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OF THE

Lycoming County Historical Society

VOLUME XXIV
NUMBER TWO

WINTER
1986



From the D. Vincent Smith photograph collection. Lycoming County Historical Museum Archives.

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of the
LYCOMING COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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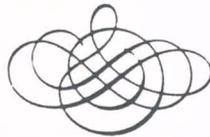
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GREETINGS FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

Dear Society Members:

This message to the supporters of our historical society and the museum is a look into the future rather than a recitation of past accomplishments. The Society's history is most interesting, absorbing, and a great credit to the pioneers who made it and regarded their efforts as worthy of preservation for posterity.

Previous *Journals* have given credit to these historical pioneers, and it is unnecessary to itemize them again. Nor do we deem it appropriate at this time to review the Sunday programs which are arranged by the museum Director and have been very exciting and well received.

The convenience of the newly installed elevator has been appreciated and utilized by the staff and by those who experience difficulty in negotiating the stairway.

A program of open houses during the months of July and August to interested prospective members was concluded by a quasi-telethon from the offices of the *Sun-Gazette* newspaper. Twenty or more Society members gave up four evenings of family activity to man the telephones to contact 400 guests who had registered at the museum during the open house period. A complete run-down on new memberships will be published later, since they are still being logged in and, hopefully, the end is not yet in sight.

Now, your officers and the two Boards are engaged in an intensive drive for operating funds to continue the level of standards required for the museum to maintain its credibility. An annual budget in excess of \$100,000 (and should be \$260,000) requires a better assured and regular income than has been the experience of past years. Our treasurer has anticipated a year-end red-ink item of \$40,000. These are hard facts and necessitate an especially effective effort to meet the minimum responsibility.

If there is any doubt about a program for our organization, please read on. A summary of such plans was handed to your officers after the annual spring dinner meeting at Warrensville. Headlining the list are these projects: a new museum roof \$20,000; fire detection system \$5,000; adequate telephone service \$1,500; chairs for the auditorium \$3,750; full-time janitorial service; full-time secretary; electrical conduit enclosure \$2,500; acid-free storage containers \$6,000; exhibit improvement \$5,000; cash register \$1,200. Other less important but essential recommendations are contained in two recent assessment inspections and reports which have been made by representatives of the Pennsylvania State Museum and the American Association of Museums. Our Society has been proud of the record and the status of the museum, and wishes to maintain its current ranking.

Much financial support has been provided by the Williamsport Foundation, cooperating business and industrial institutions, and by sympathetic citizens throughout the county. There are no federal or state funds available, so the results of the current funding campaign will determine without doubt the future direction of our museum's progress or lack of the same.

In 1922, my high school graduating class chose as its motto: "Our aim success; our hope to win." This is not an inappropriate battle cry for the dilemma at hand. As your officers and Boards, we will exert every effort within our power to insure the continuing objective of providing Lycoming County and its neighbors with the finest historical resource center that financial support, education, experience, and imagination can create. We respectfully solicit your cooperation.

Finally, we quote from the foreword in an imposing book accidentally found in the confines of the museum storage area: "Read our message carefully, judge it charitably, and pronounce not against it until time shall afford an opportunity of testing its merits."

Horace H. Lowell
President

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

As a member of the Lycoming County Historical Society, I am happy to volunteer my time and efforts to edit our Society *Journal*. As the wife of our Museum Director, I once again find my interests merging with his. I hope that you will find our collaboration successful and as interesting as we do.

I must tell you that, not being a native of Pennsylvania, I feel almost as if I am in another country. And, this region has come alive to me in the form of folk tales and histories of the past. The archaeological evidence found at Canfield Island, Meginness' great history *Otzinachson*, and recollections such as the one by Carl Taylor printed in this issue have sparked an interest and a desire to learn more about my adopted home.

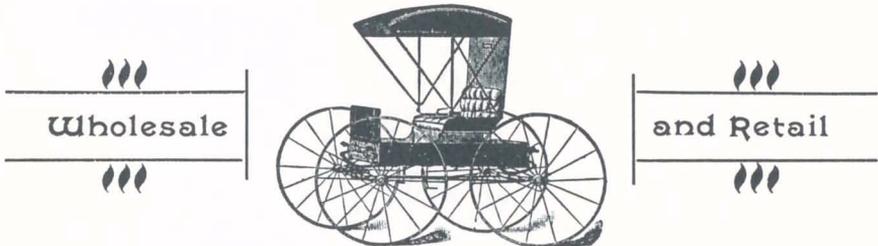
Please feel free to write to me in care of the Museum with any interesting anecdotes on historical facts you feel are worth noting. Let me know if there is particular interest in a specific area of local history. Perhaps we can explore the history of the West Branch Valley together.

I hope that with the help of other participating members we can make future *Journals* as interesting and informative as I think this one is.

Looking into the past for the future, I am —

Stephanie Zebrowski

Williamsport Wagon Co.



OFFICE, WAREROOMS AND FACTORY,

Corner Court and Church Streets,

WILLIAMSPORT, PA.

ANOTHER SEASON ON CANFIELD ISLAND

1986 UPDATE

by James P. Bressler

The excavating season of 1986 began very late in comparison to former years because of rains that persisted into late August. As a result, the original research plan for this our eighth and probably final year on Canfield had to be somewhat modified, since dry weather is essential to exploration of the deeper, older levels of human occupation. The more deeply buried, of course, the older the occupation by humans.



Members of the Society for Pennsylvania Archaeology excavating Canfield Island. Summer 1986.

Canfield continues to amaze us with its profile of strata representing most of the human prehistory of our valley. These strata are neatly separated one from another by sterile intervals of sandy clay, giving us an opportunity to study the cultural remains of each group without contamination from intruding levels. So far, we have studied to various degrees of intensity, 11 separate strata, representing as many occupational episodes, a number of which have now been radio-carbon dated. Dated cultures range from around 1500 B.C. for the later Canfield people to around 5000 B.C. for the eleventh level. To this we hope to add dates for Level 3 (Meadowood) and Level 7 (tentatively identified as Lamoka), carbon for both levels already having been collected from features that contained diagnostic artifacts.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research plan for this year called for placing a grid of squares (5' x 5') in such a position where it would hit the narrow spine of the island that was its lower extremity in the time frame of 3000 B.C. (The present terrain is, of course, much

different since the Bull Run peninsula has built up a considerable distance downriver in the intervening years.) This was critical because all through prehistory, Indian bands have camped on what was then the lower tip of the island on the high ground. Here they were closest to the lucrative fishing grounds of the Bull Run estuary at its confluence with the river. While fish could easily be obtained here with gill nets, the abundant nut trees growing nearby provided additional high protein food when in season.

Our objective was to add to our meager knowledge of the Laurentian Cultures (known to us as Levels 7, 8 and 9) and to more positively identify Levels 7 and 9 as phases of the Laurentian family. Level 8 is positively identified as Brewerton with a carbon date of 3150 B.C. To identify any of these requires finding diagnostic artifacts, generally spearpoints or other exotic stone tools, and to carefully observe accompanying features such as burials, hearths and hut post mold prints. From these observations and records a trait list is compiled which, in fact, allows us to assess and describe the settlement pattern and living habits of these people to a certain degree.

From the Laurentian zone, at a depth of around 80 inches, we would sink pits in search of lower levels representing possible Early Archaic people, who lived here occasionally during a colder climatic period prior to the time of our modern mass producing forests. Forests then were mainly Canadian or coniferous and supported fewer game animals for Indians to hunt. We believe our Level 11 belongs to the Stanly period of Terminal Early Archaic times, but this remains to be proven; thus, our effort to find out. However, to reach depths of 12 feet or more requires more than casual safety precautions with regard to stability of pit walls.

PROBLEMS OF WEATHER

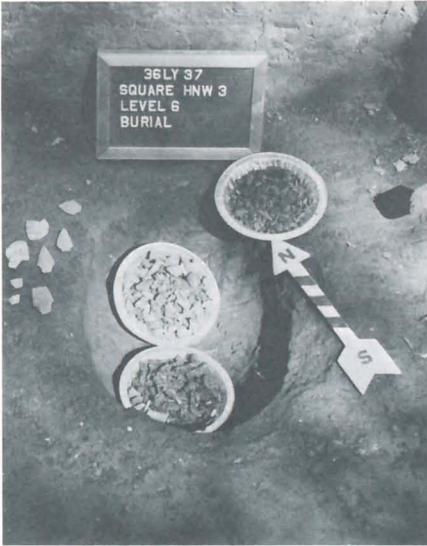
To reach such extreme depths we need a stretch of dry weather since even at the Laurentian levels, the weight of overburden is so great that the clay soil is almost as dense and hard as rock, being almost impervious to water. Rain, therefore, does not drain but collects in already deep pits and temporarily prevents further work. At this stage we are preparing four squares (100 square feet) for further exploratory probes to the deeper levels.

