

MANY THE CHANGES IN BLOOMSBURG IN FIFTY-FOUR YEARS

William Penman Here From California For First Visit In a Half Century

FEW OLD BUILDINGS

Forks Hotel and Light Street Road Tannery Running When He Left Here

Introduction: William Penman, a seventeen year old native of Bloomsburg, decided to leave his home and move to California in the late 1860s. Initially, he found employment in the gold mining industry. In 1873 he married Miss Effie Ann Jansen, a California native, and they became the parents of nine children. By the early 1880s he became an owner of various hotel properties. By late nineteenth century he also began investing in ranching operations.

After a lapse of fifty-two years, Penman returned to Bloomsburg in the early 1920s to visit his two sisters, Minnie and Martha Penman. In an interview published in the Morning Press, a Bloomsburg newspaper, he commented on the numerous changes that had occurred in town since he left to go to California.

Penman made several references to a number of places in Bloomsburg in the 1860s and at the time he returned to the town in the early 1920s. In order to aid the reader to know where these locations are, please read the various footnotes at the end of the article.

The article is reprinted as it appeared in Morning Press; the exact date of the article is unknown.

William Penman, a native of Bloomsburg and now of Santa Anna, California is making his first visit to his home town in fifty-two years, and with his daughters, Minnie and Viola, is the guest of his sisters, Misses Minnie and Martha Penman, of North Iron street. Until several years ago when she visited at his home in California, he had never seen his sister, Miss Minnie Penman. He found a decidedly different Bloomsburg from the town he left upon his return.

Mr. Penman declares his belief that the hills in town are not so high as formerly, and that the summers are not so warm. He experienced seventeen summers here before going to California, and even the hot wave this week has not affected him.

At the time he left here, the region around Iron and First streets was known as the Iron street commons, and a portion of the Episcopal church had already been erected. With George Edgar he was learning the stone cutting business and the two accustomed to practice on the stone blocks that went into the church building.

Mr. Penman finds little vacant space in town in comparison with the time he left, fifty-four years ago. That section of town along East street was known as Smoketown, and there were only a few scattered houses beyond the Forks hotel. The tannery at the corner of Main Street and Light Street Road was then running, and there was also some discussion relative to the removal of the Forks hotel, but the consensus of opinion was that the hotel would never be moved from its site in the middle of the street.

Further down East street there was a swamp and a circus grounds, the Harman and Hassert plant now standing on the site of the circus grounds.

The McKelvy furnace and the canal were then in their heyday, and there were no buildings below the canal. It hardly seems natural to Mr. Penman not to have the canal in operation.

On West Main street there were few houses below what is the now Market Square, and a vast change has been worked there. On the square at that time were several ramshackle bridges, which were almost dangerous to walk over. The jail then stood where the high school now is and the Lutheran Reformed church, was located across the street from the jail. The [Rosemont] cemetery was then very small and there were a number of barns and buildings on the ground which is now occupied by the cemetery.

At the Normal School one of the biggest changes was found by Mr. Penman. In the days he went there, the baseball field was where Science Hall now stands, and there were only two buildings on the school property.

On Main street there has been a big change, but this was not unexpected. From the Jacobs store to the Lowenberg residence, there was a not a building, and a school house and the Laycock hotel on the south side of Main street were the most important buildings in the block between Iron and Centre streets and the First National Bank occupying the other three corners. Next to the drug store was a wooden building.

Shortly after the Civil War, when the internal revenue tax acme into effect, Peter Billmeyer was proprietor of a distillery and he forgot all about putting the stamps on his whisky. The whisky was seized by the government and stored in the building, which was not locked. Every man in town who drank, Mr. Penman thought, visited the building frequently and when the time came for the sale of the liquor, not a drop was to be found.

David Stroup conducted a store where the Hess pool room now is, and the store was the gathering place for the youths of the town. They ate peanuts and chestnuts behind the stove there until bedtime and the genial proprietor chased them out. That was the store, Mr. Penman says, where the boys could get the most for their pennies, and this despite the general opinion prevailing that the proprietor was none too generous.

He was not much surprised at the paving of the streets here, for he expected Bloomsburg to be up to date in that respect.

Few of those whom he knew when he was here remain in town. Most of them have gone to other places and many are dead.

George Clark and George McKelvy are two of these he remembers who are still here.

First street at that time was known as Rock street, and the houses then owned by Caleb Barton and the Appleman are still there. The remainder of the street, was bordered with orchards.

He declares the buildings of town generally to be kept in better shape than they were in early days, and back of the KcKelvy store (now Pursel's) there was a lumber yard.

Welsh Hill he particularly remembers and called attention to the custom of the women who resided there. Not a well was to be found on the hill, and the women came to a pump at the corner of Iron and First streets to get water. They would fill their tubs, put them atop their heads and climb the hill to do their washing. Most of them from Welsh hill worked in the ore mines.

Those were the days, Mr. Penman recalled, when fishing in the river was good, and when spearing fish at night was great sport. He spent on day this week fishing along the creek, and even though he was not extremely successful, enjoyed every minute of it. He couldn't recall the time when he had been too young to fish and didn't know of anywhere he would rather fish than in the vicinity. The fishing holes are so handy, he declares, in comparison with those in California, where it is necessary to go miles.

Mr. Penman has lived in numerous parts of California and has traveled throughout the west, and he declared he has never found a place which as suited him so well for a home as in Bloomsburg.

Mr. Penman was born in a house at the corner of Iron and First streets and for a time live on 3rd street, residing there at the time the Wynkoop building was erected and Wynkoop school opened. His father was teacher of a night school prior to that time.

Later the family moved to Iron street in the house Dr. Van Horn now occupies. Later his father moved to Iowa, remained there three weeks and returned to Bloomsburg to live.

Mr. Penman is now a successful rancher in Orange county, California, and will spend some time before returning.