
“The Farmers Didn't Particularly Care for Us”: Oral Narrative and the Grass Roots
Recovery of African American Migrant Farm Labor History in Central Pennsylvania

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**“THE FARMERS DIDN’T PARTICULARLY
CARE FOR US”: ORAL NARRATIVE AND THE
GRASS ROOTS RECOVERY OF AFRICAN
AMERICAN MIGRANT FARM LABOR
HISTORY IN CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA**

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*T*he Reverend Robert Woodall can still remember the rattlesnakes that he killed, sometimes beneath the car where his small children had to stay while he and his wife worked in the fields picking apples in central Pennsylvania. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Woodall had left behind the life of a sharecropper in Mississippi to become a migrant farm worker. Each year, he would begin harvesting crops in Florida and then gradually move north along the Atlantic coast, picking oranges, peaches, apples, and any other crop that happened to be in season. He ended in late summer to mid-autumn picking apples in southcentral Pennsylvania’s Adams County. Woodall and his wife often had trouble finding child daycare while they worked. When this happened, the Woodall children had to come to the fields and stay by the car beneath the shade of a tree, out among the rattlesnakes.¹

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Lack of adequate childcare is just one of many problems associated with a system of harvesting dependent upon migrant farm labor. To most consumers, migrant farm workers provide the invisible hands that produce the affordable fruits and vegetables that end up being stocked on grocery store shelves. Yet workers who move from farm to farm harvesting each year face chronic troubles finding adequate housing, safe transportation, and health care. They are perpetual “outsiders” wherever they move, and in the United States race and citizenship operate as identifiers that reinforce this outsider status. Their transience and disconnection from local support networks often leave them vulnerable to exploitative “crew leaders” and unscrupulous employers.

These issues are endemic to migrant labor systems, not only in the United States, but throughout the world.² They formed a significant portion of Carey McWilliams’s critique of migrant farm labor in California articulated in his best-selling book *Factories in the Field* in 1939.³ Despite his observations, and despite numerous reforms, regulations, nonprofit direct service, community organizing, and state interventions, these conditions continued into the 1950s, 1960s, and persist to this day.

Nevertheless, throughout the history of migrant farm labor, there have been activists who have challenged the system. The most well known was the farm worker movement in California during the 1960s and 1970s led by Cesar Chavez and other Chicano labor leaders. This uprising of migrant workers eventually led to the formation of the United Farm Workers union and the passage of the most significant migrant farm labor laws in the nation.

Gaining less attention has been the migrant farm labor system along the East Coast in places like Pennsylvania. Here migrant workers have toiled in smaller numbers than in California, and they have played a less central role within state, regional, and global economies. Yet, as in California, activists have demanded reforms within Pennsylvania’s arrangement of migrant farm labor, a system characterized by poor housing conditions, lack of childcare and educational opportunities, and a corrupt crew-leader system. One such movement for reform emerged out of an African American community in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, not far from where Woodall picked apples. The leaders of this movement came from Carlisle’s Shiloh Baptist Church, and were led by Rev. Joseph Haggler Jr. None of these people were themselves farm workers, but they were African American, and this helped to establish common identity with a majority of farm laborers who arrived in Pennsylvania in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

While much of the history of migrant farm labor in Pennsylvania is contained in official sources like the state archives, oral histories with farm workers and those involved in the Shiloh migrant aid program have helped to reveal this hidden history of African American farm labor. These interviews illustrate how the migrant program at Shiloh went beyond services provided to black migrant workers. Those who aided migrant farm workers remember themselves experiencing a change of consciousness, learning about an entire labor system that existed only a few miles from their homes, but that was almost entirely hidden from view. Those who worked as migrant workers recall the alienation that they felt, not only as a result of racial discrimination, but also through the stigma that they experienced because of their work and homelessness. Underlying almost all interviews is the central importance of race. Anyone interviewed about migrant farm labor mentions it, and for good reason. Ultimately, the social boundaries erected around racial identities make a migrant farm labor system possible by restricting trade through a tariff on skin color.

Migrant Farm Labor in Pennsylvania

By the turn of the twentieth century, Pennsylvania farmers faced a number of economic and social pressures that were changing the way that they produced crops. The grain-farming boom in the West, led by the bonanza farm movement in the 1870s, had created an economy of scale that depressed prices for wheat, corn, and other cereals.⁴ Grain farms in the East, which tended to be much smaller and produce far less than those in the Midwest Plains, had trouble surviving in this new marketplace. Moreover, the urban industrial sectors near Pennsylvania farm country promised new, higher-paying jobs for people who used to provide local farm labor. Recognizing this, the *Seventh Annual Report to the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture* lamented, "The farm problem has . . . become suddenly very serious."⁵

New forms of farm machinery, such as improvements in steel plows, did ease the demand for labor on grain-producing farms, but these same machines also made it easier for western farmers to produce crops in even greater quantity and at lower prices. As Cindy Hahamovitch points out in her work on Atlantic migrant farm labor during the first half of the twentieth century, this led many eastern farmers with smaller land holdings to move toward the

production of produce and away from grains. Yet as the agricultural annual report noted in 1901, produce crops did not benefit much from new farm machinery: "In some farm operations, such as fruit-growing and dairy districts, much of the work must still be done by hand, and it is here that the lack of sufficient help is most severely felt."⁶

The *Annual Report* for the following year notes a continuation of this same crisis. "In some localities," the report reads, "it is impossible to hire labor at any price which the farmer can afford to pay. More women have been working in the fields this year than perhaps ever before in the history of the state."⁷ Given this crisis of labor supply, the 1901 *Annual Report* predicted that farmers would have to subdivide their properties to a level where an ordinary family could reasonably supply all of the labor needs on the farm.⁸

In fact, the opposite would end up taking place. Farms would grow larger, not smaller, as more farmers were forced to sell off their land, given the increasingly competitive nature of the agricultural marketplace. Combined with the move toward hand-picked produce, this meant that demands for farm labor actually increased. By 1914 the *Annual Report* lamented that a bumper crop of apples yielding 20,000,000 bushels actually produced thousands of bushels of waste. The report suggests the creation of a fruit-processing industry integrated into the apple-growing regions. In addition, it complains that growers "are not careful how they handle their fruit at picking and packing time." As a result, "when their fruit is put on the market alongside of that of the careful and efficient grower, [the farmers] receive from \$1.00 to \$2.00 less per barrel on account of their carelessness."⁹ Both of the problems noted by the 1914 *Annual Report* suggest an expansion of fruit growing and a continuing need for workers to harvest and process Pennsylvania farm produce.

By nature, however, this demand for labor would be seasonal. Once the crops are picked, there is no need for workers to stay. In fact, to the degree that an unemployed worker draws resources from local relief services, local communities often desire that farm workers hired to harvest crops leave their communities as soon as their job is finished. In California, this situation led to the creation of the modern migrant farm labor system. As Carey McWilliams described it in 1939, California land plots were vast, 10,000-plus-acre properties. The advent of refrigerated rail transport allowed the marketing of produce nationally in a way that was highly profitable, as long as labor costs were held down. McWilliams shows how companies that controlled the California produce market drew upon immigrant labor as the solution to this problem. They first hired workers from India, then East Asia and Armenia.

