Down With The 35 Mile Speed Limit Signs—They Mean Death To Children And Destruction Of Property.

MUSKRAT TRAPPING BUSINESS IN BALTIMORE COUNTY MORE THAN 100 YEARS OLD

Marshy Sections Return More Than Improved Land Per Acre Say Many Authorities—Story Of Industry Is An Interesting One.

The marshes of Baltimore county, especially in the "lower end," contribute a big income to the owners each year and this has been true in more than a hundred or more. This county is one of the leading Muskrat regions of Maryland and enables the owners of web-footed farms to harness their waterlogged fields and squeeze a living out of land which otherwise would be worthless.

There are no authentic chronicles or records to prove just how, when and why the pioneer families of muskrats settled in Baltimore county marshes. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century muskrats have been found and trapped. Many farmers and their families ultimately would have become candidates for the poorhouse if muskrats trapping had not come to their aid as a profitable means of livelihood.

The muskrat-trapping industry is double barreled in the income that it returns, for both the meat and the pelts of these little animals are now in demand at profitable prices.

In many instances the same Maryland marshes have been trapped over by the same families of hunters for three, four or even five generations Before the war of 1812 the country merchants in the muskrat belt were paying cash for rat pelts for which they, in turn, marketed subsequently in New York city.

By a queer turn of fortune the waterlogged lands now are yielding larger returns per acre than the best improved farming fields of the adjoining countryside. The muskrat marshes range in size from several hundred to several thousand acres.

It is not uncommon for one of the larger marshes to yield as much as $2,500 worth of pelts in a season.

It is not uncommon to catch as many as a thousand rats a year on a marsh from 100 to 150 acres. One trapper last winter secured 2,000 marketable pelts from a 300-acre marsh. Some of the men who own the marshes pay from 25 to 50 cents a skin for the catches they make on their marshlands. Other land owners lease out the trapping rights on shares

During the World War, when muskrat skins sold for from $3.50 to $5 apiece, some of the most successful trappers made as much as $300 daily in their business. However, such prices are vastly higher than those which commonly obtain. The demand for fur of all kinds was at a peak point during the war and the muskrat trappers benefitted markedly as a result. One Baltimore county man, who leased out the trapping rights on his marshes during that time, received more than $3,000 as his share of the income without having to life hs hand other than to count the money when it was paid to him.

A muskrat marsh inhabited by colonies of these clever little fur-bearing animals looks for all the world like a partly submerged hay fields. The home-made mansions of the muskrats peep out of the water exactly like the tops of hay shocks would look after a flood had visited the field.

The muskrat house, built substantially out of grasses, roots and the rushes of aquatic plants, is similar to the homes which the industrious beavers build, except that it is neither as large nor strong as the latter structures

The muskrat makes his house out of edible grasses and roots which he and his family relish If the winter is a severe one and food is scarce, Mr. and Mrs. Muskrat and their children can exist on the material used in building their home.

The top of the muskrat residence is placed ordinarily 24 to 30 inches above the high-water mark in the marsh. There are two or three entrances well below the frostline. The rats make their headquarters in sheltered, warm parts of the house far above the water line.

The muskrat lady always builds a stronger and warmer house during the years when the early indications point to a hard, long winter season

Muskrats that inhabit Maryland marshes are so easy to catch that the trappers do not have to use bait, but simply employ double-jawed steel traps, which they hide near the residences, runways and feeding grounds of the rats. In the main, the muskrats step into these skillfully concealed traps so that one or both of their front feet are ensnared.

There are both salt and fresh water marshes in the lower section of Baltimore county where muskrats are most numerous, but the rats prefer to congregate in fresh water swamps, where the food supplies which they like best are most abundant.

Although chiefly herbiverorous, muskrats sometimes will consume animal food when roots ane water grasses are not available. They live principally upon pond lillies, sedges, arums and aquatic grasses. They also relish such garden truck as cabbage, carrots, parsnips, onions, beets, pears, celery, beans and similar growth.

Buzzards, crows, foxes, hawks and raccoons prey upon muskrats. However, the rats multiply so rapidly that the attacks of these do not do not affect their ranks appreciably

Muskrats do not hibernate. During winters when snow is abundant they can be seen sometimes working busily tunneling into the snowdrifts in search of food.

