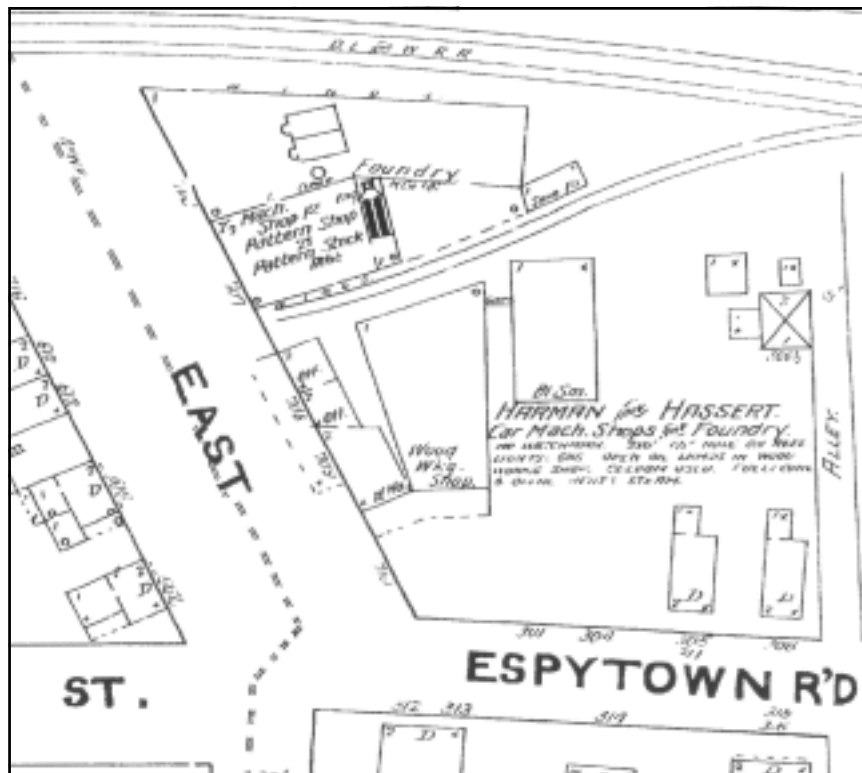


# HARMAN & HASSERT'S FOUNDRY AND MACHINE SHOPS IN BOOMSBURG

George A. Turner

**EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION:** Peter S. Harman and George Hassert initially formed a business partnership in 1875 that focused on manufacturing agricultural implements, stoves, and doing custom foundry work. With a combined investment of \$1,200, they opened a plant with 3,000 square feet on the east side of East Street between Seventh Street and the Lackawanna and Bloomsburg Railroad (later known as the Delaware, Lackawanna, and Western Railroad) and bordered on the south side by the Esptytown Road, known today as the Old Berwick Road. The site had four and a half acres that had enough room to allow their facility to be expanded in 1879.



Location of Harman & Hassert was on the northeast corner of East Street and Esptytown Road which is today called Old Berwick Road. The drawing comes from 1901 Sanborn Map of Bloomsburg.

The two men came from different backgrounds, but both had experience in the iron industry. Harman came from a family with a German ancestry; his grandfather, Jacob Harman, a native of Alsace came to America in 1770. His grandson grew up in Orangeville, although he was born in Mifflin Township on June 5, 1831. At the age of thirteen he became an apprentice to Louis H. Maus of Bloomsburg to learn the trade of molder. In time he became a journeyman and lived in several places including Philadelphia before he moved to Mahanoy City in 1861. Here he operated his own foundry and machine shop for three years. In the mid-1860s he returned to

Bloomsburg and became a partner with Benjamin Sharpless in the firm of Sharpless and Harman Foundry and Machine Shop located on the northwest corner of Sixth and Center Streets. When this business ended in the early 1870s, Harman and Hassert became partners to create their own business in 1875.

George Hassert was born in Reichensacher, Hesse Cassel, Germany, on November 5, 1824, and was seven years older than Harman. In his teenage years he learned the trade of millwright. At the age of twenty he entered the German army and served for six years. After his military service he immigrated to the United States and initially settled in Philadelphia. Three years after becoming a citizen on February 8, 1853, he and his wife moved to Bloomsburg and found employment in his trade.

After a few years, the plant became larger and the company's focus gradually shifted away from its initial products to making mining machinery, mine cars, and structural iron work for buildings. A disastrous fire on the night of October 6, 1888, destroyed key components of the business, foundry, machine shop, and the erecting shop with "all the machinery in them." This was a substantial loss, \$12,000; however, having fire insurance on the property allowed the firm to rebuild its facilities at the same site and on a much larger scale with a frontage of 350 feet and a depth of 300 feet. A Bloomsburg newspaper, *Daily Sentinel*, reported that the company provided employment for 120 skilled mechanics in 1910. The article stated: "the plant is fitted with modern machinery and has a capacity of turning out 2,500 mine and construction cars, and 2,500 tops of castings annually. The product is marketed throughout the eastern and central part of the United States, and two traveling salesmen are kept on the road the year around." The company went out of business in 1924 according to Heister V. White in his 1926 manuscript, "History of Manufacturing in Bloomsburg."

