

# A QUICK LOOK AT BLOOMSBURG IN THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY

## ACCORDING TO HOWARD J. TRAUB

**Introduction:** *Years ago the Morning Press, a Bloomsburg newspaper, ran a popular column called "The Passing Throng." It is a great resource for finding interesting historical information about Bloomsburg and the county. The editor, Edward Schuyler, wrote two columns that appeared forty years ago on January 19 and 20, 1962, which related Howard J. Traub's recollections of Bloomsburg in the late 1900s. Traub grew up in the town and at one time ran a furniture store as well as serving on the local school board. When Schuyler wrote the columns, Traub was eighty-five years and lived in Lemoyne. Both columns are combined here as one article. With Bloomsburg celebrating its two hundredth birthday, looking back to the nineteenth century can provide an interesting glimpse of what the community was like.*

*Traub's reminiscences provide a partial tour of the town beginning at Market Square with a reference to the large elm tree on the southeast corner, next to the First National Bank. The reader is taken on a walk along the different streets in the town and introduced to various merchants and homeowners. In the latter part of the article, the focus is on the town's diverse economic base.*

January 19, 1962

Most people living in Bloomsburg today will recall the large, wide-spreading elm tree on the southeast corner of Market Square; also the First National Bank which seems to have been there when the town started.

But how many recall George W. Bartch's gents' furnishing store next to the bank? Or any stores during the 1880's or 90's as one traveled up town in that period?

See if you can follow me, or determine if my memory is correct, in naming some of them as well as recalling some interesting sidelights.

Next to Bartch's was F. D. Dentler's shoe store. His son, Bill, was a fancy ice skater on the canal from which most of the water was drawn each winter. Prof. Cope, science teacher at old Bloomsburg Normal School, was also a graceful figure 8 skater.

Adjoining Dentler's was the store of Billy Vial, tobacco, then Peacock or Schuyler and later McReber hardware. After that came Rawling's meat market (Bill and Ed – Guy was a jeweler). Next was the Joe Wells jewelry store, later J. E. Roys, and then, on the corner of the alley, was Bloomsburg's post office.

Then came the Exchange Block in which George A. Clark had a bookstore that was later operated by William H. Brooke, William Slate and Sam Beidleman. You had to go up six or eight metal steps to the store.

In the same block was the Exchange Hotel – now the Hotel Magee – then operated by a Mr. Tubbs who was a member of a prominent church and was threatened with expulsion from that church for having a bar. The threat was never carried out. The Tubbs were among the town's fine families.

In the basement of the building could be found barbers Clint Fornwald, Frank Gensemer, Frank Parks, Glascoe Cameron or Sam Stilles.

Ruck Buckalew furnished the cab service for guests at the hotel, meeting all of the trains on the D. L. & W. and Pennsylvania at East Bloomsburg. He operated a first class livery stable in the rear of the courthouse and lived on First Street, the home of Lillian, Louis and Raymond.

Next to him, on the corner of Market and First, lived Dr. Reber. Then came the parsonage of the Lutheran Church and the home of Dr. Rutter, Lutheran Church alley and the home of Frank Kline, killed in a railroad accident on the B. & S. (This was a grade crossing accident which was recalled a few decades ago in the "gold is where you find it" civil trial).

At the head of Market Street was the home of A. Z. Schoch and Prof. Wilbur resided in that area. Josephus Grimes lived on the west corner of Market street. He was our county superintendent of schools and often visited the public schools of the town.

Going down the west side of Market street, from First, you encountered the home of T. C. Eyer, Pet Sterner and Samuel Wigfall (later the home of Sam Harman) and the Neal home on the present site of the Masonic Temple.

Returning to Main street, we recall that across the alley from the Exchange Hotel was the telegraph office, later the Adams express office. Then there was a grocery store of Peter Billmeyer. This was later the site of the Cummings and Verdy bookshop. Adjoining was the Gross saloon and then, on the west corner of Center and Main streets was the carriage shop of Bobby Stiff. The paint shop was on the second floor and entered by a ramp going up from Main street.

