and legally astute.<sup>138</sup> Middle Georgia peach grower Bill McGehee summed up the sentiments of most growers in 1997, when he called Hispanic workers “the Michael Jordans of farm workers.”<sup>139</sup> They had

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<sup>136</sup> Studstill and Nieto-Studstill, “Hospitality and Hostility,” 78.

<sup>137</sup> Bateman, interview with the author, 22 February 2008.

<sup>138</sup> Laurie Moses, “Chop Evans: Hot On Hydrocooling,” *American Fruit Grower* (June 1992), 4.

<sup>139</sup> Johnathan Burns, “Field of dreams: Migrants no more, Hispanic farm workers make midstate home,” *The Macon Telegraph* (14 August 1997), 1B.

given Georgia growers a *professional* work force. Growers abetted the new workers' acceptance in Peach County with "a concerted effort" to prevent misunderstandings. They explained their situation to the police chief and the Chamber of Commerce, introduced crew leaders to the Kiwanis Club and local churches, helped set up Sunday soccer matches with local parks and recreation officials, helped sponsor an annual health fair, encouraged banks to hire Spanish tellers and stores to stock Mexican food, and worked with the local Catholic Church to set up a migrant services center.<sup>140</sup>

Growers had reason to be so encouraging. In just a few years, they had regained control of the labor market, this time by importing a surplus from another nation. They claimed that they had no other options. One peach farmer assured Studstill and Nieto-Studstill that African-Americans could make ten dollars an hour in local industries and were no longer interested in farm labor. Even student labor for the packing house was increasingly hard to find, the grower said. "No one around here wants to work in peaches anymore."<sup>141</sup> Some local African-Americans agreed. Yet others viewed the transition to Mexican labor less sanguinely. "People will do the work," John Brown told a reporter for *The New York Times*. "I think [the growers] just want to find people who will do it cheaper."<sup>142</sup> Indeed, the trope of hard-working Mexicans and lazy blacks obscured the fact that local African Americans and migrant Mexicans worked in two different labor markets. For Latinos, peach work was an extension of their home labor market, and was therefore quite remunerative.

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<sup>140</sup> Studstill and Nieto-Studstill, "Hospitality and Hostility," 79.

<sup>141</sup> Studstill and Nieto-Studstill, "Hospitality and Hostility," 79.

<sup>142</sup> John Brown, quoted in Peter Applebome, "Georgia harvester is fined \$1 million in alien smuggling," *The New York Times* (8 February 1992), 1; Arthur Brice, "Action against 'pillars of the community' shocks residents," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (8 February 1992), B5; Jeffry Scott, "Lane is one of Georgia's biggest packing companies," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (8 February 1992), B5.

Whatever the availability of local labor, middle Georgia's peach growers would make sure in coming years not to be dependent on it again. Only a few years into using undocumented Mexican migrant labor, the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) worried agricultural employers across the state. The law promised heightened border security, threatening to decrease the flow of undocumented workers. It offered amnesty to anyone who could prove five years of residency or ninety days of agricultural employment, which growers feared would spark a mass exodus from low-end agricultural jobs. It pledged tougher sanctions on employers, making it harder to replace the new "legals" with more illegal migrants.<sup>143</sup> And, as a sop to the farm lobby, IRCA expanded the guest worker program that had been in place since the 1940s, a provision that seemed too cumbersome to offer much aid to southern peach growers.

Georgia's peach farmers had a simple strategy for dealing with the anticipated outflow of workers from agricultural jobs: provide better conditions. "The smart businessman is trying to upgrade his labor and get better productivity," Bill McGehee explained to a reporter. "What makes a consistent labor force is a guy who leaves at the end of the season happy with the way things went."<sup>144</sup> Indeed, at first it seemed the new law would help growers. Robert Carrazco joined 2.3 million fellow Mexicans in applying for legal status after the law went into effect.<sup>145</sup> His new status enhanced his capacity as a crew chief: he could now operate without fear of deportation, and he could cross the border to visit family and recruit more workers from his hometown of Tamazula, Jalisco. Many of Carrazco's counterparts did the same. Carlos Aguilar,

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<sup>143</sup> Jorge Durand, Douglas S. Massey, and Emilio A. Parrado, "The New Era of Mexican Migration to the United States," *The Journal of American History* 86 (September 1999): para. 13

<sup>144</sup> Bill McGehee, quoted in David A. Goldberg, "Migrants' Boon, Farmers' Burden: Amnesty Law May Create Farm Labor Crisis," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (31 July 1989), A-4.