SOME SIGNIFICANT FINDS

In the meanwhile, as we work down from the surface in four-inch sweeps with trowels to these Laurentian and deeper levels, we have found some spectacular evidence relating to Level 3 (Meadowood) and Level 6 (Canfield Archaic). Level 4 is not significant in this grid and Level 5 is a subphase of 6.

On the Meadowood level (1000-700 B.C.), we uncovered a probable cremation burial, complete with a basin-shaped crematory in which burial offerings in the form of "killed" rhyolite blades were placed along with a number of "killed" spearpoints. The inclusion of over 500 chipping flakes in the refill suggests that this was an in-house burial. The blades were specially prepared leaf-shaped rhyolite artifacts for placing with the dead, a common practice with this culture. When the cremated burial and offerings were in place, the area was liberally sprinkled with red and orange ochre, possibly as a symbol of life for the afterworld. At times Dr. William Ritchie found several hundred of these mortuary blades with Meadowood burials in New York state.

Nearby, on Level 6 (Canfield Archaic c. 2000-1600 B.C.) we found a feature of 18 end-notched net sinkers in a dark, loose, humousy matrix, alongside a row of post molds from a hut. Such moments are always time for reflection, and one tries



Canfield Island. Summer 1986.



Canfield Island. Summer 1986.

to envision the occasion when this Indian laid down his net for the last time, only to be discovered 4000 years later. Likely his mission was less profound than that of two young men, Simon and Andrew, on the sea of Galilee who, too, laid down their nets and thus followed their master to immortality. The net of our Canfield fisherman was likely burned since some of the stones show signs of having been fired. That leads to speculation that the hut, alongside of which the net was laid, also burned.

NEW CULTURAL ASSESSMENTS

Another puzzle that has emerged is that we continue to find the distinctive spearpoints of the Lamoka people on a much later level than they were supposed to be found. In New York state where extensive excavations were conducted on Lamoka sites, probable dates for their tenancy range from 3500-2500 B.C. The Lamoka province includes the West Branch Valley and may show up at Canfield as Level 7, but their spearpoints are also found on Level 6, which is considerably later. Since Level 6 is so neatly isolated, the finding of spearpoint types on the same level would point to their being there at the same time. Carbon dating of Level 7 should shed further light on this problem.

Level 9 is yet unidentified, although the finding of several Otter Creek points on a probable Level 9 points to an Early Laurentian provenience. Otter Creek may be the earliest of the hunting/fishing/gathering Archaic bands collectively known as Laurentian, and was very much at home in this valley around 4000 B.C.

NEED FOR DEDICATED WORKERS

The Canfield project is conducted by North Central Chapter #8, Society for Pennsylvania Archaeology in cooperation with the Lycoming County Historical Society, its home base. It is the Museum where artifacts are curated and stored for research purposes and for display. Only a limited number of chapter members participate in the dig. Only a few members, relatively, are physically able or mentally prepared to do the work of removing the tonnage of earth that must be done to reach the

deep levels. Many work at daily jobs and cannot provide more than a few hours per week of digging time. It is all but impossible to properly organize and distribute the various chores that must be done to make so ambitious a venture a success. Consequently, some important phases of the work are inadequately done. Pre-excavation instructional classes, so necessary for rank amateurs before they dig, could not be held. As a result, several important features were destroyed by first-time excavators before they realized what they were doing.

On the other hand, a small but very dedicated nucleus of excavators is doing a fine job of archaeological research, and will no doubt achieve, albeit on a small scale, the basic research objectives we embarked on in May. We also want to commend especially two men without whom the Canfield project would never have gotten off the ground. They are Don Snyder, owner of Canfield Island, who has given us such fine cooperation all along, and LaMar Bowman, who not only furnishes the necessary heavy equipment, but helps to excavate as well.

Basic research excavation such as Canfield is rare now all over the country having given way to contract or salvage archaeology through paid government contracts. Even more rare are sites such as Canfield where in one concentrated area, all the cultural time periods of known human history are represented in a stratified site. Once destroyed by excavation, it can never be replaced, so it is imperative that our records are accurate and that our interpretations stand the critical tests of historical accuracy. To this, Chapter #8 is committed.

REFLECTIONS

Many discoveries made on Canfield will add immensely to the pool of knowledge about people who lived and died here so many years ago that the written historical records of the old world pale in comparison. Children in our schools will have the added advantage of new knowledge about the human past in their own back yards as they attend museum field trips. Perhaps we have made their learning experiences just a bit more exciting and will thus ignite a whole new desire to learn about the past.

One cannot participate in such a venture without striking a kinship with the human element of eons past. We have removed the dirt of time from past human ages and allowed them to see the sun once more for a brief moment. We have let the ages speak to us and to each other as though it all happened in but a span of hours. We have uncovered ancient burials, imagined the wail of mourners and the inevitable grief of surviving loved ones who lavished the best they had, a few flakes of stone, as parting gifts. For these were human beings even as you and I. And having relived the human drama for a moment, we have shoveled out the remains as bits of rubble merely, the adage of "dust to dust" has come full circle at last.

The living floors need only the twitter of young people, the sounds of daily household chores and the sound of stone hitting stone by the artisan to bring them all back to life again. They lived in another time, when our valley was a pristine forest with only the winding river to break the forest canopy and to let in the sun.

If the archaeologist does not also become a dreamer and sentimentalist, he cannot function fully. He is not merely a collector of artifacts and data, for without reliving the ages he uncovers, he may have wasted the most precious resource of all — the human dramas they represent. This he must see before he can report it to the world he serves. Throughout the Canfield experience, we have tried to balance facts and fancies, for both are vital.

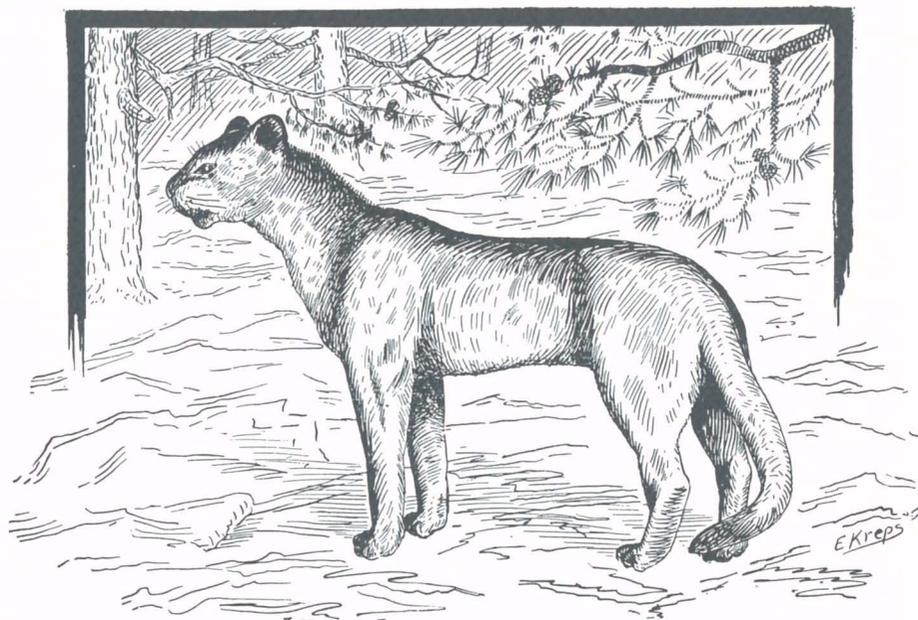
Our heritage has been immeasurably enriched, and in the process of research, so have we, the folks who did the work.

A TIGER, A PANTHER?

by Stephanie Zebrowski

While watching a local television news program this past summer, I learned that there was a panic taking hold in the Pocono Mountain region because of a strange animal said to resemble a tiger. Was it a tiger, no doubt man-eating? No one knew.

All of the interest and media hoopla brought back a personal recollection. Digging through our own "archives," my husband produced an article by J. Herbert Walker from the February 1960 issue of *Games News* entitled "Pioneers and Panthers."



In the mountainous districts of the eastern states, where they were once found in fair numbers, they were known as the panther or "painter" from a fancied resemblance to the panther of tropical Asia.

Science of Trapping by E. Kreps, 1944.

Mr. Walker's article, of course, cited the plaque noting the untimely death of Dr. Frederick Reinwald near English Center. Dr. Reinwald was reportedly killed by a panther while on the way to treat a patient in December 1846. I wonder how many of you know any stories about panthers in Pennsylvania.

