



GHOST TOWNS
OF NORTH MOUNTAIN:
RICKETTS, MOUNTAIN SPRINGS AND STULL



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Introduction

The rural and mountainous area surrounding Ricketts Glen State Park, at the intersection of Luzerne, Wyoming, and Sullivan counties, is known as North Mountain. The mountain range forms a watershed between the north and west branches of the Susquehanna River. At Ricketts Glen, Bowman's Creek begins to flow generally eastward through the now deserted ice-cutting town of Mountain Springs, along the former lumbering town of Stull, beyond the old tannery town of Noxen, into the farming valley of Beaumont, and onward to the Susquehanna River below Tunkhannock. North of Ricketts Glen, Mehoopany Creek flows northeasterly through the ghost lumber town of Ricketts, eventually flowing into the Susquehanna River at the town of Mehoopany, another old lumbering center.

In central Sullivan County, Loyalsock Creek descends from World's End State Park and passes through Lopez, once the county's major lumbering center. The Loyalsock then branches off into smaller streams before draining into Wyoming County. In lower Sullivan County, west of Ricketts Glen, Fishing Creek descends into a valley to Jamison City on the Sullivan-Columbia County line, also the site of a former lumbering community.

In the two decades between 1890 and 1910, the North Mountain area was the scene of the last major lumbering era in our region. Lumbering was the economic basis for the towns of Alderson (1887-1912) at

Harvey's Lake, and at Stull (1891-1906) on Bowman's Creek, and for large lumbering operations in the towns of Lopez (1887-1905) on Loyalsock Creek, Jamison City (1889-1912) on Fishing Creek, and at Ricketts (1890-1913) on Mehoopany Creek.

Ice-cutting was another North Mountain industry during this era, with its major center at Mountain Springs (1891-1948) along Bowman's Creek, and to a smaller extent at Lake Ganoga (1896-c.1915), a private lake development near the state park. The ice industry continued to operate for another three decades after the end of lumbering in North Mountain, closing as mechanical refrigeration came into general household use immediately after World War II.

The Lumber Industry

The American lumber industry began in Maine in 1634 and was centered there for two hundred years, but in the 1830s New York State became the early nation's lumbering leader. In 1860, Pennsylvania, with over 28 million acres of land area, most of which was densely forested, became the industry leader. From 1870 to 1890, Michigan was the leading lumbering state. But between 1870 and 1890, Pennsylvania was still among the nation's top three lumber producers, and was fourth in 1910.



Pennsylvania's forests were initially stripped for white pine, in great part for the nation's ship-building industry. Prior to 1880, the principal means of transporting felled timber was by rafting or log drives on the state's rivers and streams. For a time, Williamsport (1838-1919), on the West Branch of the Susquehanna River in Lycoming County, was the "lumber capital of the world," utilizing log drives down the river until 1909 to Williamsport mills.

By 1885, lumber companies were increasingly using small "logging railroads" to reach into Pennsylvania's forest lands. Portable steam mills were also developed to be constructed in the forest lands. Both developments lessened the dependence of the industry on stream-side mill sites for water power. At the same time, the Pennsylvania lumber industry was greatly revived by the quest for hemlock, particularly for the bark from hemlock trees, which was an important source of the chemical tannin, used in the leather industry.

The production of leather goods from animal hides also grew into a substantial American industry during the nineteenth century. Between 1850 and 1899, the nation's tanning industry grew from \$40 million to \$200 million in value, with major industry conglomerates emerging by the end of the century.

The vast hemlock forests in Pennsylvania generally were not cut in the 1860s and 1870s. With the value of hemlock recognized in later decades, logging production for hemlock, remaining pine, and other timber increased greatly in the state. Indeed, capital investment in the state's lumber industry grew from nearly \$11 million in 1860 to \$24 million in 1870, to \$45 million by 1890, when nearly 2,000 lumber mills still peppered the state's forest lands. The

number of mills had declined from 3,700 in 1870, because of larger mill operations and consolidation of land ownership by timber land speculators.

In our region Sullivan and Wyoming counties were covered by vast timber tracts supporting only small lumbering operations until the late 1880s and early 1890s when the towns of Jamison City, Lopez, Stull, and Ricketts were created by major lumbering firms to harvest the forest lands. In the more populous Luzerne County, drained by the Susquehanna River, anthracite mining became

the principle industry. However, lumbering was significant at Harvey's Lake on the Hollenback Estate lands during the 1840s through 1870s, and also during the 1870s through 1880s by John P.



Crellin and Albert Lewis in the White Haven and Bear Creek region, which was drained by the Lehigh River and its tributary streams.