<sup>145</sup> Durand et al, "The New Era of Mexican Migration to the United States," para. 19; Robert Carrazco, Jr., interview with the author, 28 July 2008, Musella, GA.

a foreman for Big Six Farms, used his legal papers to visit his hometown every winter.<sup>146</sup> Not only did IRCA help the crew chiefs of middle Georgia's peach industry, it had little effect on the undocumented labor supply throughout the U.S.—if anything, illegal immigration increased. Instead of moving back and forth seasonally, workers came and stayed. And as they became permanent, they sought to bring their families with them.<sup>147</sup> It seemed that IRCA had changed little.

Then, in June 1991, at the height of the picking season, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) conducted a dramatic raid on Fort Valley's Lane Packing Company. The agency captured and deported 130 Mexicans, found what it described as fraudulent records, and arrested four Lane employees, all Latinos. Accusing the Lanes of running a "little bondage-type operation," the INS saddled them with a \$1.1 million fine, the largest in agency history.<sup>148</sup> Despite the fact that only Mexican employees were arrested, area director Thomas Fischer presented the Lane family, recognized community pillars, as the true international criminals. Together, he alleged, they had smuggled some 250 Mexican workers a month for at least two years, charging them hefty fees for illegal passage, paying them under minimum wage, housing them in substandard dormitories and encouraging them to buy from the company commissary. "Compared to the profits," Fischer maintained, "the penalties are a slap on the wrist. That's why many people get into this instead of drugs."<sup>149</sup> The raid would inhibit illegal employment activities in the southeast, Fischer boasted to *The New York Times*, and "cripple a major

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<sup>146</sup> Johnathan Burns, "Field of Dreams," 1B.

<sup>147</sup> Durand et al, "The New Era of Mexican Migration to the United States," para. 15.

<sup>148</sup> Thomas P. Fischer, quoted in Deborah Scroggins, "INS fines Georgia firm \$1.2 million," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (8 February 1992), A1.

<sup>149</sup> Fischer, quoted in Scroggins, "INS fines Georgia firm \$1.2 million," A1.

smuggling ring.”<sup>150</sup> The loveliest product of southern orchards was again stained by an association with labor exploitation.

Yet aside from making area peach growers “as attentive as attentive can be,” as one grower put it, the INS raid had few immediate consequences.<sup>151</sup> The fine was later negotiated to an undisclosed amount. Fischer, changing his tune, acknowledged in 1993 that the Lanes had been cooperating: “we now feel they will follow the letter of the law,” he affirmed.<sup>152</sup> And Georgia growers continued employing undocumented workers. The middle Georgia peach industry had preserved its good standing in the community. The deported workers were not so fortunate.

The reprieve for growers was short-lived. In 1998, the INS staged Operation “Southern Denial” in the Vidalia onion fields of Tattnall and Toombs Counties. Although the agency had originally planned it as a ten-day, multistage operation, it halted the operation at the growers’ request after the first day. INS agents apprehended only twenty-one workers, but growers complained that many workers never returned and that the onion harvest was severely disrupted.<sup>153</sup> The message was not lost on Georgia peach growers. “They swooped down on the Vidalia onion people while they were digging onions,” Bob Dickey remembered with amazement, “and hell, they just scattered, I mean, ran in the woods!” As the onions “rotted in the field,” middle Georgia peach growers considered what would happen if the INS conducted a similar raid in their orchards. “You couldn't bring them back the next day, and the peaches would rot on the trees,” said Dickey. “So we decided to get a steady supply.”<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Fischer, quoted in Applebome, “Georgia harvester is fined \$1 million in alien smuggling,” 1.

<sup>151</sup> Charles “Chop” Evans, quoted in Moses, “Chop Evans: Hot On Hydrocooling,” 4.

<sup>152</sup> Charles “Chop” Evans, quoted in Towns, “The enduring peach,” D8.