Mr. Walker goes on to quote Dr. Joseph T. Rothrock, the "Father of Forestry" in Pennsylvania, as follows:

"That panther cry — I have often asked myself how I could describe it and failed to satisfy the urging, though at this very minute I think I have a somewhat clear remembrance of it It would not be an adequate reply if I said it sounded like the wail of a child seeking something, a cry, distinct, half inquiry and half in temper There was something human in it, although unmistakably wild, clear and piercing. And yet I do not know how to make a more satisfactory reply, except to say that the cry seemed to be in all its tones about a minute long I heard it one evening coming from an animal moving along the rocky slopes of the mountain where no child could have been at that hour"

That brought to mind for both of us the time we were deer hunting in the Seven Mountains of Centre County about 14 years ago. It was cold and very snowy. My

most vivid memory, actually, is of very cold feet. Well, getting back to my point . . . as I sat quietly in my tree stand hoping the elusive whitetail deer might just find his way within my rifle range, I heard a sound "like the wail of a child" in an area "where no child could have been at that hour." The cry lasted a long time and was quite surprising.

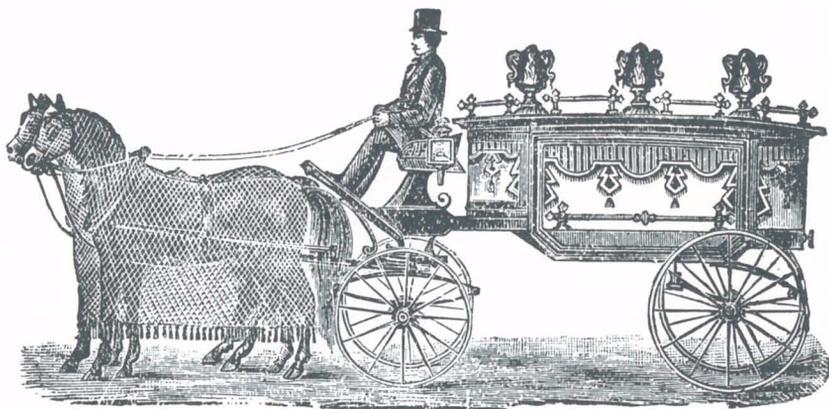
Husband Joe, who had been stalking his way through the woods, returned to my stand to begin our trek back to our car, with its blessed heater, just before dark. After listening to my description of this unusual animal sound, he sat down to listen, too. Our patience was rewarded; he too heard this strange cry.

We returned again the following day to our position in the woods with plans to "listen." Again, we were rewarded. We returned several times after that without hearing the cry again. We never did determine exactly what it was we heard. Was it a bobcat, or a panther, or maybe even a tiger? Who knows?

Editor's Note:

In a letter from Edwin L. Bell, Ph.D., Professor of Biology at Albright College to Joseph Zebrowski, he states that though no specimens have been taken since 1900 in Pennsylvania, there have been numerous sightings with "more than 50 historical records," including "rather definite proof" that a Pennsylvania panther "was taken by Lewis Dormon in the winter of 1856, between Aaronsburg and Woodward."

E. A. PAGE & BROTHERS,



WILLIAMSPORT'S OLDEST FURNITURE HOUSE
AND UNDERTAKING ESTABLISHMENT

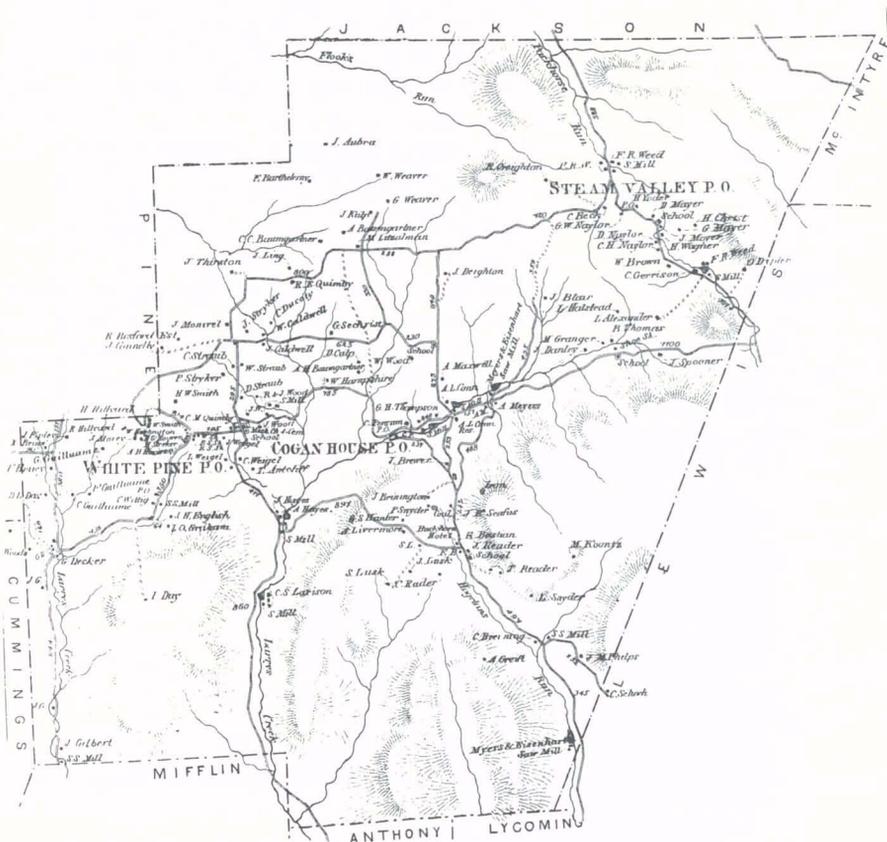
209-213 EAST THIRD STREET.

WILLIAMSPORT, PA.

"STILLING BIRCH" IN COGAN HOUSE TOWNSHIP

by Carl B. Taylor

COGAN HOUSE



"... type of oil of wintergreen is distilled from the inner bark and twigs. It is also used for remedies to purify the blood, rheumatism, and to expel worms. Applied externally it is beneficial for boils and sores."

The Rodale Herb Book

Rodale Press, 1976.

Editor's Note: Cogan House Township encompasses the Larry's Creek watershed and is the area where Steam Valley stretches to the north and Brookside and White Pine to the west.

When Carl Taylor was interviewing some of the residents of White Pine, he rekindled interest in the "stilling" process in Evan (Jack) Quimby, who is currently building an operational still. As a youth, Mr. Quimby, now in his seventies, spent many hours around birch stills, including the one run by Mr. Taylor's father-in-law. He will exhibit his still at a dinner to be given by the ladies of the White Pine Methodist Church late this fall. All are invited to attend.

My early recollections of this rural business activity in my home locality goes back to my childhood in the early 1920's, a decade or two after it had reached its peak in this area of northern Lycoming County. To this day, the only language I have ever heard to describe it is in terms of "stilling birch," or birch stilling, done by a mechanism known as a "birch still," Presumably more articulate terms would be "distilling birch oil" by a special kind of "distillery," but this would have been "high-falutin" language.

I recall seeing a few of these operations with my father, an R. F. D. carrier, while riding around the mail route over dusty roads in a Model-T Ford in the summer-time, through mud varying in depth from a few inches to axle-deep in the spring and fall, and in a sleigh during the winter months. I can also recall a bobsled pulled by a team of horses coming up the state road past our house regularly on Sunday afternoons for several winters. It was headed for a week of birch stilling at the Black's Creek camp some eight or 10 miles on northeast near the border of Tioga County. Riding in the sled was the owner-operator who was later to become my father-in-law and his hired man. At times during the year when it did not interfere with school, they would be accompanied by the "boss's" son or daughter, later my wife and brother-in-law, together perhaps with a companion for company during a week in the more or less isolated camp in the woods. Each Saturday they would return with their week's production of birch oil. Then, too, it was necessary to "get the work caught up around home" over the weekend and to get provisions for the next week.

In the earlier days many of the farmers had "stands of black birch," also called sweet birch, on their own lands; hence, they could operate their stills from their own homes. For some, this was the regular winter's work to provide a cash income. When springtime came, they would go back to their largely subsistence farming. Other men in the area might be woodsmen who alternated between lumbering jobs and stilling birch, depending on the relative availability of jobs, need for additional income, etc. A few men were more or less full-time birch stillers in the early days when "stands" of black birch were large and numerous. Thousands of acres in that area had been "logged over," especially from 1850 to 1910, first to obtain the valuable white pine lumber followed by the cutting of the hemlocks for tan bark and the hardwoods for lumber.



A stand of young birch trees.

