Massachusetts

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rettes were bought by Massachusetts consumers in the year ending June 1970. The tax paid by them for cigarettes alone yielded over $81.5 million to the state's treasury, apart from the federal cigarette tax of nearly $55 million.

Tobacco History Series

THE TOBACCO INSTITUTE

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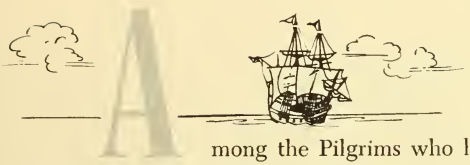
Tobacco production methods and tobacco marketing procedures are identical in Massachusetts and Connecticut. *Connecticut and Tobacco* is also available for readers.

Massachusetts and Tobacco



Among the Pilgrims who left England in late summer, 1620, were men long accustomed to smoking. They carried with them an assortment of English-made pipes and enough Virginia tobacco to last out the voyage.

It never occurred to them to store a supply of cured leaf in the *Mayflower's* hold. Their destination was Virginia where fuel for their pipes could be had almost for the asking. But contrary winds blew them far off their course. Their landfall was 500 miles north of where they had hoped to drop anchor—a mainland site that Captain John Smith had named Plymouth during his 1614 exploration.

The smokers among these English pioneers had run out of tobacco by then. Landing in the wrong place in a harsh winter was bad enough; to be without the creature comfort of tobacco made their condition seem even worse. It was a relief to them, therefore, when they saw Massachusetts Indians who were smoking. The relief ended quickly when they tried the native tobacco for that type, an ancient plant in North America, was far too harsh for palates accustomed to the sweet-scented leaf of Virginia.

The first orders for supplies from England included a request that had the urgency of a plea: "Send us 'Virginia.'" Meanwhile, smokers had to do with an occasional pipeful of the uncured native leaf which, as was reported, "they much disliked." As soon as they could, a number of the settlers began to plant tobacco. It was their hope that civilized cultivation and curing, as then understood, would improve the aboriginal type. Not much could be done, however, to reduce its pungency, though settlers in various eastern sections stubbornly continued the culture on small acreages.

The farming of tobacco in Massachusetts was, therefore, much earlier than is generally known. It was to take time, more than two centuries after the Pilgrims landed, before leaf of good quality could be produced in Massachusetts. When that did occur, production was concentrated in a stretch of the long, winding valley through which the Connecticut River flows.

TOBACCO IN MASSACHUSETTS TODAY

The Valley tobaccos

The agriculture of tobacco in the Bay State is inseparably linked with that of Connecticut. For over a hundred years excellent cigar leaf has been produced in the Massachusetts section of "Tobacco Valley." It is the chief crop in some parts of Hampden, Hampshire and Franklin, the producing counties. Only cigar-leaf types are farmed: shade-grown and Connecticut Havana Seed.

The first, long known as Connecticut Valley shade-grown, provides wrapper leaf used for cigars. In 1970

Havana Seed tobacco ready for harvesting
Courtesy Conn-Mass Tobacco Cooperative

the harvests of this type, produced on 1,800 acres, totaled about 2.5 million pounds.

Havana Seed, essentially a cigar-binder type, had a crop total in 1970 of 800,000 pounds. Havana Seed has for some time been eligible for government price support. Under the system of federal marketing quotas, 216 allotments for a total acreage of 1,355 were granted in 1970. In that year well under half the available acreage was used.

A third type, though very much in the background for the past several decades, requires mention. This is Broadleaf, classified as a binder type. Its leaves were occasionally used for fillers—the core of a cigar—and, in its best grades, for wrappers. Broadleaf was never in large-scale production in Massachusetts though long a crop of the Connecticut areas of the Valley.

Buyers and technologists

There is a wide spread in the cash value of shade-grown wrapper and Havana Seed binder leaf. The 1970 crops of the thin, elastic, silken wrapper leaf brought $10.4 million, a yield of about $4,100 an acre. The farm-sales price of this tobacco, around $3.16 a pound in 1970, is frequently well below what a cigar manufacturer may have to pay for it. Labor, storage, transportation and other costs sometimes bring the price of the best wrapper leaf to $7.00 a pound.

Massachusetts-grown Havana Seed earned a total of $480,000 for the 1970 crop, a little over 60 cents a pound. The Connecticut Valley types are regarded as "the cream of the binder crops." Binder leaf is used to shape and hold the filler of a cigar. In its cured state natural leaf has elasticity, is aromatic, and has good burning quality. A portion of best leaves still goes into binders—

some of the finest are used as wrappers—but, for the most part, binders now come from reconstituted tobacco sheets.