<sup>153</sup> Health, Education and Human Services Division, GAO, “H-2A Agricultural Guest Worker Program: Experiences of Individual Vidalia Onion Growers,” B-28097, (10 September 1998), 9.

<sup>154</sup> Dickey, interview with the author, 28 July 2008.



Shortly thereafter, most Georgia perishable crop growers signed on with the government's H-2A guest worker program, which had been available since 1986 but what growers deemed too cumbersome and expensive to be useful. Fortunately for the Dickeys, Robert Dickey III was a good friend of then U.S. Representative Saxby Chambliss, a native of southwest Georgia and friend of agribusiness.<sup>155</sup> With a skilled foreman in Robert Carrasco and the necessary political connections, the Dickeys' transition was smooth. The actual labor relations changed little, since many of the workers who came as undocumented workers continued to work under the H-2A program.

The program seemed to be a good move for growers, as these Mexican migrants—temporary by definition—became the most stable workforce the peach industry had known for decades. For many growers, close to ninety percent of their workers returned each season. South Carolina grower Chalmers Carr, president of high-volume (and aptly-named) producer Titan Farms, testified to the U.S. House Committee on Agriculture that this low turnover rate translated into greater efficiency and a product that was “the best it has ever been.” Not only that, but Carr felt that his workers took pride in their work and had developed “a feeling of ownership in Titan Peach Farms.”<sup>156</sup> By his estimation, these workers who hailed originally from the rural states of Hidalgo and Nayarit had little interest in settling permanently. “They are happy,” Carr insisted, “to have a safe means of travel to my farm, work for a limited period of time, [and] return to their homes.”<sup>157</sup> The House Committee on Agriculture would have to trust Carr on the happiness and the efficiency of his workers, because none testified.

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<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> Dickey, interview with the author, 22 February 2008; Statement of Chalmers R. Carr III, President Titan Peach Farms, 28 January 2004, in U.S. House, Committee on Agriculture, Temporary Guest Worker Proposals in the Agriculture Sector Hearing (CIS-NO: 2004-H161-7).

<sup>157</sup> Carr Statement, 28 January 2004.

It is important to unpack this image of the happy, efficient guestworker. On the one hand, growers correctly pointed to the low turnover rate as a great improvement. The same crews returned year after year, growing accustomed to working together. Furthermore, many of the same people did the pruning in January, then the thinning of early fruit in March and April, and finally the picking during the summer. This fact meant that workers *wanted* to prune and thin skillfully: their wages in the summer depended on the fruit's size, abundance, and accessibility on the tree. With the state's indispensable help, growers had discovered a highly-skilled horticultural workforce that had a stake in the success of the entire operation, not just the picking. This labor force, furthermore, served at the growers' discretion. As subjects of a highly regulated state labor program, guest workers' options were limited: they may have moved up within the farm operation (some pickers became tractor drivers, for instance), but they could not sell their dexterity and knowhow to the highest bidder.

And then there is the question of motivation. Employers sometimes portrayed Hispanic workers as naturally suited to field labor; they just work harder than local blacks, the thinking went. And they pointed out that whereas the African-American labor force was made up of teenagers and "derelicts," to use Dickey's word, Mexican workers were more likely to be men in their twenties and thirties who had committed themselves not to a day of casual labor but to an entire season, since workers return home early at their own cost. But growers seemed reluctant to discuss the differences in motivation for the two labor pools. Agricultural labor rarely, if ever, offered southern blacks a chance for significant advancement, and in addition bore the stink of slavery and Jim Crow. For Mexican guest workers, however, seasonal jobs such as peach picking enabled many to improve their status and living conditions at home. Temporary employment in the U.S. has allowed workers to build bigger houses, pay for school fees, and purchase consumer

goods such as radios and washing machines. Although many have cast doubt on the long-term benefits for “sending communities,” migration has often been worth the risk for the short run.<sup>158</sup>

In this sense, the H-2A program did have some advantages over the *sindocumento* alternative, especially in its stability and predictability. “Under H-2 contracts,” anthropologist David Griffith notes, “workers at least know where they will be working, what they will be doing, and approximately how much money they will make.”<sup>159</sup>

