

THE SCHOOLS OF LONG AGO, HARVEST TIME, EIGHT CUPS OF COFFEE AT ONE MEAL — OTHER NOTES OF INTEREST

INTRODUCTION

I. W. Hartman, a prominent businessman in Bloomsburg in the latter part of the 1800s and early 1900s, wrote several articles about local history for *The Democratic Sentinel*, a Bloomsburg newspaper. Hartman, who was born two miles east of Catawissa in 1825, lived to be ninety-seven years old. At the age of eighteen he began clerking in the Eyer and Hefley store in Bloomsburg. Five years later, in 1852, he formed a partnership with his brother, H. C. Hartman, and opened a general store. After some time he became the sole owner of the business. He served several terms as a member of town council, the school board, and as superintendent and treasurer of the Rosemont Cemetery. The obituary from the *Morning Press* stated: "Always he stood for progress and foresight and optimism — rare qualities he possessed throughout his entire life."

Hartman's article focused mainly on education in Montour Township and Catawissa in the 1830s and 1840s. He also commented about farm work, "Apple Jack" whiskey, and taking a clerk's position in a Bloomsburg store. His article appeared in *The Democratic Sentinel* on July 26, 1895.

I. W. HARTMAN'S LETTER TO *THE DEMOCRATIC SENTINEL*

Editor *Democratic Sentinel*: — Without an explanation, my last letter might be misleading in regard to the ability of Mr. Nevius and Thomas Drake as teachers. Their ability was kept in check for the want of better facilities and more advanced books and studies.

After we left Hemlock township, a new school house was built with more modern desks and seats and new books with new ideas and methods were introduced. Mr. Nevius continued for years after and the pupils advanced under his teaching. He always bore the reputation of an educated man. My older brothers continued going there until a new school house was built in Montour township.

And now, gathering up my thoughts, with my promises, I again give to the public some more facts on "Old History for the Young." My school days closed at the "Forks" by the removal of our family to "Dutch Valley," on the farm now owned by John Mensch. My

father purchased it from Jacob Good, who afterwards moved to Ohio, then considered the "far west." Many of the older people of that valley can remember him by the stories told about his capacity for drinking coffee. It was said that his daily ration of coffee was eight and ten cups at each meal, and that upon one occasion on a wager during harvest time at dinner he drank sixteen cups. We had not been long in Montour township, (it had just been cut off from Hemlock) until they began agitating the building of a school house and accepted the new school law. Of course there was great opposition and strong objections to it. The Governor who signed the bill was denounced by those who had property, but no children, or those whose children had grown beyond the age to receive any of its benefits. Said the law was passed to make *lazy people* and *scoundrels* out of poor men's sons and daughters. Another agitation was the location; some wanted it at the "Forks" of the Danville and Catawissa roads, near Peter Evans' (them Mathias Girton's) others on our farm near Peter Rupert's line, others at Judge Rupert's, where his daughter then had a subscription school, (now Rupert). It was however finally decided to build it on Peter Rupert's lot, and there you can see it now as a dwelling, near the "arch bridge." The school house was quite central for that part of the township, and we boys had the advantages of a three months' school every winter. There was also a subscription school in the summer, but as I had grown to be able to plough, harrow, make hay, haul coal to the lime kilns, and at spare times assist in hauling ore from the Paxton farm (now Reuben Guild's) to over the river furnaces, one at Mainville, "Hawk's Furnace," the other the "Esther Furnace," near where Simon Shive now lives, and most of the older brothers having gone to learn trades, it was not for me to go to the summer school.

Our harvests those days required from four to six cradles and double that number of binders for at least ten days. I, being the youngest of the family, did the water and whiskey carrying for the hands, and with the ten o'clock lunch furnished by the female department of the house, a big ground table was set. Drinking whiskey in those days was not considered out of order for old or young. The farmer who did not furnish drink could get no hands. I remember joining in with all hands and taking my share. The article was not the "knock-em-stiff" kind of these days; we gathered the apples and peaches and hauled them by wagon loads to Minard Farley's stillhouse in Frosty Valley, (now Wm. Appleman's farm), and had them stilled into whiskey called "Apple Jack" and "Peach Brandy." We boys had free access to the cellar, and if our stomachs were a little out of tune in the morning, we would put tansy in the whiskey and by dinner time could take our usual meal. Don't know if it was in the quality of the whiskey or brandy or in our volition (will power) to say "No," for there were seven of us boys and am glad to say not one became a *drunkard*. It is truthfully said "Strong men have wills, weak men have wishes." I am inclined in all cases to give credit to the word "No."

