

MORDANSVILLE

EDITOR'S NOTE: Today, there only exists a remnant of Mordansville which in the latter part of the 1800s and early 1900s had a large woolen mill, sawmill, blacksmith, general store, and small hotel. It is approximately three miles north of Bloomsburg, located a short distance on the east side of State Route 42. The Sands family, Joseph E. and his son, Charles L., were prominent participants in the village's economic life. When raising sheep for wool was a big business with area farmers in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, Charles operated the largest woolen mill in Columbia County. In addition, voters elected both men to the office of Columbia County Commissioner; Joseph served one term from 1875 to 1878 and Charles' term was 1890 to 1893.

The following article comes from the W.P.A. Project No. 5175, 1936, Columbia County History, at Bloomsburg Public Library. The author is not identified. The person relied in part on information found in two histories of Columbia County: Bates, Samuel P. *History of Columbia and Montour Counties*. Chicago: A. Warner & Co., 1887 and *Historical and Biographic Annals of Columbia and Montour Counties Pennsylvania*. Chicago: J. H. Beers & Company, 1915.

There are several editorial revisions to the article to correct spelling and grammar errors, sentence structure, and the inclusion of additional content for clarity purposes.

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Mordansville, a small community along Little Fishing Creek in Mt. Pleasant Township, was named after John Mordan who settled in the area during the 1790s. When more settlers moved into the area he built a sawmill that gave rise to a village.¹

Years later in 1856 Joseph E. Sands and Thomas Mather started a woolen mill at this site. Sands became sole owner of the mill in 1860, and when he died in 1881 his son, Charles L. Sands, became the owner. In the initial operation of the mill the "farmers brought wool here to be carded, and after spinning, and weaving the cloth, returned it for the finishing touches of the fulling and pressing machines."² Charles L. Sands felt this method caused too much delay to complete the process. He decided to remodel and invest in more up-to-date machinery that would allow him to perform the complete manufacturing process. The mill produced woolen blankets, women's stockings, numerous patterns of flannels including a flannel called the Lumberman's which was used by lumbermen and blacksmiths. He also manufactured yarn in various colors and in different plies (two, three and four). The four-ply yarn was used for filling in rag carpet which was quite an industry at that time. The looms used to manufacture carpet were run by hand. The only cloth manufactured was a satinet, made of a cotton warp and woolen filling and used mainly for men's trousers.

¹ Walter M. Brash, *Columbia County Place Names* (Orangeville: Columbia County Historical Society, 1982), 150.

² Fulling was a process of cleaning, shrinking, and thickening cloth by moisture, heat and pressure.

Previous to Charles L. Sands taking over the woolen mill, it was run by water power. The scouring and washing of the wool was done in a copper vat heated with cord wood. There were times during the summer months when it was impossible to operate mill on account of scarcity of water. To overcome this problem, a boiler and engine were installed. Wood was used to heat the boiler.

In 1887 the Wilks-Barre and Western Railroad connected Watsontown to Millville.³ Soft coal was purchased at Brisbin in Clearfield County, Pennsylvania. Shipped from there over the Pennsylvania Railroad to Watsontown then to Evers Grove, it was then hauled by wagons to Mordansville. The freight on a car of coal from Watsontown to Evers Grove was more than the car of coal cost at Brisbin.

With two new investors, William R. Hagenbauch and M. J. Elder, the C. L. Sands & Co. built a new dye house, installed large cedar vats for dyeing; also large tubs for washing and scouring wools. These were heated by steam. The mill for most of the time operated night and day in order to keep up with the orders.



This view of Mordansville was taken in 1912. The white building was a church and the building to the right was a store. Across the road from the store was Kindt's blacksmith shop. The barn to the far left belonged to Charles L. Sands. The location of the woolen mill that burned in 1905 would have been farther to the left of Sands' barn.