To acknowledge that the program had some relative advantages is a far cry from claiming that guest workers were “happy,” however. While H-2A regulations made some pieces of this transnational labor arrangement more predictable, it still bore a strong resemblance to illegal forms. Some of the irregularities came to light in a class action lawsuit brought by workers against the members of the Georgia Growers Association. The GGA contracted with Dan Bremer and his company AgWorks, Inc., who then hired Ricardo Rodriguez to “locate and recruit” H-2A workers. Rodriguez in turn hired his own agents to recruit workers from their home villages in Mexico. After paying Rodriguez’ agents a “recruiting fee” in order to be selected, workers then traveled to Monterrey at their own expense (about \$50). There workers paid from \$45 to \$100 to the Mexican bank Banamex as a “visa reciprocity fee,” another \$100 to Ricardo Rodriguez for the U.S. Consulate’s H-2A visa application, \$35 for visa processing, and an additional \$120 for transportation from Monterrey to Georgia. The suit charged that the growers never reimbursed the workers, which then caused their wages to fall below the legal minimum.<sup>160</sup> After a series of

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<sup>158</sup> Jeffrey H. Cohen, *The Culture of Migration in Southern Mexico*, vol. 1 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 111, 121; Leon Fink, *The Maya of Morganton: Work and Community in the Nuevo New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 168-169; Griffith, *American Guestworkers*, chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>159</sup> Griffith, *American Guestworkers*, 163.

<sup>160</sup> Juan Duque-Tovar, et al, v. Georgia Growers Association, et al, “Memorandum of Law in Support of Plaintiffs’ Motion for Conditional Certification and for Court-Authorized Notice,” Civil Action No. 1:03-CV-128-2 (WLS), U.S. District Court Middle Division of Georgia, Albany Division, (15 December 2003), 15.

motions and counter motions, the parties reached an undisclosed settlement. Regardless of the outcome, the *Duque-Tovar* lawsuit suggests how labyrinthine — and how open to abuses — the H-2A system was.

Furthermore, peach picking has always been unpleasant and poorly-paid work. For Angelo Surez, the job was his hardest in twenty-five years of field labor. “The sun is hot, and baskets get heavy after a while,” Surez complained. “And the gnats fly in my mouth and up my nose.”<sup>161</sup> One telling indication of Mexicans’ supposed preference for field labor is the second generation of “settled out” migrants and their career choices. Robert Carrazco’s son graduated from the University of Georgia in 2008 with a business degree and now works in Atlanta.<sup>162</sup> Antonio Barajas hoped that his children would find something easier. “Picking peaches is hard work,” Antonio’s son Tony explained. “[My father] wants me to do something else.”<sup>163</sup> In other words, once settled in the U.S., Latinos left the work for the same reasons African Americans abandoned it. Within the U.S. labor market, migrant farm work did not offer anywhere close to a living wage.

These ambitions notwithstanding, growers have implied that the stability of the Mexican workforce stemmed from the positive relations between crews and owners. Big Six farm operator Bill McGehee told *The Macon Telegraph* that he thought the peach growers had learned from past mistakes. “It’s better for all of us,” he explained, “if we take care of our workers.”<sup>164</sup> In Fort Valley, according to local nurse Helen Hudson, growers had established a reputation as leaders—at least in comparison to the vegetable and tobacco fields of south Georgia—in offering

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<sup>161</sup> Angelo Surez, quoted in Towns, “The enduring peach,” D8.

<sup>162</sup> Robert Carrazco, interview with the author, 28 July 2008, Musella, GA.

<sup>163</sup> Tony Barajas, quoted in Sally Scherer, “Taking root: one family’s journey,” *The Macon Telegraph* (6 August 1995), 8E.

<sup>164</sup> Bill McGehee, quoted in Jodi White and Sally Scherer, “‘Invisible work force’ lacking necessities,” *The Macon Telegraph* (6 August 1995), 9A.

decent living conditions. “The farmers value them here,” Hudson maintained. “[The workers] will crawl to the field and not miss work unless they absolutely have to.”<sup>165</sup> Chalmers Carr pointed to the invitations he and his family received every year to his workers’ hometowns to witness the benefits of working on his farm. “These workers,” Carr declared, “have become part of my business and my life, as I have become part of theirs.”<sup>166</sup>

There is a subtle displacement at work when growers present this labor system as a matter of personal relationships. For though growers speak glowingly of their current workforce, their happiness hangs by the thin thread of federal assistance. Indeed, with the exception of the POW labor program, the federal government has never played a larger role in the industry’s labor relations. The state’s implicit support via Jim Crow laws has given way to only slightly more direct intervention: H-2A is a kind of immigration policy loophole that allows employers to continue drawing from sending areas of Latin America. And yet growers, then and now, have used strikingly similar language — language that obscures the structural dynamics at play — when discussing labor relations.

