

Life in the Canneries at the Turn of the Century
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Objectives:

In this lesson, the students will:

- Recognize the importance of canneries as a source of employment at the turn of the century.
- Understand the problems of canneries and child labor issues.
- Use a graph to interpret data, analyze information, and draw conclusions.
- Analyze and draw conclusions from historical pictures and documents.

MSPAP Outcomes and Indicators

Skills and Processes

- Obtain, interpret, organize, and use information from reading, asking questions, observing, and listening.
- Obtain, interpret, organize, and use print and non-print sources of information such as pictures, graphics, maps, globes, and artifacts.
- Define and clarify problems drawn from history and the social sciences.
- Identify resources, and prepare solutions based on available data.

Economics

- Describe the relationship between available resources and production of goods and services.
- Explain how the exchange of goods and services connects Maryland with world.
- Describe the relationship of supply and demand to the production and consumption of goods and services.
- Analyze historical and economic factors which have contributed to the growth and development of Maryland's economy.

Student Worksheets:

Life in the Canneries Worksheet- 8 Activities

1. Help Wanted Ad
2. Jobs in the Cannery
3. The Canning Process
4. The Job Interview
5. A Postcard Home
6. Maryland Oyster Harvest
7. Immigrant Worker Wages

8. Child Labor Advocate

Key Web Sites Referenced in this Lesson:

- Steps in the canning of fruit and tuna: (<http://www.cfis.com.au/food.html>)
- Historic skipjack *Kathryn* built in 1901 for dredging oysters: (<http://www.cr.nps.gov/maritime/nhl/kathryn.htm>)

Teacher Background Information:

The canning industry of Baltimore brought jobs to its residents and food for the nation. In the 19th century, Baltimore was a major canning center. It was the first city to can oysters and the first place where corn was canned commercially. Due to Baltimore's proximity to the Chesapeake, along with its ready labor supply and excellent rail and water transportation, the city was a mecca for the canning industry. Rail and water transportation not only created a means to get food supplies to Baltimore for canning, they also transported canned food out of the city. For example, gold miners in California enjoyed canned oysters from the Chesapeake! With steady immigration into the state, adults laborers, as well as their children, rapidly found work due to the constant demand from the canneries.

Children were a common sight in the canneries in the late 1800s and early 1900s until child labor began to become a major concern. A major reason for the decline of child labor in the canning industry was the passage of increasing restrictive child labor laws. Further, child labor was found to be unreliable and inconsistent, particularly with the advent of mechanization in the canning industry. Adult laborers were usually more skilled, better-trained, and more reliable in the working environment. Between the years 1880 to 1920, the percentage of the children under the age of sixteen working in U.S. manufacturing declined from 7% to 1%. In addition to restrictive child labor laws and mechanization that demanded adult laborers, another factor limited the use of children in the canning industry was the passage of mandatory school attendance laws.

Laws protecting the rights of children were gradually tightened throughout the early 1900s. In 1889, the law permitted children 10 years of age to work in the manufacturing sector for 10 hours a day or 60 hours a week. In 1901, the age was raised to 12 years and the hours lowered to 9 hours a day or 54 hours per week. In 1905, the minimum working age was raised to 14, although children from 12 to 14 were allowed to work during their school vacations if they received a vacation permit for their schools.

The child labor laws mentioned above applied primarily to the manufacturing sector. Canneries usually were exempted under an "horticultural pursuits" clause that specifically exempted canneries from the child labor laws. School attendance legislation passed in 1911 and 1913 mandating minimum school attendance also exempted canneries. In 1915, students under the age of 16 were still allowed to work in the canneries during school hours if they obtained a certificate verifying their ability to read and write English from their local school. In 1916, a law was finally passed restricting work hour for all employees under 18 years of age to 8 hours a day or 48 hours a week. These laws did not ban the employment of children in the canneries, but they did place serious constraints on hiring them through restrictive wage and hours provisions.

The impact of technological improvements was greater in city canneries than in rural canneries. Mechanization eventually eliminating most of the child labor in the cities, although rural canneries were more tolerate of children. Located in remote locations with limited labor pools, rural canneries depended on migrant labor. This kind of labor often consisted of family groups with children relocating from urban locations.

Seasonal canneries operating in rural areas were slower to adopt mechanized processes and slower to implement regular hours and time-rate payment systems associated with this technology. Urban canneries had access to a variety of crops and usually operated for a longer season. Therefore they adopted new machinery as it was invented. Rural canneries, on the other hand, usually processed only one crop over a short season. They tended to retain older, labor intensive production techniques. Below is a report published by the U.S. Buearu of Labor on the working conditions found in a Maryland cannery in 1918.

"Sometimes the smaller children, who had to stand on boxes to reach the peeling tables, worked with their mothers or other relatives, and their earnings were added to older members of the family. Others worked independently, and proudly exhibited the number of checks earned.