These water-loving rats never venture vary far from their domiciles unless food becomes exceedingly scarce. The food supply of the Baltimore county marshes is usually adequate to satisfy their needs, as trapping is carried on so extensively that the numbers of rats are always about sufficient to consume the available food.

The breeding season covers the period from spring until late fall. The average female produces five litters, with about seven to each litter. Although born blind and naked the baby rats soon develop to maturity. About one-half of the muskrats caught in the Maryland marshlands are black in color, while the remainder are brown.

In a still-water marsh the trap is placed usually about two or three inches below the surface of the water. It is fastened securely by means of a chain to a wooden peg which is driven deep into the mud. The traps are placed similarly on ebb and flow marshes. In the latter case the trappers must exercise care to place their artificial snares in positions where they will be submerged constantly. If this is not done the rats will see the traps and avoid them.

During the hunting season the trappers inspect their traplines daily and remove all the captives that have been snared. Bags of from 25 to 50 rats daily on marshes that range from 200 to 400 acres in size are not unusual

Indications are that the industry will be practically everlasting, for the suspersaturated soils yield higher annual revenue in muskrat skins and carcasses than they would in agricultural crops if they were drained and reclaimed.

Much of the land is subject to tidal overflows, so that it would be almost impossible to drain it except at high expenditures.

For a long time to come the marshes of Baltimore county will continue to produce fur for milady's coats and hats, and professional and amateur trappers will gain attractive livelihood.

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NINE THOROUGHBREDS DIE IN FIRE WHEN BARN ON MERRYMAN FARM BURNS.

Five valuable race horses, two valuable colts, two yearlings and three work horses were burned up when fire destroyed the big horse barn at the farm of Louis McLane Merryman, at Sparks.

All of the horses, with the exception of one, belonged to Mr. Merryman.

The race horses were: Foremistress and her 3-week-old sorrel colt, by Boniface; Cello and her 5-week-old colt, by Prince Pal; Charlie Horse, which was to have been ridden by Mr Merryman in the Maryland Hunt Cup race; Sinnfeinner; Goodtime, belonging to John Farrell, of New York.

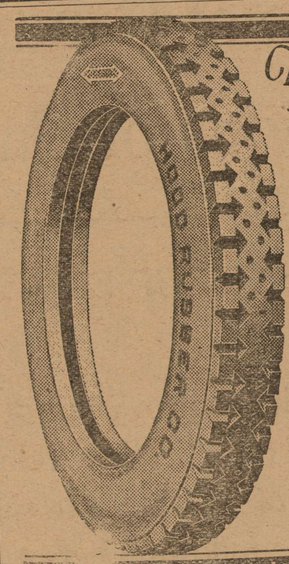
Eight calves which also were in the barn were gotten out by neighbors.

Mr. and Mrs. Merryman were the dinner guests of Frank J. Hoen at his home in the Worthington Valley, about 15 miles away, when the fire broke out.

It was discovered by Maria Hall, a colored nurse, who was at home with the two children of Mr. and Mrs. Merryman. The barn was a short distance from the house.

The nurse notified members of the Cockeysville Volunteer Fire Department and then called Mr. and Mrs. Merryman, who made a hurried run to their home.

By the time the firemen arrived the entire barn was a wreck. They devoted their efforts in saving the home and nearby buildings.



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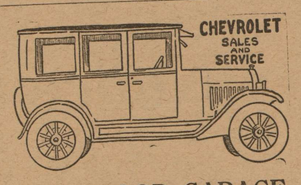

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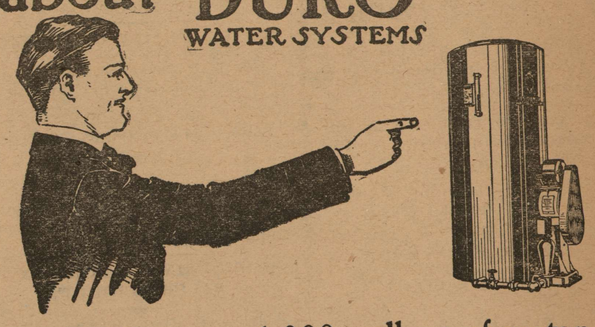

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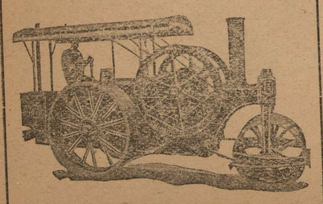

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