Later workers arrived from Latin American, principally Mexico. In each case, their status as outsiders, marked such by racial identifiers, made it harder for them to bargain for higher wages and better working conditions.¹⁰

Beyond their status as immigrants and racial outsiders, migrant workers in California worked under a crew-leader system, an experience that East Coast workers would share with their western counterparts. Crew leaders posed perhaps the most problematic aspect of the migrant farm-labor system as the leaders of crews withheld wages from crew members for expenses, transportation, housing, and liquor. Crew leaders kept their crews in perpetual debt, creating conditions whereby workers found themselves to be working under a system of peonage that approximated slavery.¹¹

In many respects, Adams County, Pennsylvania, farming is very different from the large-scale, corporate growing on the West Coast. Families belonging to cooperatives still own most of the area's farms even today, and few are larger than 1,000 acres. Yet, like California, Adams County's agricultural history has increasingly become oriented around growing fruit and relying on migrant farm labor. Because it is a rolling and hilly region with good soil, farmers recognized Adams County as a good place for fruit orchards in the early nineteenth century. It did not develop into a fruit-growing center, however, until between 1875 and 1900. Even after 1905, the county ranked relatively low as one of the major fruit-producing areas of the state. Yet by 1925 it had become Pennsylvania's most productive apple-growing region.¹²

Self-published histories of the Adams County Fruit Growers Association reflect these trends. They report the first widespread growing and marketing of produce in Adams County in the last decades of the nineteenth century in the hills surrounding the site of the Civil War's pivotal battle, Gettysburg. With the completion of the Gettysburg-Harrisburg Railroad in 1885, nurseries in the county began to sell apple trees throughout the region. By the middle of the 1890s, the farms of Adams County produced enough fruit to support a fruit-processing and -packing economy. By the early twentieth century, apples grown in Adams County were being shipped and sold in Europe. In a letter home after a visit to fruit growers in California in 1919, Adams County apple processor C. H. Musselman expressed his enthusiasm for the future of apple growing in southcentral Pennsylvania. Regretting that he had gone into the business of processing instead of growing, he wrote: "There is nothing in my mind as profitable in Adams County as raising apples. As evidence of this I am arranging to go into apple growing myself on a large scale."¹³

By the early twentieth century, a fruit-growing economy in Adams County was firmly established, but it is less clear when farmers began to employ migrant workers. Certainly there was not the widespread migrant farm-labor system that developed in California that McWilliams describes. According to some local sources, farmers in Adams County hired youths from nearby communities to pick fruit during the harvest season during the first half of the twentieth century. M. Francis Coulson, interviewed by Gettysburg College student Jenny Sonnenberg, provides one such narrative. When asked if he remembered there being “many minorities” living in Adams County during World War II, Coulson responded that the only nonwhites in the area would have lived in Gettysburg. “That was before the period when the Puerto Rican or the Spanish and the Black people would come into this area to harvest fruit. During the war period, the fruit workers were mostly our own local residents, mainly high-school students and so forth.” Coulson remembered that sometimes high schools would close during the harvest season to allow teens to pick crops in the fall.¹⁴

Parker Coble, who later went on to lead the effort to provide educational and other social services for migrant farm workers and their children, also remembers the involvement of local laborers in the local harvest season. “And that’s when we were still using an awful lot of kids, and people taking vacations. And that was, it’s still post-depression mentality. You don’t take vacations for vacations, you took a vacation to go get another job and work.”¹⁵

Even with a local supply of labor, it may not have been sufficient to provide for the labor demands of growers before or during World War II. Colleen Sease, an employee of a migrant services nonprofit corporation in central Pennsylvania, remembers stories from her family about a small Adams County hotel and restaurant called the Elkhorn Inn during the late 1920s and early 1930s, located in Bendersville. She recalls that her relatives told her of transient people, or “hobos,” who would come to stay in the hotel during the harvest season to pick crops.

From the stories that my mother and my Uncle Thurston told me, most of the rooms were rented out to migrants. And I didn’t know enough to ask too many questions, but in later years I did ask, and they said well, migrants were not foreign people at that time. They were not from Mexico, they were not from Puerto Rico or Haiti or anywhere else. They were local men, mostly single who came out of

the Philadelphia and Baltimore area, and they would come up from the Baltimore, Washington, Philadelphia area and pick apples, and pick cherries, and peaches and whatever was available and would also work in the canning factories. Although I don’t know a lot about the canning process back then, how much factory work was available, the stories that I heard were mostly about the migrants picking the fruit and vegetables, and then the family, the boys and other people transporting it to Harrisburg, and to New York.¹⁶

Note that in her interview with M. Francis Coulson, Jenny Sonnenberg did not initially ask about migrant farm labor, but rather about minorities living in Adams County. This, in turn, led to a reflection upon farm labor. Likewise, Coleen Sease was careful to explain that the “hobos” who arrived in Adams County were white, not Puerto Rican, Mexican, or Haitian. These turns in the conversation make perfect sense because the majority of nonwhites in Adams County have entered either as migrant farm workers or as part of a workforce supporting an agricultural economy. Sease’s remarks highlight the central role that race historically has played in identifying who was an “insider” to the long-settled communities of Adams County, and who was a transient outsider. One can see this most clearly during the early 1940s and into World War II when both local and national initiatives established programs to provide temporary farm labor to Adams County growers.

African Americans from nearby Carlisle, for example, remember a local employment office hiring teenagers to harvest crops in neighboring Adams County. Marcus Hodge, an African American resident of nearby Carlisle in neighboring Cumberland County, remembers working in a government-sponsored youth employment program in 1941. “We were hired more or less through the employment office which was on Pomfret Street at the time,” Hodge recalls. “Each morning, a stake bodied truck would come by and these children would go down—young people—to pick beans. . . . There would be maybe thirty or forty on the truck each day that would go.” Another African American, Mae Wright, was a teenager in Carlisle and remembers getting a harvesting job through the same agency. She enjoyed the opportunity to work outside in a job that differed from those proscribed for African American girls living in town, such as domestic work in people’s homes.¹⁷

Both Hodge and Wright also remember encountering migrant workers from the southern United States in the fields while they were harvesting. Hodge recalls that the first migrant workers he met were single men who

picked tomatoes, which were hauled to processing plants near Carlisle. Wright also recalls that most of the migrant workers were single and African American. In contrast with their own teenage summer job experiences, Hodge and Wright recognized the deprivation and exploitation that characterized migrant farm workers' lives. Seeing what may have been some of the earliest examples of the crew-leader system, both recalled encountering camps where workers lived near the farm fields. Hodge remembered that the isolation of farm workers in these remote hillside regions made them vulnerable to those who charged them for rent and food. "What they earned, they almost had to pay back [to] who was running the thing, you know."¹⁸

A number of African American farm workers, however, would travel the fifteen to thirty miles north to the black community in Carlisle whenever they had the opportunity to get away. Carlisle has an African American community that dates back to the early nineteenth century. The black areas of Carlisle would have been easy for a migrant farm worker to find since the borough had a long history of residential segregation and other forms of discrimination. Mae Wright and Marcus Hodge each would have experienced this discrimination directly. Both, for example, attended segregated elementary schools. Even though the Pennsylvania state legislature outlawed officially sanctioned school segregation by race in Pennsylvania public schools in 1881, Carlisle maintained an explicitly segregated school system until 1948, in direct violation of state law.¹⁹

Yet for black migrant workers from the South, local black neighborhoods also provided businesses and services hard to find in much of central Pennsylvania. Wright remembers, "Some of them would come into town on Saturday to get their hair cut, and would go uptown to buy clothes and stuff like that." Likewise, Hodge recalls, "Some of them would go to town. You'd see them even in Carlisle like on the weekends or something."²⁰ In this sense, Carlisle's African American community served as somewhat of a refuge for some black migrant workers. These informal community ties would eventually allow for the development of more institutionalized forms of direct service aid through Reverend Haggler's Shiloh Baptist Church. The necessity of such services became evident by the late 1950s as migrant farm labor became an entrenched component of the way that crops were harvested in southcentral Pennsylvania.

