

PART V

VEGETABLE CANNERIES

During the late summer and fall the ripening of the tomato crop colors the landscape and industrial life of southern Delaware. Fields are fringed with rows of filled tomato baskets waiting to be carried to a neighboring cannery. On the roads are trucks and on the waterways are barges piled several tiers deep with baskets of red—splashes of brightness in their surroundings. As one travels in rural Delaware, tall, thin smokestacks, characteristic of canneries, usually are the only skyline evidence of industrial life.

According to the commercial value of Delaware's manufactured products, the canning industry ranked fifth at the time of the 1920 census.¹ Considerable quantities of peas, corn, and beans, and small quantities of sweet potatoes, pumpkins, and fruit are canned, but the chief canned product is tomatoes. In 1924 Delaware ranked sixth among the States in the output of canned tomatoes.² The National Canners' Association in its compilation of annual canning statistics gives the following figures for Delaware: Corn 221,000 cases, peas 305,000 cases, and tomatoes 803,000 cases.³ According to a list submitted by the Delaware Labor Commission there were 71 canneries operating in the State in 1924. About 85 per cent of the canneries were in the two southern and rural counties—32 in Kent and 30 in Sussex. There were 9 in New Castle, the northern county.⁴

Thirty-four canneries were visited by agents of the Women's Bureau, and all but four of these were working on tomatoes during the 1924 season. Three canneries were equipped to can only corn, one was canning lima beans, and two worked alternately on corn and tomatoes.

During September, the peak month for the tomato canners, more women are employed in the canneries than in any other industry in the State.⁵ According to estimates given by the canners, approximately 2,200 women and 1,500 men were employed in the 34 canneries visited during the peak weeks. This was said to be made up of fairly equal numbers of negro and white men and women.

¹ U. S. Bureau of the Census. Fourteenth census: 1920. v. 9, Manufactures, 1919. pp. 219, 220.

² National Canners' Association. Tomato statistics, corn statistics, and pea statistics, 1924.

³ Idem.

⁴ Delaware Labor Commission. Manufacturing establishments of Delaware, Jan. 1, 1925. pp. 13-18.

⁵ U. S. Bureau of the Census. Fourteenth census: 1920. v. 9, Manufactures, 1919. p. 224. Table 27.