

CHAPTER VI

WALTONVILLE: A COMPANY TOWN

Similar to many industrial endeavors of the day, the Hummelstown Brownstone Company had a company town. Centered around the old Berst House, barn and cemetery, it extended north and south along Quarry/Waltonville Road and back toward quarries #1 and #3 on what is now Brookline Drive. Flourishing during the 1880's and again in the early 1900's, it nearly rivaled Hummelstown in population and the number of stores and hotels therein. By 1888 Waltonville could boast of three quarries, three stores, four butcher shops, two bakeries and a barber shop.

Post Office and Mercantile Ventures

Due to this influx of workers and their families, Waltonville was granted a post office in 1890 which was located in the company store, and Robert Walton was appointed postmaster. To accommodate the increased trade, the Waltons expanded the store with a 30 x 100 foot brownstone building which quickly became a new store and warehouse, and a "fine line of general merchandise" was "constantly kept on hand."¹

However, the Waltons changed the location of the company store only nine years later when they relocated it in Hummelstown on East Main Street. This decision at first appears to be self-defeating until one considers that the completion of the Brownstone - Middletown Railroad made the journey to and from the quarries a simple matter. The new store was considerably larger than the Waltonville facility and was stocked more

¹The Hummelstown Sun, July 25, 1890, Hummelstown Brownstone Manuscript Group, Hummelstown Area and Derry Township Historical Societies.

completely. More brightly illuminated and featuring separate “apartments” for special goods, it was the most up to date mercantile venture of its kind in that area.

Other men tried their hand at competing with the Walton’s stores, but few appeared to remain in business for any length of time. M. F. Nissley closed a branch store that he had started at the quarries and moved back to Hummelstown. In 1887 it appears that their chief competitor was H. Shope and Son who had experienced a number of prosperous years prior to that due to their large inventory and the “bargains” that they offered.

The Hess Family had a butcher shop in Waltonville, but they moved to Hershey where they established the J.C. Hess Ford Garage the first such franchise in the area.

Housing



F-1: Sutcliffe’s Boarding House, Waltonville – At the lower, left-hand corner can be seen the fence a few headstones of St. Lucy’s Cemetery. The majority of these were later relocated in the Hummelstown Cemetery. (Photo Courtesy of Charles Wagner)

The Waltons as well as the majority of the managerial staff and many of the skilled workers of the quarries made Hummelstown their home. The Keystone Hotel on East Main Street, in business since the late 18th Century, was a favorite haunt of the stonecutters. The Grand Central Hotel (now the Warwick Hotel) and the National Hotel were two other popular inns. On the other hand, most unskilled workers lived in Waltonville. In addition to the boarding house owned by the Waltons, a Mrs. Sutcliffe owned one which was enlarged in 1887 to house upwards of twenty boarders while other independent people in the area rented rooms. The Waltons augmented these boarding houses with company houses. Throughout the 1880's they added single and double houses reaching the zenith in 1905 when they added twenty new dwellings to the village. They evidently kept them in repair for it was reported that "every house belonging to the Brownstone Company has received a new coat of paint which makes this an up-to-date village and causes strangers to stare at its beauty."²

Churches and Religion

The Protestant workers had a number of churches to serve their needs both in Hummelstown and the surrounding country side, and Zion Lutheran Church, the Walton's home church, organized a mission Sunday School at the quarries. The Diocese of Harrisburg, under the leadership of Bishop Shanahan, ministered to the Roman Catholic population in 1904 by providing St. Lucy's Chapel which was erected adjacent to Mrs. Sutcliffe's Boarding House, and by the summer of 1905 Mrs. Lizzie Lundy and Mr. Anthony Savastio had organized Sunday School Classes. Next to the chapel was a small Roman Catholic cemetery in which a number of the workers were buried. When

² The Hummelstown Sun, loc. cit., Sept. 16, 1904.

the village of Waltonville met its demise and St. Lucy's was razed, the coffins were exhumed and the majority of them along with the headstones were reinterred in the north edge of the Hummelstown Cemetery.

School

During the heydays of the late 1880's, Waltonville's rapid growth in population necessitated the building of a school. In the fall of 1889 a Prof. D. Bemesderfer was appointed the teacher in the new school with at least fifty-five pupils in his charge. This certainly made it one of Derry Township's larger country schools, and considerably larger than the one in Old Derry that Milton Hershey attended as a youth. However, within the first month of his tenure, Bemesderfer saw fit to tender his resignation and assume the duties of secretary of the Pennsylvania Brownstone Company Limited. Unfortunately for him, this company was absorbed by the Waltons the following year. Bemesderfer was succeeded by an "accomplished young lady," Miss Laura Reider, who ruled her fifty plus students "into discipline, even to the assistance of a stout piece of birch."³

Recreation and Holidays

It is evident from newspaper accounts that picnics, especially on holidays such as the Fourth of July, were one of the chief points of recreation in Waltonville as well as Hummelstown. Another major form of entertainment for the summer months was

³ The Hummelstown Sun, loc. cit., February 7, 1890.

baseball and the stonecutters under the leadership of Nicholas Savastio, their star pitcher, fielded one of the best of the local teams.