This is the result of a technological development, perfected about a dozen years ago. The process takes sound tobacco, much of it formerly impractical for use in cigars, and converts it into a flat sheet from which binders of correct size are cut. Natural binder types, according to the Department of Agriculture, go principally into a form of chewing tobacco. A considerable part of Connecticut Valley binder leaf has been exported annually. Tobacco accounted for around 6 percent of the cash receipts from Massachusetts field crops in 1970.

Nature's aides

Making a crop of tobacco, any tobacco, means a routine of exacting labor that takes most of each year. Whole families are frequently involved in the preparation of fields, cultivation, harvesting, curing, and packing for delivery to warehouses. On many farms there will be other crops as well, together with dairying and care of livestock.

For the most part binder tobacco farms in Massachusetts are small, the average being four or five acres. The plants of the binder type, variously referred to as "outdoor," "open field," or "sun-grown," are cut down, stalk and all, when mature. The stalks are then speared onto sticks in groups of five or six plants, and after lying on the ground long enough to wilt, are removed to barns for air curing.

Tobacco specialty

The shade-grown type puts the greatest strain on a farmer's strength and patience. No product of the fields makes greater demands on growers. The intensive routines of culture, harvesting and curing explain why the cost of producing an acre of wrapper leaf averages about $4,500. Growers of this type always hope to produce flawless leaf, for manufacturers' buyers want wrappers free of imperfections. As a practical step in reducing costs, farms of shade-grown tobacco are combined and cover anywhere from sixty to a hundred acres.

The sheltered leaf

The skill of the hand controls most of the operations associated with wrapper tobacco. Early in April, seeds are sown under glass-covered cold frames in soil that has been sterilized by steam or chemicals. Nature is abundantly generous in the productivity of the tiny tobacco seeds; one ounce contains 300,000 seeds, capable of producing 250,000 pounds of tobacco on 200 acres if all the seeds are planted. When the seedlings are ready for transplanting, they are hand set by two to six workers seated behind a planting machine. The largest of these mechanisms makes it possible to set out five to seven acres a day.

The tobacco fields are covered by flat-top "tents" of loosely woven cotton cloth, about 5,000 square yards being required for each acre. Supplied in 400-inch strips, the cloth is hand sewn to wires stretched from the tops

of 50 wooden poles, eight feet above the ground and arranged 33 feet apart from each other in any direction.

The exceptional labor represented by the erection of miles of cloth screening is an annual, and unavoidable, routine. The covering provides wrapper leaf with necessary protection from the sun's direct heat and heavy winds, and—though to a lesser degree—some defense against temperature changes and hungry insects which like their tobacco raw. The consequent humidity within the tents approximates the tropical atmosphere of the East Indies, long the major source of fine wrapper leaf.

Shade-grown tobacco develops a stalk that frequently grows as high as the ceiling cover. Curiously enough, this type does not take deep root despite its height and the weight of its leaves. As an added protection against heavy wind and rain it is occasionally necessary to support the young plants with strings attached to overhead wires.

Hand-picked harvesters

As the leaves mature each is most carefully removed by hand. This tedious "priming" begins with two or four bottom leaves, the first to ripen. The plants of each field will be primed five to seven times. The harvesting is ordinarily carried out by thousands of young men of slender build. Workers of this physique are needed for they can move between the rows of plants without brushing against, and possibly bruising, the delicate leaves. Placed in canvas baskets, the leaves are transported to curing sheds for drying, a process that takes from six to eight weeks.

"Priming" leaves of shade-grown tobacco
Courtesy Cigar Institute of America

Toil and trouble

Once their harvests are in, farmers knock down their tents. The ceiling cloths of single thickness, now affected by sun and weather, must be renewed each spring. Several thicknesses of this cloth will make the side-walls of next year's tents.

Throughout a good part of each season farmers live with the reality that weather and other elements of nature can be unpredictable. If, in one season, nature is cooperative, in another it may bring ruin to a tobacco

grower's efforts. Under the cloth coverings he will be engaged in daily warfare against insect pests and plant diseases. Even while that continual battle is under way, the farmer may lose his carefully constructed tent or find it seriously damaged by summer hailstones, by a freak wind that will tear it apart or, most dangerous, by accidental fire.

Attempts have been made to eliminate, or at least reduce, damage from wind and fire. Plastic materials, fire-resistant cloth and other fabrics have been experimented with. The search has not resulted in an acceptable material of reasonable cost but the search goes on.

