

Jamison City as I Remember It

From 1900 to 1917

Catherine Casey Chapin

***Introduction:** Catherine Casey Chapin in 1976 wrote a memoir about living in Jamison City, a community in Sugarloaf Township at the northern end of the Columbia County, in the early years of the twentieth century. Her family moved to Jamison City because her father worked for the Bloomsburg and Sullivan Railroad as an engineer. When the railroad began providing service from Bloomsburg to Jamison City in November 1888, it became an important factor that created a surge of economic activity centering on lumbering. This, in turn, gave rise to a sawmill and the use of hemlock bark for a tannery. The place soon experienced a rapid growth and jobs. Catherine recalls many of the residents' names, recounts what it was like to live there, the kind of work people did, different business, existence of schools, kinds of entertainment, and tragedies that occurred. Unfortunately, by the mid-1920s its economy had sharply declined. Craig A. Newton and James R. Sperry in their book, A Quiet Boomtown, Jamison City, Pa., 1889-1912, published in 1972, provides a very readable and good historical account of this settlement.*

The memoir is from the Society's manuscript collection. There were some punctuation, paragraph and capitalization changes to the text for clarity purposes. The complete name for the Penna. Lumber Company was corrected to Central Pennsylvania Lumber Company.

My mother and father, James and Elizabeth Casey, my sister Mary, my brother Albert and myself moved from Bloomsburg to Jamison City in 1900.

There were three trains, The Bloomsburg and Sullivan passenger train, a freight train and a log train. The passenger train made three trips a day to Bloomsburg; left Jamison at six o'clock in the morning, back in Jamison City at ten o'clock to Bloomsburg at four o'clock, to Jamison City at eight o'clock in the evening. The train had a baggage car, it carried the U.S. Mail three times a day. The baggage master on the train was Henry Rupert. My father, James Casey, was the only engineer. The other crew members on the passenger train that I remember were J. W. Scott, John Bunting, conductors; firemen were Charles Ash, Charles Welliver, Harry Bittenbender, Samuel Lanning and Roland Hess was brakeman. The freight crew were Charles Turner, Webb Faye, Wm. Straub, Amos Lyn, Ralph Miller and Mr. Rhodarmel. Some of these men later worked on the passenger train. The freight train made one round trip a day, the superintendent was W. C. Snyder and Samuel Wigfall. During the Bloomsburg Fair week they ran a special train every day and always filled with passengers. The stations were Jamison City, Central, Edsons, Stillwater, Zaners, Forks, Lightstreet, and Bloomsburg; also the train always

stopped at Grassmere Park, Maple Grove, and Williams Lodge near Forks but no station there.

The log train was owned by the Central Pennsylvania Lumber Company. It went up in the mountains above Elk Grove. My Grandfather, Thos. Casey, was the superintendent, the only crew members I remember were Charles Hirleman, Mr. Albertson and a Mr. Sones. Mr. Albertson was killed while working on the railroad. The train carried logs from the woods to the saw mill in Jamison. Jamison station always had a station agent, those I remember were Benjamin Laubach, Roy Hartman, who later became a doctor in Chicago, James Gallagher, Thomas Gallagher, John (Tony) Gallagher and Barret McHenry. The station is still there.

The Elk Tanning Co. and the Central Pennsylvania Lumber Company were the main industries. At one time there was an acid factory. The tannery ground their own bark and used large vats to tan the hides. They were taken on the Bloomsburg and Sullivan train when they were dry and sent to large cities. Most of the men who worked in the tannery lived in Germantown near the tannery, the houses were all dark and built alike. The superintendent and bookkeepers had homes in Jamison City. Some of the superintendents were Gus Olson, John McMahan, Mr. Metz and Mr. Plank. The bookkeepers were Mr. Gavitt and John Gallagher. The men from the lumber mill lived in Hoboken across the creek. Their houses were dark red and nearly all built alike; two of these houses are still there. The only Superintendents of the mill I remember were a Mr. Edward Drum, Mr. Hodgeman and Thomas Lundy. Joe Sutliff and Ira Hess were the sawyers at the mill. Many men from Central, Elk Grove, Grassmere and Fritz Hill worked at these mills.

There were four hotels there at the same time. The VanSickle Hotel at the lower end of Jamison; The Procter Inn as (Big Onion) a beautiful hotel on the hill back of the station (many well to do families from the cities used to visit this hotel); a large hotel three stories, on the corner operated by John Hill later by Dennis Dorsey; the Blue Front Hotel owned by Matthew Farkes just beyond the Dorsey hotel, there was always a lot of excitement on Saturday night. The log train would bring the men from the lumber camps to town.

Jamison had three merchandise stores, one on the corner owned by a Mr. Vaughn, John Hill and later by Frank Mather. The store is still standing. The post office was in the store; mail went out three times a day. Three of the girls that worked in the post office were Doris Hill, Irma Kemmer and Florence Metherell. This building is owned by William Mather, the son of Frank Mather. O. B. Ammerman had a store on Main Street later owned by Mace Tubbs. Benjamin Cole owned a store on Water Street, his wife and daughter operated a millinery store. All three of these stores carried most anything anyone would need at that time.

