

THE HOOP-POLE INDUSTRY.

Talk with a Man Who Has Made Money
Following It.

"There are many strange ways of getting a living in this world," said a farmer from Ulster County to a reporter of THE NEW-YORK TIMES. "What do you suppose I am going to New-York for at this time of the year when farmers should be harvesting their crops?"

He answered the question himself, saying:

"Well, I am a farmer, but not in the general acceptation of the word. I raise potatoes and corn enough for my family use and buckwheat for flapjacks, but my principal crop is hoop poles, and they are now all harvested, split, and shaved into barrel hoops and ready for the market. I am going to New-York to sell my annual crop."

Asked to give a general description of the hoop-pole industry, the farmer said:

"The mountains, swamps, and uplands of Ulster, Sullivan, Greene, and Delaware Counties were formerly covered with a dense growth of hard wood, mainly hickory, white, red, and rock oaks, pignut, and ash. This has been cut off for many years, and in its stead there has sprung up a dense growth of saplings, mostly growing from the old stumps, some stumps producing as many as twenty or thirty lusty straight-grained saplings.

"These furnish what we call the hoop-pole stock. They are cut generally in the months of October and November, after all other farm work is finished, and piled and stacked up in the hoop-pole woods. All saplings from 12 up to 30 feet in length are cut, some often furnishing two poles for hoops of different lengths.

"At the first fall of snow these poles, yet green and full of sap, are hauled on sleds to the barnyards, where they are cut into lengths and split into strips, poles furnishing two hoops and often as many as five. These are then taken under the long sheds which you find in every farmyard where the shavers are at work. A flat bench called a horse, with a clamp worked by a treadle and called a head, and a drawknife furnishes the outfit of each shaver. The rough hoop just as it is split from the pole is laid flat on the horse and shaved while it is held firm under the head. As it is shaved by a drawknife an arm's length, it is shoved further along under the head until its whole length is shaved.

"The shaved hoops are then sorted and bound into bundles of 100, being tied at three parts of their length. They are then ready for the market, but generally do not reach there for some months, as each farmer who shaves hoops keeps his stock for the most favorable prices, or till navigation in the Hudson opens.

"The best hoops are the hickory and pignut. These are used for apple, pork, vinegar, and beef barrels, kegs, and other classes of the cooperage. The oak hoops, which are generally shaved at full length, are used to strap packing boxes, and are also of good quality. Hoops of mountain ash, which are not only shaved but stripped into what is known as 'strapping,' are mainly used for butter tubs, firkins, and flour and sugar barrels. The seconds of all kinds, or shorts, as they are sometimes called, are mainly used about Kingston and Rosendale in hooping cement and lime barrels.

"Another class of hoops, short and smooth-shaved from chestnut sprouts, are used only to bind powder kegs. They are generally shaved to order, and are sold only to the gunpowder mills and contractors who make kegs for them.

"As to price, the shaved hoops range from 50 cents a bunch for cement and lime barrel hoops to as high as \$3 a bunch for heavy hickory and oak straps for packing boxes. There isn't so much demand now, however, for hoops of the strap class, as band iron has taken their place.

"I have a bargeload of hoops on the way to New-York now which I shall find a ready market for as soon as I arrive. There is something over 3,000 bunches and they will net me nearly or over \$2,000. They represent a portion of my own work last Winter and that of several of my neighbors. As you must know, I am somewhat of a speculator and buy up hoops for the market, and have so far this season sent over 10,000 bunches to the market.

"Where will I sell them? Well, the packing-box trade about Duane, Hudson, Franklin, and other streets in the dry goods district will take all my straps. The barrel, tub, and keg hoops I will sell in Williamsburg among the cooperage establishments there. I may be fortunate enough to sell all my hoops to one party upon my arrival, but it will take me only a few hours to dispose of all, at any rate. Next week I will probably have a couple more canalboats loaded with another shipment.

"Where do most of my hoops come from? Well, I get most of those I buy along the line of the Delaware and Hudson Canal. Then I buy them up through the valleys of the Rondout, the Neversink, and the Beaverkill. Sometimes I take trips up the Erie Railroad into the Montgaup Valley and to Sparrowbush, but I get most of my hoops in Ulster. A great many come from the towns of Rochester, Marbletown, Wauvarsing, and Olive, and from the mountains of Woodstock, Denning, and Shandaken. I sell thousands of hoops to the cement and lime companies about Kingston and Rosendale that never see the New-York market."

"Do you know of any one who ever got rich in the hoop trade?" asked the reporter.

"Well!" said the old man, "I'm pretty comfortable myself. Then there was a man in Kingston named Hiram Davis who has been dead for a number of years who left a family of children all well off. Hiram made most of his money out of the hoop and heading trade, and in spite of the fact that he gave large sums to the church and charity, he died well off. Had he been as close a dealer as some men I know of he could have been worth a million, but Hiram was honest, dead honest."

The old man then said: "Young man, it matters little what business a man is in in this country as long as he has a good reputation and attends to his own affairs. If he attends strictly to his business, deals square, is honest and not improvident, he can gain a competence, even in shaving hoops. My boys have both been given good educations, but they are both in the same business that I am. They have nice homes and are not proud.

"They think with their dad, that it is better to be a good judge of hoop poles and have an eye to business than it is to be an unsuccessful lawyer or a savings bank President with a hankering for fast horses and champagne."