A question which puzzled me recently, not being a forester, was why there were such large stands of black birch in that area in those earlier years. In more recent times, while one has no difficulty in finding occasional clusters of birch seedlings and brush, as well as scattered trees of varying sizes, it is doubtful that a single location can be found which would make "stilling" economically feasible even if a market could be found for the oil. It appears that the prolific and fast-growing birch seedlings followed in a natural succession the removal of the forest trees, especially in the moist hollows and valleys. These were particularly fortunate locations because of the copious supply of fresh water needed in the distilling process.

The "stillers" would "case" the forest lands for heavy stands of brush and young birch trees, stands a few acres to stands of many acres. They would arrive at a conclusion as to the feasibility of a location for a still and an estimate of the amount of oil which might be obtained. They would then offer to buy the birch wood on a designated tract. It is very likely that the estimated figure was based entirely upon the "sizing up" by an "experienced eye." If so, that is now truly a lost skill. As was customary in those days, inexperienced men would rely on the judgment and advice of older and more experienced relatives and friends whom they could trust.

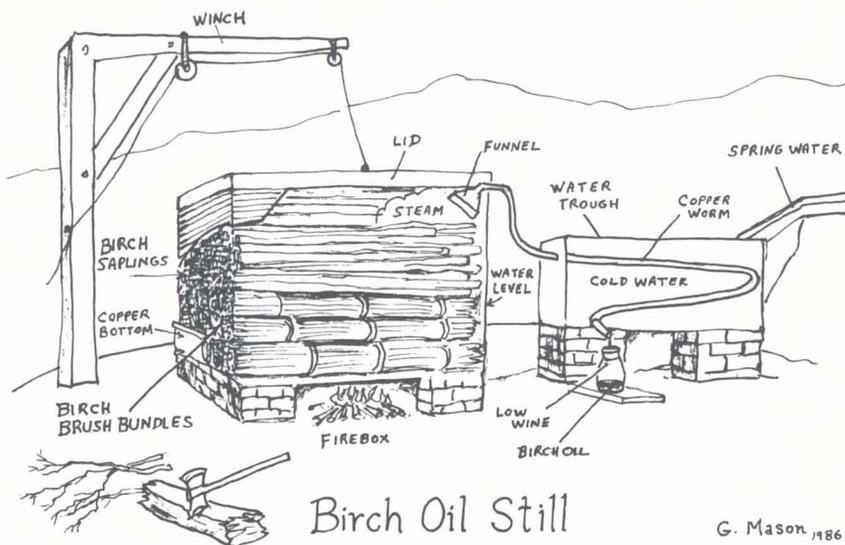
My recollection, confirmed by my informants, is that this kind of work was principally, though not exclusively, performed from late fall into early springtime. It is obvious that this fit very well into the local farmers' schedules; but this left unanswered the question of whether there were inherent qualities of the wood product which made summer distilling generally undesirable or impractical. Was there something about the birch tree which, like the sugar maple, yielded its high quality liquid only on a seasonal basis? I sought the answer from several of my mostly older friends in the locality, men and women who had some direct firsthand experience in their families' operations during their youth. The consensus was that the problems were principally operational. The leaves made the bundles of brush much heavier and bulkier. The saplings and small trees picked up considerably more dirt when skidded over bare ground than over snow and ice. Then, too, working conditions were more pleasant in cold weather considering the mosquitoes, "punkies" (see footnote), gnats and other hungry flies. There was also a belief held by some that the leaves would soak up some of the oil during the distilling process.

THE OPERATION

The simplicity of the birch still and its operation lent itself to relative ease in entering and leaving the business. Even so, the cash outlay for hardware, sheet metal, tubing, etc., while small in today's computations, was sizeable for the average person building a still in the economy of those earlier days. If a small building from an abandoned lumber camp was available for shelter at an appropriate site, the process of getting established was simplified for those for whom the distance from home was too far to travel daily.

The still itself was a rectangular "tank" six to 10 feet long, five to six feet in height and four to six feet wide. It was set on stone pillars a foot, more or less, above the ground to provide space for the firebox underneath. The bottom part was made of copper plate or sheet metal, next to the fire, with watertight joints and extending a foot or two up the sides. To conserve on costs and to provide greater stability, two-inch tongue and grooved planks were used to finish the sides and ends to the desired height. All joints had to be sealed. One person I interviewed said that white lead, which came in a putty form for house paint, was generally used for caulking. However, another acquaintance mentioned that as an economy measure his father sometimes used "cow chop," a finely ground grain for cow feed, that when mixed with water formed a starchy paste for caulking. A heavy plank

lid, hinged on one side, completed the box. This lid was raised and lowered by a homemade windlass, winch, or block and tackle. To make the seal watertight and as nearly airtight as possible, four iron bands (U-shaped loops) were put over and extended down the sides where they were anchored securely; wedges were driven between the loops and the lid to tighten it down. Stones were used to enclose three sides of the "firebox." One end was either left open or enclosed with a hinged iron door for tending the fire and removal of the ashes. Since smoke could escape through the crevices between the stones, no chimney was needed.



Birch Oil Still

G. Mason, 1886

Cutaway drawing of a birch still. Drawing by George R. Mason, Morgantown, West Virginia.

Very near the top of the inside of the tank at one end a funnel-shaped piece of metal six to eight inches in diameter was installed, with the narrow end extending through the wall to the outside. The wide end on the inside would catch all the steam from the heated liquid. This was the only opening to the outside except for the plugged drain hole at the bottom. The small end was inserted into a long piece of copper tubing called a "worm" which was submerged in a tank of running cold water fed continuously through a wooden trough from the spring or stream of water located not far away at a higher elevation. Obviously the location of the still had to be determined in part by its relation to a continuous supply of fresh, cold water. As the steam passed through the worm, it condensed and dripped out the end into a pail or tub. The oil, being heavier, sank to the bottom. The lighter, watery, milky-looking liquid came to the top as a useless by-product called "low-wine" — a term which no one seemed to be able to explain! It contained some impurities in its scum, which was skimmed off frequently. It had a pleasant birch flavoring and occasionally was used by the workers as a refreshing drink. The oil was drained from the bottom of the "catch bucket," usually into glass jugs to be taken home for repackaging for shipping or to an area dealer in a nearby town or city.

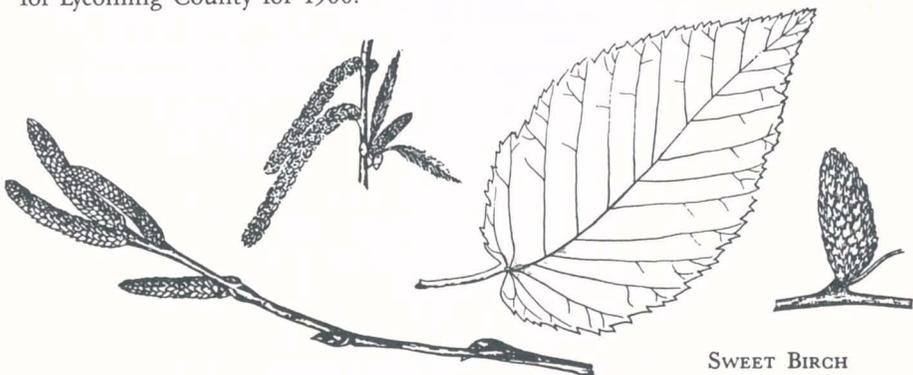
Two persons were regarded as a minimum crew for operating the still. One would usually be kept busy cutting the birch and skidding, hauling, or carrying it to the still. The standing brush was cut and tied into manageable bundles with wire. Saplings and small trees, sometimes up to six or eight inches in diameter, were skidded by a horse to the central location and there cut into lengths which could be put into the tank after the limbs and tops were trimmed off and bundled. A

larged chopping block, conveniently located near the still, was an essential part of the equipment. Firewood also had to be brought in and cut although the larger birch sticks were recycled for this use after having been processed and given time to dry. The other member of the crew worked mainly around the still engaged in the loading and unloading processes, tending to the fire, skimming the low wine, draining off the oil, etc. Often a son or daughter and their friends helped with these chores.

Starting with an empty tank, the operators would "load" it, or fill it with the birch wood. The bundles were placed in the bottom, then larger pieces were placed on top of them to help with the compacting. After being packed full of wood, the tank was then filled with water to a depth of one or two feet from the trough leading from the spring. The lid was then lowered and secured, and the fire was built up. This meant "firing" periodically throughout the night over a 24-hour period. A low but continuous fire was better than a very hot one. One belief expressed was that a hot fire might "drive the oil back into the wood," but this was not substantiated. The oil came from the bark layers, although, as any woodsman knows, the green wood itself has a distinctly birch odor and flavor. Younger bark was more productive than older bark.

Efficient operators liked to "run a batch" every 24 hours. Near the end of the boiling period, the fire would be pulled, the water drained, and the lid opened. Tongs were used to pull out the processed wood. The oil would be drained into the glass containers, but the low wine would be put back into the tank for recycling in the next batch.