The teachers in that school, as I remember, was first Lewis Barkley, of Bloomsburg, then single but afterwards married Mahala Quick, who with her son and daughter reside in Bloomsburg, he having died many years ago. The second teacher was A. J. Sloan, father of Harry Sloan, the dry goods merchant, Bloomsburg. The third and last one was a cousin of mine from Canada, Joseph Hartman. They were all very acceptable teachers. Lewis Barkley also taught singing school and had a large class for Saturday nights. One or two of them taught in the summer the subscription school. There were many improvements

and advantages given us which were not in all the older schools. We had Smith's grammar, Rose's arithmetic, a late edition of geography and U.S. History; we still held on to the Webster spelling book and the English reader, had the old copy book and goose quill.

The one particular new matter introduced by Jos. Hartman was electricity, "Benj. Franklin's tamed lightning," as it was called by the boys. The teacher having procured a "battery," manufactured it. I well remember he had me on a chair as the subject with a glass tumbler under each leg of the chair, and as the scholars would take my hand the current would be conveyed to them; if they touched my nose it would smart, if the hair it would sparkle. It caused quite an excitement in the community. They said he was smarter than "Yankee teachers."

The people began reading about Dr. Franklin. Some of the older people had read about his going through the streets of Philadelphia with "gingerbread" under his arm; others had read how when he was a "printer boy" going to London, England, in a printing office inquiring for work. The superintendent looked at him and asked where he came from; his reply was "America." The superintendent went to one of the type cases and set up this: "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Franklin quickly set up this answer: "Come and see." It was enough, he was employed, but they had not read his being greater than "Van Amberg, the lion tamer." Franklin tamed the lightning and Morse caged it and fully conquered it; now it rules the world in light and power.

New books were introduced with new ideas which did much toward breaking down the prejudices of tax payers. From that time on the people began to see and hear good results from the public school system. Scholars, both male and female, began reaching out after knowledge and put themselves in touch with new books. The rote arithmetic crowded out "Old Pike," as it taught us how to measure and reckon how many perch of stone or how many thousand of brick was in a round well, or how much it would cost to shoe a horse all around, giving the blacksmith one farthing (or 2 cents) for the first nail and doubling each to the end. I remember when it was given to me to solve, it required both sides of my slate, and little time was left in the day for other problems. (Try it and see how wealthy the blacksmith became shoeing one horse). Reading, writing, spelling, and a sprinkling of grammar were taught. Debating societies became popular and in the debates we had lively times. The Rupert boys, the Quick boys, the Roberts boys and many others were good debaters. A little fellow by the name of Patrick Keef, who lived in a shanty down at the Dugan hollow, where the road along the rocks ended, his father was a canal "boss," was one of the best debaters. One of the subjects for debate was "When is a person most happy, in pursuit or possession?" One of the speakers a few night previous had started over the hills to see his "lady love" and darkness and night overtook him and for a time lost his way. He happened to be on the opposite side in the argument. The little Irishman, Keef, said: "Mr. President, I desire to ask my opponent if he was not happier when in possession of his lady than when in pursuit of her, wandering around in the woods." Of course in those days it would bring the house "down" in applause.

Work grew on my hands on the farm, and like other boys I grew older and began to feel manly, could drive four horses with single line, turn as short a corner as any of the neighbor boys, could go to Bloomsburg, and Catawissa battalions or general trainings, for that was our only outing for the summer, could attend revival meetings in Bloomsburg, in the old hill church and the old Methodist church, could walk nights and Sundays to Samuel Melick's camp meeting grounds.

Soon the shadows came, with my father's sickness and death. My brother Frank moved down from Bloomsburg and took possession and charge of the farm and lime kilns. My mother and I moved to Catawissa, bidding good-bye to the school house at the arch bridge as we drove by, and through the influence of Col. Paxton and others we were able to drive down the new road completed along the rocks to the Catawissa bridge which had been completed some years before.

On the first of June, 1843, I entered J. J. Brower's summer school at Catawissa for a term of three months, with the Paxton boys, the Ellis boys, Seesholtzs, Brobsts. Yeters, Kreighs, and others, male and female. We were drilled in higher studies (not much Greek or Roman History) but in algebra, astronomy, grammar, geography, history, philosophy &c. It was a common remark at the time that Mr. Brower taught a remarkable school for one only twenty years of age. He is living in Bloomsburg, now a retired life, having been a successful merchant for many years, afterwards Justice of the Peace.

Learning about the middle of August that there was a vacancy in Eyer & Hefley's store in Bloomsburg, my brother Charles who then resided in Catawissa, came over and secured the place for me. I came August 17, 1843, thus ending my school-days and beginning a busy life in Bloomsburg.

If I write again, it will be on what I saw when I came and what I did not see but see now.

Yours &c., I. W. Hartman