In the 1890s, a major lumbering industry was revived at Harvey's Lake and extended along Bowman's Creek by Albert Lewis, the "lumber king of Wyoming Valley." He was also tied financially and by his first marriage to the Crellin family and the Lehigh Valley Railroad. Lewis was also associated with Adam Stull and his son Arthur L. Stull in the Bowman's Creek lumber business.

A contemporary of Albert Lewis was the remarkable Col. Robert Bruce Ricketts, after whom Ricketts Glen State Park is named. Ricketts Glen State Park annually attracts over 375,000 visitors. Few are aware that a century ago the park and its surrounding game lands were the site of a major lumbering industry with a town, named Ricketts, of B00 residents. At Lake Ganoga, adjacent to the park lands, Col. Ricketts had a summer resort served by the Ganoga Branch of the Lehigh Valley Railroad.

A Civil War hero, Ricketts was an immense land speculator in the timber lands of Luzerne, Sullivan, and Wyoming counties. Col. Ricketts once owned nearly 60,000 acres in the region. Much of his land was principally drained by Mehoopany Creek. Ricketts' immense tracts

were generally called his "Mehoopany Lands." Ricketts was on the verge of financial disaster for two decades until the Lehigh Valley Railroad was constructed through his lands. In the early 1890s, the Trexler and Turrell Lumber Company created the town of Ricketts, a few miles north of Lake Jean, which was a "boom town" from 1890 to 1913. Today it is a ghost town without a single marker to note its existence.

Through Col. Ricketts' foresight, the precious Kitchens Creek glens and waterfalls were preserved in their natural state and are the heart of Ricketts Glen State Park. Two-thirds of the 13,050-acre state park is former Ricketts land. Ricketts also protected his "pet," the Lake Ganoga area, from lumbering and only in the present generation is development truly occurring at the private Lake Ganoga development.

The Ice Industry

Prior to the 1830s, food was generally preserved by salting, spicing, pickling, or smoking. Butchers slaughtered meat only for the day's trade, as preservation for longer periods was not practical. Milk and dairy products and fresh fruits and vegetables subject to spoilage were sold in local markets since storage and shipping



farm produce over any significant distance or time was not practical. Indeed, milk was often hauled to city markets at night when temperatures were cooler. Ale and beer making required cool temperatures and its manufacture was limited to the cooler months.

The early ice industry was localized. Farmers cut small harvests from local ponds, and only better homes, taverns, and hotels purchased ice from local dealers. Ice was a luxury not commonly available to the general public except for cooling drinks.

Urbanization, improved ice-box technology, and consumer demand, including the popularity of mineral waters, fruit juices, and ice cream, stimulated the creation of an American ice industry. Farmers increased their use of ice for meat and dairy use. Food cooled with ice could be shipped by railroad to more distant places. During the last half of the nineteenth century, ice became a necessity for home and business, and by the 1870s there were substantial ice dealers in medium-sized communities like Wilkes-Barre and Scranton.

The first commercial ice dealer in Wilkes-Barre was Capt. Gilman Converse, captain of the Wyoming, a 155-foot steamboat which hauled freight and passengers on the Susquehanna River from 1849 to 1852 between Tunkhannock and Pittston, with occasional trips to Wilkes-Barre. Gilman sold ice from 1855 to 1865, cutting it from the river and local ponds. After Gilman's business was destroyed in a March 1865 flood, he was succeeded by the Wilkes-Barre Ice Company, which was followed by the Wyoming Valley Ice Company in 1869.

By 1880, an estimated 5 million tons of ice was consumed by the American public. Pennsylvania was the nation's third largest producer

of ice, following Maine and New York. Pennsylvania consumed about 1 million tons annually, cut on the state's lakes and rivers or bought from Maine and New York ice firms. The industry, by this time, also supported major conglomerate ice firms; the most well-known was the Knickerbocker Ice Company of New York, which also reached into Pennsylvania. With the growth of the ice industry during the 1880s, substantial regional companies were formed in White Haven and Pocono Lake.

Albert Lewis and Arthur L. Stull were the founders of two major ice production companies in Luzerne County. In the mid-1800s, Lewis and Stull jointly founded the Mountain Springs Ice Com-

pany in Ross Township, located now in state game lands adjacent to Ricketts Glen State Park. Lewis left the Mountain Springs company in 1912. Stull, along with his brother Albert A. Stull, and a son Robert A. Stull, then managed the Mountain Springs Ice Company. Lewis owned an even larger ice company at Bear Creek, near Wilkes-Barre, where he lived in a Tudor mansion amid a unique company town.

This work offers a history of Albert Lewis and Arthur L. Stull and their creation of two Bowman's Creek towns, Stull and Mountain Springs. In addition, the story of Col. Robert Bruce Ricketts and the lumbering town named after him on Mehoopany Creek is explored.