

BERWICK'S GROWTH

Introduction: *The Democratic Sentinel*, a Bloomsburg newspaper, published a very optimistic article in 1902 about Berwick's economic growth. It believed there was a distinct possibility that it could exceed Bloomsburg's population and become the foremost town in the Columbia County. The Jackson and Woodin Manufacturing Company, one of Berwick's early industries that made railway cars, became part of the American Car and Foundry Company in 1899. A. C. & F. was the economic mainstay of the town and was under going a major expansion at this time. J. H. Beers' history of Columbia and Montour Counties stated that the railroad industry wanted freight cars made of all steel construction for transporting coal was an important factor stimulating the growth. Sensing this new market opportunity, A. C. & F. invested heavily in the Berwick plant. "About three millions of dollars were spend in the purchase of additional land, erection of buildings and installation of machinery."

Unfortunately, in the early 1960s A. C. & F. closed its operation in Berwick, which in created a serious economic impact on the community and the surrounding area.

The following article, "Berwick's Big Boom," appeared in *The Democratic Sentinel* on July 25, 1902. There were a few editorial changes to the text, punctuation, and capitalization for clarity purposes.

BERWICK'S BIG BOOM

New Industries Now Building and Others in Prospect Have Transformed Our Erstwhile Quiet Neighbor into a Bustling Little city and Values Soaring and Many new Houses Being Erected.

That the industries of a town are largely responsible for any unusual growth or developments which occur in a business way was never more aptly illustrated than by the remarkable boom which our sister town of Berwick is enjoying at this time, and it is not confined alone to real estate transactions, for its influence is likewise felt in all other channels of business. As a matter of fact, it is the manufacturing and industrial centres which experience the wonderful building booms rather than towns which are dependent upon an agricultural community or section, and the more diversified the form and kinds of manufacture the more permanent and lasting will be their benefits.

Berwick, as is well known, is the home of the Jackson & Woodin Car Works, and which later as an integral part of the American Car and Foundry Company, has become one of its chief centres of production. This of itself has given Berwick the prestige that it has enjoyed in the past and has been primarily responsible for its growth until it has become the second town of importance in Columbia County.

The recent acquisition by the above company of land adjacent to their large rolling mill plant in the western end of town, whereon a large steel plant and a malleable iron works

are now in course of construction, has given an added impetus to the place and has caused a remarkable change in land values over those which have hitherto obtained in that vicinity.

The Berwick part of the American Car and Foundry company now has 2,600 men on its pay-roll, and its monthly disbursement in wages amounting to \$140,000, together with the prospective employment of at least 2,400 men which will be required within a year or so to man the new plants now being erected, will bright the total up to 5,000 employees (a good sized town of itself, by the way). This will at least and probably more than double the amount now paid out in wages monthly and leave little room for conjecture as to the real cause of Berwick's wonderful boom, the appreciation in value of her land and the wild desire among her people to seek investment for idle capital by the purchase of homes, building lots, etc., and thus receive the benefits which are bound to come later though greatly increased values.

Nor is this desire for investment confined to Berwickians alone. Since the Berwick Land Improvement Company purchased several fine large farms in the borough of West Berwick and Briarcreek Township and had the same surveyed and laid into building lots, cut streets and otherwise improved their holdings by planting trees, etc., there has been a steady and continuous demand for these lots. The latter are 45 x 165 feet and inasmuch as the company will expend \$200,000 in the erection of dwelling houses on them during the present season they are being eagerly purchased by shrewd buyers from various parts of the state who realize this unequaled opportunity and have been quick to grasp it.

The opportunities for the investment of capital in this thriving borough were never better than they are at present. Lots that were purchased but a short time ago have already doubled in value and the prospect that they will go much higher in the near future is not in the leastwise remote. The industrial growth of Berwick is not fictitious – it is a patent to the most unobserving among men, and being an assurance, this small investor proposes to "make hay while the sun shines" by seizing them as they present themselves.