To point out this displacement is not to deny the sincerity of growers’ feelings toward their workers, nor even to dismiss the benefits experienced by some workers, but it does highlight the long history of this approach to labor relations in the black belt. More than a century before Chalmers Carr testified to Congress about his hard-working Latinos, J.H. Hale made similar observations of the “splendid” faithfulness of his African-American labor. In this light, *Fortune Magazine’s* lighthearted portrayal of the Georgia peach grower as a “planter” was more penetrating than it seemed. For peach growers shared much with their cotton-farming counterparts: they managed expansive plantations, drew from the same impoverished labor pool,

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<sup>165</sup> Helen Hudson, quoted in Burns, “Field of dreams,” 1B.

<sup>166</sup> Carr Statement, 28 January 2004.

and described their labor relations in terms of paternalistic responsibility rather than social and political power.

Peach growers had regained the harvest festival, albeit somewhat artificially, with imported workers. Again, the peach harvest was an economic oasis, a welcome influx of cash into a rural economy — but this time it was so for the economies of Nayarit and Jalisco. And again the workers' have a home away from home: the labor camp.

For some growers, worker housing has been a piecemeal affair. Robert Dickey bought some old houses and renovated a motel in Roberta, a few miles away from his packing shed in Musella. But at Lane Packing Company, the housing is part of the main complex and an integral part of the tour with Nick Strickland. The jeep pulls the visitor trailer not only through the pecan and peach orchards but also through guestworker housing, where the recording assures visitors that all the workers are there legally. Construction style has not changed much since the days of Camp Wheeler — long, low barracks like the 20x100 standard issue buildings at Wheeler, though with green metal roofs and the relative luxury of propane tanks and air conditioners. The few mountain bikes resting outside a building with a large screen porch suggest that these men have their own version of “limited parole.” In place of a commissary, the Lane camp has a cinderblock building labeled “Mexican Cafe / Cafe Mexicano” — also run by Mexican immigrants so as to be sensitive to “national tastes.”



*Figures 19, 20, 21, 22*

Guestworker Facilities at Lane Packing Company, Fort Valley, GA. Photographs by the author, summer 2009.

In 1925, as the partisans of Peach County celebrated their new polity, Jennie Vance had offered a vision of a utopian “wonder county.” It would be a place free of corruption and dishonesty, but also deeply compassionate. As evidence of this, Vance cited their plans for a “Kind Farm,” a place for the poor with well-maintained buildings, green lawns, orderly flower and vegetable gardens. It would offer the destitute, she declared, “the happiness of a home.” We have no evidence that Peach County ever maintained such an institution, but in a way her vision has been fulfilled in the labor camps of the region’s peach orchards: they offer some of the comforts and kindnesses of a home, but not a home. The permanence of the South’s signature product depends upon impermanence, a transfusion of rural Mexico into rural Georgia, a transitory repopulation of the rural South and a temporary recapturing of the harvest festival.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION

History is not the past, any more than anthropology is the different. History is a conscious relationship between past and present; anthropology is a conscious relationship between familiar and strange. In re-presenting the past, in re-constructing the different, there is no avoiding our present or ourselves. . . . Both the gone and the other are a “mirror for man.”<sup>1</sup>

This story of the Georgia peach has orbited around a series of key landscapes: a nursery, a home, a plantation, a market, a stage, and a labor camp. Since the mythology of the peach remains strong in the South, and since, as Greg Denning says, “there is no avoiding our present,” I’d like to invite you to revisit some of these places.