While the adults worked steadily, the children were allowed considerable freedom in coming and going, especially those who were imported with their parents and lived in the labor camps. This was even more noticeable in the corn-husking sheds, where smaller children were more often found than in

the tomato canneries. Those too small to husk corn sometimes assisted their mothers by "silking the corn," removing husks, and pushing the corn within their mothers' reach.

The boys and girls who were time workers usually labeled cans and rolled them down the chute and inspected cans passing on conveyors. Boys were sometimes employed on time rate to do trucking, hauling and removing skins, and general laboring work, such as carrying baskets of tomatoes to steamers or to the peelers, and piling baskets, cans and cases.... Sometimes children as young as 7 or 8 were regarded as good workers by their parents, and worked with the steadiness and speed of adult workers."

Teaching Tips:

This lesson is more effective when it involves discussion and brain-storming. Encourage students to use their imaginations to visualize would it would have been like to work in a cannery. Based on the information they gather in the lesson , students will effectively write a persuasive letter to the National Labor Council clearly stating their viewpoints. Before beginning the letter, review what a typical day would involve in a cannery and what one might see and feel as a worker. This unit will help students empathize with those who worked in the canneries. It will also help them to understand the value of this industry.

Assessment Tool:

You will know if your students have done a good job if:

- Letters are written from the perspective of a child laborer.
- The letter includes persuasive evident to support child labor laws.
- The letter includes ideas to improve the working conditions in the canneries.

Extensions:

To challenge your advanced readers, two primary source articles have been provided.

- The first is a portion of a report published in 1911 by the U.S. Bureau of Labor. It describes the horrific conditions in which people worked in tomato canneries.
- The second is an editorial from a newspaper called *Life and Labor* written by Mary E. Dreier in 1913. It is a call for legislative protections for women and children in the workplace.

These articles can be read by the students or aloud by the teacher. Both describe conditions and life of the turn-of-the-century cannery worker.

Student References:

- *Liddy* by Katherine Patterson. This is a story written through the eyes of a young girl caught up in the drudgery of the textile factory life.
- *The History of Labor*, Cobblestone, , October 1992
- *Seeing was Believing* by Mary Morton Cowan. v 13 n. 8. This issue focuses on the labor movement, children's labor at the turn of the century, and the benefits of the union.

Teacher References:

- *The Celebrated Oysterhouse Cookbook*, by Frederic J. Parks, 1985, Parks Seafood, 435 N. 7th., Allentown, Pa. 18102
- *Baltimore: Industrial Gateway on the Chesapeake*, by Benjamin Latrobe, Jr., 1985, Chapter of The Society for Industrial Archeology, Baltimore, MD. Published by Baltimore Museum of Industry, 1415 Key Highway Baltimore, MD 21230
- *The Baltimore Book: New Views of Local History*, Elizabeth Fee, Linda Shopes, Linda Zeidman, 1991, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, PA 19122,
- "The Decline of Child Labor in the U.S. Fruit and Vegetable Canning Industry: Law or Economics," in *Business History Review*, 1992, Vol. 66, #4, pp. 723-748. Harvard College
- *The Oyster Wars of Chesapeake Bay*, John R. Wennersten, 1981, Tidewater Publishers, Centerville, MD 21617
- *Maryland's Vanishing Lives* , John Sherwood, 1994, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD
- *Magazine of History; The Progressive Era*, Spring 1999 Vol. 13, No. 3
This magazine is for teachers of history. Magazine of History, Organization of American Historians, 112 N. Bryan St., Bloomington, IN 47408-4199

Teacher Web Sites for Reference:

- <http://www.cr.nps.gov/maritime/nhl/kathryn.htm>
The National Historic Maritime Landmarks Commission maintains an informative site including information about *Kathryn*, a turn of the century skipjack. *Kathryn* was built in 1901 and used for dredging oysters.
- <http://imp.cssc.olemiss.edu/publications/missfolk/backissues/biloxi.html>
Down Around Biloxi describes the culture and structure of the Biloxi seafood industry. This site gives a good description of factory life and it's people. Many experienced workers transferred from Baltimore to Biloxi to fill a labor shortage there.
- <http://www.cancentral.com/educat.htm>
The Can Manufacturers Institute maintains an informative site that contains extensive information about the making of cans. Pages include: a history of cans, how cans are made, and recycling information.

Field Trip:

Baltimore Museum of Industry, 1415 Key Highway Baltimore, MD 21230,
Phone: 410/727-4808

Kid's Cannery: Activity length, 90 minutes; Audience, 3-8th grades; Group size 10-35.

This is a wonderful hands-on learning experience in which students become workers of the factory, from shuckers to managers. They earn wages, pay union dues, and spend their salaries (what's left of it) at the company store.

Web address:

http://www.mcps.k12.md.us/curriculum/socialstd/FT/Baltimore_Industry.html

Other Resources:

- Moses Myers House, Living History Program, Norfolk, VA.
Contact: Education Dept. 757/664-6239
- Scales and Tales, MD Department of Environment. A program that brings rescued birds and animals to schools. Phone: 410-922-8825