

The Gum Naval Stores Industry Of Dixie

by

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TUCKED away on the market pages of the daily newspaper is a small paragraph captioned: "NAVAL STORES MARKET". It is datelined, "SAVANNAH, GA."

In the paragraph are letters such as X, WW, WG, after which is a figure, say, 6.75.

Actually, many people believe that Uncle Sam's Navy is purchasing secret material or at least the quotations are in code, thus the X, WW, and WG. Could these designations stand for bell bottom trousers, sixteen inch cannons or deck plates? The answer is no.

Those market quotations are results of the daily bidding and trading in two of the oldest agricultural products in this country . . . Spirits of Gum Turpentine and Gum Rosin which come only from the living slash and longleaf pine trees.

Gum Turpentine itself doesn't come directly from the tree. Gum Turpentine is a by-product of a pale, yellow, sticky substance that oozes slowly from the tree after it has been chipped or tapped. The name of this substance is Oleoresin, which is collected in small cups attached to the tree. Turpentine farmers call this Oleoresin, "dip" or "gum". The contents are emptied into large barrels which are hauled to a distillery for processing into Gum Turpentine. There's a residue after this processing and this material solidifies about 24 hours after a charge is turned out. This is Gum Rosin, of which there are 13 grades ranging from a transparent pale yellow to black. The X above stands for extra while the WW is waterwhite and the WG is for Windowglass, three of the top grades of rosin. It is sold on the 100 pound basis while turpentine by the gallon. The 6.75 means rosin brought \$6.75 per hundred that day.

The woods producing dip are located in only five states. They are: Georgia, South Carolina, Florida, Alabama and Mississippi. Only two species of pines produce this oleoresin for commercial purposes: The longleaf and the slash pine tree.

In these green slash and longleaf pine forests of the South, close to 300,000 men are engaged in one of the world's oldest agricultural enterprises. Nature has supplied the crop. Man applies his ingenuity and muscles.

The early colonists used the pine tar and pitch to caulk the seams of their wooden vessels. History says Noah caulked his Ark with the pine products. The Pnoenician mariners sailed in wooden ships likewise caulked. Thus, the term "Naval Stores" was applied to the industry. Today, however, gum turpentine and rosin have usurped the title as both go into hundreds of commercial products and both have many uses in their own right.

Pine trees are farmed. The forests are worked in crops, a crop being composed of 10,000 faces. Unlike the dirt farmer, the gum farmer doesn't have any spring plowing. He plows, however, but not to break the soil. He plows fire lines to protect his forests from the bugaboo of all timber—the woods fire. The gum farmer hasn't any seed to plant unless he wants to set out



A stand of longleaf pine being turpented.



In the language of the Gum Farmer, this is a "Hocver Wagon" which is used extensively in the "Piney Woods" to haul the dip from the trees to a central collection point. In this photo the wagon is loaded with old cups which are brought in about every two years to be boiled and repaired.

saplings to reclaim idle, once-cultivated acres or those eroded. Nature sees to most of his re-seeding problems. He must certainly protect them though.

Georgia is the largest producing state. Florida is next. Georgia produces 74% of the country's annual production. The nation's gum crop has been valued as high as \$60,000,000. Like all agriculture ventures, there have been lean seasons and healthy ones.

Many turpentine farmers begin chipping when the tree reaches nine inches DBH. This is the size recommended by the U. S. Forest Service, at which tapping operations should begin. Some of the more far-sighted and progressive farmers wait for eleven inch diameters before tapping.

With the first breath of Spring, operations begin and they conclude generally late in November. The gum circulates more freely in the warm season of the year.

On trees that are being worked, one fresh "streak" is put on each week, starting at the bottom and working up the trunks. The workers use a sharp, short instrument known as a "hack" for scarifying the trees during the first three years of operation. For

the next three years, he employs a longer instrument with a similar sharp cutting edge known as a "puller". These workers are so adept that it is a common occurrence for one man to handle 5,000 to 10,000 trees a week.

Cups that collect the oleoresin, or crude gum, are attached to the tree just beneath the streak or wound. As the cups become filled, workers walk among the trees and empty the gum into buckets. The contents are dumped into barrels. The full barrels



A typical scene in the "Piney Woods" of Dixie. This worker known as a dipper is collecting the Gum from the cups.



Shown here are a dip crew and a puller (at far right) putting on a new streak.

are then hauled to a processing plant for distillation into Gum Turpentine and Gum Rosin. This substance, when cool, hardens into varying shades of hard, brittle, semi-transparent material.