Along with the programs that employed many African American youths as farm workers, and the initiation of a southern migrant farm-labor "stream," the federal government brought temporary farm workers to rural parts of

Pennsylvania on temporary visas. These contract workers were meant to replace many of the white, local, young workers who had harvested crops in the past, but who had either joined the military or moved to cities seeking work in higher-paying industrial jobs. John Peters, whose family has owned and operated one of the largest fruit orchards and nurseries in Pennsylvania since the Civil War, remembers that the federal government aided farmers like those in Adams County through guest-worker programs associated with the Roosevelt administration’s Lend Lease policy.²¹

Everybody went to work in war factories and there was very much of a shortage of labor, and the government did a variety of things to try and help the agricultural labor situation, and one of them was to help Great Britain to keep the islands in the Caribbean, which they couldn’t keep anymore [since] they were on this side of the ocean. Britain could [only] desperately survive itself, so Churchill and Roosevelt entered into agreements where they got American destroyers and American naval equipment in trade for our protectorate of islands like Jamaica. . . . The US government started bringing Jamaicans in, and also we had people from Puerto Rico and people from the Bahaman Islands, we had Bahamian people in here in the ’40s, that was part of the government recognition of this fact that all the agricultural workers had gone to make bullets or make war, so that’s a very interesting sequence that happened.²²

The laborers from the Caribbean that Peters remembers arrived in the state alongside the earliest workers from Mexico to come to Pennsylvania as part of the Bracero program in 1944. These were railroad workers sent to various regions of the country. In 1944, for example, 3,200 people from Mexico who held Bracero program visas worked on railroads in Pennsylvania. From this nationwide program, Mexican workers often settled in local U.S. communities once their visas expired. Bethlehem Steel recruited many to work in their steel factories, and this resulted in a small Mexican community forming in that city.²³

Relatively few stayed in Pennsylvania, however, even as the Bracero program continued through the 1950s. In fact, it was not until the 1990s that large numbers of local Adams County farmers relied upon workers from Mexico. This most likely has to do with the continuation of H-2 visa programs created with countries such as Haiti and Jamaica, such as the ones

that Peters describes. By the 1970s, some 20,000 workers came to toil in the Florida sugarcane fields each year, many joining the East Coast migrant farm-labor stream that ran through central Pennsylvania.²⁴

The previous testimonials and statistics all show how the creation of a migrant farm-labor system in central Pennsylvania during World War II was the result of both the development of fruit growing and the loss of a local labor supply. Orchard fruits, such as apples, require manual harvesting and therefore a large labor supply to maintain production. Yet World War II, providing both an exit of local workers and policy initiatives to introduce transient workers, served as a watershed era for farm labor in Adams County when migrant workers first became a regular presence in the area.

Institutionalization of Migrant Farm Labor

By the early 1950s, central Pennsylvania had become part of a larger migration of agricultural labor along the Atlantic coast that stretched from Florida, up through the Carolinas, along the Delaware-Maryland-Virginia (commonly referred to as the "Del-Mar-Va") peninsula, through central Pennsylvania and into upstate and western New York. Many of these laborers were guest workers or new migrants from Puerto Rico, pushed from the rural Caribbean island by U.S. policies that encouraged the development of an industrial economy within the protectorate. As Peters described, the federal government had provided East Coast farmers with temporary domestic workers from Puerto Rico during World War II. These contract labor programs continued into the 1950s. By 1953 14,930 contract workers were brought from Puerto Rico to farms on the mainland, with 27 percent destined for Pennsylvania.²⁵

Other Pennsylvania migrant farm workers were from the southern United States. Many were African American migrants like Woodall who were part of a dynamic pattern of movement that dated back to the early twentieth century. Contrary to the view that the Great Migration of African Americans north was a clear-cut journey from the rural south to the urban north, black migration actually involved a great deal of movement back and forth between the two regions. As Peter Gottlieb illustrates, even migrants to the steel factories of Pittsburgh whose numbers in that city swelled from 25,623 to 54,983 between 1910 and 1930 often returned to the south during periods when they were laid off or when they were needed by family still located in Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, or Alabama.²⁶

For both groups in Pennsylvania, migrant farm labor involved many of the same problems associated with the job that McWilliams discussed in California during the 1930s. The most significant of these involved families that moved together following harvests. Parents often found education for their children impossible since they were only in one location for a brief period of time. As Woodall’s story at the outset illustrates, migrant workers often had no daycare for their youngest children. Even single male workers, however, faced dangerous transportation, poor housing, primitive sanitation conditions, and life-threatening accidents while on the job. Being excluded from the National Labor Relations Act, farm workers were denied the right to organize and negotiate collective bargaining agreements with their crews or their employers. Lacking the right to form a union left workers particularly vulnerable to the abuses of the crew-leader system. When a crew leader threatened a worker with violence, or withheld a wage, a worker had no recourse to any sort of collective response. Excluded from the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act, farm laborers also were not guaranteed a minimum wage.

In many respects, because federal labor protections excluded migrant farm workers, agricultural workers needed more help than workers in other industries. In Pennsylvania, state agencies first began to recognize these problems and develop policies to deal with them during the 1950s. In 1952 the governor of Pennsylvania, John S. Fine, established by executive order the first Governor’s Interdepartmental Committee on Migrant Labor. The committee was charged with compiling statistics, issuing annual reports on the conditions of farm laborers, and coming up with policy recommendations, particularly ones that could coordinate various state agencies that might have jurisdiction over migrant labor issues, such as the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Health, and the Department of Labor and Industry. The committee continued to operate throughout the next few decades and by the end of the 1950s had established some demographic and statistical analysis of migrant labor in the state.