Another individual I interviewed said that three pints of oil (or around four pounds) per day was considered a "good average" production. Memories were hazy as to how much was paid for the oil; understandable because those persons interviewed were primarily younger helpers working around the family still. One recollection was "around \$50 per gallon during the early 1930's." The actual computations were made by weight. (Edward Ritter of the U.S. Forest Service stated in the *Journal of Forestry* in 1940 that "a price of \$1 per pound was quoted about forty years ago, while during World War I distillers received as high as \$10 to \$15 per pound." The present market price in New York is between \$2.25 and \$2.75 per pound.") Some "stillers" took their oil to area dealers within a radius of 25 or 30 miles. Others, like my father-in-law, E. B. Ayres, shipped theirs directly to New York or Philadelphia by rail. They had specially-built copper cans of two and four-gallon capacities which fit snugly into wooden frames for protection. The cans were shipped by Railway Express. They had to be taken to the nearest railroad stations, a distance of 15 to 25 miles, depending on whether the destination was New York or Philadelphia. E. B. Ayres and Day, oils, White Pine Village, is listed in Boyd's Directory for Lycoming County for 1900.



SWEET BIRCH

THE REMARKABLE BLACK BIRCH

Up until some 50 to 60 years ago, probably every family in our rural area had a small bottle of birch oil on the pantry shelf alongside the vanilla and maple flavorings for candy, cookies, cakes and ice cream. In some instances it could have been found with the medicines although it was so highly concentrated that it had to be used with utmost caution. It was not only “hotter” than red pepper, it was more dangerous as a caustic. My family, like many others, used it for toothaches. Cavities were large and plentiful in those days of infrequent visits to the dentist. A small piece of cotton would be saturated with the oil and then forced into the cavity with a toothpick — a home-produced alternative to oil of clove. Care had to be taken not to touch any of the surrounding flesh. Some families used the oil diluted heavily with water for stomach-aches, and especially for an ailment called “acute indigestion.” Some mixed a drop with a teaspoon of sugar and nibbled it for rheumatism. Most used it as the “heat” ingredient for rubbing linaments for both humans and animals. It was mixed with some kind of available fat, such as lard, venison or beef tallow, or even bear fat. The large number of linament preparations (e.g. Sloan’s Linament, with advertising signs at every country store) had a widespread use for aching joints and swelling of both man and beast.

Many older people in other parts of the country with whom I have talked are familiar with the commercial name “oil of wintergreen,” although I have found no evidence of this usage in my native area. Lee Iacocca stated on page 16 of his *Autobiography* that birch bark pills were taken for rheumatic fever during his illness in 1939 “to get the infection out of your joints. They were so strong you had to take antacid pills to keep from throwing up . . . But I’ll never forget those crude splints with cotton wadding wet with oil of wintergreen to quiet down the lousy pain in my knees, ankles, elbows, and wrists. They actually alleviated the pain on the inside by giving you third-degree burns on the outside.”



BLACK BIRCH

I have never seen a definitive list of the commercial uses of the oil, but certain recollections of birch flavoring are still distinct. Bottled “birch beer” — not a beer but a “soft drink” — had its popular place alongside root beer, orange crush and sarsaparilla at the country stores and festivals sitting in the tubs of water cooled by the floating chunks of ice from the nearby “ice houses.” The so-called pink wintergreen candies and teaberry chewing gum had a distinctly birch flavor. In the previously mentioned 1940 *Journal of Forestry*, Edward Ritter stated that “birch oil is used in the manufacture of disinfectants, insect powders, drugs, candies and chewing gum, but the future of this minor industry is not bright because synthetic substitute oils are produced more cheaply.”



Cogan House Township, D. Vincent Smith photo.

It should be noted that oil was only one of the products of the black birch trees, which were once regarded as having little or no market value. Beautifully-grained plywood paneling and veneer are used widely for walls, doors, cupboards, furniture, etc. So also is the tough hardwood used for handles, implements, cutting boards, etc. One other use that might bring back other than pleasant memories to some of the older readers relates to birch brush. The supple "switches" growing alongside the road near country schoolhouses seemed to be a favorite of teachers in their treatment of transgressors.

A cutter-skidder woodsman I once worked alongside who had no seasoned wood for heating his cabin when winter set in, would "keep his eyes peeled" for black birch trees of eight to 12 inches in diameter. When he spotted one, he would say, "I'm going to have that for firewood. That wood has enough oil in it to make it burn even when green." At quitting time he felled the tree, hitched his team to it, and down the hillside it went to his woodpile.

BIRCH STILLING HAPPENINGS

While my older acquaintances have mainly pleasant memories of birch stilling, they are aware also of both minor and major tragedies over the years in our community. One of the duties of my wife as a girl of nine or 10, while visiting her father's camp, was skimming off the vessel catching the oil. She was warned to be very careful not to get the liquid anywhere on her body other than her hands. Once she

forgot and started to rub an itching eye with her hand. It "burned and burned," and she has never forgotten the extreme pain, like soap in the eye only 10 times worse! A generous and prolonged bathing with cold water eventually reduced the discomfort — and fortunately no injury resulted.

In one family, the father was building a still inside his cow pasture field. He was using white lead to seal the joints between the boards. During the noon hour while he was at the house for dinner, one of his cows licked the white lead. She was dead by mid-afternoon.

Many years ago, the following story was told to me by my mother about a neighbor when she was still living at home in the spring of 1896. This neighbor, a first cousin of one of my grandmothers, was returning home from work in the woods one evening when he stopped at a birch still for a drink of low wine. Perhaps it was a combination of darkness and carelessness which led to the tragedy which followed. He dipped too deeply into the container and got some *oil* in his drink. Within a couple of days he was dead — his stomach "eaten out" by the caustic liquid. A large family of small children was left for his impoverished widow to raise. A tombstone in the local Persun Cemetery reads: George Alexander, 3-4-1858 — 5-5-1896.

Although birch stilling continued in our area on a small scale until the mid-1940's, the last operation in which any of my relatives was involved was in 1937. Work for wages was almost nonexistent in those Depression years, especially in the winter time. My brother-in-law, who had a knowledge of the operation, had recently married. He and his wife decided that they might be able to get some income by running a nearby still that had been idle for a number of years. They worked very hard for several weeks and finally had enough oil to fill a can which had been left over from his father's earlier business. Using what was an "old" address for a dealer in New York City, they shipped the can by Railway Express. In a short time word came back from the dealer that he was no longer in business for oil, so he would ship the can back. When it arrived, the oil was gone, and the contents consisted only of birch-smelling water — a "scam" which to this day conjures up to this couple negative recollections about birch stilling.

I would like to thank my wife, Florence (Ayres) Taylor and her brother, Norman Ayres, Mary (Baumgartner) Brewer and her husband, Foster, the brothers Charles and Carl Persun, Jack Quimby, Charles Day and his mother Anna (Kulp) Day and Boyd Campbell, most of whom are in their seventies or eighties, for their invaluable information.

(Other publications by the author: *The Early History of Cogan House Township*, 1982, by Milton H. Landis and Carl B. Taylor. *Jim and Mildred Cohick, the Trading Post and Other Ventures*, 1984, by Carl B. Taylor, 773 Augusta Avenue, Morgantown, WV 26505.

From *THE SUN 1899 ALMANAC* under the heading Local Chronology:

January 8 — Elmer Haines, 22 years, took an overdose of extract of birch to cure pain in the stomach and died.

WHEN WE WALKED HAND IN HAND

by J. J. Zebrowski



RARE FIND - Two-inch, copper medallion, circa 1727.

"What you have is a medallion given to the Indians as a token of friendship during the reign of George I of England," said Steve Warfel, Pennsylvania State Museum archaeologist. "It probably dates no later than 1727. Another medal of the same type was found at Sunbury. It was believed to have come from Shikellamy's grave. Several more were found by archaeological teams at Conoy Town and the Strickler site, a Susquehannock town. The medallions were made in England and shipped to America for Indian gifts. These medals could have been given to the Indians at councils or by traders. We don't have much information about them . . ."

I held the broken medallion in my hand and wondered. There must be more to it than that.

My interest in this colonial Pennsylvania relic began one evening in June 1986. I was scheduled for a speaking engagement for the Lions Club at Williamsport's Villa Restaurant. Since I arrived nearly an hour early, I decided to do some exploring in the history-rich vicinity.

The attack and scalping of James Brady during the Revolution occurred within a mile of the restaurant. Several archaeological excavations were conducted on nearby Indian sites and within that same mile was Otstonwakin, town of Madam Montour, matriarch of that village.



General area of Madam Montour's Village.

