

IRON ORE FURNACE AT MAINVILLE

First in Columbia County, Was Built in the Year 1815

Southsider's Prosperous Residents

Supposed Hidden Coal in the Mountain Still Unmined

***Introduction:** I. W. Hartman, a well known and respected businessman in Bloomsburg in the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, often wrote articles about local history and his descriptive accounts of his travels to different places in Columbia County. Some of his articles have previously appeared in the Newsletter. When he died at the age of ninety-seven on January 16, 1922, the Morning Press described him as public spirited citizen and one who always "stood for progress and foresight and optimism – rare qualities he processed throughout his entire life." It also referred to him as the "last of the older generation of prominent Bloomsburgers remaining, and his wonderful memory went to make him the court of last resort in matters pertaining to the Bloomsburg of early days."*

Hartman's article is about taking a Reading Railroad passenger train from Catawissa to visit the Mainville area on April 25, 1912. He comments about John Hauck's iron furnace, search for coal in the area, drainage from coal mines polluting Catawissa Creek, large Reading Railroad bridge, local stores, Kester and Shuman Mills, buildings destroyed by past fires, dinner at Boyd Yetter's Hotel, and the Methodist and Lutheran churches in the community.

The article is reprinted as it appeared in the Democratic Sentinel, May 2, 1912.

Editor *Daily Sentinel*: –

I had been planning and anticipating in my mind for weeks a trip to Mainville and so expressed myself to a number of my friends including yourself, all of whom expressed the desire that I should write it up for public reading.

All readers of letters describing countries, scenes, or objects which they never have seen or visited, develops in their mind's eye some location or sight of the place. For instance, when I read of London, I immediately locate it in my vision as covering a broad expanse of low level land.

When I heard travelers describe the sandy desert of Africa, my mind's eye sees Mungo Parks with his twenty-five camels and that number of servants starting out in search of the river Niger. When I read of Boston my mind takes in Bunker Hill Monument. When I sing "Rock of Ages Cleft For Me," my mind goes back 200 years, when Toplady took

refuge from a heavy thunder storm under a large rock, and I see him with pencil and tablet in hands composing that hymn.

By faith we look at things unseen. With this introduction I take my seat in the 9:06 morning cars of the Reading road, on Thursday, April 25th, to Mainville, with the object on gathering old and new news.

"When I was a small boy," these six words carrying me back 80 years, when my father or one of my older brothers would place me upon feed bag on a load of ore and starting for the Hauck furnace, at East Mainville, (history tells us John Hauck erected this the first furnace in Columbia county in 1815), with the condition of the roads in the spring of the year, it required four horses to convey one ton up the hills of the road leading from the Richard farm in Montour township and down to the Catawissa bridge and from Catawissa over the hill road by the way of now Nelson Hartman's farm, where I was born. It also required the whole day from six o'clock in the morning until after night for the trip.

Such was the kind of employment for many farmers between seasons. Daniel Pursel, John Deitterich, Mathias Girton with others were engaged in the same.

Arriving at the Mainville station, situated upon the side of the Catawissa mountain, considerably elevated above the town, I took a survey of its location and called to mind a resemblance by photographs in my possession, also from descriptions by travelers of many towns in Switzerland, which are mountain locked with streams of water flowing down the mountain side and kept by the perpetual melting snow.

Mainville, however, is not mountain locked, although there are two peaks looking over the town said to be four to five hundred feet high. It has its outlets to Bloomsburg, Catawissa, Mifflinville, and to the coal regions by both wagon and railroad.

The Nescopeck and Catawissa Mountains, so conspicuous to travelers, as they are whirled along the rails and over the high bridges, are too rocky for cultivation and do not slope up as many of the foreign mountains, nevertheless they form an attractive water gap and with capital invested would make a delightful summer resort.

From the station, I began my jaunt, walking east along the Catawissa Creek, now diluted and black by streams coming into it from the coal mines, near Hazleton and Lofty. Many years ago it abounded with fish of many kinds, but fish are like human beings, they require fresh water.