The 1956 report notes eight counties (Adams, Franklin, York, Chester, Potter, Lancaster, Northumberland, and Lehigh) that led the state in the use of migrant farm workers. It lists the number of “Southern Negro” workers as 5,555, and the number of Puerto Ricans as 2,600. In Adams County migrant workers comprised 26.9 percent of the hired seasonal labor force, and the value of the crop that they directly harvested was stated to be \$1,010,518.²⁷ The 1957 annual report tallied 35,000 local workers who harvested produce and 10,000 “out-of-state” workers. Of those who

migrated into the state, the report states that 4,000 were Puerto Rican and 6,000 southern.²⁸

The commission meetings, most often led by the state secretary of labor and industry, issued recommendations for regulations of child-labor practices, child welfare and education, transportation, housing, crew leaders, health coverage, and minimum wage. Secretary William L. Batt Jr., who served during the administration of Gov. George M. Leader (1955–59), took an active lead with the committee, presiding over regular meetings and issuing reports that included specific policy implementations. For example, in October of 1957, the committee filed the “Final Report on 1957 Season and Plans for 1958.” The report is divided into sections titled “Transportation,” “Housing,” “Health and Welfare,” “Day Care for Migrants’ Children,” and “Coordination of Migrant Programs with Other States.” It recommended that the Department of Labor and Industry issue statewide regulations to prevent fatal accidents in the transport of migrant workers; reported on a labor-camp inspection program instituted as part of an agreement between the departments of Health and Labor and Industry; noted new regulations for migrant housing that required “hot and cold running water, adequate refrigeration and cooking facilities, screen doors and windows, and 250 cubic feet of air space and 3 square feet of window space per occupant”; banned the use of tents for sleeping quarters; and informed readers of new licensing regulations for crew leaders who were now responsible for “safe and sanitary conduct of migrant workers,” as well as for worker conduct, “well-being and morale” while in camps. Crew leaders were also held responsible, along with labor-camp owners, for “compliance with all regulations governing farm labor camps.”²⁹

Nevertheless, the report expressed dissatisfaction with the conditions faced by migrant farm workers and acknowledged the need for further regulations. Perhaps this may explain why for the March 5, 1958, meeting the committee expanded to include not only representatives of Pennsylvania farmers (such as the Pennsylvania Vegetable Growers Association, Farm Service Association, the State Horticulture Association of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania Cooperative Potato Growers Association, and the Pennsylvania Cannery Association), but also several service organizations and activist groups (Pennsylvania Citizens Committee on Migrant Labor, Pennsylvania Citizens Association for Health and Welfare, Pennsylvania Federation of Women’s Clubs, Pennsylvania Congress of Parents and Teachers, Pennsylvania Council of Churches, Pennsylvania Catholic Churches, NAACP, AFL-CIO).³⁰

In addition to these groups, the National Council of Churches (NCC) maintained an active mission among migrant farm workers in Pennsylvania, and its records help provide an even fuller picture of migrant labor in the state. Monica Owen, a representative from the NCC, provided a report on the "plight of the migrants" based on two weeks that she had spent in late February and early March 1958 in rural Pennsylvania. She stated that migrant workers spent 75 percent of their income on provisions in the towns where they were employed. In addition, she advocated for a guaranteed minimum wage, an affordable Blue Cross migrant health-insurance plan, and tighter enforcement of transportation regulations. In addition, she commended the state crew-leader regulations, calling the crew-leader system "one of the basic evils."³¹

The NCC was, in fact, one of the most prominent groups to take an interest in migrant farm-labor issues in the United States. Yet despite the intensive effort on the part of Governor Leader's committee to reform the migrant labor system, leaders within the state Department of Agriculture clearly expressed discomfort with, if not resistance to, the regulations the committee advocated. Alvin Saylor, the state agricultural economist who provided reports about the committee's meetings to Agriculture Secretary William L. Henning, expressed frustration with Owens's March presentation and objected to her promotion of minimum-wage laws, child-labor regulations, and "many other 'do-good' things which are very respectable endeavors." Saylor responded to these suggestions by writing

It is extremely difficult for anyone or any individual or any organization to be opposed to movements of this kind, however, all these things have very serious economic consequences for the farmers of Pennsylvania. For instance, if these housing regulations, if minimum wage laws, if child labor laws go through, which are anywhere near what they are talking about, in my opinion there will be a shifting out of agriculture in Pennsylvania from the crops which are harvested by migrant labor into dairy or other livestock production. The vegetables and fruits which need migrant labor will be harvested in the far west where they can do it more efficiently, possibly more economically than we could do it with the kind of rules and regulations in Pennsylvania.³²

Saylor's report on the July 16, 1958, meeting also proved critical of the committee recommendations. In particular, he took note of a proposal for the state to pressure farmers into providing a Blue Cross health insurance

program, and for the state to expand its workmen's compensation, for migrant workers. He also expressed concern over the committee supporting legislation to prohibit children under the age of eighteen from working in migrant labor, and possibly to include farm workers in national minimum-wage regulations. Perhaps most problematic for Saylor was a proposal to bring the regulation of farm-labor wages under the jurisdiction of the Department of Labor and Industry rather than the Department of Agriculture. Saylor noted that Labor and Industry Secretary Batt had already ruled against the Pennsylvania Farm Labor Service in its attempt to bring 2,000 Puerto Rican workers to Pennsylvania to work at a wage of \$.65 per hour. Saylor alleged that the \$.75 per hour suggested by Batt would put their employers "completely out of business."³³

Secretary of Agriculture Henning clearly expressed sympathy with Saylor's report and seemed to indicate that the governor's committee was a threat to his agency and to farmers in general. Henning replied to Saylor's report on the July 22 meeting by writing, "I think I know how the farmers feel about these programs, but I assure you that the folks running this committee do not have this same viewpoint. Please continue to attend all meetings; and regardless of what the chairman says, you stand up and fight for the farmer. He is our business."³⁴

Even with a sympathetic governor, supportive cabinet officials, and the involvement of nongovernmental activists, the governor's committee faced serious obstacles to the implementation of its proposals. Agricultural economists and farmers still had a very powerful voice within the governor's administration, and, to a much greater extent, among Republicans in the Pennsylvania Senate. One of the most influential organizations representing the interests of growers, the Pennsylvania Farmers' Association, issued a memo by Secretary-Treasurer C. M. Wilson in February of 1959 about "serious developments in the farm labor field" taking place in the state. In particular, Wilson set an alarmist tone, reporting that Secretary Batt sought to bring farm workers under the provisions of the "Fair Labor Standards Act," which would guarantee minimum wage and overtime pay to this previously excluded sector of the labor market. In addition, Wilson criticized Batt for stating that migrant-worker housing was worse than pigpens; noted that Batt was listed as a member of the National Advisory Committee on Farm Labor, which the memo stated "is largely comprised of labor union representatives and others who are strongly urging and helping to promote a labor union

of farm workers”; and warned that the chair of a legislative committee was pressing for a bill that would set the minimum age for working on a farm at fourteen.³⁵

A few weeks after this memo was released, a Republican-led group of state senators introduced Senate Bill 383, “An Act prohibiting the Department of Labor and Industry from promulgating and enforcing any rules or regulations affecting domestic servants or farm laborers.”³⁶ *Harrisburg Patriot* editorial writer George Draut commented in May that the bill had no chance of being enacted into law, facing both a hostile House and governor. In addition, it was a bill that even many Senate Republicans found embarrassing and politically damaging. It was only introduced so some senators could demonstrate their loyalty to farmers, illustrating once more the influence that the farmers’ lobby still had within the state government.³⁷

Although the proposed provision did not pass the state Senate, it actually only mirrored federal policy. Just as with federal law, the state proposals never overtly mention race. Yet they specifically targeted two occupations that employed a disproportionate number of nonwhites.³⁸ Perhaps this is why, in 1959, an African American farm family came knocking on the door of Rev. Joseph Haggler Jr., in the middle of Carlisle’s African American district, looking for help. As documents from the governor’s committee and from the NCC show, the needs of farm workers were not being addressed in Adams County, Pennsylvania. During the late 1950s and early 1960s Reverend Haggler would organize programs with help from the NCC to provide advocacy and services to address the difficulties that migrant farm workers experienced.