I turned off the main highway onto the first back road that appealed to me. Puddles from the previous night's heavy rain dotted the dirt road. I drove slowly between them, enjoying the view of the Susquehanna beneath forest-covered Bald Eagle Mountain.

When the road wound through the probable location of Madam Montour's village I noticed that the rain had washed small gullies in the road bed. Pebbles and bits of hard debris stood on small pillars which had risen above the freshly eroded surface. I began to scan the ground through the open car window. You'd be surprised at what you can see from a car moving at less than 10 miles per hour. I noticed what appeared to be a coin along the edge of the road.

I stopped the car.

I picked up the greenish disc and rubbed some of the corrosion away. A silhouette and lettering began to show. It looked like an English penny from the colonial era, but was larger, and it was broken in half — deliberately. The depressions left by fingers were visible.

More rubbing revealed the words, "George, King of Great Britain," and a male bust wearing flowing hair.

A figure drawing an arrow on a bow decorated the reverse side. A tree and the sun filled the background. The remains of half an eye were attached to the disc, allowing it to be worn like a pendant.

Then I knew what I had — an Indian medallion.

Late that evening I checked several reference books for information. Dr. Barry Kent's recent book, *Susquehanna's Indians*, illustrated a full sequence of George I medallions. It became possible to assign an approximate date due to minor detail changes in each new issuing. If the date sequence is correct, the medallion was struck near the end of George I's reign. George I died June 24, 1727.

The following morning I called the Pennsylvania State Museum with the previously stated results. Their information was based on Dr. Barry Kent's work. Kent was once State Archaeologist.

The Pennsylvania Archives produced nothing. No mention of medals or pendants were found in the colonial records. The search did, however, reveal a story. Until 1727, the Pennsylvania relationship with the resident Indians was remarkably peaceful. There was no bloodshed between the two peoples before that year. The "bright chain of friendship" made by William Penn and the Indian tribes had endured for three generations. It was a time when the two peoples "walked hand in hand." This relationship ended in 1727.

During a council held in Philadelphia with the Five Nations of Iroquois during July 1727, the Indian chiefs complained of large quantities of rum sent to the Indians, and of traders who made them drunk and cheated them. The interpreter at this conference was "a French woman who had lived long among the Indians . . . Madam Montour."

In September of that year the first blood was spilled. During a drunken argument a trader was killed by Indians. The German Palentines began to arrive in the same year and frontiersmen encroached on Indian lands. The longest time of peace between European settlers and Indians in the entire history of the United States had begun to deteriorate until it abruptly ended in 1753 with the outbreak of the French and Indian War.

You are probably still wondering about the medal. This much can be stated. It was deliberately broken in half. Many Indian cultures buried grave gifts along with their dead. At times the gift was deliberately broken or "killed" to release its spirit, so that it could accompany the departed soul. It is known that Indian burial grounds were found in the Sand Hill vicinity during colonial times and following



These medals were given as tokens of friendship at councils or by traders.

later floods. The medallion was also found on the site of Madam Montour's village. Could it have belonged to Madam Montour, the interpreter at the 1727 conference? That would be wild speculation, though a circumstantial case could be made. But then that is one of the perplexities of historical relics. The whole truth may never be known.

REFURBISHING THE LUMBER GALLERY

In 1985, the Historical Museum, under the direction of Joseph Zebrowski, began a five-year plan of exhibit improvement. The program to upgrade the exhibits began with the Ralston General Store, because the opportunity to obtain the exhibit materials presented itself.



One of the newly refurbished exhibit cases with enlarged captions and photos.

The Lumber Gallery was begun next because it is the core of the collection, the most important exhibit area of the Museum. The Lumber Era is the West Branch's main claim to fame, the "Lumber Capital of the World." It was the goal of the program to make it easier for Museum visitors to understand the importance and scope of the lumbering industry and its effect on the area.

It was decided that the exhibit would be designed to accommodate both the larger numbers of senior citizens visiting the Museum, some who experience vision problems, as well as the younger audiences of school children attending regularly as a part of school curriculum with easier to read labels and captions and larger pictures.

With so many new Historical Society members from other areas moving here and the numbers of tourists visiting our Museum who are unfamiliar with our local history, it was necessary to organize the exhibit in short story form.

Sandra Rife, an artist with a background of museum exhibit design, contracted to develop the refurbishing of the exhibit areas. Over a period of months, Mrs. Rife was provided with research materials, photos, and a general plan of development of the exhibit. Artifacts were chosen, the interpretation was written and the work began to explain how the lumbering industry developed here as a result of the immense natural timber resources of the West Branch Valley and, the opportunities for economic development into north central Pennsylvania's principle industry, from boom to bust.

The Gallery follows this path of development of the industry from its early days of immense timber resources, and the impact of the Susquehanna River to the men whose lives were spent working in the great forests. The tools of the trade and the



Joan Moore at work on the Sawdust War mural.

illustration of their uses bring the Museum visitor a little bit closer to the realities of life during this period of history of the area. Due to the depletion of the natural resources, the cost of operations became prohibitive and the industry declined.

The problems people faced, the social issues of the day were as new then as they are old now. The industry brought with it ideological differences between the mill workers and the mill owners, which resulted in the Saw Dust War of 1872. Without the use of artifacts, it was necessary to tell the story in a unique fashion. Joan Moore, a mural artist from Forksville, volunteered her services to produce a mural painting depicting the confrontation between a parade of striking mill workers and the Pennsylvania militia brandishing fixed bayonets on Pine Street in Williamsport.

The logging sled on permanent exhibit in the Gallery has been more prominently exhibited on a new raised platform and is "pulled" by a pair of life-size draft horses, much to the delight of many of our younger visitors.

As it is now, the work continues, new exhibits are being developed in other areas of the Museum, new artifacts have been promised for donation . . . come see!



Life-sized draft horse silhouettes "pulling" the log sled in the Lumber Gallery to the delight of museum visitors.

a spot in Lycoming County



ULMAN'S STORE / WILLIAMSPORT

Born July 3, 1830 in Mannheim Germany, Moses Ulman was the youngest of 14 children. After settling in Liberty, Pa., and operating a small store there, he soon realized the small farming community offered little commercial success, so he moved his family to Williamsport and started a clothing business. He retired in 1882 and turned the business over to his two sons, Hiram & Lemuel. The building, at 41 W. 3rd St. is presently being restored.

RESEARCH AND DRAWING BY MIKE MAIETTA/COGAN STATION, PENNA.

STARCH CAKE

Something old, something new, something different . . .

Being an avid cook, I am always looking for something "new" to try. In my search, I found a recipe for "Starch Cake" in a handwritten cookbook dated June 1, 1852, in the Museum collection.

If you'll notice, the author of the recipe has assumed a "quick oven" is an understood cooking term and has relied upon the home cook's skill to ". . . add what spice you please."

Starch Cake

Take 1 lb. of good Starch; 1 lb. Sugar; roll and sifted both. 8 Eggs beaten separately; ¾ lb. fresh Butter. Beat the Butter to a cream. Add the Eggs & Sugar & beat all well together. Just before you put it into the oven add the starch, stir it well and bake in a quick oven. Add what spice you please.

I am unfamiliar with such a thing as a Starch Cake and would like any information anyone has regarding this or a similar recipe. For instance, can anyone tell me if the starch referred to is cornstarch?

Editor

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PETER HERDIC — INDUSTRIALIST OF WILLIAMSPORT

by Beth Heffner



An early photo of Herdic, taken during the 1860's.

Although not a native of the area, Peter Herdic gained reknown as one of Williamsport's greatest industrialists of the 19th Century. Born December 14, 1824 at Fort Plains, New York, he came to Lycoming County, Pennsylvania in 1846 and seven years later moved to Williamsport, a small town of less than 1,700 inhabitants.

From the time he arrived until his death at the age of 63, he worked not only for his own personal gain, but to help those around him. Throughout his life he was involved in over 20 area businesses including several lumber companies, two public utilities, two newspapers, two luxury hotels, and a bank. He acquired over 54,000 acres in Lycoming, Potter and Cameron Counties, which contained valuable coal deposits. It has been estimated that approximately 630 separate pieces of real estate were owned at various times by Herdic.

In 1878, he declared bankruptcy for an estimated \$2,000,000. His vast properties were purchased for a few cents on the dollar by other local industrialists. Undaunted, he continued to make ventures and had achieved moderate success at the time of his death in 1888.

EARLY YEARS

Having lost both his father and stepfather at a relatively young age, Peter looked to a neighbor, Mr. Davis, as his role model. The man, in turn, took a liking to young Peter and would spend hours discussing various topics with the boy. Davis owned a great deal of property and related to the boy his method for both earning and saving money — don't spend wages, but instead loan them out at a reasonable interest rate. Other jobs could be found to furnish spending money. Frugality

was the key. Davis also stressed such notions as personal integrity and the importance of fulfilling promises.