Sewing, stripping, selling

Harvested shade-grown leaves ready for curing in barns are threaded through each base in pairs of 15 to 22 —front to front, back to back—and then strung on a wooden lath. This sewing, by hand or by hand-feeding onto automatic sewing equipment, is usually done by young women from high schools and colleges during their summer vacations. These occasional workers increase the farm population of Massachusetts by several thousand. During the curing period of a month or more, heat will frequently be used within the barns to maintain a favorable temperature. The leaves will be taken down when humid weather has restored their pliability. They are then "in order."

Following a long-established tradition, binder leaf is bought at farmers' barns when stripped from its stalks. There will be different prices paid for it; leaf suitable for cigars will obviously command higher prices than those of the "stemming grades," intended for scrap chewing tobacco. (The latter phrase is an Internal Revenue Service classification. It refers to fragments of good leaf suitable for use in chewing—sometimes smoking—tobac-

cos but not usable in cigars.) Buyers know pretty well in advance about the quality of the crop, having observed the growing fields and the harvests. The selling and buying of shade-grown tobacco operates under other procedures. Generally, this type is grown only for major cigar manufacturers, or by packer-dealers who own the farms and the harvests.

Binder leaf cured in Massachusetts is delivered to the Conn-Mass Tobacco Cooperative warehouses at Holyoke and is occasionally stored in other towns by this organization. The Cooperative, an association of Havana Seed and Broadleaf growers in the Connecticut Valley, was organized in 1949. The leaf comes into the warehouse untied and unsorted, in paper-covered packages usually of 40 to 50 pounds in weight. After inspection, this tobacco undergoes standard procedure: forced sweating for a few weeks through circulation of hot air. The process speeds up the necessary fermentation of tobacco—in essence, a continuation of curing that ripens it further.

Mellowing leaf

Far more labor is applied to cured shade-grown tobacco than to the binder type. After barn curing it is temporarily arranged in bulks, still on the sticks. Then a group of leaves are tied together in small bundles ("hands"), laid in wooden boxes and sent to packing houses. There the loosened leaves are prepared for fermentation by being built into bulks eight feet high, twelve to sixteen feet long, and containing 2 to about 3 tons. Experiments are under way which will speed the subtle process of fermentation without affecting leaf

quality. The corporate owners of shade-grown tobacco farms operate bulking houses themselves.

The building of bulks is as carefully done as though the piles were intended for permanence. Thermometer readings are regularly taken at the center of the piles. At intervals the bulks are turned and rebuilt so that all leaves have the natural heat necessary for fermentation.

The practice of sweating leaf in these large piles has recently been abandoned by a number of handlers. Their method now is to pack shade leaf in cardboard containers and place it in heated rooms until it is sufficiently fermented.

Grades of shade

When the sweating process has run its course, workers of long experience sort the leaves and arrange them individually by grades. There will be no fewer than 10 and as many as 20 or more grades, arranged by color, texture, and condition. The leaves, separated into sizes, are then re-tied in hands of 25 to 40, placed in bales and stored under cool temperature during which they pass through the final stage of fermentation.

A year and more will have passed from the time this tobacco was planted. Not all of it goes into manufacturers' bins. A considerable part stays in storage until ready for hand rollers or machines.

For the past twenty years or so a good deal of wrapper leaf has been sent to Puerto Rico for sorting and grading by highly skilled hands. As needed, these wrappers are manufactured by American firms in the island. For the most part, however, factories in the United States produce the cigars bought by American consumers.

The stream of supplies

Tobacco farming in Massachusetts makes necessarily heavy demands on the resources of equipment manufacturers, and on suppliers of materials and services, many outside the state. Millions of yards of cotton cloth, for instance, are required annually. It takes the harvest of an acre of southern cotton to supply the cloth needed for an acre of shade-grown leaf. Farmers producing this tobacco will need for each acre many thousand feet of sewing twine for tents, two tons of plant nutrient, and other materials. All this is apart from heavy equipment, tools, galvanized wire, building construction and the other numerous requirements of a specialized agriculture.

In Massachusetts alone there are 60 firms, some extensive in their operations, that provide materials, equipment and services to tobacco farmers.

Shipping leaf

Substantial quantities of wrapper and far smaller amounts of binder leaf are export commodities. Nearly 1.7 million pounds of shade-grown tobacco, valued at about $5 million, went overseas in 1970, chiefly to West Germany and Canada, with the Valley providing a substantial portion. Binder leaf of the Havana Seed type—about 481,000 pounds of it at a cost of about $500,000 to foreign buyers—was shipped out in 1970, most of it to Spain and West Germany. As far more Havana Seed is grown in Massachusetts than in Connecticut, farms in the former state supplied the major part of this exportation.

