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MAKING SOUTHERN SANDHILLS BLOOM

BY FREDERICK J. HASKIN



THIS is a country made of sand, rolled into long ridges, festooned with wire grass, which nothing will eat, and decorated here and there with a crooked pine tree, not worth cutting down. It looks like the poorest farming land in the world, and for a long time it was taken at its face value. According to a saying, if a rabbit wanted to cross this country he had to carry his provisions with him.

If Bre'r Rabbit came this way now he could camp beside some of the finest sweet potato and truck patches in the country; he could find vineyards of sweet grapes that covered hundreds of acres, and his bobbing tail would be multiplied a million times in the bursting bolls of the cotton fields. For the Sandhills have been transformed. In ten years a waste has been made a productive farm country. There are still thousands of acres to be reclaimed, but their productivity has been proved, and this is the story of the men that made the Sandhills blossom.

First of them was Dr. Seaman A. Knapp, government expert, and rural philosopher. There are probably people in the Carolina hills who never heard that Teddy went to Africa, and are still ignorant of Bryan's fondness for grape juice, but there are none who do not remember and revere Seaman A. Knapp. He found a community of Highland Scotchmen living in the valleys and bottoms, where they raised enough food for their own consumption. The vast rolling areas of the Sandhills had never felt the bite of a plow. They were regarded as fit for nothing, after the timber had been cut.

SAW SANDHILLS' FUTURE

Dr. Knapp knew that Boston got all its truck from a sand flat and New York from a sand bar—namely Long Island. The truck section back of Norfolk is made of sand, and so is Florida, which supplies a nation with winter vegetables. He knew that the Sandhills had a future, not only in truck but in corn and cotton, both of which would grow in the sand if properly fertilized. But these people had never used fertilizer, and, furthermore, they had no money with which to buy it, for they sold almost nothing. Dr. Knapp had to build up the rudiments of commerce before he could do anything for agriculture. He began by stimulating the people in every way to put their products on the market and to raise "money crops."

Once some people came to him for a contribution toward holding a bazaar in order to make money for a neighborhood church. He asked them what they would sell at the bazaar. They said they would make things to sell. Dr. Knapp saw his chance to get in a lesson in practical economics. He pointed out that if members of the community made things, sold

them to each other, and used the money for a community enterprise, they were producing exactly nothing. Their time was wasted. He therefore, made his contribution only on the condition that it be used to plant the ground where the church was to be built in cotton. All the neighbors were to help care for the patch. When the cotton was harvested, the proceeds would be devoted to a building fund. Dr. Knapp's project carried, and the whole community had a practical demonstration of how to raise and market money crops.

ADDED HIGH-GRADE CORN

Dr. Knapp also distributed high-grade seed corn, and persuaded the farmers to plant it by promising to buy all they raised at \$2 a bushel. He never had to pay this price, because all the other farmers were envious of the tall, heavy crop which grew from the "fancy" corn and promptly bought all that was harvested for seed. So corn planting spread apace, and already the farms were reaching up the hillsides and out of the bottoms.

The cotton business got its big boost when some young men with money came South looking for plantations. They went first to the famous Albemarle County, and asked the price of the rich cotton lands in that State. They found they could buy all they wanted for \$100 or \$200 an acre, but they had been instructed to pay only \$20. So they went to the Sandhills where the soil seemed much the same, and bought great tracts of the rolling uplands. Here, to the amazement of the natives, they covered hundreds of acres with growing cotton. Other men with capital followed, and also others without capital. Both classes generally succeeded. Cotton became the money crop of the Sandhills.

The most romantic incident in the upbuilding of the hill country, however, was the taming of the scuppernong grape. This sweet and juicy fruit is a native of the swamps and creek bottoms in the Sandhill country. Its vines tangle themselves over vast acres, and bear great quantities of the fruit, which is pale pink, and grows in clusters of three. The old-time Scotch settlers quickly acquired a fondness for this delicious wild grape, and transplanted it to their door yards. Nearly every homestead had its scuppernong vine somewhere in the yard, from which the fresh fruit was gathered and eaten. Some of these vines covered almost an acre of ground, and produced far more grapes than the family could use; but no one ever thought of marketing them. They are extremely perishable, and too sweet to preserve with sugar.

TURNUED GRAPES INTO WINE

There is, however, one other time-honored way of using the grape, and it occurred to a certain man from Norfolk who visited the Sandhill country that the