African American Mobilization for Migrant Workers

Joseph Haggler III remembers that it was sometime in the summer of 1958 or 1959 when his family first became aware that African American migrant farm workers even existed beyond the South Mountain ridge near his home in Carlisle. His family had moved to Carlisle from New Jersey when his father, Rev. Joseph Haggler Jr., was called to minister the Shiloh Baptist Church in 1955. About his father’s ministry, Haggler remembers, “My father was a people person. He was a pastor and he had a lot of genuine concern for people.”³⁹

Indeed, it was not only Haggler's father, but also his mother who saw the ministry as a calling to help the local community. After working to earn a master's degree from the Teachers College at Columbia University, Ophelia Haggler became a middle school French and English teacher within the Carlisle Area School District.⁴⁰ Out of this same community concern that characterized his family, Reverend Haggler organized some of the first coordinated migrant farm labor services in Adams County that linked the needs of farm workers to the local residential population.

A black family from Florida had come to work in central Pennsylvania on the farms and ran into some sort of difficulty, some sort of problem. Somehow they were—because of my father's reputation of helping people, helping people that were stranded, helping people that had difficulties—they were directed to him and he became aware of the trials and tribulations that migrant farm worker families faced. I remember him helping these folks get a car repaired and they were at our house. You know, we were not real pleased with that as kids. But [he helped] them as they got themselves back together so they could go back to Florida. I guess he was moved by this whole thing and began to get involved pretty much locally probably first in the Bendersville–Dillsburg area just to try to find out what was going on. . . . That's how he got started.⁴¹

As the younger Haggler remembers, it was not only his father's reputation that drew this family to their house for help, but also the historical, cultural, and social role of African American churches. Although Shiloh Baptist was not the only black church in Carlisle, unlike others, it was located in an African American neighborhood. The fact that it served the African American community made it a possible refuge. "That was the place that you went to get things resolved," remembers Haggler. "So even migrant laborers would come to Carlisle and I'm sure there were other places in the country that they went and when things got bad or they needed help, where do you go? You find the African American community, and you find the church. And that's where you'll get the help."⁴²

Not long after this incident, Reverend Haggler began to organize a migrant-labor program to assist workers and their families. Joseph Haggler III remembers being with his father when he had a meeting with one of the major

growers in Adams County who had actually seen a need for an education and daycare program for the children of migrant farm workers. This grower had a brother attend the meeting who was a minister. Haggler recalls, “This guy was white and obviously he didn’t feel that he was able to do it for political reasons.” Instead, he told Reverend Haggler that the National Council of Churches had been trying to start a program of activities for migrant workers in Adams County that might include childhood education and recreation. This particular farmer felt that such a program could “kind of be a buffer between the farmers and the laborers themselves.”⁴³ As much as such a program was initiated out of a genuine concern for the welfare of farm workers, this grower also recognized that it would be in the interest of farmers to provide a humane working environment for their employees.

The reports that the NCC provided to the governor’s committee developed from such programs. In fact, the NCC had been involved in coordinating services for migrant farm workers nationally since 1950 when they took control of the National Migrant Committee that had been under the leadership of the Home Mission Council of North America. Their work had focused mostly upon attending to the basic needs of migrant farm workers such as clothing, housing, and food. However, because of the massive scale of migrant farm labor nationally, and because their focus did not initially address the structural vulnerabilities of migrant farm workers, their work did not create much change for migrant farm workers during the early part of the 1950s.⁴⁴ The involvement of local ministers like Joseph Haggler promised to take these programs in a new direction. With their help, there was a way for black communities to get involved in aiding migrant workers and draw attention to an inherently exploitative system that was largely hidden from public view.

The NCC had developed field missions in Adams County and nearby Franklin County before Reverend Haggler became involved in the late 1950s.⁴⁵ These programs provided educational services, food, daycare, and health care to workers. In addition, summer staff generated reports regarding housing and working conditions that could be used for a broader assessment of the lives of migrant farm workers. For example, report forms from 1958 asked field staff to report upon the attitude of employers toward their workers, migrants’ understanding of how employers viewed them, and the degree to which migrant workers have been integrated into the surrounding community.⁴⁶



FIGURE 1: Joseph Haggler III working as a field organizer in Adams County during the early 1960's. His father, Joseph Haggler Jr., mobilized volunteers from his parish, Shiloh Baptist Church in Carlisle, to help migrant farm workers by providing services such as day care, education, and advocacy. Photo courtesy of Mildred B. Jones.

Reports from field missionaries suggest that most of the workers in the region were either African American or Puerto Rican. A summary of state field reports roughly concurs with state reports from the same time period, noting that a total of 10,000 migrants came to the state in 1957, with 60 percent listed as “Negro” and 40 percent listed as “Spanish.” These reports also note that these groups tended to remain separate.

Missionaries devoted a great deal of effort to bringing blacks and Puerto Ricans together in a common fellowship.⁴⁷ This proved to be difficult, however, for a number of reasons. Most obviously, language provided a barrier to communication. In addition, in his oral history interview Haggler remembered that African American and Puerto Rican populations had very different needs based upon their demographic makeup. He recalled that about half of African American camps were comprised of entire families, but that about “95%–98%” of Puerto Rican camps were male.⁴⁸ His recollections reflect policy of the time period. Both the U.S. and Puerto Rican authorities encouraged Puerto Rican males and females to take work in different sectors of the economy when coming to the United States on temporary work programs. Women tended to end up as domestic servants, while men tended to work in agricultural labor. For policymakers, this served the purpose of discouraging permanent residence on the mainland after the end of the harvesting season.⁴⁹

Reports also state that migrant workers tended to be alienated from the local communities that surrounded farms, and that missionaries actively worked to overcome the social barriers between the two populations. A field worker discussing conditions in Adams County remarked that the NCC program, despite achieving success in helping migrants, did little to bridge the gap between workers and surrounding communities. “There is little evidence . . . that it made much difference so far as the community is concerned.” In the words of Ismael D. Adujar, the staff member serving Franklin County in July of 1958, an “unmet need” was to “establish a closer relationship between Migrants and the community.”⁵⁰

Reverend Haggler was able to address many of these problems, enlisting his parishioners in a coordinated campaign to provide migrant services. Most of those who followed his calling were women who volunteered at the church. One of the most active was Mildred Jones. She had joined Shiloh as an adult and heard about the migrant programs in August of 1961 when another volunteer had to leave and needed to be replaced. She remembered that she initially became involved in a daycare program for children. “We first started at a church in Biglerville, the first church in ’61,” Jones recalls. “And I’m not too sure about ’62, I know we were in Bendersville in ’63.”⁵¹ Jones tells of a program that attended to the needs of children, but provided only the most basic services.