George Hassert, a Democrat, took an active role in the community by serving on the Bloomsburg Town Council for four one year terms from 1880 to 1883. In his obituary there was a statement that he was "very kind to the poor and often did deeds of charity that were known to but a few." At the age of sixty-four he died from a heart attack on October 26, 1889. *Columbia County Republican*, a Bloomsburg newspaper, reported when Hassert's coffin was taken from his home on the corner of Fourth and Catherine Streets to Rosemont Cemetery. The procession included "an unusually large number of people, the entire force of the firm's hands marching in body."

Peter S. Harman, like his partner, took an active interest in the civic life of Bloomsburg. He believed in promoting the welfare and general good of the town. For example, when the Bloomsburg Elevator Company declared bankruptcy, he made a financial investment to help the firm to recovery. His help contributed to saving jobs and materially benefited business interests. Harman, a Republican, served as President of Town Council (equivalent to Mayor) for three consecutive one year terms from 1887 to 1889. In the 1890 election, George A. Herring who had been elected Council President five times between 1878 and 1885 defeated Harmon by a narrow

margin of 2.6%. The following year Harman decided to run against Herring and defeated his opponent easily by winning 56.1% of the votes. Harman died on October 15, 1899, at the age of sixty-eight.

With his death, the management of Harman and Hassert passed to the heirs of both families. The company became incorporated on August 15, 1902, with James Lee Harman, son of Peter, as President and General Manager. George E. Hassert, the son of the other founder, became Vice President. A second son of Peter, John G. Harman an attorney served as the firm's Solicitor.

*The Morning Press* on March 2, 1903, stated in the opening paragraph of a special section devoted to surveying Bloomsburg's industries: "Never was Bloomsburg, the 'Parlor City' of Pennsylvania, more alive with the hum of industry, than it is today." It described the town's industrial base. "Every manufacturing plant is working to its fullest capacity and the evidence of prosperity and thrift is everywhere apparent. The very success and prosperity of the town is in large measure due to the diversity of its industries." At the start of the twentieth century Bloomsburg had around twenty-five factories that provided employment for approximately twelve hundred people. The newspaper's editor observed: "Bloomsburg never undergoes those periods of depression to which most towns are subject and this is because of the varied manufactories that give employment to its men and women." The company that Peter S. Harman and George Hassert started was an important component of the town's prosperity.

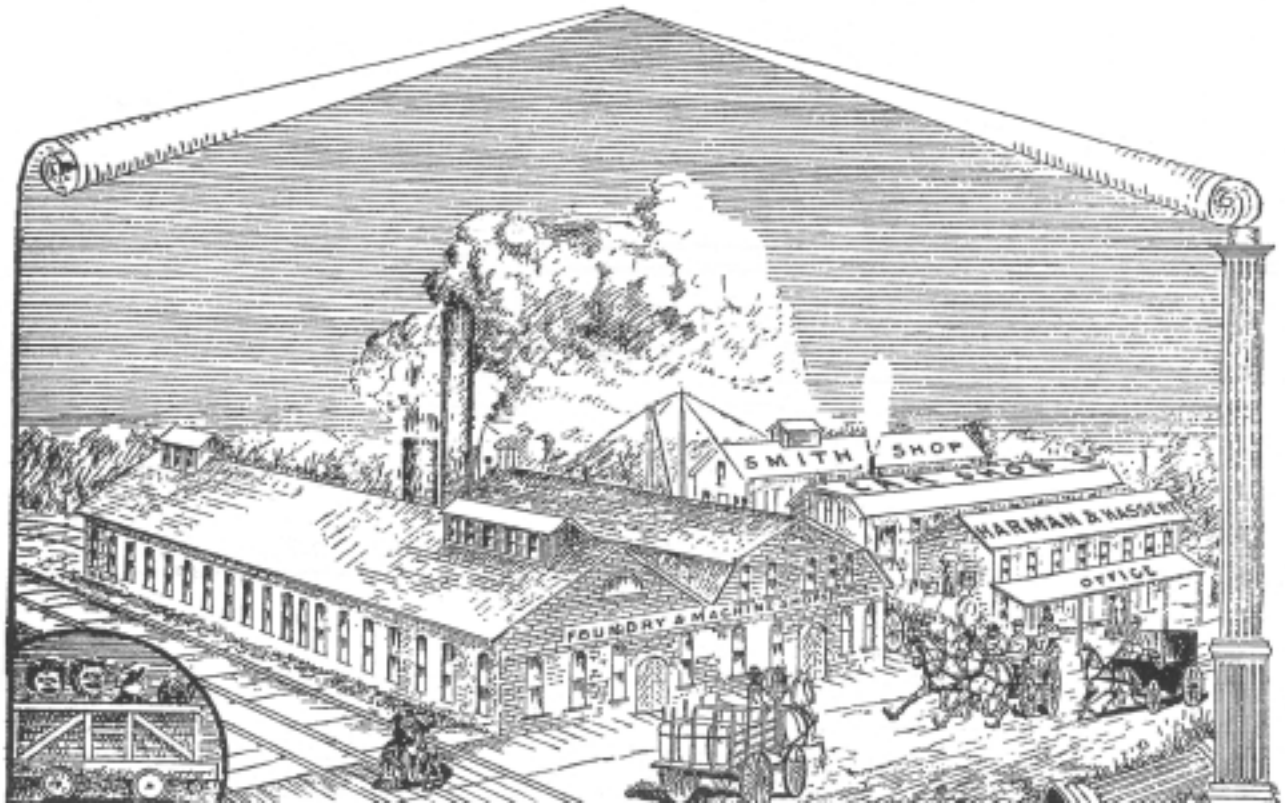
Information for this introduction came from Bloomsburg's newspapers, *Columbia County Republican*, *The Democratic Sentinel*, *The Bloomsburg Daily*, *Daily Sentinel*, and *The Morning Press*. *Historical and Biographical Annals of Columbia and Montour Counties Pennsylvania* provided biographical information about the two families.

