

Kite Report Was Bad News For Pineland Dwelling

by Elizabeth M. Perinchief
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IN 1911 THE LEGISLATURE granted a \$2000 appropriation to the Department of Charities and Corrections for research in hereditary feeble-mindedness. The area selected was the Pine Belt, but unfortunately "Pineys" was used as a term of reference and the general public erroneously made "Piney" synonymous with mental deficiency. In the course of time, people residing in the Barrens built up a natural resentment to any outside investigation or infringement on their privacy.

The report specifically stated that conditions depicted therein were *not* confined to "The Pines" and, by no means were all dwellers in the Belt of the type shown. "The existing conditions are known ... and recognized by residents in the area who are hoping and striving for improving these conditions." The names and locations used were all fictitious.

Mr. Joseph Byers, the Commissioner, stated that "the isolation of the community and its people, unaffected by currents of social intercourse, tended to develop anti-social and unmoral conditions." In-breeding and promiscuity coupled with an almost animal instinct for survival and freedom from any restraint produced several degenerate families whose actions scandalized their respectable neighbors and who were a constant source of creeping "perversion" and perpetuating mentally defective strains.

Several children lived in shacks with a woman and successive male companions - or vice versa - to whom they may or may not have been married, but to whom each could have had blood-line ties. The women were not prostitutes. They were adamantly defensive of their men, who were often abusive. But, they saw no wrong in having a "frolic" with another man, nor did they object to their own man's wanderings. Children raised in this atmosphere had no example of moral conduct, saw no need to alter the pattern of existence, and so continued to perpetuate and spread this "contamination".

Existence was basically hand to mouth. Wants were simple: Cleanliness practically unheard of and venereal disease rampant. "Familia feeble-mindedness" cloaked with a naive shrewdness, was prevalent.

Miss Elizabeth Kite did much of the investigating. She cites "a forlorn child woman of low grade mentality whose reproductive instincts alone were unimpaired." She tells of one incident when the husband swore at Mag over some soup she had cooked and said "I'd like to know what I ever married you for". To which Mag replied "Cause ol' Dory Foster made you". That made the husband madder and he broke the soup plate over her head. When the couple was arrested some time later for instigating the children to breaking into homes and smashing and scattering the possessions, the father was glad of a legal opportunity to leave. Mag, having mothered 11 children, 2 illegitimate, and 4 in State Mental Institutions, said she'd "get out and get another man". She was eventually put in State custody where her limited industrial abilities were turned to profitable account and where she could not reproduce. The whereabouts of six of her children, all feeble-minded or moronic, were unknown.

Another investigative report is centered around a descendant of a well respected Quaker family who had coupled with a mentally defective "Pine" strain. "The man of imbecile intelligence had a distinctive sense of decency but his wife was of notorious degenerative stock, of slightly higher mentality than her husband, good looking and sprightly with an utter lack of decency." The seven children were of undetermined paternity, since various men and relatives frequented the shack and were shared by mother and daughter. The father and five children were burned to death in a fire when he poured oil in a wood stove. Through the action of concerned neighbors, the mother and daughter were placed in permanent custody and the surviving son, with a low mental age, was placed with relatives where he was responding to loving care, proper attention and training.

Mr. Johnstone, Director of the Training School at Vineland, in summarizing the Pine Belt report pointed out the "menace of unprotected feeble-minded girls at large in a community who are unmoral rather than immoral". He referred to such areas in the Pines communities as "plague spots" of congenital rather than pathological feeble-mindedness. He advocated female sterilization, non-parole for incorrigible degenerates, expanded institutional care, training and release, under strict supervision, of the productive feeble-minded of "favorable temperamental traits".

Needless to say the release of this report in 1913 created a flurry of approbation and criticism. The "Piney" who came to "town" infrequently was looked on with apprehension and distrust. He became the butt of jokes and derision through misunderstanding, bias and hypocrisy. The towns and cities had just

as many degenerates and feeble-minded. There were over 12,300 wards of the State in 1913. The sparsely populated Pinelands probably provided but a fraction of the inmates, but because of their isolation it had been easier to single them out for research. Ironically, Burlington County, largest in the State, had the highest proportion of State wards to population.