Arriving at the location of the old furnace, near the Reading high bridge, I found only the remains of the cinder tip and for many feet around the soil still black from the charcoal. I remember seeing high up the valley the charcoal pits sending out their black smoke. Not satisfied with walking over the furnace grounds, walked up to the level of the high railroad bridge, which is said to be 100 feet high and spans a chasm of several hundred feet.

The fascination of this outlook completely captivated me, when I looked at the combination of these lofty mountains I was held spell bound and seemed to be living in past. What a source of pride came to me as I looked up and thank kind providence for having extended by life to walk over grounds and enjoying scenes of 80 years ago. As I gazed and looked at the two bridges, the Pennsylvania, which spans the Catawissa Creek and runs up Scott's Valley to Hazleton, both wholly constructed of iron, my mind said these are triumphs over nature. I remained long enough to see a freight train of at least fifty cars pass over the Reading bridge with a locomotive at each end, also the passenger train over the Pennsylvania bridge, after which I started upon my return, paying my respects to the proprietor of the East End Store, Mr. Deaner, who from appearances understands keeping a large stock of goods in good condition, and having used the yard stick for 57 years I always enjoy seek a clean stock of goods. From there I passed on to the Shuman flour and feed mill, formerly owned and operated by friend Mr. Nuss, now a resident of Bloomsburg.

I pause just here, to say with pleasure that Mifflin, Main, Catawissa and Beaver townships have furnished Bloomsburg with many good and valuable citizens, all of whom we extend a welcome hand. From there I passed under the Pennsy railroad bridge and with strained eyes focused the Nescopeck mountain with its large boulders of rocks protruding almost to the wagon road and saw where parties in their dreams supposed was hidden away in the mountain a great fortune in coal, investing much capital in searching only to give it up with fisherman's luck.

Called to pay my respects to Mr. Kester whose flour and feed mill is located on the grounds where the old forge was. He having that morning gone to the coal regions on business so did not have the pleasure of a chat with him, discovered however, that his mill was up-to-date with modern machinery.

I shall be compelled to pass over many interesting sights for want of space and only touch on certain details. There are so many interesting facts and experiences in this trip which carry me back and loom up before my mind, sufficient for another trip. I discovered from a distance, paths leading up to the summit of both the Nescopeck and Catawissa mountains and my boyish nature and desire to climb to their heights almost conquered me, but time, weak knees and the bell in my stomach ringing for dinner hour, forbade that I should make the attempt. Persons who have gone up say the view is grand and that Bloomsburg can be seen.

As I passed along the street with my face in the direction of the Boyd Yetter's Hotel, where I frequently enjoy a good dinner, I discovered that the numerous fires which had visited the place within the last few years have left one side of the street in quite a ragged condition, from broken cellar walls, charred fences, etc.

Arriving at the hotel somewhat fatigued, soon the sound of "mine hostess," Mrs. Yetter was heard announcing that the turkey dinner was ready. I said within myself, "who could have anticipated a turkey dinner on the 25 of April, four months after turkey feasting time has expired," nevertheless it was there "red hot," with all the "fixins" including a half-

dozen side dishes from cranberries to stewed onions, with butter bright as a gold dollar. I did my share cleaning the plates, with not a whimper of indigestion to follow. After dinner I was invited to the barn to see the fine herd of cows and there I discovered the source from whence came this yellow butter. Ten or twelve blooded Jerseys make up the herd and they are beauties.

After dinner I called at the store of Mr. Longenberger and was surprised to see a large store filled with merchandise, all in apple-pie-order. From there I walked out passing handsome homes and the Methodist Church, until I arrived at the Lutheran Church, located as a city set upon a hill. I am told the churches are well sustained, both having a large membership of farmers.

I say good bye to my Mainville friends, and they all said come again, which I promised to do in the near future.

Truly yours,

I. W. Hartman