Several years later, while working at a sawmill for Ranson Light, he remembered those discussions with Davis and applied the principles learned. His wages from the sawmill were loaned to his next employer, George Severns, at an interest rate of seven percent. He did the same with his salary from Severns. His own needs were sparse; he usually spend no more than \$10 per year on personal needs. He continued to do this until he had saved almost \$400.

In 1846, at the age of twenty-two, Herdic emigrated to Cogan House Township in Lycoming County, Pennsylvania. Along with William Andress, he purchased a shingle business from Hubbard Webster. In their first year, their profit was \$740 each. The business lasted for three years, at which time Herdic was worth \$2,500.

A portion of this was used to purchase the farm of Andrew Kyle, which consisted of 154 acres along Lycoming Creek. A small house was built on the property for his bride, Amanda Taylor, whom he married on Christmas Day, 1849. The couple resided at the farm for four years, during which time he purchased a tract of timberland and built a steam-powered sawmill. His profits from this venture were in the area of \$11,000.

WILLIAMSPORT MILLIONAIRE



Herdic began purchasing property shortly after his arrival in Williamsport. His first major acquisition involved 10 acres of the Hepburn Islands and the Big Water Mill from Major James H. Perkins in February 1854 for the sum of \$7,000. A portion of the property on the islands was used in the construction of a dam across the Susquehanna River. The Big Water Mill property, along with other river front

lands became the lumberyards for the great quantities of timber sent down the river.

To gain greater control over his profits from the lumbering industry, Herdic purchased the Susquehanna River Boom from Major Perkins and Associates in 1857. His partners in the venture were Mahlon Fisher and John G. Reading. Not only did Herdic purchase the boom itself, he petitioned the state legislature for permission to increase the boomage fee from .50 to \$1.25 per thousand feet; his request was granted. Since the annual quantity usually exceeded two hundred million feet, the profits were enormous.

Over the years, Herdic was involved in at least three known lumbering companies. The first was a co-partnership with George Lentz, and John and Henry White known as Herdic, Lentz & Whites. The mills were located above Center Street. Herdic withdrew from the firm in 1867. He was also involved as a partner in a firm named Krouse, Herdic & Co., which consisted of one mill and employed about 90 men. He also established Peter Herdic & Co.

<small>E. H. KROUSE.</small>	<small>F. HERDIC.</small>	<small>FRANK L. HERDIC.</small>	<small>FRED. BIRMINGHAM.</small>
KROUSE, HERDIC & CO.,			
<small>Manufacturers of and Dealers in</small>			
LUMBER OF ALL KINDS,			
Shingles, Lath, Staves and Bill Timber.			
<small>OFFICE--Herdic Block, near Herdic House, YARD AND MILL--Foot of Locust Street,</small>			
WILLIAMSPORT, PA.			

By the time of his financial troubles, Herdic owned much of the land along Fourth Street west of Hepburn Street:

November 1855 — Eight acres between Third & Fourth Streets. Purchase price \$8,000.

April 1859 — 70 acres from Francis Campbell located between Campbell Street and Maynard, and from Fourth Street to the river. Purchase price \$17,000.

1859 — 44 acres continuous with Campbell plot extending west to Park Street and from Fourth Street to the river. Purchase price \$8,820.

July 1860 — 10 acres from Elmira Street to Locust Street between Third and Fourth Streets, five or six houses included. Purchase price \$17,000.

December 1860 — 23 acres between Third and Fourth Streets.

April 1863 — 18 acres from D. B. Canfield from northwest corner of Fourth and Campbell Streets. Purchase price \$18,000.

June 1864 — 188 acres. Purchase price \$14,000.

December 1864 — 180 acres known as Maynard Farm west of Hepburn Street between Fourth Street and the river. Purchase price \$108,000.

April 1865 — 56 acres north of railroad from Center Street to Campbell Street.

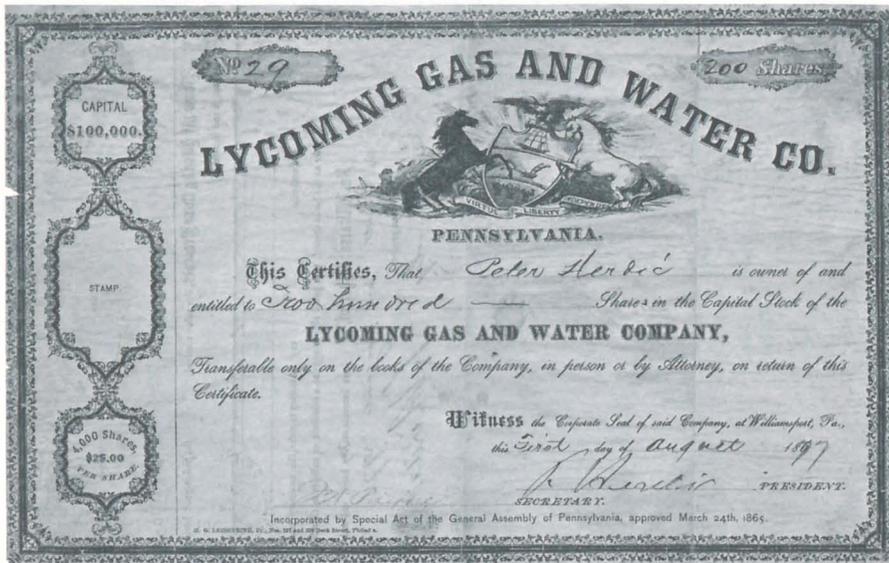
March 1866 — five acres on southwest corner of Fourth and Maynard Streets. Purchase price \$25,600.

In April of 1863, Herdic purchased the "Grove Lot" from D. B. Canfield for \$5,000. It was a five-acre plot situated at the northwest corner of Fourth and Campbell Streets. At the same time he also purchased the 13 adjoining acres at a cost of \$1,000 per acre.

His next step was to hire renowned architect Eber Culver to design a luxury hotel for the railroad passengers. Cost was no object; Herdic refused to even look

at the estimate Culver presented to him. Culver was given the “go ahead” and work commenced. By the time the Herdic House Hotel opened in the autumn of 1865, its total cost was in the area of \$225,000.

The four-story hotel could accommodate 700 guests. In addition, the hotel sported reception parlors, reading rooms, two dining rooms, a telegraph office (one of two in Williamsport), a barber shop, a ballroom, a restaurant, a cigar stand and a newsstand. It was equipped with gaslights; however, on opening night they were inoperable — the gas company burned to the ground!



Stock Certificate - Lycoming Gas and Water Company, circa 1877.

The hotel was situated on a five-acre plot and was surrounded by trees, vines, shrubs and flowers. Wildlife was always visible to the hotel’s guests; there were never fewer than four or five deer in the park. A fountain in the central court completed the panorama.

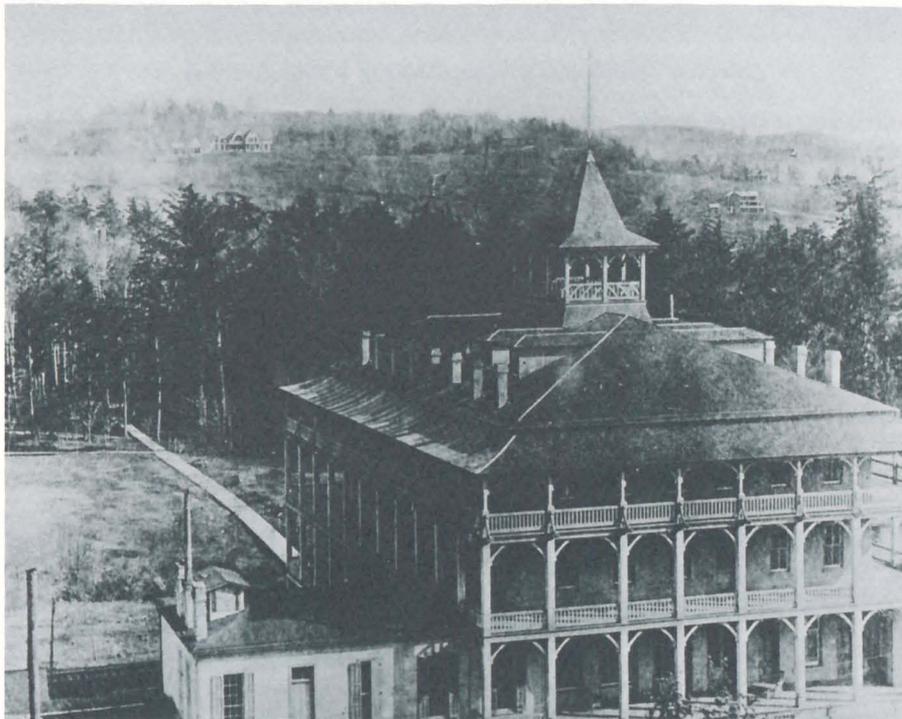
Another of Herdic’s projects was the construction of Trinity Church. Originally estimated at \$25,000, the church — complete with bell tower and organ — cost over \$80,000. It was furnished with a set of Winchester chimes — the first in the nation. On February 22, 1876, Herdic donated it to the congregation with the condition that it be open to anyone regardless of creed.