On a commercial front, both commodities go into hundreds of products, and there are many uses. The most outstanding use for Gum Spirits is as a paint thinner. It penetrates the surface and anchors the paint. Rosin goes chiefly into soap and paper.

When a tree has passed its period of usefulness for turpentine (each face doesn't exceed 90 inches in height), the gum farmer thins these trees out of his woods, for poles, cross ties and lumber.

Primarily though, gum farmers operate for turpentine, and this other business is entirely incidental.

Whenever three or more Americans meet they invariably form a club or association, a visiting British journalist once wrote for his newspaper back home. Of course, that is a slight exaggeration but in that, there is some truth.

Scan the telephone "yellow" section of an American city or town and you'll see listed numerous clubs, unions, groups . . . from Lovers of Rose bushes to the Society of Lonely Bachelors.

The Gum Naval Stores Industry is no exception. Almost from Colonial days, Turpentine operators have met and formed associations. For a number of reasons many died out after a few years of life.



A close-up of a turpentine pine. The white substance has dried on the face and is known as "scrape" which is gathered in the late winter months.

For fourteen years, however one has remained and shows all signs of being here for years to come. That organization is the American Turpentine Farmers Association Cooperative. Known to the producers and the trade as "AT-FA", this Association was, like the others, born in adversity and weaned on hard times, but unlike the others is now lustily growing through its "teens".

In the middle 30's a group of producers met at Jacksonville, Florida and from that meeting emerged the present AT-FA. It was agreed to establish the general offices at Valdosta, Georgia.

According to the by-laws, the purpose of which the Association is formed are:

(a) To provide, through research, education and negotiation, improvements in the production and marketing of oleoresin, gum turpentine, gum rosin and their by-products, and to furnish facilities and agencies for economical production and orderly marketing of such oleoresin, gum turpentine and gum rosin and their by-products through the United States and foreign countries.

(b) To stabilize the gum naval stores industry and to secure better results in distributing the products thereof; to appear in behalf of the members of this Association before trade, federal, state, legislative, educational and commercial bodies and to act in behalf of its members before such bodies; to negotiate with such agencies on behalf of its members; to improve the relationship between its members and the agencies distributing the products of its members; to organize co-operative associations for the benefit of its members and to create agencies which shall act for all of its members; to assist members to maintain standards of quality and to encourage and promote better and more economical methods of production; to improve methods, equipment and facilities in the production, handling and distribution of the products of its members, to encourage the planting farming and production of resinous trees and to assist its members in the agricultural production thereof; to rent, buy, build, own, sell and control such buildings, land, equipment, machinery and supplies and other real and personal property as may be necessary in its business of improving methods, equipment, and facilities in the production and handling of the products of its members and to exercise all rights of ownership in such properties; to buy and sell supplies co-operatively for the benefit of its members or to create agencies for such purposes; and to borrow money of any person, firm, corporation, or government agency, and to secure the payment thereof, by note, mortgage or other evidence of indebtedness and to take and receive, for the use and benefit of the Association, notes bonds, mortgages, liens, or other evidence of and securities for indebtedness; to buy and



Putting on a new streak with a bark hack, one of the newest tools in the industry. The bottle hanging on the gutter contains sulfuric acid which will be sprayed on the streak to prolong the flow of gum. The object over the cup is a cover carried by the chipper to keep chips and trash from falling into the gum.

sell the products of its members, and to create such agencies therefor; to create agencies for warehousing the products of its members and for financing the production of such products and to finance such agencies; and generally to assist its members in orderly marketing of the products of its members.

(c) To advertise the products of its members; to maintain research laboratories and operate them for the benefit of its

members; and to cooperate with and contribute to the support of any existing schools and laboratories whose work tends to further research in the field of oleoresin, gum turpentine, gum rosin and their by-products.

(d) To cooperate with state and federal agencies in the planting, conservation and growing of slash pine and other resinous trees; in pine tree farming or other agricultural activities of state and federal agencies, affecting the production and distribution of gum naval stores; and to encourage the planting, growing and farming of slash pine and other resinous trees by its members; to cooperate with state and federal agencies in forest preservation and conservation and to do anything in a cooperative manner which will mutually benefit the community and the members.

(e) To affiliate, by contract or otherwise, with other cooperative organizations having generally similar objects; to organize subsidiary associations or corporations having generally similar objects.