They came over, had breakfast in the morning, and then I think we went out. And they had some type of place, playground work set up, some of them, and then at noontime, they gave them lunch, and after lunch and bathroom duties they went and took a nap. And then I guess they got them up around 2:30 for snack. And then 3:00 they left on the bus to go back, because some of these children it took them an hour. Before they could get back home.⁵²

Volunteers did work to help teach reading and basic arithmetic, despite the fact that many had no prior experience or training as teachers. Their work was a daily commitment. Although it might not have changed the system of migrant farm labor, it did bring the life conditions of some migrants to the attention of many within Carlisle’s African American community. While initially directed toward this work because of contact with African American farm workers, volunteers from Shiloh Baptist also became involved with

migrant children who were Puerto Rican, and even some of the few poor whites who traveled to Pennsylvania to harvest.

Joseph Haggler III was a teenager at the time and was employed in a paid position where he would administer recreational programs and help with daycare. For him, it was an enjoyable summer job, but also one that changed his perspective by exposing him to the hardships that farm workers faced. Emblematic of these problems was the condition of migrant-worker housing that employers provided.

There were many problems—labor type related problems—between migrant workers and the farmers. Some of these places to me were unlivable. Totally unlivable conditions. I know one of the things that I remember in some of these shacks that they lived in and I had really never seen it before—not that I was a privileged child or anything—but the big thing were these sticky strips that they would hang from the ceiling to catch flies. You would go into these shacks and these things would just be almost—they were yellow—and they were almost covered in black with flies. That was one of the things that always just bothered me. Kids would be sitting in a shack, on a dirt floor, and just flies all over them. Health issues became a thing that my father got very concerned about and he would try to through the Council of Churches recruit medical personnel just to come out and have a day to go through the camp and look at the children and that kind of thing.⁵³

Reports by NCC staff members confirm Haggler's perceptions of migrant-housing conditions. A summary of reports from Adams County in 1957 notes that "all Puerto Ricans" were living "under relatively poor conditions so far as housing was concerned."⁵⁴

Field reports from staff member M. Rodriguez in Adams County also record problems with working conditions reflected in common health issues among migrant workers, including skin diseases, colds, and diarrhea. When prompted to report what migrant workers did when they were sick, Rodriguez wrote, "Stay sick until he or someone (or chaplain) make understand to the farmer or foreman the seriousness of the case."⁵⁵ In an August 5, 1958, summer staff report Rodriguez notes that the health conditions at the camps that he had visited were "poor." In a narrative report, he notes that many of the poor conditions could be improved by workers taking better

care of their living quarters. However, he also states that growers needed to provide most improvements, such as "better housing conditions (baths, partitions, ranges, sinks, latrines, clean bedding, refrigeration)."⁵⁶

Such reports not only revealed poverty, but also exposed issues that were the basis for political conflicts between farmers and farm-worker advocates. Despite the initial endorsement from some Adams County growers, not every farmer appreciated the programs that Shiloh volunteers were providing. Haggler III recalls that some farmers were openly hostile toward the program, remembering, "The farmers didn't particularly care for us." Remembering an incident when he stayed in the car while his father engaged in a shouting match with a farm manager on a farmhouse porch, he recalls that the abuses of the crew-leader system were an especially contentious issue. Haggler recollects that crew leaders, many of whom were also African American, would commonly withhold wages from crew members. His father would feel compelled to become involved to make sure that workers were paid fairly. This potentially destabilized the way that many farmers did business and could invite threats of violence.

These were tough guys—and I know my mother was always concerned that—from a safety standpoint—there was probably more to be concerned about from these guys who brought the migrant laborers up, than from these more civilized, I guess you would say, farm managers and owners. I mean these were dangerous, these were dangerous guys. And he tried to fight for the rights of these migrant laborers to get them paid. I mean the guy would bring people up and they would work and it was time to get paid—the guy would disappear, busses gone, people left, stuck, no money, nothing. He tried to prevent those things from happening. What he was trying to do was kind of organize the individual laborers so that they could be responsible for their own funds.⁵⁷

In fact, it was precisely the organization of workers that most concerned Pennsylvania farmers. By the middle of the 1960s, those influencing the Department of Agriculture worried less about the NCC National Migrant Committee than they did about the possibility of a union organization drive among farm workers such as that which Cesar Chavez had been conducting in the fields of California. Files from the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture from the middle of the 1960s contain newspaper clippings about

farm workers collectively organizing in Florida, California, and Texas. An official from the Farm Labor Service within the Department of Labor and Industry wrote foreboding memos to Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Jack Grey that accompanied these clippings. The notes read, "Here's more on unionization on the farm. This should be an interesting year;" and "The pot continues to BOIL!"⁵⁸

Parker Coble, a lifelong Adams County resident and a pioneer in providing services to migrant farm workers, remembers that the possibility of a farm workers' union could be used as a foil to pressure growers into supporting migrant Head Start, education, and other services. As Coble notes in his narrative, he did not support unions. Instead he presented his proposals as, in the words of Joseph Haggler III, a buffer between the growers and the workers.

You have to think of what was happening on the national scene, because we had a man by the name of Cesar Chavez, who I had met years ago. Cesar Chavez was very active in California with organizing unions. And I told the growers, my philosophy was that the union did not necessarily represent the best interest of the worker. They also had the interest of the union themselves. And if we could provide the quality of services in this area, you wouldn't have labor union problems as far as worrying about somebody coming in and organizing and saying whoa, day before you're to pick peaches we're not going to pick. That if you treat the people right, you'll have quality. And that's basically what happened.⁵⁹

Coble remembers that this line of argument did not convince all Adams County growers. "We tried to change growers' attitudes," he says. "We had some growers in Adams County who wanted no parts of this."⁶⁰ Yet Coble was able to convince several growers, including representatives of the one of the largest orchards in the region, the Musselmann Company, to provide funds and donate land for support of an education center for adults and children. Partnering with the federal Office of Economic Opportunity through the War on Poverty, they created a service headquarters called the Opportunities Center in Bendersville, Pennsylvania, which opened in September of 1965. This organization provided daycare as well as adult education programs that included drivers' education, home economics, consumer education, instruction in English as a second language, basic English reading and writing programs for

southern migrants, and some prevocational training. The effort was the result of a broad, interdepartmental state daycare program involving the Department of Public Welfare, the Department of Labor and Industry, the Department of Migrant labor, and Penn State University’s Department of Public Instruction in the supervision of the \$25,000 daycare center. At its opening, the *Gettysburg Times* touted the center as the first of its kind in the state and the first services center to be initiated by growers in the United States.⁶¹

Despite the work of this center and the good will of growers, the daycare facilities could handle no more than fifty migrant children. At the time that it opened, 1,100 migrant farm workers were coming to Adams County each year.⁶² Moreover, while the Opportunities Center might have provided important educational programs for adult migrants, it could not alter the structurally exploitative aspects of the migrant farm-labor system the way that more political activism, like union organization, could. Their exclusion for federal labor protections left farm workers across the country highly dependent upon the goodwill of farmers.⁶³

For Rev. Robert Woodall, the services provided by organizations like the Opportunities Center eventually did allow his family to find daycare for their children. As a farm worker in the early 1970s, he initially had no idea that daycare was available in Adams County. It had not been an option anywhere else that he had picked crops. Eventually, he remembers what he terms a “church group” from near Gettysburg finding his family and offering after school and daycare services while he and his wife harvested apples.