In the Opera House block (Center street) was the shoe repair shop of Philip Unangst. Also there was the shop of John Wolf, plumber, with that business later taken over by W. O. and then Edward W. Holmes.

Then came the office of Colonel John Freeze, later the office of Judge Harman and next the John Freeze home with a beautiful lawn.

On the other side of Center street was the home of Mr. White. This was at the corner of Third. Next came the home of George Norman and then the butcher shop of Charlie Reice. In the alley was the office of Dr. Welliver, veterinarian, and the livery stable of Dennis Brink, the father of Charles and Harry. On the north corner of Main and Center streets was the dry goods store of H. J. Clark, then the Johnny Philips candy store and, at one time, C. H. Reice's meat market.

In the block was the stone house of Joshua Fetterman and the Central Hotel. Across from the alleys abutting the hotel on the east, was the clothing store of David Lowenberg, a fine citizen. Then came one of the Weis brothers' first stores, Harry Freeze manager.

Going up the street you encountered Runyan's hardware with Harry Sharpless the clerk. At that location, too, was Fish Bay, operated on the pavement and in the basement and run by Tidy Jacoby. There also was the George Hess jewelry, Jack Keller with notions and Marr's dry goods. Dora Marr was a teacher in the Fifth Street School.

January 20, 1962

But how many can remember back in the 1880's when it was definitely a heavy industry town?

In its area there were two large blast iron furnaces. One was located along what is now Millville Road and in a section known as Morgantown or Irondale and from which Iron street gets its name. It was operated by a branch of the Drinker family and others. Rod Drinker served at one time as president of the town council and owned the farms on which Fernville is now located. Its main cross street is Drinker street.

The furnace site was selected after geologists found a good grade of iron ore beneath the surface of the farms in Hemlock Township and in an area bordered by Fishing Creek, Wedgetown and Buckhorn.

The ore was dug from slopes extending several hundred feet underground. A track was laid and the ore loaded in small mine cars. A large rope was attached to the car. The other end was secured to a wooden drum outside the mine. A hitch was made for a horse walking in a small circle to wind up the rope around the drum and bring the loaded car to the surface. There the ore was loaded into wagons. Jake Martz, Wedgetown, made a business of hauling ore and when he hauled to the furnace and stayed too long at Bill Giger's saloon, "Old Tom," his lead horse, of the three, always took him home safely.

The Neal furnace was located at the east end of town, between Berwick road and the Pennsylvania canal. For its coal, ore and lime stone and other materials it was serviced by a siding from D. L. & W. railroad and the canal.

The company erected a row of so called company houses along the main thoroughfare which were lived in and eventually purchased by the employees. This section was generally known as Tater Row.

Such actions were common among industries which had any hope of permanency and it might be cited as the humble beginning of our deferred payment plan that has now become a national habit.

Some company houses were erected at Irondale and called Morgantown. The Magee Carpet Company had a similar group, known as Magee Row and since torn down.

Another industry in Bloomsburg at the time were the Car Shops, owned and operated by George M. and John K. Lockard. George lived in a large frame home on East street, opposite the business office of the Car Shops, and John built what at the time was considered a mansion and was probably the first stucco house in town. It was on Fifth street and was later owned by Dr. Miller and others.

The Car Shops were operated by AC&F Company. Dick Angel was their efficient bookkeeper and lived on East street.

Harman and Hassert's foundry was flourishing at that time. They also made mine cars. B. F. Sharpless had a foundry for cast iron stoves and parts, before steel was used for the same purpose. It was at the corner of Sixth and Center streets.

Other heavy industries were the Tub Works, Elevator Works, F. J. Richard wire drawing machinery and desk works. All of these are no longer operating.

However we have in their places a silk mill established by Joseph Ratti whom the town should remember gratefully for starting our first hospital in the remodeled Ritter home on East Fifth street. Other textiles were the silk throwing mills.

Our large Magee Carpet Company is one of the largest mills of its kind in the nation and would be the pride of any city. The same goes for Milco Undergarment Company, rated as one of the best established textile industries.