(f) To cultivate the spirit of cooperation among its members.

Thus set up to begin functioning, the Association plunged in. Gum Turpentine went begging at 17½ cents per gallon.

Prices of rosin and turpentine had been going down for years to the point where there was no profit for the producer. In those days a barrel of crude gum would have brought only \$7.29.

Cheap substitutes had taken away many of the best markets for Turpentine.

Producers were heavily in debt.

The whole industry was facing bankruptcy.

That was the situation in the middle 1930's.

An operator has only to think back to those calamitous years and compare them with his situation today to realize the tremendous changes that have taken place.

Today, there is a good demand for Gum Turpentine and Rosin at profitable prices. Producers are out of debt. The industry is in good shape financially.

Tremendous changes, and they didn't just happen.

Through the untiring efforts of the officers and directors of the American Turpentine Farmers Association, together with the strong support of Producers and other interests in the Gum Naval Stores Industry, the producer-members have literally pulled themselves up by the bootstraps from depression to better times.

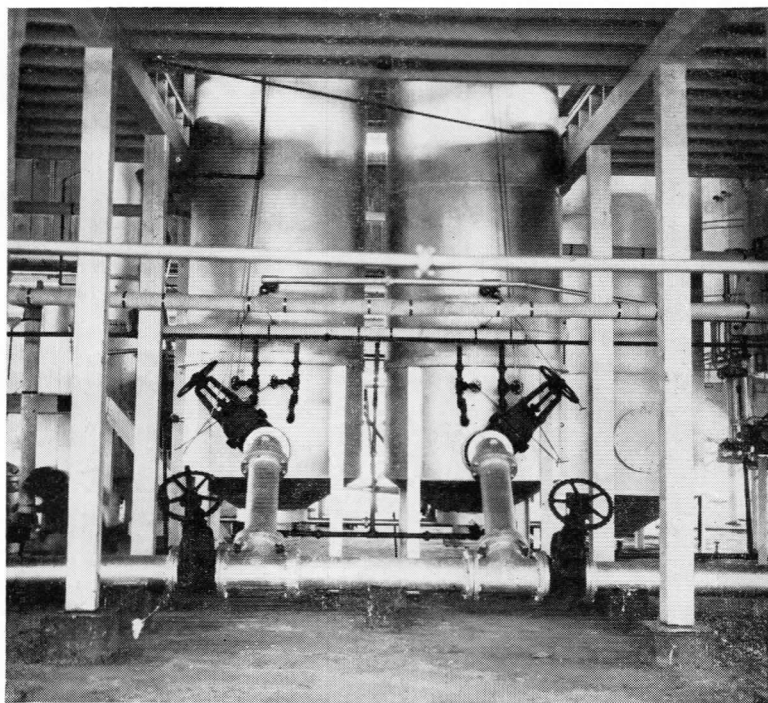
Now the amazing thing about American Turpentine Farmers Association Cooperative is that it has never actually cost producers one single penny. On the other hand, it has secured benefits for

gum producers running into millions and millions of dollars over and above the small dues paid by members of the Association.

The Association has sponsored annually a Conservation Program for Gum Naval Stores operators. During the years 1936-49 inclusive, \$11,295 814.00 have been paid to Naval Stores Producers for compliance with the provisions of the Naval Stores Conservation Program which is administered by the U. S. Forest Service.

If the Association had done nothing more than sponsor the Conservation Program, it would have many times justified its existence. Cash benefits resulting from the Conservation Program alone amount to many times the annual dues of members of the Association.

When prices of Turpentine and Rosin were far below cost of production, and Naval Stores operators were facing financial ruin, American Turpentine Farmers Association made available millions of dollars in loans. Coming at a time when Naval Stores operators were in the direst straits, these Commodity Credit Loans



Interior of a modern Gum Turpentine and Rosin processing plant.

handled through the Association were the salvation of operators and the industry.

Keeping abreast of many changes taking place in the agricultural programs of the Federal Government, officials of the "infant" Association decided to make a test case which, as it turned out, proved very far reaching and sweeping.

The Association argued that a turpentine operator was as much an agriculturist as a row crop farmer who was producing, say cotton.

Instead of cotton in the fields, a turpentine worker worked with trees.

Taking the issue to court, the Association argued and proved that a producer manufactured nothing. The tree did the manufacturing as did the cotton stalk. The Turpentine worker simply harvested the production from the tree.

Of course, it was not as simple as this, for days and days were spent in the courtrooms and thousands of words filed in briefs.