One of Herdic’s unfinished projects was an office and market complex known as the Herdic Block. It too was designed for Herdic by E. Culver. Many of the companies which Herdic served as president, including the Lumberman’s National Bank, Lycoming Gas and Water Company, and the Williamsport Manufacturing Company, were located here. Other tenants include Williamsport Iron and Lumber, S. N. Williams Lumber, West Branch Lumber, Susquehanna Boom, and Laurel Run Improvement. When Herdic went into voluntary bankruptcy in 1878, the project was bought by William Weightman. He later completed the Weightman Block.

Other acquisitions of Herdic’s included the two newspapers, the *Lycoming Gazette* and the *Daily Bulletin*. He first acquired the *Lycoming Gazette* in April of 1869 and in November of that year he consolidated it with the *Daily Bulletin* to form the *Gazette and Bulletin*. In 1877, he also published *The National Standard*; two years later it folded.

In February of 1865 the Lumberman's National Bank was organized; Herdic was its president. Its capital was roughly \$100,000 with a surplus of \$8,000. The average number of depositors was 100. First located near the Herdic House, it moved several times, finally settling in the Opera House Block.

On the northern outskirts of Williamsport was located a 19-acre tract of land known as Herdic Park. Herdic purchased the land in July of 1865 from James Armstrong for \$10,000. More acreage was added until the park consisted of 35 acres. Several buildings were erected and a half-mile racetrack was built. Adjoining the property were ponds and hatching houses full of speckled trout.



Minnequa Springs was Herdic's resort hotel in Canton, PA.

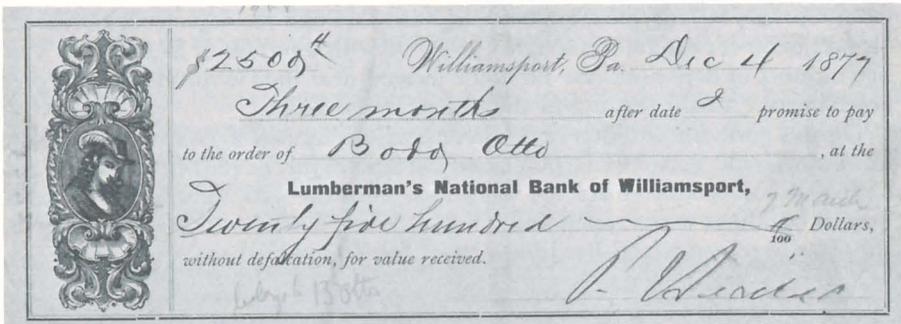
Herdic's second luxury hotel, Minnequa Springs, was built on a 604-acre plot of land purchased in 1869. Located near Canton in Bradford County, Pennsylvania, the property contained the Minnequa Springs, whose legendary healing power drew crowds. The water was one of only two accepted in Pharmacoepeia.

The hotel itself was a white frame structure capable of housing up to 600 guests and their servants. Also included was a train station, a post office, a newsroom and a telegraph. Special guests such as actors E. L. Davenport and Frank Mayo served as entertainment. A drill team known as the Herdic Grays provided recreation for the guests. Herdic even imported Penobscot Indians to create crafts and souvenirs.

In 1878, shortly before his bankruptcy, the hotel burned to the ground. The land became part of the Maynard Estate; a later owner made a "comeback" attempt with a modernized brick hotel complete with gaslights and an elevator, but its popularity was never regained.

THE TROUBLED YEARS

During the financial panic which swept the country between 1873 and 1878, Her-

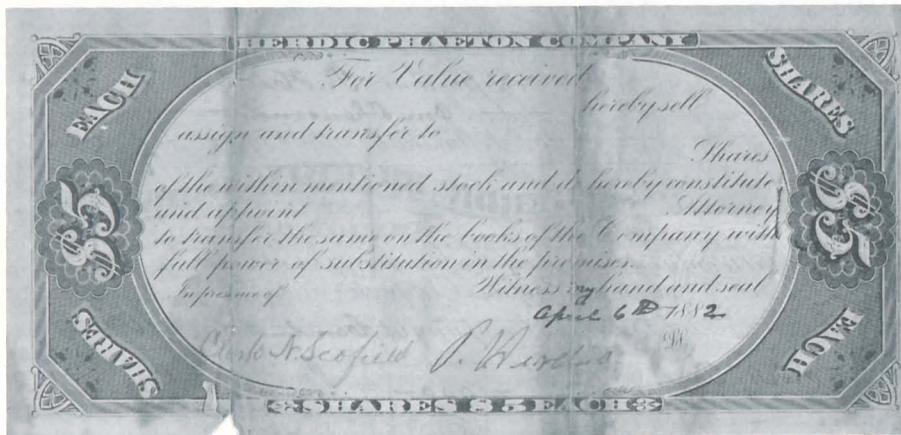


Bank Note - Lumberman's National Bank of Williamsport, circa 1877.

dic found it increasingly harder to meet his obligations. Perhaps part of the reason was that Herdic loved wild speculation; he would never pay a debt if an attractive offer came about. Herdic wasted no sympathy on wealthy creditors, which earned him not a few business enemies.

Herdic failed for \$2,000,000 in 1878. At the time of his failure, he owed William Weightman several hundred thousand dollars. As a result, Weightman bought several choice pieces of real estate at sheriff sale, including the Weightman Block. He convinced his son-in-law to purchase the Herdic House and Herdic Park. Other property of Herdic's was sold on the block for cents on the dollar. A Mr. C. W. Scott bought \$58,000 of assets for a quarter. A 20-acre river front plot with house, barn and sheds went for \$50.

ON THE COMEBACK TRAIL



The Herdic was a type of horse-drawn carriage or taxi. It was one of Herdic's enterprises to regain financial stability following his bankruptcy in 1878.

Undaunted, Herdic attempted to stabilize his financial status with another venture. He established the Herdic Phaeton Company which specialized in a carriage designed by Herdic and, consequently, became known as a herdic. It was used as a taxi service in several east coast cities, including Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. It was manufactured at Alba in Bradford County, north of his former Minnequa holdings. The venture was only moderately successful. The coaches were abandoned in most cities shortly after being introduced.

Herdic's final project involved a series of waterworks systems throughout Penn-

sylvania and other states. The first was built in Cairo, Illinois in 1886. Waterworks that Herdic was responsible for in Pennsylvania include those at Huntingdon, Canton and Selinsgrove. Herdic even had a system built in Orlando, Florida.

DEATH

It was while touring his plant in Huntingdon in February of 1888, that Herdic sustained an injury, which would shortly thereafter take his life. Herdic accidentally slipped on some ice and fell down an embankment. No serious injury was noticed at the time, but Herdic has severely fractured his skull. Insisting that he felt fine, he refused to seek medical help.

After finishing the inspection at Huntingdon, Herdic travelled to New York on other business. While there he began to suffer from paralysis on his right side. At this point there was very little the doctors could do for him. On Sunday, he slipped into a coma, from which he never emerged. On Friday, March 2, 1888, Peter Herdic passed quietly away.

Williamsport's great industrialist died without a will, leaving only an estate administered in orphan's court. His widow renounced her right to administer the estate; a nephew, James P. Herdic was nominated to handle affairs. After filing, James Herdic discovered that there were no assets in the estate; Peter's creditors had attached them to the settlement in one of his court cases a decade before.

Following his death, Peter Herdic passed into anonymity. His social companions had forgotten him shortly after his financial crisis, many of the people he had helped or encouraged during his lifetime were also gone. His name was not mentioned in local history books except in connection with the Herdic House, later known as the Park Hotel. His legend was revived shortly 50 years later, until he again passed into obscurity.

Can it be that Williamsport has really forgotten one of its most prominent figures? Herdic gave Williamsport its first real start on the road to prosperity, yet until recently the only manner in which he was honored was in the naming of a street after him. At the present time, Herdic Street, a mere one block in length, lies between Park Avenue and High Street, just west of Campbell Street. With the renewed interest in Williamsport's lumbering era, however, Peter Herdic is slowly being remembered as a prominent and colorful figure in local history.