The Augusta National Golf Club is an emerald in the rough. With the possible exception of St. Andrews in Scotland, it is the most famous golf course on the planet, hailed not only for its playability but also for its ornamental plantings – the work of horticulturists. We can watch the Masters’ on television in April, and it’s all lucent greens, tall pines, bright azaleas, curving fairways, arched bridges over perfect water hazards, stately magnolias lining the avenue to the clubhouse. If it’s not April, we can visit the tournament’s website and download a Masters’ screensaver for our computer so that our unproductive moments at work can be redeemed with reminders of a place we’ll never be able to go without a stroke of luck. The National is one of the most exclusive clubs in the nation. Membership is by invitation only, and only for men. The first African American joined in 1990; women have only visited the course as guests. Even the

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<sup>1</sup> Greg Denning, *Islands and Beaches: Discourse on a Silent Land: Marquesas, 1774-1880* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1980), 2–3.



professionals who play the Masters' are not allowed inside except during the tournament, and only tournament winners are given honorary memberships.

Like the organization itself, the course is surprisingly surreptitious. Hidden from view by unruly bamboo, privet and weed tree hedges, the National is tucked away about three miles from Augusta's downtown amid the aging strip malls of Washington Road. Arby's, Zaxby's, Pep Boys, Publix – a suburban wasteland houses one of the South's most precisely managed landscapes. The course is an oasis in an aesthetic desert.

A century and a half ago, the Augusta National was another kind of gem in the rough: Fruitland Nursery. The holes at the National pay tribute to Berckmans' work there: Redbud, Pink Dogwood, Yellow Jasmine, Flowering Peach, Azelea, Camellia, Magnolia. While the grounds today demonstrate what is aesthetically possible in the South and in the world of golf, in the nineteenth century Berckmans had even more ambitious goals. He wanted to transform the South, to make its landscapes more lovely, its farms more diverse, its people more prosperous, its society more settled. All of this, he believed, could be accomplished through the art of horticulture.

Berckmans found the exemplar of his horticultural ideal in Samuel Henry Rumph of Marshallville, Georgia, who, like Berckmans, left his homes to us. The first house is a lovely country home about two miles outside of Marshallville, off Juice Plant Road. A crumbling stone arch looms over a wrought iron gate and a large granite block that once bore the Victorian shoes of ladies alighting from their carriages. The arch perfectly frames the entryway of the house, and other details indicate a sure aesthetic hand: the two chimneys with decorative brickwork, the spindled porch railing and ornamental woodwork on the eaves, the sweeping porch and floor to ceiling windows. The landscape, too, was thoughtfully arranged. Stately magnolias—that

ubiquitous symbol of white southern wealth—flank the walkway. Aging boxwoods line the porch, and a large hemlock shades the northern side of the house. Willow Lake, where Rumph lived in the nineteenth century, was in its day a paragon of rural sophistication. In those days Samuel Rumph embodied the ideals of southern horticulture, in his gentlemanly manner of living, his horticultural work as the breeder of the Elberta peach, and in his business acumen as a nurseryman and shipper of peaches.

In Marshallville proper, Rumph's second house is a startling two story structure, with eight Corinthian columns, symmetrical porches, four chimneys and a parapet, all in red brick and gleaming white masonry. Ornamentals—dogwoods and boxwoods especially—surround this home as well, but unlike the landscaping of the country home, which cocoons the house as if to protect it, these trees yield to the mansion as the dramatic focal point, like attendants in a royal court. The historical marker out front explains informs you that this was the home of Samuel Rumph, the “father of Georgia's commercial peach industry.” After his first wife's death in 1892, Rumph married Pearlie Reese, and had a house built befitting her desires, her given name, and the success he had won in the highly competitive New York City produce markets. Together, the two homes tell a parable of horticultural progress. Start in the country with some fruit trees; end in town in a house early twentieth-century newspaper articles routinely described as “palatial.”

It was not a Georgia boy who made the peach industry what it was, but a Connecticut Yankee, John Howard Hale of Glastonbury. Today his hometown is an oasis in the midst of metropolitan sprawl. It is a landscape of gentle hills, forested gorges, riverside meadows, and more colonial-era structures than almost any other place in the U.S. Scattered among these idyllic scenes, pruned and trellised fruit farms lure New Englanders and New Yorkers in late

summer to pick and purchase fresh cherries, blueberries, raspberries, apples, plums, apricots, peaches. This is an iconic New England landscape, but there is hardly a Yankee name among the orchards. Berruti, Botticello, Bussa, Carini, Dondero, Draghi, Preli: Glastonbury is a little Italy in central Connecticut.