Stringing wrapper leaf on automatic sewing mechanism
Courtesy Cigar Institute of America

Manufactured products

The people of Massachusetts are no different from those in the rest of the country in their marked preference for cigarettes. In the year ending June 1970 they bought 679.8 million packages manufactured in the United States. The estimated wholesale value of tobacco commodities and related goods distributed in Massachusetts during 1970 totaled $184,591,231. Of this total cigarettes accounted for $156,145,779; cigars, $19,596,638.

Fiscal contributors

More than 45,000 retailers throughout the state serve tobacco consumers. Included are automatic merchandising machines, clubs and canteens. Taxes take 50 percent (more in some local communities) of the cost to a buyer of cigarettes. The federal share is 8 cents a package; the state tax is now 12 cents. A use tax also applies in Massachusetts.

A state tax of 2 cents per package of cigarettes became effective in September 1939. It was a "temporary" excise, to expire in 1941. The Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts was petitioned by an interested group for a referendum on the tax, a petition denied on technical grounds. Since the inception of the cigarette tax (increased six times since 1945) the total gross yield to the state treasury has been in the area of $983 million.

The development of tobacco agriculture to its present status in Massachusetts was not achieved without difficulty. As it progressed, together with a growing commerce in tobacco, it became of increasing value to the state's economy. Both segments provide an interesting part of the long record of America's industrial history.

CENTURIES OF HISTORY

The Smoking Fathers

In 1630, when the noted Puritan, John Winthrop, arrived in Massachusetts there were several settlements other than Plymouth where tobacco was being grown. The plots set aside for this agriculture were originally intended only to provide enough of the leaf for the personal needs of the growers. Then, under the influence of Virginia's notable commercial success with tobacco, farmers began to expand the culture in the expectation that they could produce enough to establish an export trade.

Winthrop, the first regularly elected governor of the colony and regarded as its most important member, was long a devoted smoker. But, together with many of his fellow colonists, he rejected the native Indian leaf and gave no encouragement to that grown by the settlers. Records show imports of Virginia-grown tobacco via England directly to the governor, and a shipment from Barbados in 1637 very possibly for him and his smoking circle.

Crop control

The holders of the charter to England's second permanent North American colony had no enthusiasm about

tobacco culture in Massachusetts though well aware that the first established colony, Virginia, had been saved from failure by concentration on tobacco production. These joint proprietors, undoubtedly influenced by the royal opposition to smoking vigorously expressed by the first Stuart kings, wrote to the governor at Plymouth in April 1629. Their letter reveals, indirectly, that Massachusetts-grown tobacco had been recently exported to England. It reads, in part:

> *. . . And as touching the old planters their earnest desire for the present to continue the planting of tobacco, (a trade by the Companie generally disavowed . . . by some of the [largest investors] amongst us, who absolutely declared themselves unwilling to have any hand in this plantation if we intend to cherish or permit the planting thereof except for a man's private use for mere necessity) we are of the opinion that the old planters will have smal encouragement to [continue]. We find here, by late experience, that it doth hardly produce the freight [charges, and duty].*

The writers go on earnestly to say that this export trade is not likely to improve; so much tobacco is being produced elsewhere that before long this commodity will bring only low prices. However, if the old planters —all others are excluded—insist that they must continue the culture for their livelihood, let them go on with it for a while, but under restrictions as to acreage. As soon as possible the planting of tobacco should be "utterly suppressed," except for a man's own needs. No servants are permitted to sell it, and none to use it "except for the benefit of health, when taken privately."

Smoking control

Not long after the proprietors' letter was received the General Court of the colony issued the first of a series of prohibitory orders against smoking and commerce in tobacco. Under the regulation of 1632 no one was permitted to smoke publicly under penalty of a fine. That seems to have been ineffective; two years later the fine was considerably increased with the added injunction that none smoke in company or, "when alone, before strangers." This effort to make smoking a secret and solitary habit was so openly defied that, in 1637, the Court announced that "all former lawes against tobacco are repealed, tobacco is set at liberty."

A year later the Court again exercised its authority, but it was obviously weakening before the strength of a powerful recreative custom. Shaking its collective head in sorrow, the Court found that since the former laws against tobacco had been repealed, "the same is more abused than before." This time, however, smoking was only prohibited in fields except on journeys, and during meals in private rooms of inns.

