

Ice Harvesting, cont.

until the summer months as well as a railroad siding for ease of loading and transporting to markets in Philadelphia. By the 1920s, the demand began to decline and the ice harvesting industry began to wane. By the 1930s, artificial ice was drastically undercutting the price for natural harvested ice. By this time, two dams had already been destroyed in floods of 1925 and not rebuilt, and then in 1939, remaining dams were destroyed in a year of heavy flooding. Very little local evidence remains today of these once thriving businesses.

Cigar Industry

The railroad set the stage for the development of the cigar industry in the Upper Perkiomen Valley in the 1880s and 1890s. The manufacturing of cigars changed the community from an agricultural based economy to an industrial economy. These changes were reflected in an influx of workers from surrounding farms and the cities for the newly constructed factories, an increase in building for their houses, supporting businesses such as general and specialty stores, and the establishment of places of worship and clubs and organizations for the workers. By 1910, the cigar manufacturing industry was among the largest employers in the Upper Perkiomen Valley. Factories were established in every community. The semi-skilled, hand-made cigar process appealed to the artisan and trade-oriented Pennsylvania German population, offering better paying jobs as an attractive alternative to farming. The cigar industry in the region waned in the late 1920s. Several factors accounted for this decline, including large-scale machine mass-production elsewhere and advertising campaigns by national cigar and cigarette companies which gained greater share of the market.

Conclusion

For the remainder of the 20th century, some of the factory buildings, once busy centers of cigar industry employment and activity in the various towns, were reused for other industries including weaving, clothing manufacturing and rug making. Other buildings stood empty, eventually

deteriorated and were razed. Population centers continued to grow and with it small local businesses. Some examples include automobile dealers and repair shops, bakeries, green grocers, dry-goods merchants, electric appliance and repair stores and drug stores and pharmacies. Throughout the second half of the 20th century, small family owned businesses gave way to regional chain stores. The improvements of highways in the 1970s, especially Route 663 to Quakertown, brought even more pressure on small businesses as consumers could more easily travel to larger population centers for their shopping needs. Smaller family farms also suffered throughout the post World War II period as more children left the farm, and the Upper Perkiomen Valley, for better paying employment opportunities. Today, like many communities in the nation, the Upper Perkiomen Valley has few of the once plentiful family run farms.

Throughout these tours, buildings are highlighted with text describing their various functions over the years. Vintage photos of some of the buildings appearance are also included. The buildings pictured in this introductory brochure are no longer in existence.



*Perkiomen Brewery, Rt. 29 & 63,
Green Lane*

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Upper Perk Downtown supports these series of tours.



Cover Artwork

*"Back-A-Ways", Watercolor
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Self-guided Tour Introduction



A series of 7 tours



*Schwenkfelder Library & Heritage Center
Pennsburg, Pennsylvania*

Prior to European settlement, the Upper Perkiomen Valley (then known as the "Goschenhoppen") was populated by Native American people known as the Lenape. By the time the majority of the European immigrants came to the area, however, the Lenape had been gone for over a generation. The name "Perkiomen" is said to be of Lenape derivation. Its meaning, though uncertain, may refer to the existence of cranberry bogs along the Perkiomen Valley watershed. The origin of the term "Goschenhoppen" is unknown as well.



Pennsburg Hotel, Rt. 29 & 663

The vast majority of the early settlers in the Upper Perkiomen Valley were Germans who adhered to the Lutheran and German Reformed faiths. Other German settlers included Mennonites, Brethren, Schwenkfelders and Roman Catholics. The German language was used almost exclusively. Formal high German was used for religious observance and a German dialect for every day speech. The dialect eventually evolved into what we know today as Pennsylvania German (or Deitsch or "Dutch"). The settlers were generally subsistence farmers or craftsmen who also farmed.

Turnpikes

Several very old roads run through the Upper Perkiomen Valley. Sumneytown Pike, Geryville Pike and Route 29 were major thoroughfares throughout the 18th century.

These roads continue to be significant routes today. "The Great Road to Philadelphia", called Main Street or Route 29 today, was laid out in 1735. One can



Green Lane Train Station

still see the occasional mileage marker which indicated "miles to P(hiladelphia)." Pennsylvania as a colony and then as a state did not maintain the roads as the state government does today. The roads were maintained by

those who lived near them or used them. This method eventually became intolerable as the major roads became more and more frequently impassable. Eventually, after several false starts, privately owned "turnpikes" evolved. Owners began charging tolls for road maintenance and profits for investors. The tours will mention these turnpikes which were critical to the settlement and prosperity of the region.

Mills

In addition to farming, the settlers of the 18th century soon discovered the potential of the plentiful local streams of the community for operating mills. The earliest mills were established for cutting wood or grinding grain for flour. These were known as saw mills and grist mills, respectively. Mills also were built along the waters for production of gun powder (powder mills), linseed and other plant oils (oil mills), for mixing animal feeds (feed mills), and machine shops and forges. Local tradition states that more mills were in operation along the Perkiomen Creek at the end of the 18th century than on any other waterway in the state of Pennsylvania. The mills brought prosperity to the community, which was reflected in its growth and good paying jobs. Inns along the turnpikes provided food and lodging to those transporting goods to and from the area's markets. Roads improved as more materials and finished products needed to be moved to and from the city. In the mid-19th century, as factories operated by steam and coal began to be built in the city or closer to the city, water driven mills became less cost effective and eventually obsolete.

Railroads

The Philadelphia and Reading Railroad was operating along the Schuylkill River as early as 1848. By 1868, the Perkiomen Railroad extended service from the Perkiomen Junction (where the Perkiomen Creek drains into the Schuylkill River) to the Upper



Red Hill Train Station

Perkiomen Valley. The freight and passenger service stops included Perkiomenville, Green Lane, McLean's Station (between Green Lane and Red Hill), Red Hill, Pennsburg, East Greenville and Palm. Daily freight service included early morning milk runs to markets in the city. From the 1880s through the 1920s, ice was also transported on the Perkiomen Railroad to consumers and wholesalers. Cigar factories, which developed throughout the region in the early 20th century, relied on railroad for transportation to the warehouses in the city and beyond. Shortly after World War II, passenger service on the Perkiomen line was rapidly replaced by automobiles and an increasingly improved system of roads. Riders declined rapidly and service ceased altogether in the 1960s.

Ice Harvesting

Before the advent of electric refrigerators in every home, natural ice was relied upon to cool and keep food fresh through summer months. Locally, farmers with any source of water harvested ice for their own personal use. Several small dams supported small local businesses. One of these, the Sweinhart dam, was located along the Macoby Creek near Pennsburg. This dam supplied natural ice for the Pennsburg, East Greenville and Red Hill communities during the hot summer months.



Hancock Ice Co. Dam & Warehouse, Green Lane

While the small businesses continued to serve the local demand, interstate ice businesses established themselves in the community. Two companies dominated the development of the ice industry in the 20th century, the Knickerbocker Ice Company and the John C. Hancock Company. By 1904, five Hancock dams and two Knickerbocker dams were located along the Perkiomen and its tributaries from Green Lane to Powder Valley. In addition to dams, these larger companies' locations required an insulated warehouse to keep the harvested ice