The woolen products of the mill were sold mainly through the coal regions. The coal companies of the "Coxes" and "Pardees" were the largest users. The product in

³ The name of the Wilkes-Barre and Western Railroad was changed later to the Susquehanna, Bloomsburg, and Berwick Railroad.

yarns was all packed in a press of five pound bundles. The flannels were in rolls up to thirty-five yards; for shipping, it was packed in heavy paper and sewed in burlap, then hauled to Bloomsburg, and shipped on the different railroads. The production of the mill gradually increased to the point of 25,000 pounds of wool per year.

There were lots of sheep in the Columbia County and the surrounding counties with flocks ranging from a dozen to three hundred. The largest one in Columbia County was owned by C. Kreamer at Jerseytown. Much of the wool produced in this area found its way to the C. L. Sands & Co. Woolen Mills, a hundred thousand pounds or more. A sorter graded the wool and put it into three different piles. Fine used for yarns, fine and medium went into yarns for flannel and blankets, and wool from the neck of fleece and all loose wool were placed in three hundred pound sacks and sold to worsted mill companies for combining with other coarser fibers to manufacture coarser materials. This part of the fleece was mostly bought by large commission houses.

In 1898 Charles L. Sands and William R. Hagenbauch bought the interest of M. J. Elder when he retired. A short time after that, the mill was closed down as silk and lighter materials were taking the place of heavy woolen wear.

In the early 1900s the S. B. & B. Railroad built a branch line from Eyers Grove to Mordansville. The route took the race that supplied the Woolen Mill with water with the train running within two feet of the mill. That was the end of the operation of the mill. In 1905 a fire destroyed the mill causing a heavy loss to Charles L. Sands who did not have it insured.

Previous to the mill discontinuing operations, Mordansville was a growing little town. Joseph E. Sands established the first store and was the first postmaster when post office opened in 1834. The business was taken over later taken over by his son J. P. Sands. A fire destroyed the store and workroom as well as other structures. R. C. Kindt lost his house and blacksmith shop in the fire. He then purchased a blacksmith shop and house erected by Clark Beagle on the corner of the John Mordan's garden on the road leading to Bloomsburg. Together, Kindt and his son, Robert, ran a blacksmith business. After the death of the father, Robert continued the business.

Later Charles L. Sands erected a two story store building on the lot where the T. S. Sands building had stood and rented the same to William H. Manning and John McGarrey who stocked the store and ran it under the name of Manning & McGarrey. Later it was taken over by Charles L. Sands and run under the management of his son Joseph E. Sands. Shortly after H. H. Kindt opened up a store directly across the road from the Sands store. There was such a demand at that time for a blacksmith that C. L. Sands erected a shop and rented it to Adam Black.

The sawmill built and owned by John Mordan was taken over by his son, Daniel Mordan, when his father died. Daniel Mordan later took in John V. Kline as a partner. They branched out by adding a cider press and chopping mill and did a thriving

business and at this writing the same plant exists. The Charles L. Sands home in 1902 was licensed (permitted to sell alcohol) by Joseph E. Sands. He conducted a hotel there for six years and then sold it to Harry W. Johnson who after two years quit.

In 1914 John McCaslin a native of Missouri moved to Mt. Pleasant and purchased the Frank Kindt farm and home. He opened a store in the same room H. H. Kindt had formerly conducted a store in which he operated for a couple of years until he met his death in a sand slide at the Vanderslice sand hole. Mordansville at one time was on the main road from Bloomsburg to Millville. It crossed to the east side of Little Fishing Creek into Mordansville through a covered bridge. The road followed the creek north crossing later to the west side of the creek through the Wilson Covered Bridge. This part of the road is no longer used. The main road no longer uses the covered bridge to cross the creek to pass through Mordansville

Frank Thomas bought the old John Kindt property, remodeled it, and built a dance hall to it; he opened a store in the same room always used for this purpose; then he also put in a gas and oil station, served lunches, and Sunday dinners. He rented the place to one Karshner who licensed it and conducted it, but a short time later lost his business. Owing to the change in the road, the place cannot be made a paying proposition but is still in existence.

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