In 1635 it had been ordered that no tobacco could be bought or sold. The order was amended the following year to exempt wholesalers "provided they transport it out of this jurisdiction."

Dissenting opinion

The Court was stubborn but not nearly as stubborn—or as adaptable—as the smokers it was trying to control by judicial regulations. When, in 1646, the wise men of the bench made it a punishable offense for parishioners

to smoke on Sundays within two miles of "entrance to or departure from" a house of worship, they neglected to include the meetinghouse itself. Therefore, church business after services was frequently conducted in a cloud of smoke.

The Puritan elements continued to have a difficult time in their campaign against smoking. Too often persons of prominence were showing directly, or by inference, the futility of attempting to curb or eliminate one of mankind's recreations. A conspicuous example among these opponents was Captain John Underhill, the author of *News from America* in 1638, a magistrate, a successful Indian fighter—and a man who had not been noted for his piety. An early writer, remarking that Underhill was a "lusty man," told of the occasion when he held forth to his pastor before the whole congregation, saying that:

> *having long lain under a spirit of bondage, he could get no assurance; till at length as he was taking a pipe of (that good creature), tobacco, the spirit set home upon him an absolute promise of free grace, with such assurance and joy that he has never since doubted of his good estate.*

Indian ways

The Algonquians in and near the Massachusetts colony also had restrictions relating to tobacco and its use. Roger Williams commented on their belief that the plant was "a sacred weed, to be cultivated and used only by the braves... every other crop was planted and gathered by the squaws." Women were not permitted to smoke. It was regarded as bad manners for a youth

"to take the pipe till he had made himself a name, and was entitled to sit in council."

Some Indians, Williams wrote elsewhere, did not smoke,

> *But they are rare Birds: for generally all the men throughout the country have a tobacco-bag with a pipe in it hanging at their back; sometimes they make such great pipes both of wood and stone that they are two feet long, with men and beasts carved, so big and massive that a man may be hurt mortally by one of them.*

Usually, he went on to say, these big-pipe Indians were "Men-eaters" who came from places several hundred miles off to the west. The natives he observed told him that they smoked to prevent toothache and because it refreshed and revived them. Yet only the bravest of the braves could take the native type in its natural state. The usual practice among northeastern tribes was to mix their strong tobacco with leaves of bland flavor and herbs, together with a little oil as a binder. Even this blend was far too pungent for white men.

Several 17th century visitors to New England, commenting on the "small, round leafed tobacco called *Pooke*," likened it to henbane, or remarked that it was "odious" to the English. Some of these observers saw Indians smoking pipes made from a lobster or crab claw.

Handicaps to culture

Hampered as they were by the orders of the General Court and the overseers of morals, planters had to confine themselves to small fields of tobacco. About the

time that Boston began to acquire the characteristics of a village, in the 1630's, seeds of the Virginia type were imported into the colony. Some undoubtedly came from the West Indies.

Tobacco of a milder sort resulted but it still did not provide leaves for a flavorful smoke. There was nothing wrong with the seeds; nothing wrong with the culture. What was wrong, for this particular plant, was the soil, which contained too high a proportion of common salt. It was to take time for the farmers to understand this basic fault.

Still, tobacco of the Massachusetts colony continued to be traded to various other settlements in New England, briefly to New Amsterdam, and some of it was exported to the mother country.

Transplanted tobacco

If the English customs records at ports of entry were to be taken as evidence, enormous quantities of tobacco "of the growth of New England" were being shipped out of Boston harbor before 1650. This gave the impression in that period that Massachusetts and contiguous areas held vast plantations of tobacco fields.

But the tobacco was not grown in New England. It was a product chiefly of Virginia and Maryland. British colonial policy dictated that tobacco grown in southern Anglo-American settlements be sent directly to England where it was dutiable, and be carried only in English ships. As there was then no entry duty on New England

Boston from City Point near Sea Street, 1832
From the I. N. Phelps Stokes Collection,
New York Public Library

tobacco, exporters in Virginia and Maryland had been sending a large part of their crops to Boston by coastwise vessels. There it was loaded on ocean-going ships, with false bills of lading.

It required a Parliamentary Act, passed in 1650, to close up this loophole, so convenient to the largest growers of tobacco in Virginia and Maryland. Yet Boston remained a busy port for southern planters. An investigator for the London commissioners of customs found in 1708 that much tobacco from Virginia was being transshipped illegally to other colonies without paying an intercolonial duty. This was but one of numerous official complaints of customs violations by Massachusetts shippers.