When we were in Gettysburg, somebody came out to the camp and said, “We’re going to put your children in [daycare].” A church came out and did that. A church near Gettysburg came out and said they wanted to take care of our children. And they didn’t charge us anything. That was some help.⁶⁴

Despite Reverend Haggler’s successful mobilization of Shiloh, Woodall remembers that African American communities in Gettysburg or Carlisle were not always sympathetic toward farm workers. “Migrant workers seemed to be a different set of people from even the blacks,” he recalls.⁶⁵ In fact, Woodall recalls that the church that provided these services was a white congregation. Nevertheless, informal ties within Carlisle’s African American community, and aid from some charitable whites, helped him eventually to find a life outside of migrant farm work.

Like the African American migrant workers that Marcus Hodge remembers, Woodall would travel into Carlisle to get his hair cut, and came to know some women church members who tried to help him find an apartment. Woodall describes his decision to settle in Carlisle as a calling from God, but despite his sense of divine intervention, the women helping him find a place to live were not initially successful. When Woodall told them that he was giving up and heading back to Florida, one of the women remembered that she had a relative in Chicago who owned a property in Carlisle. The house, it turned out, was vacant. The owner met Woodall at the house the next day. In exchange for repairing drywall in the ceiling that had been damaged by water, Woodall received three free months' rent, and would have to pay only \$50 a month after that.⁶⁶ "I almost passed out. . . . I went back to the camp, and moved from the camp. One trip. You know, all I brought from the camp was some clothes, and pots, and pans. Now here I was. Big five-bedroom house. No bed, no furniture, no nothing."⁶⁷

Others, both white and black, eventually helped Woodall find furniture and a job. He joked that after a white woman arrived at the house with a donated truckload of furniture, he thought that it was a trick orchestrated by the local Ku Klux Klan. "I knew I was going to die then," he says. Woodall never did return to migrant farm work, although he did occasionally return to visit the camps. "I went back to those camps. Not to stay. I went back as a dream, and then I stopped going because when I would go, I would get very emotional. The hard times, the slave feeling, the feeling like nobody."⁶⁸ Woodall eventually found work in a local steel foundry and, after he retired, became an ordained minister and Pastor of the Bible-Hibner Memorial Church of God in Christ, one of the largest African American congregations in Carlisle.

By the time that Woodall settled in Carlisle, however, Reverend Haggler's NCC-sponsored volunteer effort no longer existed. Haggler's initial encounter with a group of stray migrant workers had led him to pursue advocacy for agricultural laborers on a more political level. In 1964 he served as a liaison between Governor William Scranton's Committee on Migrant Labor and Secretary of Labor and Industry William P. Young. Later, Haggler would be named director of the Tri-County Commission on Economic Opportunity, directing antipoverty programs in Carlisle, Middletown, Edgemont, and Steelton, Pennsylvania.⁶⁹

In 1978 Pennsylvania passed a new labor law that addressed many of the problems that Reverend Haggler recognized within the migrant farm-labor

system. The Committee on Migrant Labor under Gov. Milton Shapp, led by an administrator named Victor Yarnell, and pressured by farm-labor activists like Mary Ellen Beaver of Columbia County, drafted a new set of regulations for migrant farm labor in Pennsylvania. In 1978 the state Senate passed the bill into law. It established that migrant farm workers were guaranteed a minimum wage, outlawed the employment of minors under the age of fourteen, and restricted the employment of children between the ages of fourteen and seventeen to nonschool hours. The law also established firm regulations for work hours, housing, sanitation, and crew-leader conduct. Now, for the first time by legal statute, crew leaders could only operate if they had a license, which needed to be renewed annually and could be revoked if the crew leader violated regulations.⁷⁰

By the middle of the 1980s, the migrant farm-labor population was no longer primarily African American. Workers continued to come from Puerto Rico and the Caribbean, but they were now joined by Latin American immigrants, most of whom arrived from Mexico. The association of migrant farm work with Latinos is so strong that many in small towns like Carlisle along the mid-Atlantic have forgotten about the presence of African Americans among migrant farm laborers, and about the efforts of people like the members of Shiloh Baptist Church to serve their needs and advocate on their behalf.

Despite legislation like Pennsylvania’s 1978 law, contemporary migrant farm workers across the country face many of the same problems with housing and crew-leader abuse as they did in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In 2010 an organization called the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) in Florida launched a traveling exhibit called the Florida Modern-Day Slavery Museum to bring attention to the life conditions of migrant farm laborers. The U.S. Department of Justice reported that between 1993 and 2010 the CIW helped to prosecute cases involving over 1,000 farm laborers who charged their employers for holding them under conditions of slavery. As in the past, those directly responsible were labor contractors, but the corporations who hired them were among the largest in the country—Consolidated Citrus, Lykes Brothers, Manley Farms North, Inc., Ag-Mart Farms, Pacific Tomato Growers, and Six L’s.⁷¹ Daniel Rothenberg also documents many of these conditions in his 1998 book *With These Hands*.⁷²

These sources point out that, as in the past, migrant farm workers live and work in remote areas hidden from the general public. Since a great number are undocumented immigrants, they are not likely to seek help to rectify

abuse by farm-labor contractors. In addition, farm workers are still excluded from provisions in the Fair Labor Standards Act that protect their right to organize a union. While the 1983 Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act provided farm workers with the right to the minimum wage, they still cannot collect overtime pay.⁷³ Finally, although farm workers are covered by Social Security, this has only meant an additional payroll tax for a large proportion of the agricultural labor population. Since so many migrant laborers are undocumented immigrants, the money that they contribute to Social Security under false identifications numbers will never be redeemed. According to the 2008 annual report on Social Security, these payroll deductions from undocumented immigrants like those who enter agricultural labor will provide enough funds to pay 15 percent of the trust fund's long-term deficits.⁷⁴ So U.S. citizens can thank migrant workers for not only providing affordable produce at the checkout counter but also helping to finance their retirement.

Adams County is not the only place where 45,000 to 50,000 seasonal farm workers earn a living in Pennsylvania. Mushroom growers in Chester County near Philadelphia also employ migrant workers year round. As in Adams County, 91 percent of those working during the first decade of the twenty-first century were born in Mexico, many working on temporary H2A visas. These documents only allow an individual to work for a single employer and mandate that a worker return home at the end of the season. Adams and Chester counties employ the greatest number of such workers in the state. Yet, because mushrooms are harvested throughout the year, mushroom harvesters' salaries are slightly higher, and their populations are more stable, than those of workers who harvest seasonal crops like apples. Ironically, federal regulators, citing these more favorable conditions, do not classify mushroom workers as "migrant." As a result, this agricultural population is excluded from the benefits and services that are available to migrant workers in places with more seasonal harvests.⁷⁵

Nevertheless, the legacy of the Shiloh program remains in Adams County. Just off High Street in downtown Gettysburg, the Center for Human Services provides education programs for migrant workers to earn their general education degree (GED), while next door the Lincoln Intermediate Unit 12 provides services for migrant child development. These have included help for farm-worker families within the Migrant Head Start and Migrant Even Start programs. Nonprofit groups like Rural Opportunities, Inc., in Aspers (between Carlisle and Gettysburg) help provide emergency food and shelter,

financial education, Migrant Head Start, and Property Management services for migrant farm workers. All of these service agencies came out of the policy initiatives of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s Great Society. Through the work of activists and community organizers like Joseph Haggler Jr., these initiatives brought essential services to farm workers in Adams County. Parker Coble, who worked alongside Haggler in the 1960s, is adamant when asked about the legacy of their work from that era.