Mr. Sax and Joseph Mamolin were both Jews. Mr. Sax had a clothing store and Mr. Mamolin a jewelry store. The Barber shops, one owned by Mr. John Kennedy later by Wm. VanSickle; the other was owned by Mr. Bardman later by Winfield Brady. Two butcher shops one owned by George Hunsinger later by Wilbur McHenry and Michael

Downs. Mr. John Thompson worked in the butcher shop. The other butcher shop was owned by a Mr. Albertson, in the building now the log cabin.

The only church in the community was a Methodist Church (that building is still there), the Methodist ministers I remember were Rev. Dunville, Rev. Deihl and Rev. Driver; also had a parsonage. The Catholics held mass once a month in different homes. mass was said in our house (James Casey) for many years. When the congregation grew larger, the Maccabee Lodge left them use the upstairs of their building at no charge. After many people left Jamison, mass was held in the homes of John Gallagher and Michael Downs. The Priest came from Bloomsburg.

Two school houses, one across the iron bridge up on the hill. There were steps and a board walk all the way to the school house. It was a two story building. The first three grades were on the first floor and the 4th through 8th grades were on the second floor. The teachers I remember were Miss Effie Seeby, later Mrs. Dr. Laubach, Miss Blance Robbins, Miss Fannie Harris, Miss Ethel Ask, Miss Helen Knouse, Otto Peterman, Dean Smith, Walter Illison, Miss Ida Smith and Miss Helen Tubbs. The Sullivan County school was a one story school located above the Tannery; the teachers were Mrs. Carola Fritz, Miss Marie Stoner, Miss Zola Smith, Miss Doris Miller and Miss Edith Olson. After we left Jamison in 1916 other teacher were Miss Nora Comstock, Emory VanSickle, Miss Martha Hess, Miss Edith VanSickle, Miss Ethel Davis and Donald Sands. Professor A. S. Fritz was a teacher there in 1896-1897. There were three doctors Dr. Wackenhoff, Dr. Smithgall and Dr. Shaw.

The B & S Station is still in the same location. At one time there was a large feed mill in back of the station. The upstairs was used for entertainment, such as dances, dramas, once a year medicine show; one of our Jamison girls left with the show and a Mr. Barman who traveled with the show stayed in Jamison. He opened and operated a barbershop and later married a Carpenter girl from Benton. James Brady lived in the White House at the foot of the hill above the tannery. This house is now owned by Mrs. Low. In Orangeville, another lovely home called the Red House, just beyond the tannery. A Mr. Brit Cole lived there. The many officers and influential men connected with the tannery always stayed at this home. John Gallagher, Mr. Gavitt of the tannery and Joseph Sutliff, Ira Hess and all the superintendents had homes in Jamison but they were not company homes. Saturday night was always a big night. The men from the lumber camps came to town. The log train owned by the lumber company brought them to town. In later years the Macabee Hall, a two story building on Main Street had a clothing store on the first floor and the second floor was used for dances, dramas (mostly home talent), Medicine shows and Church services.

Jamison had its share of sorrow. A Mr. Kocher from Central was burned to death at the mill, Mr. Albertson was killed by the log train and Mr. Knouse was killed by the B & S freight train. Sterling Cole, seventeen years old, son of Alfred Cole, invented a steam engine and when he started it, it exploded and scalded him. He died instantly. The Michael Downs home burned to ground, the kitchen stove exploded, Harold a grandson was burned to death and Margaret and Ama Downs were burned so bad they died the

night in the Bloomsburg Hospital. Jamison had one case of small pox, a Mr. Shultz, he recovered. Mrs. James Sweeney had an ice cream parlor; it was home made ice cream. People came from everywhere for her ice cream. The only electric power was in the tannery. The mill, hotels and stores had their own power plants. The only fire protection was the hose from the tannery and mill.

Our entertainment was dancing, skating, sleigh riding, ball games and festivals. We always went to the homes and made candy, played the piano or organ and sang, also played flinch. The hotel had a livery stable which rented horses and buggies or sleighs, a real treat for all. Jamison had a band, they played for picnics, parades and parties. My grandfather, Metherell, taught the band. They also had a good baseball team. My brother was bat boy part of the time. Jamison had a fine baseball diamond.

The freight train transported the hides from the tannery and the lumber from the mill to Bloomsburg, then it was taken on to cities to be used.

Some excitement once in awhile was when the Black Hand was popular. A Mabel Carter received a letter threatening her harm but nothing happened. Mr. John Peterman from near Central stoned his brother Abraham to death. They brought John to Jamison to be taken to the Bloomsburg jail on the B & S train. Jamison at one time was a prosperous town. Beside the houses in Germantown and Hobokin there were houses on both sides of the street from the tannery to the VanSickle house, at the lower end of the town this house is still there. There were many accidents at the tannery and mill, many people were taken either to Bloomsburg or Williamsport Hospitals on the B & S train.

One of our Jamison City boys became a Catholic priest, Carl Gallagher, son of Mr. & Mrs. John Gallagher. Father Jerome Gallagher is now at Saint Bonaventure Friary, Patterson, New Jersey.

In 1916, the discontinued part of the service of the Bloomsburg and Sullivan, to only two trips a day. The train stayed in Benton over night. That is when we moved to Benton. Later the train service was discontinued altogether. The tannery and lumber mill closed down, that was the end of prosperity in Jamison City.

At eighty-one years old, I am sure I have forgotten many names of families and many things that happened there through the years. I will always remember those wonderful years and the wonderful friendly and good people. I am happy to have been a part of Jamison City. There are many of the houses there and people making their homes there still.

Catherine Casey Chapin, 1976