Tobacco pays its way

In 18th century Massachusetts, tobacco as a commodity was treated with more respect than it had been by most of the Puritan Fathers. The cured leaf became legal tender in payment of taxes at the rate of 4 pence per pound in 1729. In some towns, fifty years earlier, it had been accepted by tax collectors at 6 pence per pound. Some clergymen grew it commercially to supplement their incomes. Just before the War of Independence records show it being sold by them at 5 to 8 pence per pound.

Yet production remained low. Little of the crops was consumed locally, for smokers were being supplied by the superior leaf from the southern colonies. Some of the inexpensive Massachusetts-grown tobacco was exported to the West Indies for use by slaves who had a preference for pungent varieties.

Career smokers

The recreative uses of tobacco had grown to wide proportions in the 18th century. Pipe smoking was still most popular among New Englanders though snuff and chewing tobacco had numerous devotees. In 1724 the *Boston Courant* fumed helplessly over the "enormous" consumption of tobacco, a common subject for scolding editors. The Puritan Fathers would have been horrified at some of Massachusetts' career smokers. Among the most notable was Jonathan Dwight of Springfield who built a Unitarian church at his own considerable expense in the early 1800's. This "old-time gentlemen" could always be found on the streets of the town on any clear day. All one had to do was to look for a small cloud of smoke. Dwight added somewhat to his local fame by his method of lighting his pipe in summer—he used a burning glass.

The new smoke

Before the end of the 18th century there was a swing in smoking tastes which developed rapidly in the next few decades. Consumer preference was largely for cigars, long the favorite smoke of Spaniards, Portuguese and Latin Americans. The new vogue was to have valuable economic effects for Massachusetts.

Tobacco farming had been moving west in the state, to the "beautiful and gracious" Connecticut Valley area. Small crops of "shoestring" continued to be harvested. The nickname of this variety came from the appearance of the long, narrow, close-veined leaf.

Its chief use was as fillers of inexpensive cigars, and production continued until the early 1830's. Then it was supplanted by a broad-leaf variety, which had been recently introduced into Connecticut from Maryland. This tobacco, with thin, delicate, smooth leaves was very pliant, almost tasteless, and, therefore, most suitable as a cigar wrapper. The first successful culture of cigar leaf in the United States began in the Connecticut Valley.

The "rolling trade"

Having discovered the cigar, more than three centuries after it had first been seen by Spanish explorers in the West Indies, a considerable number of people went energetically into its manufacture. It was at first a household industry. Women and youngsters turned out the brown rolls which were then bartered for store goods. Cigars of doubtful vintage could be bought for a penny; the better-made and better-tasting ones cost two cents.

Then factories as such began to appear. By 1831 towns in Essex County were producing a total of up to 20 million hand-rolled cigars a year, but these were largely from imported Cuban leaf. Yet there were still devotees of chewing and smoking tobacco around, and they were supplied by manufacturers in the Lynn area who had developed a lucrative business by 1808.

Tropical transplant

The harvests of new Broadleaf grown in Massachusetts showed an annual increase in the years following its introduction. The crop total of around 65,000 pounds in 1840 was fifty times greater by 1860. Wrapper leaf brought $40 the hundred pounds in 1857. In the last war year, 1865, harvests reached over 9.3 million pounds valued at more than $1.6 million.

View of the Connecticut Valley from Mount Holyoke
From Willis, *American Scenery*, 1840

Five years thereafter came a new and most valuable introduction of a tobacco type to the Connecticut Valley: Havana. The U.S. Department of Agriculture had, since 1840, been distributing Cuban seeds to Valley farmers but experimental crops had not been successful. By 1870, however, more careful supervision by agricultural experts in Massachusetts and by federal advisers resulted in the production of the desired tobacco. The fine, thin, light leaf of this type was bland in flavor, which made it ideal as a wrapper. Further, in its developed state, the plant produced more wrapper leaves than that of any other variety and supplied as well a superior leaf for binders.

This new type was known as "Spanish" or "Havana." That grown in the Valley for four years or longer was called "Havana Seed." Fresh seeds were obtained in Cuba each year and, remarkably, the tobacco plants thrived in poor soils unsuitable for almost any other crops. Not long after its introduction to the Valley, however, production had to be curtailed. The unpredictable consumer was responsible; cigar smokers rather suddenly expressed a marked preference for dark wrappers rather than the light-colored leaf of Havana Seed. Valley farmers tried darkening their leaf with licorice, slower curing, special sweating and other methods, all of them successful—except with the consumer. It was not until the early 1880's that there was a shift in taste back to light wrappers.