Fort Valley, meanwhile, is Georgia's version of a rustbelt town. There are traces of its days as a bustling hub: the empty warehouses, the dilapidated freight depot, the wise old Victorian homes, the tangled intersection of half a dozen state highways, and, above all, the railroad tracks. The southeastern edge of downtown is a great wasteland of tracks, the old depot standing isolated like an outpost of civilization. Steel and creosote rive the city's center, going east, west, south, north. North to distant markets, north to cities heavy with capital.

The phrase, "the other side of the tracks," still means something in Fort Valley. The railroad marks off territory. On the northern side is the "historic district," with the wide avenues, spacious lawns, and filigreed verandas of the town's Victorian-era prosperity. To the south is the old African American section, with more modest homes on narrower streets. Faded purple and yellow "wildcat" pawprints on the streets show the way to Fort Valley State University, which anchors the black side of town. Once a vocational school in the Hampton-Tuskegee tradition, the school is now essentially a community college – with a strong agricultural component – for local African Americans. Overlooking downtown is an old fashioned water tower, taller than any building, floating beatifically above the town's divisions. Painted white and emblazoned with a yellow-red peach and green leaves, the tower boasts that Fort Valley is "Georgia's Peach City."

The shared history of Glastonbury and Fort Valley is almost entirely obscured now, but once Hale knit the two places together with his vision, his capital, and his innumerable trips between them on railway coaches. The legacy of that moment in the 1890s and 1900s when

boosters and investors established the peach industry can still be read in Fort Valley's railroad tracks. The tracks brought in outsiders looking to modernize the place and divided the town along racial lines.

The railroad tracks also connected the Georgia peach industry to distant markets, and as the industry got big, growers had to learn about those distant places. Today, one is as likely to find Chilean fruit in a Georgia grocery store. In June 2011, as the best Georgia peaches were ripening, grocery retailer Trader Joe's sent out a flyer informing me that they had fresh California peaches for sale at my local Athens store. "Our supplier is a third generation California tree-fruit grower," the ad said. "For this box, they're providing us with big fruit that's juicy and incredibly flavorful." The advertisement plays to my need to feel a direct connection to the farmer himself. I am supposed to imagine a farm family out in a sunny orchard, carefully selecting fruit and placing them in the Trader Joe's box. And lest I start thinking of the two thousand miles that box must travel, the ad assures me that the fruit are shipped to the store "very cold," keeping the fruit "firm" and also "really ripe." Refrigerated transit, in other words, has shortened the distance from farm to table.

If you do want local peaches, I know just the place. We'll head down Miami Valley Road – the name is a heritage of that moment of northern investment, when horticulturists from Ohio's Miami Valley descended upon Fort Valley in the 1890s – a two-lane passage through a typical Georgia countryside: old farm buildings, soybean fields, peach trees, pecans. And then Lane Southern Orchards explodes out of the otherwise sleepy landscape with a sixty-foot sign advertising peaches, pecans, strawberries, sweet corn, and Indian River citrus; an elaborate gate guarded by two man-sized fiberglass peaches; a rectangular pond with ducks and a fountain; and the two-story packing shed itself. This is more than a packing shed; it's an agritourism complex.

Inside, we can eat lunch with a chaser of soft-serve peach ice cream; buy peaches, pecans, peach wine, pecan brittle, and other seasonal goods; send your children to frolic at the playground lined with antique tractors; and tour the packinghouse and orchards. Lane runs a high-tech operation. We can see this technological tour de force by strolling the catwalk that hovers above the packing line. Automatic conveyors move the fruit through washers, defuzzers, and waxers; a sizing machine uses digital photographs to sort the fruit into quarter-inch categories; another device applies a PLU sticker for use in supermarkets; yet another assembles cardboard boxes with hot glue.

Amid all this whirring machinery, people work. Unlike in some industries, the workers in this packing shed are not invisible but part of the attraction. They endure the constant stares of curious visitors. White, black, and Latino women sort the fruit into Ones and Twos — the best fruit will go to supermarket customers and the rest to local farm stands. Further down the line, Latino men hand-pack every box of Lane peaches, while a sign on the catwalk explains that hand-packing minimizes bruising and allows the company to customize orders.