The Association won its case. Exemption from complying with Social Security Law and the Wage Hour Law were tangible results of this classification.

In short, turpentiners were officially recognized as Turpentine Farmers and were engaged in turpentine farming.

AT-FA has won many battle for producers at the nation's capitol. Its position is strong and it has many true and staunch friends. Only through the Association can the producer hope to maintain his position and safeguard his industry in the future from unfavorable laws or regulations.

When the American Turpentine Farmers Association was first organized, Gum Turpentine was a cracker barrel commodity. It was sold in 50 gallon drums and anybody who wanted to buy Gum Turpentine from a paint store or other retailer was forced to take a bottle or can with him. The turpentine, of course, was out of sight in the rear of the store. There was nothing to remind anybody to buy Gum Turpentine. It was a messy, inconvenient product for the retailer or the consumer to handle.

Gum Turpentine had lost out as one of the ingredients in manufactured paint and was fast losing its position as a paint thinner with lead and oil, or as a thinner for manufactured paint.

Small wonder then that the demand for Gum Turpentine was decreasing year by year and prices, of course, were going down, down, down!

So, in 1938 American Turpentine Farmers Association sponsored a national advertising program, to get more people to use



The old method of distilling Gum Turpentine. Contrast the interior of this old-time fire still with the interior shot of the new.

more Gum Turpentine. Along with the national advertising the Association sponsored and had designed attractive, lithographed tin containers and beautifully designed bottles—all bearing the AT-FA Seal of Approval. In other words, the Association took Gum Turpentine out of the cracker barrel and gave it a modern merchandising dress.

The Association conducted national surveys to create new markets and stimulate old markets for Gum Turpentine.

It was not long before the goodwill of master painters and painting contractors all over the country was won for Gum Turpentine. They liked the new packaged turpentine. It was easy and convenient to handle. They liked the advertising which urged the public to "PAINT NOW AND SAVE!" 9 out of 10 Master Painters and Painting Contractors said they preferred to use Gum Turpentine. Thus, a great market was won back for Gum Turpentine.

Homeowners all over the country were told of the advantages of Gum Turpentine, not only for thinning paints, but for cleaning floors, furniture, woodwork, porcelain, metal fixtures, etc. Distribution for Gum Turpentine was gained in cities and towns all over the country. Great mail order houses like Sears, Montgomery-Ward, Butler Bros., for the first time handled Gum Tur-

pentine. Distribution was established in great organizations of 5 and 10-cent stores, chain drug stores, as well as independent drug and grocery stores, and of course, in nearly all leading paint, hardware stores and lumber supply dealers.

TODAY IT'S ESTIMATED THAT MORE THAN 80% OF THE CROP OF GUM TURPENTINE WILL BE SOLD IN SMALL PACKAGES. Getting this much turpentine into new channels of trade in modern merchandising packages is the equivalent of finding an entirely new market for Gum Turpentine, and this is a stable, year-round market that will continue to grow if properly supported. It is also a market that is not too much concerned about the price of Turpentine. Within reason, it will pay the price asked.

This all important accomplishment of American Turpentine Farmers Association is the underlying factor in the steady increase in prices from 17½ cents per gallon and for the steady demand all over the country for Gum Turpentine.

"There remains, of course, a depressing lot yet to be accomplished in the gum naval stores industry. But don't say we are static. Don't say we aren't making any changes", says Judge Harley Langdale, a producer and president of the Association.

It is interesting to note that Judge Langdale was the first



A boxcar being filled with Pure Gum Spirits of Turpentine. Before the Association's advertising and merchandising program was in effect Turpentine was shipped in drums and tankcars. It has created a new outlet for the product.

president of the Association and today has been its only president. For fourteen years the membership has seen fit to re-elect him president and it has been without opposition.

CONTRIBUTOR'S BACKGROUND

Eugene F. Grenaker, Jr., author of "The Gum Naval Stores Industry of Dixie" is a native Georgian and has been connected with the American Turpentine Farmers Association since 1941, as Editor of the AT-FA Journal, official organ of the Association which is published monthly. In addition to that he handles publicity for the Association. Prior to his affiliation with the Association, Mr. Grenaker was a reporter with the "Augusta Herald", Augusta, Georgia, where he was born and reared. He is a veteran of World War II having served in the Navy, he is a member of the American Legion, the Valdosta Exchange Club and the First Christian Church of Valdosta. He is married and has one son.

