



knee-deep in history

The Scribe

April 2023

Palmerton Area Historical Society
www.palmertonhistorical.org

Palmerton 100 Years Ago *Delaware Avenue Looked Like Allentown's Lehigh Street*

When ground was broken for Palmerton in 1898 the automobile was a novelty and yet, within the next 25 years Delaware Avenue was lined with car dealerships. In that short period of time, the automobile had become a fixture in daily life and Palmerton was no exception.

The Great War (WWI) had ended and with prices starting at \$300 for a basic Model T Ford, car ownership was within the reach of most families. Manufacturers were quick to take advantage of this demand and before long as many as 1900 different companies were vying for business.

In 1923 Palmerton, citizens had a choice – Studebaker, Hudson, Essex, Ford, Durant, Nash, Buick, Dodge, and Willys were soon followed by Oldsmobile and Pontiac. Prices ranged from the austere Model T to more elaborate vehicles such as the

Willys-Knight (\$1995) whose advertisements claimed “owners report 50,000 miles without an engine adjustment” and their “engine actually improves with age!” Other dealers were less effusive stating simply their cars “contain all the requirements of the most exacting motorist.”

Eventually, almost all independent automobile manufacturers either merged or went out of business. From 1941-1945, most car production ceased as factories were converted



Can you identify where and when this photo was taken?

to supply the war effort and the few remaining independents were acquired by “the Big Three” of GM, Ford, and Chrysler.

Today, Palmertonians must travel to neighboring towns for automobile purchases.

But there are still many in town who can recall days when new car dealers offered their wares here.

Palmerton Area Historical Society

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The Lehigh Gap ***As It Was 200 Years Ago***

Commuters who regularly pass through Lehigh Gap today take little notice of this marvel of nature. In 1844, a visitor with the eye of a poet, wrote of his experience at “Die Lecha Wasser-Kaft.” His words are excerpted and summarized here

The writer visited this place in September 1844. In ascending the eastern bank some hundred feet, the scene heightens in grandeur, and the stream – the beautiful, rippled waters of the Lehigh River add much, nay everything, to make it impressive beyond oblivion. ... It is, as it rolls majestically over a rocky bed and reflects the somber shade of the impending mountain, a grand stream.

The eastern bank of the Gap is bordered by craggy cliffs and of forms the most bizarre. The traveler is amply rewarded for the exertion of climbing from rock to rock by the rich and extensive prospect which the eye then commands. At a distance, variegated woods and farms, watered by the Lehigh, burst upon the sight and fill the mind with sublime ideas of the greatness of the Creator.....

With thanks to the
Pennsylvania Geological Society (1941)

SAVE THE DATE!

August 27th at 2PM

The Historical Society will host
Allentown Symphony Orchestra
in an exciting Pops Concert
at Palmerton HS Auditorium

Look for Details in Next Issue!

W. Edwards Deming – *What Was His Role in NJZ’s Success?*

Following the defeat of Japan in 1945, the United States almost immediately set about the task of helping rebuild a country devastated by World War II. Many know that as Supreme Commander General Douglas MacArthur played a significant role in this undertaking. Few are aware of the contributions that resulted from the teachings of an obscure consultant from Powell, Wyoming.

Dr. W. Edwards Deming was a middle-aged engineer and statistician when he was brought to Japan by the US Army in 1947. While fulfilling his duties involving



compilation of a census, Deming was asked by the Japanese to elaborate on his thoughts on how to achieve manufacturing excellence. In a few short years his principles were being enthusiastically adopted by the Japanese as they went about rebuilding their country. By 1951, Deming was so revered that the Deming Prize was established by the Union of Japanese Scientists & Engineers. This honor remains today as the oldest and most prestigious award of its kind in recognizing companies and individuals around the world for work in quality control.

It is said “a prophet is without honor in his own country” and for years Deming’s approach was largely ignored in the United States. It was not until Japanese automobiles took significant

market share from US car makers in the 1970s that the American industry took notice. Companies began to realize that Deming’s teachings “delivered economic dynamite” and soon Ford, Proctor & Gamble, and even the New York Times began to adopt them.