Fields, yields, and factories

Only a limited amount of land was available to tobacco farmers in the Massachusetts section of the Valley. Yet prices of the best farm lands in Hampden County, for instance, were such as to make later growers yearn for "the good, old days." In the late 1870's land for

tobacco farming could be bought in the county for $150 to $250 an acre. A farmer in the area reported the result of growing a good crop in that period. He had made a profit of $85.50 by selling the yield of each acre (2,000 pounds) for $280. His experience was matched by neighboring growers.

In the tenth census (1880), it was reported that there were 271 factories in Massachusetts making cigars and cheroots. The manufacturers' value of these products in that year was over $2 million. More than 55.6 million cigars had been rolled by hand workers in the reported year and this total placed Massachusetts eighth in domestic cigar production. Nearly 6 million cigarettes, not then thought of as ever likely to become a serious competitor to the virile cigar, had come out of Massachusetts factories in 1880. There were then nine factories producing chewing and smoking tobaccos but the total for these plants came to less than 450,000 pounds. The yield to the federal revenue in the fiscal year of 1880, chiefly from manufactured products, was $609,555.

Smoke fighters

Fitchburg, Massachusetts had, from the 1860's, become the center of energetic American antitobacconists. Under the supervision of Reverend George Trask a series of frequently hysterical messages, in badly printed tracts, flooded the land. These publications of the Anti-Tobacco Depository provided material for numerous futile sermons and lectures.

In an effort to show how the "Demon weed had corrupted" even church officials, Trask reported a conversation between a farmer and his deacon. The farmer was doubtful about the morality of growing tobacco after reading Trask's pamphlets. The deacon

> *justified raising the crop on the score that tobacco had been used for centuries, used the*

world over, and would be till the world shall end... our lands seemed to be exactly adapted to produce a broad, silky leaf for wrappers to high-priced Havanas...
I have made more from even the little tobacco patch back of my barn than from all other crops on my whole place. [Apart from doubling his subscriptions to foreign missions and sending his children to good schools, the deacon had made presents to the minister] which he gladly received in spite of the denunciations of Mr. Trask and other fanatics.

The most ardent American antitobacconist of his day then went on to say that the farmer had followed his deacon's advice, for he was "a pious and plausible man." Trask said he was not at all surprised that the crop failed, leaving the grower a poorer and unhappy man.

Almost everyone else was surprised; there were too many successful farmers around and these could hardly be influenced by the Reverend Trask.

Smokers' emancipation

It was not until 1880 that the city council in Boston finally decided to make the public highways safe for smokers by repealing an almost forgotten law, passed in 1798. That regulation, modifying one of the early colonial period, had prohibited the use of a "lighted pipe or segar" on public streets and roads. It had been said at the time that the ordinance was intended to reduce a fire hazard but the restricted smokers protested that they were being hampered by a Puritan code.

In the mid-nineteenth century a sympathetic mayor had already made it a little easier for smokers. A part of the Boston Commons, under his direction, had been set

Smokers' Circle on Boston Common around 1850
Culver Pictures

aside for users of tobacco and this soon overpopulated area acquired the name of "the Smokers' Circle."

No rules or regulations, beyond one's own capacity to resist temptation, could curb the use of tobacco. Some of the most prominent citizens of the capital were conspicuous devotees of cigars. Most, perhaps all, were of the temperament of a well-known legislator and philanthropist, William Sturges. Aware one day that he was perhaps smoking too much he laid aside his lit cigar saying, "I will not take another—till I change my mind."

Leaf competitor

Around 1876 cigar manufacturers were introduced to Sumatran wrapper leaf when a sample importation came into New York. This light-colored leaf, remarkably bland in taste, was regarded as the perfect wrapper. Concededly, Connecticut Valley wrapper leaf was excellent, but it required five to ten pounds of it to wrap a thousand cigars against only two pounds of the fine product of Sumatra. This latter factor alone endeared it to manufacturers who began to import it as a filler which paid a lower duty than wrapper. Consumer reaction to the color of the new cigar covering was promptly favorable, whereupon increasing orders went to dealers in Sumatra.

The consequent adverse effect on wrapper production in the Connecticut Valley brought about the formation of the New England Tobacco Growers Association in 1883. The duty on imported leaf had been 35 cents per pound. The Association succeeded in forcing through a raise in the impost to 75 cents a pound on tobacco leaves suitable for wrappers. Yet Sumatran wrapper continued to come in, and in larger quantities. The tariff went to $2 in 1890 but at the urging of manufacturers was reduced to $1.50 in 1894.