Later, on the farm tour, an elderly man known only as “Red” drives your shaded cart through the migrant labor housing, while the pre-recorded voiceover emphasizes the workers’ temporary, legal presence under the auspices of the federal H-2A guestworker program, and their comfortable, clean housing — they have their own lavanderia and cafeteria. Interspersed with informative explanations of their modern growing techniques and advertisements for various delicacies back at the store, carefully selected songs drive home another point. Alabama’s “Song of the South” takes you to back to the singer’s childhood as the son of a cotton farmer so poor they did not know that the stock market had crashed. “Gone, gone with the wind,” they sing in the chorus. “There ain’t nobody looking back again.” This is followed up by Alan Jackson’s

“Where I Come From,” in which the protagonist, a trucker, tries to explain himself to a range of interlocutors from other places (New Jersey, California, Michigan). “Where I come from, it’s cornbread and chicken,” he sings, “a lotta front porch pickin’.” The penultimate song is “Midnight Train to Georgia,” a 1973 Motown number performed by Gladys Knight and the Pips. The song takes place in Los Angeles, where the female narrator has fallen in love with a man from Georgia. Her lover tells her that he’s returning to his home, to find “what’s left of his world . . . a simpler place and time.” The tour closes out, naturally enough, with Ray Charles’ famous rendition of “Georgia On My Mind,” now the official song of the state of Georgia.

Together the songs highlight the agrarian South, a place and time lost to us moderns, despite the fact that the tour itself reinforces the modernity of the orchards: the irrigation, the new varieties, the chemicals, the efficient labor source. The implication is that a visit to this peach and pecan orchard quite literally puts the South in your mouth. Peaches are quintessentially southern, a Georgia specialty.

Except, of course, that they are not. The fact that Lane Southern Orchards now sells Indian River Citrus is not just a marketing scheme to attract year-round business. In 2006, the Lane family entered into what they described as a “partnership” with B&H Georgia Orchards, which despite its name is a Florida-based company owned by the Banack and Hazel families of Vero Beach. Having made their fortune in “Indian River Citrus,” the Banacks and Hazels are now apparently part-owners of Lane Packing (the details of the arrangement are not available to the public), which means that outsiders have a significant stake in Georgia’s most famous crop.

The picking and packing of Georgia peaches depends not only on outside capital but also on workers who do not live here. They are guests of the state and of the growers, who are attempting to treat them well. But the entire arrangement hangs upon poverty and powerlessness

– though now displaced some 1,800 miles away in Mexico. A hundred years ago, Georgia peaches came to market courtesy of African Americans, who for white southerners and northerners alike were simple-minded “darkeys” with nothing better to do. If whites inquired at all, they tended to explain black poverty in terms of spendthrift personal habits. Today, the circumstances of guestworker poverty are easier to ignore, because they are so distant. But if the places of the rural South are to be whole and inhabited – if there was anything true in the place-making visions of southerners – they will have to be more inclusive visions than the ones that drove development in past decades.

So, to return to the original question, why do southerners cling to peaches? The fruit emerged as a viable agricultural commodity at a moment when the South was desperately in need of a new face, a new kind of reputation. The peach and its cultural resonances helped to erase the ugly South with its African American poverty, environmental degradation, and ignorance. And growers and boosters achieved this cultural feat even as the cultivation of the peach depended on the social and economic structures of the cotton South.

All of which should remind us, again, that agriculture *is* culture. The stories we tell and the pictures we paint about hunger and farming have a way of opening certain doors and closing others. The southern horticultural reform movement, which narrowed into the Georgia peach industry, was, ultimately, a racially exclusive vision of development. And today, as the South faces all-too familiar questions about its current low-wage non-white workforce – undocumented Latin Americans – losing the real story is not something we can afford to do.

My hope is that the next time we bite into a peach, or hear Lauren Alaina belting out Georgia peaches, or pass that monstrosity of a watertower they call the “Peach Orb” along

Interstate 85, that something of this complicated, ridiculous, broken story resonates in our minds.

As the Argentine proverb has it, *Si te gusta el durazno, bancate la pelusa.*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> If you like the peach, deal with the fuzz. I am indebted to Pablo Lepegna for sharing this proverb with me.



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