For years, New Jersey Zinc was recognized for the consistency delivered across its product line. As new employees joined the company,

their orientation espoused much of Deming’s approach – “do it right the first time.” As customers tightened specifications on products such as

zinc powder for newly developed alkaline batteries, NJZ was able to meet the challenge and maintain market dominance.

Deming passed away in 1993 but his teachings remain viable today. He believed that excellence begins with corporate management. Since 2010, Columbia University School of Business has sponsored the “Deming Cup for Operational Excellence” to honor business leaders who foster a culture of continuous improvement within their organizations. Previous winners have come from areas as diverse as family-owned S.C. Johnson & Son, Pepsico, and Cleveland Clinic. Had this honor in Deming’s memory been available years ago, NJZ management would have been a worthy nominee.

Before N *A Brief Walk Through t*

Prior to the arrival of The New Jersey Zinc Company 125 years ago, the area in the vicinity of the Lehigh Gap was more than just fertile farmland. This region was originally part of Northampton County and its colorful history pre-dates the American Revolution.

The Lehigh Gap was a well-known pass and provided important access from Bethlehem and Easton to settlements north of Blue Mountain. A military road had been laid out in the 1740's and Benjamin Franklin passed here as he moved troops from Bethlehem to protect the Moravian mission at Gnadenhuetten near present day

was still Indian territory and attacks on the new settlers were common.

During the next fifty years, colonists began establishing farms in the area. The military road that Franklin had traveled was eventually abandoned and in 1806 it became part of the "Lehigh and Susquehanna Turnpike" (State Road?) that ran from Easton to Berwick. This encouraged the entrepreneurial spirit of newcomers such as George Ziegenfuss.

Ziegenfuss acquired property east of the Gap along a fast-flowing minor tributary of

the Lehigh River. There he constructed a mill and soon the village of Millport appeared (present-day Aquashicola). Business began to flourish and the nearby waters of the Creek were rumored to have healing powers. A road was constructed east along the Creek (today's Little Gap Highway), bath houses were built, and the area saw use as summer resort (early version of DonLaine Campgrounds? Sunny Rest Lodge?).