The entry duties provided some protection for Valley tobacco farmers even though over five million pounds of Sumatran wrapper was imported in 1900. Imports of this leaf rose as cigar consumption increased in the States.

Shade brightens the Valley

The gloom among Valley farmers was dispelled by a single word, one that held a great potential: "Shade." Around 1896 a government expert had experimented in Florida with seeds from Sumatra. Despite the similarity of soil and climate with that of the East Indies, plants of poor quality resulted. In further experiments it was discovered that tobacco shaded by trees produced excellent wrapper leaf. Thereafter it was experimentally grown under shade provided by thin, closely set slats at first, and finally under cotton cloth. The filtered sunlight affected the growing leaves by thinning them and lightening their color. By 1898 the new type was pronounced a success.

Though it was regarded as doubtful that the climate of the Connecticut Valley was suitable for a wrapper leaf of equal delicacy, the U. S. Department of Agriculture began a soil study in the area in 1899. A tentative crop was produced in 1901 and the type was enthusiastically accepted by manufacturers, some of whom paid higher prices than the leaf deserved. Valley farmers became extravagant in their purchases of the Sumatran variety seeds grown in Florida, over-produced, and were careless in crop management. It was the period of the "Shade craze."

In consequence, there were no buyers for the 1902 crop; the results in 1903 were even worse. The expensive lesson did not have to be learned again. Farmers placed themselves in the hands of professional agriculturists

who brought in Cuban, in addition to Sumatran seeds. Under the supervision of state and federal experts, growers gave the alien plant the loving care nature demands for one of its more sensitive products. Within a few years tobacco farmers in the area were in the enviable place, and one not since lost, of producing the remarkably fine leaf known as Connecticut Valley shade-grown.

Generations of farmers had sweated over tobacco since its seeds were first planted in Plymouth soil. The crops had ranged in quality from poor to indifferent to fair to excellent. The popularity of the cigar in the States gave Massachusetts tobacco farmers their long-awaited chance.

As a producer of leaf the Bay State never ranked with the major tobacco colonies or states. But Massachusetts crops make up in quality what they cannot show in production figures. And the exclusive, shade-grown wrapper leaf of the producing counties represents a triumph—an impressive evidence of the ability of scientific man to adjust nature to his needs.

Information on the current tobacco agriculture of Massachusetts was obtained from Prof. W. G. Colby, College of Agriculture, University of Massachusetts; Economic Research Service, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, and publications of the Agricultural Marketing Service; and by the Shade Tobacco Growers Agricultural Association. Data on tobacco commerce and economics were provided by the Dept. of Commerce, Massachusetts; the Cigar Manufacturers Association; various compilations of the U.S. Dept. of Commerce, and the Internal Revenue Service, and from the National Association of Tobacco Distributors' *Coordinator*, 1971. The annual issues of the Tobacco Tax Council were the source for much of the data relating to cigarette taxation, supplemented by information from Dr. William Stauffer, the Council's economist.

For material on earlier periods the works used chiefly were *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts* (various dates); Massachusetts Historical Society, *Proceedings* (various dates); "Report on Tobacco," J. B. Killebrew, and "Statistics of Manufactures of Tobacco," J. R. Dodge, both in the Tenth Census, 1880 (1883); *Economic and Social History of New England*, W. B. Weeden (1890); *The History of Tobacco Production in the Connecticut Valley*, Elizabeth Ramsey, in Smith College Studies in History, XV (1930); *A History of Tobacco Production in New England*, Clarence I. Hendrickson, Storrs Agricultural Experiment Station, Connecticut Agricultural College (Oct. 1931); *The Economic Development of the Cigar Industry*, W. N. Baer (1933), *Hampden County, 1636-1936*, C. Johnson (1936), and the following sources of quoted matter.

The quotations on p. 16, and those from Court orders on pp. 17 and 18 are from *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay*, ed. N. Shurtleff (1853); that on p. 18 appears in Mass. Hist. Soc. *Proceedings*, Sec. 2, vol. IV (1889); those from Roger Williams' writings on pp. 18-19 come from his *Key into the Language of the Indians* (1643), *History of Northfield*, Mass., J. H. Temple and G. Sheldon (1875), and *Commonwealth History of Massachusetts*, ed. Albert B. Hart (1927), and that on pp. 27-28 is from E. Ramsey's *History*, listed above.

The library of the Tobacco Merchants Association of the U.S. was an invaluable source for general material.