It’s been amazing, and the greatest thing is to see kids do well. I had adults, who because of the War on Poverty programs and the whole leadership roles, in this community, who have done jobs that weren’t related to migrant work, and become very good at them and highly recognized. People said there was no good come out of the War on Poverty. It was a great waste of money. I will beg to differ till my dying day. Lot of good.⁷⁶

Conclusion

In recent years, a national debate has erupted over immigration. Many resent that large populations of Latin Americans cross the border into the United States illegally. Such undocumented immigrants comprise a large proportion of the current population of migrant farm workers, even in places far away from the U.S. border with Mexico like Adams County, Pennsylvania. Ironically, a substantial number who support immigration restrictions also claim to support free trade. In his appearance before Congress in September of 2010, satirist Stephen Colbert, in his character persona portraying a conservative television commentator, ironically skewered the contradiction inherent in holding these two positions simultaneously. “Now I’m a free market guy,” he told the Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, Refugees, Border Security and International Law of the Committee on the Judiciary House of Representatives. “Normally I would leave this to the invisible hand of the market, but the invisible hand of the market has already moved 84,000 acres of production and 22,000 farm jobs to Mexico and shut down over a million acres of U.S. farmland due to lack of available labor. Because apparently, even the invisible hand doesn’t want to pick beans.”⁷⁷

Far from exemplifying the “invisible hand of the free market,” the modern farm-labor system developed around a tariff on skin color, an irrational barrier

to free trade. Contemporary neoliberal policies like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) allow corporations to move across Canada, the United States, and Mexico in a free search for the lowest wages and most favorable markets, yet farm workers from Mexico cannot legally place their labor on an open market across national boundaries in search for the highest wages and most competitive markets. For them, free trade flows in only one direction.

The centrality of race to the oral histories of migrant farm work in Pennsylvania should also lead one to question assumptions about a rational free market guiding agricultural labor. Reverend Woodall was a migrant farm worker largely because of the subordinate economic status that he experienced as a child of a sharecropper in Jim Crow Mississippi. Mae Wright and Marcus Hodge only picked beans because their family finances made it imperative that they find work, something that was not unique to African Americans in Carlisle but, because of discriminatory practices, was ubiquitous among African Americans in the borough. Each chose to leave farm labor once given the opportunity. During the 1950s and 1960s, African American migrant farm workers did not need to cross a border to become second-class citizens. Their race alone did this, and no matter how benevolent employers in Adams County may have been, they had an investment in the tariff that their workers were forced to pay on their skin color.

For both contemporary migrant workers and those from the past, their availability as cheap, seasonal agricultural workers depended upon barriers to full, or even legal, citizenship. The tariff on skin color was as integral a part of the history of Adams County, Pennsylvania, as the Battle of Gettysburg, and it still remains a core aspect of the modern farm-labor system. Oral histories about Pennsylvania's farm-labor system show how this history is very much alive today, even if the surnames and skin colors have changed.

NOTES

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“THE FARMERS DIDN’T PARTICULARLY CARE FOR US”

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5. *Seventh Annual Report of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, Part 1, 1901* (Harrisburg: State Printer of Pennsylvania, 1902), p. 6, RG 1, 1.19, Box 2, Department of Agriculture files, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg (hereafter *Seventh Annual Report*).
6. Hahamovitch, *Fruits of Their Labor*, 5; *Seventh Annual Report*, 6.
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32. A. N. Saylor, report to Hon. W. L. Henning, Secretary of Agriculture, on the March 5, 1958, meeting of the Governor's Committee on Migrant Labor, March 10, 1958, Records for the Department of Agriculture.
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34. William L. Henning, correspondence to Mr. A. N. Saylor, August 15, 1958, Records for the Department of Agriculture.
35. Memo from the Pennsylvania Farmers Association, February 23, 1959, National Council of Churches RG 7, Box 11, folder 2, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia. Unless otherwise noted, all references to Presbyterian Historical Society files come from National Council of Churches RG 7, Box 11, folder 2.

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37. “Farm Migrants Can’t Vote, but It’s an Explosive Political Issue,” May 11, 1959, an editorial from the *Harrisburg Patriot*, Presbyterian Historical Society.
38. For a discussion of the racially discriminatory implications of New Deal policy, see George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 217.
39. Joseph Haggler, oral history interview with author, March 13, 2001.
40. Lewis S. Ulen, “Harrisburg Windmill,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 25, 1962, 24.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
44. Richard B. Cook, *That’s What . . . I’m Talking About: Collected Essays and Reviews* (Cockeysville, MD: Nativia Publishing, 2006), 33–34.
45. See field reports in Presbyterian Historical Society.
46. Migrant Ministry State Report, November 1, 1957, Presbyterian Historical Society.
47. Ibid.
48. Haggler interview.
49. Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia*, 56.
50. Migrant Ministry State Report, November 1, 1957.
51. Mildred Jones, oral history interview with author, February 19, 2001.
52. Ibid.
53. Haggler interview.
54. Migrant Ministry State Report, November 1, 1957.
55. Report on “Health Problems of Migrants” from Adams County, September 3, 1958, National Council of Churches RG 7, Box 12, folder 18, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia.
56. Pennsylvania Council of Churches Summer Staff Report, Presbyterian Historical Society.
57. Ibid.
58. Memos to Jack Grey, March 1966, Records for the Department of Agriculture, Secretary of Agriculture, Administrative Correspondence.
59. Coble interview.
60. Ibid.
61. Ibid.; “First Day Care Center Opens on Wednesday,” *Gettysburg Times*, September 23, 1965, 1, 3.
62. “First Day Care Center Opens on Wednesday.”
63. Many in Adams County portray growers in the region as exceptionally generous for the way that some supported the creation of a Migrant Head Start center. More comparative work needs to be done to determine the degree to which Adams County growers were, indeed, exceptional. Even if they were, this only proves the point that migrant workers could not always rely upon the benevolence of growers.
64. Woodall interview.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid.

67. Ibid.
68. Ibid.
69. Lewis S. Ulen, "Harrisburg Windmill," *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 12, 1966, 12B.
70. See Laws of Pennsylvania, Session of 1978. Act No. 1978-93, SB 967.
71. Bill Maxwell, "Museum Shows Slavery in the Fields," *St. Petersburg Times*, March 21, 2010, 3P.
72. Daniel Rothenberg, *With These Hands: The Hidden World of Migrant Farmworkers Today* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
73. See Phillip L. Martin, *Promise Unfulfilled: Unions, Immigration and the Farm Workers* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003); U.S. Department of Labor, Employment Standards Administration, Wage and Hour Division, *Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act as Amended*, White House Publication 1465, Revised November 1997.
74. "How Immigrants Saved Social Security (Editorial)," *New York Times*, April 2, 2008, A26.
75. "State Narrative for Pennsylvania: Application for 2008; Annual Report for 2006," *Maternal and Child Health Services Title V Block Grant*, Friday, July 6, 2007, http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/enterprise_portal_information/212 (accessed June 9, 2011).
76. Coble interview.
77. "Stephen Colbert to House Sub-Committee: 'This is America.'" Youtube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uw6SvGShobc&feature=youtube>.