The following article, "Harman and Hassert's Works," appeared in *The Columbian* on May 1, 1891, describing the origins of the company and the kind of business it conducted. There were some editorial corrections made in the article involving grammar and spelling for the purpose of clarity.

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## HARMAN & HASSERT'S WORKS

Prominent among the manufactures of Bloomsburg is the firm of Harman & Hassert, car builders, founders & machinists, and dealers in engines, boilers, steam pumps, steam and gas fitters' supplies and coal. Peter S. Harman & George Hassert began business, under the above firm name, in the year 1875, in a small building sixty by fifty feet, which they at that time, erected on the premises they now occupy. Their works was a foundry and a machine shop and their business consisted in the manufacture of stoves and plows and in repairing agricultural implements, engines and mill gearing &c., &c.



An illustration of Harman & Hassert that appeared in the *Columbian* on May 1, 1891.

Through careful management and close attention to business, they have gradually enlarged their capacity and increased their facilities until today they stand in the front, among the leading manufactures of this section.

Their office, foundry, machine shop, smith and car shop and coal bunkers cover a large area of ground on the eastern corner of the intersection of East Street and Delaware, Lackawanna, & Western tracks with a frontage of three hundred feet on East Street, and two hundred and fifty feet on the Delaware, Lackawanna, & Western Railroad.

They have regularly in their employ about sixty workmen busily engaged in the manufacture of mine cars, mill carts, car wheels and axles, coal breaker and house work, plain and ornamented building columns, water pipe, mill gearing and all kinds of general jobbing work.

On the night of the 6<sup>th</sup> of October 1888 their plant was totally destroyed by fire, but with the usual promptness and energy they at once commenced the erection of new buildings on the site of the ruins, and in ninety days from the date of the fire they were running along as usual with greater and better facilities than ever before. Their loss by fire was followed by the sudden death of George Hassert who died in October 1889. Since then the business has been conducted by the surviving member alone, Mr. Peter S. Harman, to whose perseverance and fine business qualities the success of the firm is largely due. Mr. Harman not only has the reputation of successfully

managing his own affairs but as a public spirited man and an enterprising citizen he enjoys the confidence and respect of his fellow townsmen, who have acknowledged his executive ability, by re-electing him President of the Council, which position he now holds. The business of Harman & Hassert is strongly identified with the coal business throughout the Lackawanna Valley where as well as elsewhere they have won for themselves a name for promptness, carefulness, and dispatch in the execution of all order entrusted to their care.

### THE FOUNDRY

In this department they have a capacity of ten tons of melted iron per day. Their work consists of mine car wheels, building columns, cast iron piping, breaker work, stove repairs, and plow castings.



This site on East Street was the location of Harman & Hassert.  
The two large buildings were once used by the firm.

### MACHINE SHOP

The machine shop is complete with all the latest and best machines. The turning lathes have a swing of six in feet diameter and a length of twenty feet. The drill presses, planers, and large power punch are all fine machines. In this department a large number of skilled mechanics are employed, whose time is devoted to making shafting, pumps, hangers, and general repairs. Strict attention is given to all grades of

work, and satisfaction guaranteed. Especial attention is given to mill gearing and saw mill work.

#### THE CAR SHOP

In this department especial attention is given to the manufacture of mine cars, which are made from one ton upwards in all sizes styles and descriptions. This line of the business has increased rapidly in the last few years until now they are furnishing mine cars in many sections of the state.

#### PATTERN SHOP

This is the most complete to be found in this section. Well equipment with all the machinery and tools necessary to make anything in the pattern line. Parties in need of patterns should send drawing and specifications, or come themselves and see a pattern will be made complete.

#### COAL

The coal yard is large and easy to reach, and the coal well protected from the storms, and large scales upon which accurate weight is obtained. Coal can be furnished in ton or car load lots.

#### SUPPLY DEPARTMENT

In addition to the stock for their own use they carry a large line of supplies for machinists, plumbers, and others. Gas, steam, and water pipe are furnished in car load at astonishing low prices. [They have] water gauges, gauge glasses, valves of all descriptions, packing of all kinds, sheet rubber, asbestos board, square and round packings, belting of all kinds and lace leather [as well as] machine belts, large screws wrenches, files, oil cups, &c.

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