

# JAMISON CITY

**Introduction:** Jamison City is a small community near the northern border of Columbia County with Sullivan County. The year 1889 was key time in the development of the town: The Pennsylvania Central Lumbering Company began building a lumber mill, construction of a tannery started, and the Bloomsburg & Sullivan Railroad completed the line between Bloomsburg and Jamison City. However, after three decades the town lost its economic underpinning. Today, little remains of what existed when Jamison City was a boomtown.

This is a memoir by Catherine Casey Chapin, written in 1976, of her reminiscences of Jamison City. As a young person, she lived in the town when her family moved there in 1900. Her account provided a general description of the community. For example, it includes recollections of the tannery, lumber mill, various businesses, hotels, the Bloomsburg & Sullivan Railroad, and a sense of what life was like living there.

Her account is from the Society's manuscript collection. There were some spelling, punctuation, and capitalization changes made, as well as some editing of the text for clarity purposes.

If you are interested in learning more about the history of Jamison City, read the book *A Quiet Boomtown, Jamison City, PA, 1889-1912*, by Craig A. Newton and James R. Sperry, published in 1972. It is very readable and a good historical account of this community.

I moved to Jamison City in 1900. At that time and for many years it was a prosperous and busy community.

There was a large tannery, The Elk Tanning Co., a large saw mill and an acid factory. The tannery was at the upper end of Jamison, in Sullivan County. The county lines separating Columbia and Sullivan Counties is where the house now owned by Mrs. Stella Petterman stands. It was the first house we lived in. The tannery had a room where they ground the bark, and large vats where they dyed the hides. There were long sheds where they hung the hides to dry. The hides were brought to the tannery by the freight train and were shipped to different parts of our country. Besides the men who lived in Jamison many men from Fritz Hill, Central, and Grassmere were employed there. The tannery families lived in Germantown near the tannery. All the houses were single and were built

alike. All were painted dark red. The superintendent and bookkeepers of both the tannery and mill had different houses. Mrs. Kopeck owns the superintendent house.

The lumber mill was the Central Pennsylvania Lumber Company and was located below the tannery. It was a large mill. The lumber yard filled most of the town down to the road where the store and post office were. The road goes out across the iron bridge. The people that worked in the mill, most of them, lived in Hoboken across the creek. I think there are two houses still standing there. Some of the pictures show a part of the lumber yard; some of them show the mill dam filled with logs. I have a picture of the bark sheds and some school pictures. The logs and bark were brought to the tannery and mill by the log train that went up into the mountains above Elk Grove and Emmons every day.

The acid factory I don't remember very much about. Some of Alvin Sutliff's people, I think, operated this factory. It closed down soon after we moved to Jamison.

There were three general merchandise stores you could buy most anything. Frank Mather operated the store on the corner and was the last owner. The post office was in the store. The building is still there and is owned by William Mather, his son. O. B. Ammerman had the store on upper Main Street and Benjamin, or Bemy, Cole as we called him operated a store on Water Street.

Mr. Sacks had a clothing store and Mr. Mamolen had a jewelry store.

There were two barber shops, operated by William Van Sickle. and Mr. Bardman. Mr. Bardman came to Jamison with a medicine show but liked it and stayed; thereafter he left Jamison. Years later Winfield Brady operated that barber shop.

There were two butcher shops, one owned by Michael Downs, the other by a Mr. Albertson. A large feed mill was back of the Station.

The Bloomsburg and Sullivan passenger train made three round trips a day to Bloomsburg and back. The first train left Jamison at 6:10 in the morning; the last came to Jamison at 8:10 in the evening. This train brought mail to Jamison each evening. A crowd gathered at the station and then we all went to the Post Office and visited with everyone. My father was the engineer on this train. The freight train made one trip every day to and from Bloomsburg. The first auto in Jamison was owned by Frank Mather. There was a livery stable from which many people rented horses and buggies. There was a school house on the hill across the bridge. This was the Columbia County school. The first three grades were on the first floor and the other five on the second floor. We had many teachers in this school from Benton: Otto Petterman, Fannie Harris, Effie Seely, who is married to Dr. Frank Laubach, Ethel Ash Ellison, Blanche Robbins Brooks and Helen Knouse Long. And in the Sullivan County school, which was above, the tannery, Mrs. Carala Cole Fritz and Zola Smith Swanson were teachers.

There was one church, the Methodist Church. It is still standing on lower Main Street.

There were two doctors there at the same time, Dr. Smithgall and Dr. Shaw. The doctors from Benton came up there in later years.

At onetime there were four hotels there. The Van Sickle Hotel at the lower end of Jamison; the Dorsey Hotel, the Forbes Hotel, and the Proctor. Many people called it the Big Onion. It was a beautiful building, very large, upon the hill back of Mather's store.

There was a Macabee Lodge Hall where all the medicine shows, dramas, and dances were held. The Catholic people had Mass once a month in the Lodge Hall.

Every Saturday the men from the lumber camps up in the mountains came to town on the log train and made things very lively.

On the second of March, 1919, a part of the big rock near the top of the mountain came roaring down the mountain and made a path down as far as the school house. A part of the rock is still on the mountain. Someone has painted it white.

There were houses on both sides of Main Street from the tannery to where the railroad crosses the road at the lower end of town. A back street, Water Street, had houses on both sides of the road. Several of these houses are still there. People have bought many of the homes for summer homes.

As in every community we had our share of accidents. A Mr. Kocher from Central was burned to death where the mill burned their rubbish. A Mr. Poust was run over by the freight train in Jamison. Mr. Roland Hess from above Edson's fell from a freight car and was killed. Sterling Cole, a very young man, tried to invent steam engine or boiler. It exploded and killed him. A terrible fire at the home of Michael Downs took the lives of three of that family.

At one time there were groves of chestnut trees and in the fall after a good frost everyone would gather chestnuts by the bags full.

Mrs. Sweeny had an ice cream parlor, with home made ice cream. Many people went to Jamison for that treat. Jamison had a very good baseball team and a good ball field.

First the mill closed down, then the tannery, then the train discontinued service there, and most of the people moved away. A very few families are still living there but in the summer there are many families come there who have bought some of the old homes.

There were three track beds that ran from the station up to and beyond the tannery, and one went up to the main mill building. During fair week each year a special train came to Jamison, stayed there each night, and took people to the fair. This train had six and seven cars and they were always filled: so that will give you some idea as to the many people that lived in Jamison.

Jamison had a very good band.

About 1920, three deer were stocked in the mountains in Jamison City, near the game preserve building, above the tannery. They were taken to Jamison on the Bloomsburg and Sullivan passenger train in the baggage car. The train went through Benton around three o'clock in the afternoon. The Benton school pupils were dismissed long enough to go to the Benton station to see the deer. Bobby's [Robert Casey} great grandfather was the engineer of the train.