

Dubois County tomato canneries

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documented. Leo and Ken Blessinger believe changes in government health regulations might have played a large role, as did progress in mechanization.

“During the war,” tells Ken, “the government bought a lot of tomatoes. That was during World War II, but after the war...I don’t know if they had a stockpile.”

St. Anthony’s Centennial book states of the St. Anthony Cannery, “The best production of scaled tomatoes was the 1940 season. Over a million cans of Grade A tomatoes were canned and sold to the federal government. After that year it was difficult to procure enough acreage to make operation of the cannery profitable.”

A Purdue Extension report from 1951 describes “considerable blight” and “trouble in moving the canned crop” throughout the previous season (1950). Six canneries

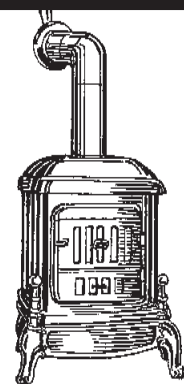
still show as active on this report, including Patoka Springs, Break O’day, Morning Star, Shamrock, Blessinger, and St. Anthony. The following year, Blessinger is not found on the report. Ken and Leo verify that the Blessinger Cannery closed in 1950. (Incidentally, this date illustrates that Ken was around 14 years of age when the cannery closed, as he graduated in ‘54. It also demonstrates just how young he and Leo were when they labored in the family cannery. Note that the United States passed its very first — very limited — child labor laws in 1938.)

The 1952 report also shows a decrease of production by 40% from the previous season with a total of only 40,000 cases produced across all five canneries. (Compare to the 38,000 cases packed by Daniel Boone alone in 1943.)

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The labeling station at Morning Star (1935). Unfortunately, these two young women are unidentified by County Agent Nicholson. This reporter reckons the young woman on the left is Clara Seger.



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