

## HALCYON DAYS OF ESPY WERE IN THE BOATING DAYS OF FADING PAST

But Even these Came After the Espys Went  
Into the Real Estate Game There

**INTRODUCTION:** The article is about Espy, a small community of a few hundred people bordering the Susquehanna River, two miles east of Bloomsburg in Scott Township during the nineteenth century. It appeared in *The Morning Press*, a Bloomsburg Newspaper, on December 9, 1916. The person who wrote it did not have a byline. It is quite clear the writer relied extensively on material about Espy found on page 266 in *Historical and Biographical Annals of Columbia and Montour Counties Pennsylvania*, published in 1915. The author explains the origins of the community and why its name became Espy. A major focus of the article is how the canal became a key factor in early economic life.



It is odd the way in which a man's identity will persist in sticking to a piece, modest as he may be in desiring that posterity remember him by deeds rather than words. There's the case of Espy.

When Josiah Espy bought a tract of three hundred acres from the Penns, this including the present site of Espy, he never intended that the village should be named after him. He had an entirely different name – Liberty – picked for the place. His son George was the first to build there, erecting a two – story log house where the canal later ran, and almost in the center of the present town. This he built in 1775, and lived there until 1810, when he removed to Crawford County. Then years before he left, the Espys laid the town out in lots, and they were sold to various persons, but by no means all the buyers occupied them, as is sometimes the case in real estate purchases. The family's efforts to give the town the name of Liberty failed completely for the residents were determined the town should be named after the Espys, even though they no longer resided there. It was fixed for all time, by the establishment in 1828 of a post office there by that name. Then, there were fourteen log houses and twelve frame dwellings in the town.

Espy, like many other towns, has had its ups and downs, but the boating days were it halcyon days. Away, back in 1824 – George and Thomas Webb built the first boat used on the old canal from that point, and for years and years canal boating was a prominent business with Espy folk, just as canal-boat making became a source of great prosperity. There isn't an old canal-boatman today but doesn't remember Espy as one of the high spots along the whole canal system. Boatyards quickly sprang into existence, and they were operated by Barton & Edgar, Kressler & Vansickle and Fowler, Tronsue & McKamey, with the Pennsylvania Canal Company later absorbing them all, but

continuing to make boats there until the canal was abandoned in the nineties. The year 1900 witnessed the destruction of the boat yard and the Milnes grist mill, which for many years stood beside the canal basin, in which great fortunes were often represented in the scores of boats tied up there for the night.

Not only did the boatyards spell prosperity in themselves, but it meant development of other lines of business. Three planing mills prospered. Two of them were owned by Thomas W. Edgar and the other by D. Snyder & Company. Then, too, there was a tannery, a pottery, a distillery, and vinegar factory and a brickyard, but all of them have passed into oblivion.

Even today the bog that lies back of the town and which only in recent years has given of its richness to make a fertilizer ingredient, excites the curiosity of those who see it for the first [time]. From the earliest days of the town it has been there, the bog starting at the brook near Almedia and extending to those who lived in the settlement. A log bridge, which was called the "Indian Patch," was built, and for years this was the only means of passage from Espy toward Light Street. But the discovery of Iron ore made necessary improved road conditions, and, once again necessity was the mother of invention. John Hauck had a furnace at Mainville, and across the morass he built a corduroy road, which facilitated travel.