

BLOOMSBURG GETS GAS LIGHTS

Introduction: The Bloomsburg Gas Company formed by local stockholders came into existence in May 1874. Six months later, an article appeared in The Democratic Sentinel on November 6, 1874, that told of a "memorable" event when Bloomsburg for the first time had the sensation of being a town bathed in light rather than shrouded in darkness. The community was awash from the rays of gas lights that beamed from its many public and private buildings. The writer was clearly caught up in the evening's excitement of witnessing a new era when light would replace the unchallenged darkness of the past. This special event prompted a reference to Bloomsburg as

"a city set upon a hill whose light could not be hid." The idea of "a city upon a hill" as a special place was the same analogy that John Winthrop, the first governor of the Puritan settlement in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, used in describing their new home: "For we must consider that we shall be a city upon a hill, the eyes of all people are upon us." The article concluded with the hope that Town Council would quickly take the necessary steps to install gas street lamps.

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On Wednesday night of last week – memorable occasion – the town of Bloomsburg was as a city set upon a hill whose light could not be hid. From hotels and stores, from private dwellings and from public buildings there poured forth a flood of brilliant light, and we doubt not the silent stars and full orb'd moon smiled in a celestial way at the new ally they had gained in their endless fight against darkness and shadows. All of which means that on the aforesaid night gas was first used as an illuminator in Bloomsburg. Now indeed may we be excused if for a time at least we put on Congressional airs and indulge in mirth and hilarity, for this is indeed "laughing gas" to us who have so long struggled through the unmitigated blackness of the night.

Contrary to the usual precedents but little difficulty was experienced with the gas, and when after an hour or two of burning, the jets gained somewhat of their normal size and shape the effect was magical. The large display windows of our merchants were brilliant and the goods tastefully arranged therein were even prettier and more enticing than in the garish light of day. We noticed particularly those of Clark & Wolf, Lutz & Sloan, I. W. Hartman, and Thatcher, Gearhart & Co. Brown's Hotel was a blaze of light and the illumination of the private residences throughout the town was a fitting celebration of the victory of Light over Darkness. It is utterly impossible to write in a calm, commonplace way of this great improvement. We have wrestled too long with oil and wicks, chimneys and burners, not to feel a thrill of genuine pleasure when we think that hereafter there will be no grease, no cracked glass, no bother and trouble with uncut wicks and unfilled lamps. Blest be the man who first invented gas and with logical sequence blest be those who have introduced it here.

Now we look for prompt action on the part of the Town Council in the matter street lamps. Let there be no needless delay in furnishing these. They are a public necessity, loudly called for, and it is to be hoped that no petty spirit of false economy will be allowed to postpone their erection. Nothing impresses a stranger more favorable than the proper lighting of the streets of a town, evidencing as it does a desire on the part of its citizens to have things done decently and in order.

Bloomsburg is large enough and old enough to cut loose from the matters which pertained to its infancy and step forward and claim its place as a full-grown town. It will not be many years before we will need a Mayor and Select and Common Councils. When the street lamps are erected we shall be willing to admit that we have an un-commonly select Council as it

is.

Postscript: David Lowenberg, President of Town Council, appointed a committee on November 19, 1874, to make a recommendation of whether or not the Town should invest funds to install gas street lights. Not all the residents were supportive of the idea. Within two weeks Council received a petition containing a hundred signatures opposing spending money for street lights. Despite the opposition, the measure passed on December 15 by a vote of four to two. The Bloomsburg Gas Company completed the installation in June 1875 at a cost of \$435.21. In the first year the average monthly gas charge came to \$76.00.