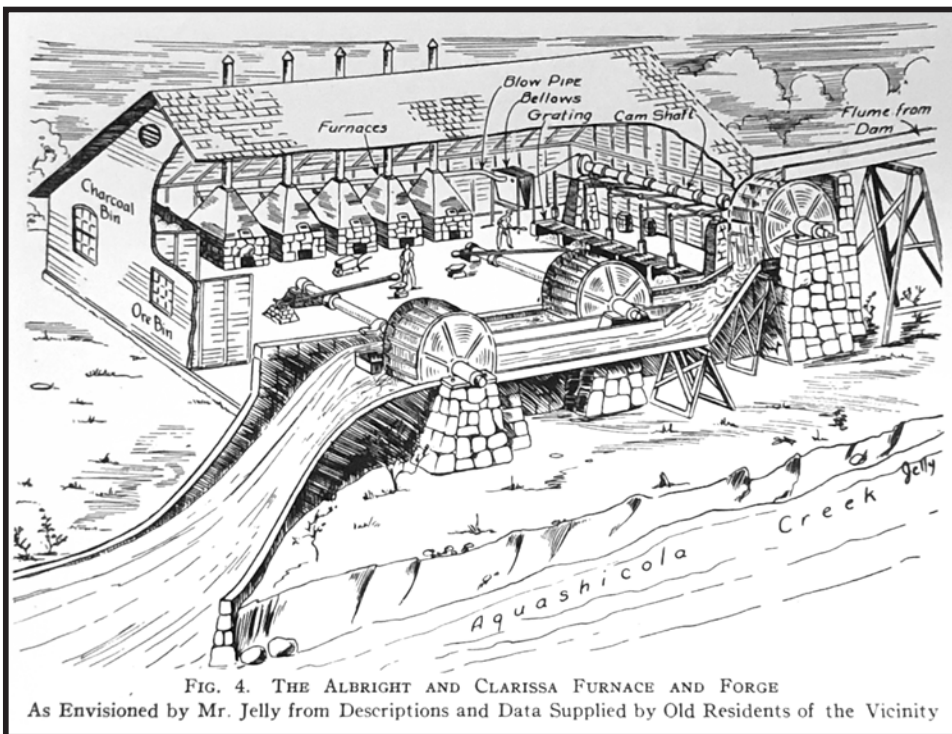


FIG. 4. THE ALBRIGHT AND CLARISSA FURNACE AND FORGE

As Envisioned by Mr. Jelly from Descriptions and Data Supplied by Old Residents of the Vicinity

Lehighton. He described his trip in a letter of January 26, 1756 noting "... we marched cautiously through the gap of the mountain, a very dangerous pass..." At that time, the area

In 1817, Josiah White and Erskine Hazard created the Lehigh Coal & Navigation Company (LC&N) to transport anthracite coal by canal barges to the eastern cities. At the same time, work was begun on the

QJZ ?

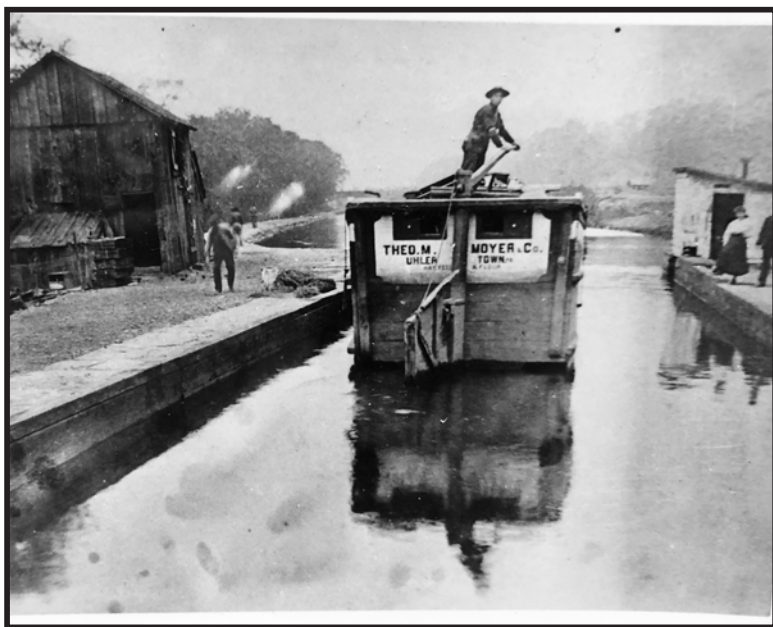
The Area's Early History

construction of an iron forge just east of Little Gap. Initially, pig iron was brought to the area from hearths in Berks County for processing into structural iron parts. Many of these parts were used in the construction of the Lehigh Gap bridge to Slatington where they survived for over one hundred years. In 1827, the iron works were expanded to include direct smelting of ore brought upriver from Whitehall. The smelter operated until it was wiped out in 1841 when the area experienced a disastrous flood.

On March 13, 1843, the County of Carbon was officially created from portions of neighboring Northampton and Monroe counties. The wealth of its anthracite coal deposits attracted further growth – and competition for the canal. For 30 years LC&N held a virtual monopoly on the transportation of coal until around 1850 when Asa Packer helped create the Lehigh Valley Railroad. Shortly thereafter, tonnage via canal barges began to fall dramatically as rail shipments took hold.

In 1858, Robert Prince established a metallic paint works at the Lehigh Gap where he converted iron ore from area mines into a product that provided protection against the corrosive effects of acids and alkalis. Twenty years later, his sons established the Prince Brothers works in nearby Bowmansville where there appeared to be an inexhaustible source of ore at so-called “Stony Hill.”