The American Car and Foundry Company recently acquired about two hundred acres of land in the western end of town and ground has been broken in the vicinity of the proposed steel plant for the erection of a number of two-story frame dwellings about twenty of which are now in course of construction as company houses. These, it is stated, are somewhat in the nature of an experiment and if the proposition of the company to its men to secure a home for themselves either though the purchase by cash or installment prove successful, it is understood that many more will be erected. These houses, it is further understood, can also be rented by employees at reasonable rates, the purchases of same being optional with the latter, and the same may be said to apply to the building lots on this tract.

Now a word about the new steel plant. This industry, we are informed, is for the purpose of shaping the pressed steel and preparing it for the various uses for which it is needed in the manufacture of cars. The dimensions of the building are 748 x 289 feet, one story in height, and is to be constructed of brick with steel frames, the girders supporting it being

about 120 in number. The foundation is of concrete, eight feet at the base and gradually narrows to two feet at the top. The stack, which is already completed, is the finest that has ever been erected in this section of the country, and may be regarded as a work of art. It is 115 feet in height, 17 feet in diameter at the base and about 8 feet at the top, and is constructed entirely of hollow (gray vitrified) brick in order to withstand the intense heat and gases to which it will be subjected.

The malleable iron works, the second of these new plants, consists of several buildings, and will be constructed of brick. The dimensions of these buildings are as follows: Annealing building, 100 x 200 feet; foundry, 140 x 148 feet; tumbler room, 50 x 142 feet; and the height of each will be about forty feet. Work on both of the new plants is well underway and is progressing rapidly and about 200 men are employed on same.

The great building boom which Berwick is now experiencing is not confined alone to the two large companies mentioned above, but it is likewise being done largely by individuals, and in North Berwick many new buildings are constantly being erected. Particularly is this so in the Joseph Thompson addition to Berwick, lying partly in Briarcreek and Salem Townships, Luzerne County.

The demand for houses is something unprecedented, and no sooner is a dwelling completed before it is snapped up by the eager renter. With the great influx of laboring men to the town recently, it has taxed the officials of the American Car and Foundry Company to their utmost to provide shelter and lodging for them. The hotels are all filled up and many private residents have thrown open their doors and have taken "boarders," a most unusual thing for them to do in many instances, but as there is a premium on accommodations at this time, they no doubt feel that they may as well turn an honest dollar in this way as not.

The recent find of a considerable view of anthracite coal on the Varner farm in Salem township, almost at their very doors, has also been productive of no little excitement, and with its development in the near future, as is now promised, will go still further toward augmenting Berwick's importance in the commercial and industrial world. With a population now estimated at 4,000 our sister town bids fair at not distant day to outstrip us [Bloomsburg] in the race for prominence and it will be but a short time until she will have surpassed us considerably in the matter of population.*

There are certain well-defined rumors concerning the erection of another large steel plant for the manufacture of pressed steel by the American Car and Foundry Company, and their recent acquisition of such a vast amount of land would tend in a great measure to confirm and strengthen this belief, which is at once logical and reasonable, but whatever the company may have in prospect regarding the erection of the latter is entirely problematical, for their intents and purposes are kept well shielded from the public gaze. Should, however, the rumor prove true, and with the not at all remote possibility of the Milton plant of the American Car and Foundry Company being moved to Nescopeck, as was believed would have been the case had not the big strike at Milton been adjusted by the men returning to work, the advantages accruing to Berwick will be something

enormous, and will cause it to take precedence over any other manufacturing centre in this section. Her future prosperity can only be contemplated, not predicted, and unless Bloomsburg gets a hump on herself and hustles as she has never hustled before to induce new industries to locate here, she will have been so completely distanced by her up-river neighbor and competitor for commercial supremacy, that she will rank among the "also rans," and will be held up as an object of pity for her lack of enterprise.