

OLD HISTORY FOR THE YOUNG

(Historical Accounts of the Bloomsburg Area)

Introduction

I. W. Hartman, a prominent Bloomsburg merchant, wrote a letter to Thomas Jefferson Vanderslice, editor of *The Democrat Sentinel*, a Bloomsburg newspaper, about the early history of the town. Published under a headline of "Old History for the Young," it appeared on July 5, 1895. In his letter he referred to a number of different mills in the Bloomsburg area and a huckleberry bog in the town, an area at the rear of St. Matthew's Lutheran Church and the Court House.

Hartman, born near Catawissa in 1825, grew up on a farm near what is today Fernville in Hemlock Township. He began his business career in 1843 as a clerk in a Bloomsburg store. Five years later he formed a partnership with his brother, Henry, to run a general store. Years later he bought out his brother's interest and then took in his son, Edwin, as a partner. The Hartman store located on northwest corner of the square (today the State Liquor Store) was the longest continuous business in Bloomsburg in 1895. I. W. Hartman took an active interest in civic affairs; he served as a member of town council, school director, and superintendent and treasurer of the Rosemont Cemetery.

Hartman's Letter to the Editor

Mr. Editor: I was asked by a gentleman of our town if I remembered an old mill just across Fishingcreek; and he was told that at one time there was one, and would like the history of it. In a common expression of an Irishman, I said: "And sure I do remember it." Shortly after my father and family moved from Catawissa (where I was born) to the Wm. McKelvy farm, afterwards known as the "Red Mill" farm, they began planning to tear down the old Dreisbach mill and build a new one. Whilst that was in progress of building, which lasted about two years, we boarded the hands, and all of our milling was done at "Folks Mill," which stood near the old house in now Fernville, and just where the old road, (now an alley) came out to the creek. The dam was up where the Irondale bridge was a few years ago. I well remember going with my father to the mill on horseback, he on one horse and I on another, with a bag of wheat, rye or corn. I was too small and young to go alone, and in order to get two bags there in one trip he would take me along, leading my horse and watching that the bag and I did not fall off. I also remember being the laughing stock for passers by, as the horse's back was wide, my limbs short, and sitting on a bag of grain they would be as straight out as the limbs of an oak tree. In those days there were no small wagons, people went on horse back or with the big farm wagon. My mother often told me how she went to her old home at Orwigsburg, on horseback,

and carried with her one of us boys. I am told the mill was built by Elias Deitterich, grandfather of all the Deitterich boys and girls and all the Mendenhall boys and girls about here. He sold it to a Mr. Folk. I well remember the old man Folk in his miller clothes. Joshua Mendenhall was, I think, the last miller, and afterwards farmed the Drinker Farm. The mill lost most of its customers after the Red Mill began running, and Barton's mill rebuilt, with Boone's mill soon to follow. John Barton, who kept store where Eyer's store now is, owned a mill where Shew's paper mill now stands, and sometimes we would go up there when Hemlock creek ran dry and too low for grinding. I had a faint recollection of "Boss Wells," as they called him, building a corn stalk bridge over the creek just where the Fernville bridge now stands, so that people from Oyer Stettle (as Bloomsburg was called by the Germans) could get over with their grists of wheat or rye, mostly rye, as that was the bread for head workers in those days. The tail race was a great place for fishing with nets; of course their fish stories were not equal to mine from Ocean Grove. The old mill, like some of us, soon began showing its age and began falling down piece by piece, until a big flood in the creek washed out the race and dam and tore away one corner of the mill, and finally it gave up the ghost. Part of the old frame work and walls were still there when the Irondale Co. bought the grounds. There is somewhere near by under the dam, one of the buhr stone carried down by the flood.

And now, Mr. Editor, let us leave Hemlock township and give to the young men of our town something perhaps few of them have ever heard of: Do you know that in the earlier days of Bloomsburg there was a large huckleberry bog being in the rear of Dr. Rutter's and the Lutheran church lots and extending down as far as Dr. McKelvy's and in width of about two lots. Of course the whole north side of the town was a wilderness. I am told by those who are older that the bog was a good hiding place for deer, and the old settlers would secret themselves at about the west corner of Rosemont cemetery with shot guns whilst others with dogs would rout them out of the bog. There was a path running diagonally up through Mr. Schoch's, Wm. Chrisman's and Prof. Walker's lots to about the old cocoonery, then along the hilltop to the cemetery and down to the creek. The deer would follow this path and make for the mountains. I am told at one time nine deer were started and one large buck was shot. They always divided with their neighbors enough for all hands for a big dinner. I remember since coming to Bloomsburg, 52 years ago, the bears coming up the hill and looking over town.

Yours,

I. W. Hartman