It was no surprise that Stephen Palmer and his associates looked favorably upon the area near the Lehigh Gap and began to acquire property in the early 1890's. Zinc production was already well-established in the Lehigh Valley and Palmer's vision to consolidate these companies justified his plans to construct here the largest zinc smelting operation in the United States.



A classic example of barge traffic on the canal.

There are many useful sources of the early history of the area such as the monumental Mathews & Hungerford History of the Counties of Lehigh and Carbon (1884). A more concise account is available in the *Silver Anniversary of the Founding of Palmerton 1898-1923*. A few copies of this publication are available at the Palmerton Area Heritage Center.

1898 Was a Busy Year!

Teddy Roosevelt Was Giving Stephen Palmer Company!

In the 1890's the island of Cuba was struggling for independence from Spain and its proximity to Florida gave the United States government reason to be concerned. In 1898, as the conflict intensified between the rebels who sought independence and the Spanish government, President McKinley ordered the USS Maine to Cuba ostensibly as a peaceful show of strength. The rest is history!

On February 15, 1898 the USS Maine unexpectedly blew up in the harbor at Havana and 260 sailors lost their lives. The media in the United States immediately called for retribution and two months later the US declared war on Spain. Although the cause of the sinking of the battleship was never clearly established, the slogan "Remember the Maine" became a battle cry.

While Stephen Palmer was breaking ground for his new smelter and its adjacent town, a dashing Theodore Roosevelt was gaining notoriety in Cuba for leading a troop of "Rough Riders" to the top of San Juan Hill. This strategic battle took place on July 1st and was the last major

engagement of the war. America had a new hero who would soon be elected Governor of the State of New York. In 1901 Roosevelt would become the 26th (and youngest) President of the United States following the assassination of President McKinley.

The fighting in Cuba was brief. Less than 300 Americans died in battle although it was reported that 4,000 died of tropical diseases. A peace treaty with Spain was signed in December 1898 and Cuba became independent. Spain also ceded the islands of Guam and Puerto Rico to the United States. Much has been written about the justification for the Spanish-American War. It is part of American history and will continue to be studied extensively.

In 1998, as Palmerton celebrated a dinner marking its 100th Anniversary, the Chamber of Commerce invited a Theodore Roosevelt impersonator to provide perspective for the evening. There are dozens of TR "reprisors" across the US – the Chamber was unable to find a single "Stephen Palmer!"



2023 Monthly Program Schedule

*all programs held in the Knight's Gallery of the Palmerton Library unless otherwise noted
handicap accessibility*

April 10 (6:30pm)

***History of Glen Onoko and
Surrounding Landmarks***

Vince Hydro

May 8 (6:30pm)

Before NJZ?

The Area's Early History

Peter Kern

June 12 (6:30pm)

The Walnutport Canal

Brenda Morris

July 10 (6:30pm)

The Town That Zinc Built

David Taschler

August 14 (5-8pm)

Annual Picnic

Walnutport Canal Pavilion

August 18 (9am-3pm)

Sidewalk Sale

Heritage Center

September 9-10

Historic Bus Tours at

Palmerton Festival

October 9

TBA

November 13

TBA

December 3

Ecumenical Service (3pm)

at Little White Church

Annual Banquet (4:30pm)

at Bert's Steakhouse

New Historical Society Publication

Recordings and Reflections of Myra Brookmyer

Myra Brookmyer served as Visiting Nurse for The New Jersey Zinc Company over a 30-year period spanning two World Wars, a devastating pandemic, and the Great Depression. During that time, she filled her notebooks with touching scenes of the community that she later compiled in a 32-page memoir titled "*Sense of Touch.*"

Thanks to the thoughtfulness of a member, an original copy was preserved and this unique treasure has been skillfully reproduced by TN Printing in a numbered Limited Edition of 250. Copies are available at the Heritage Center (\$10) or by mail (\$15).



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Heritage Center**

410 Delaware Avenue
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**Thursdays & Saturdays
10am-1pm**