After the stonecutters baseball team sweeps up the diamond with that bunch of cobblers from the shoe factory, Captain Wertman will know what it is to be canned, and Captain Harry is far from being a dead one. It is not necessary to mention the two humiliating drubbings the cobblers have received at the hands of the stonies. If the shoemakers will be at the Race Track, or any other ball yard, at 10 A. M. in Hummelstown on July 4th, 1906, we will show them how to drive pegs and play ball. Three new stars will debut with the stonies this year. Mr. J. F. McGowen, formerly of Philadelphia, and now main guy in the stone yard, if he pushes the ball around as swiftly as he pushes things around the stone yard, we'll make good time. Mr. James Youtz, who is now engaged in lifting freight cars on the tracks at Waltonville, will play first base, and Mr. Harry Taylor of Philadelphia, once head of a brewery league, will play short.⁴

Traveling shows were rare and, consequently, well attended by the villagers in Waltonville. In August of 1906 a Mr. and Mrs. Ash came to town for three days where Mr. Ash amazed the residents with his one-man-show. Despite his duties as the star performer, ring master, tent builder, cook, horseshoer, lion tamer, and elephant groom, his most memorable feats were those involving strength. Mr. Ash had traveled with the Barnum, Bailey and Hutchinson, Fourpaugh, Ringling Brothers and Dan Rice Circuses where he was their featured strong man, and the fact that he could make twelve husky quarry men look like "babies" on the other end of a rope amazed the onlookers.

As the summer gave way to fall, the "stonies" from Scotland, England, and Wales, homesick for their favorite sport, introduced soccer to Derry Township and Hummelstown in 1907.

The game of Association Football is progressing by leaps and bounds in these parts. There can be no doubt that Capt. Smith of the Anglo - Scots has a lot to do with this, but the interest taken in the game by some of its new votaries has a great deal more to do with it. Especially noticeable

⁴The Hummelstown Sun, loc. cit., June 29, 1906.

amongst these is Mr. J. Henry proprietor of the Bellevue - Stratford. Anyone seeing his play in the match held in the field adjoining the hotel on Saturday could not have failed to see the making of a great player in him. He kicks with great force, if without much precision at present. In fact it is safe to be some distance from him when he is kicking. The ball might receive the kick but it might not, and there isn't a hospital handy for the victim to get proper treatment.⁵

As things slowed down at the pits at the onset of winter, Thanksgiving and Christmas were of paramount importance. During these great feast days the Waltons dined on smoked shad, potatoes, Holland cheeses, oyster pie, turkey, etc. using their apricot Limoge china, crystal, and silver service⁶ while their employees had more simple fare. Yet for many years the Waltons supplemented the Thanksgiving dinner of most of their employees.

The annual custom of the Messrs. Walton at this season of giving all married men and those who are the support of their mothers in their employ a nice turkey, was again observed on Tuesday when a large number of choice birds was given away by them. This act of kindness should be greatly appreciated by their little army of employees.

In the winter months ice skating and sledding were popular, but not without accidents. When nine "Hunks" boarded a big sled and lost control of it at the bottom of the hill they hit a stone wall. The account in The Sun hastened to add, "Three Hunks have broken heads, but the stone wall is still there."⁷

Throughout the year the stonecutters held dinners and banquets, but seldom did many outsiders have the opportunity to attend the festivities. St. Lucy's sponsored

⁵ The Hummelstown Sun, loc. cit., November 15, 1907

⁶ "The Waltons of Walton Hill," The Dauphin Historian, Vol. 2, No. 2, December 12, 1973, and Vol. 2, No. 3, January 16, 1974. (probable author Robert T. Fox, Jr.)

⁷ The Hummelstown Sun, loc. cit., February 22, 1907

carnivals that featured refreshments, local musical entertainment, and raffles to raise money, and the village supported them well.

The Italians formed a string band and often serenaded people from the porch of the store, and in February of 1906, about twenty Italians traveled to Hummelstown dressed in fantastic costumes and performed mandolin music and dancing for the enjoyment of the townspeople.

Crime

There is a tendency to romanticize small town life at the turn of the last century. All was not perfect in those pastoral Edens. Alcohol abuse following paydays with its resultant fights, donnybrooks, stabbings and shootings kept the constabulary on its toes and was grist for The Sun's mill.

A number of Negroes at the Brownstone Quarries were engaged in a drunken brawl on Sunday, (and) one was shot in the right breast. The one who did the shooting immediately left the scene and has not yet been found.⁸

Saturday was payday at the quarries and on Saturday night and Sunday beer and whiskey flowed freely. Several of our men got into trouble in consequence of it.⁹

Burglary was another crime reported occasionally. By today's standards the value of goods and money taken during these episodes appears to be inconsequential. Nevertheless, they represented felonious theft at that time. When the company store was burgled in 1889, approximately \$400 worth of goods was taken. Although no listing of the stolen goods was given, one can imagine what it might have included when compared with a burglary of the same store ten years later when the felons absconded with \$75

⁸ The Hummelstown Sun, loc. cit., August 2, 1907

⁹ The Hummelstown Sun, loc. cit., July 4, 1890

worth of goods that included: “several suits of clothing, a dozen or more pairs of men’s shoes, five caddies of tobacco, and a box of cheap cigars.”¹⁰

Then there were matters of personal contention, perhaps exacerbated by ethnic differences, which led to assault. In Waltonville on August 8, 1913, William Dick was stabbed while arguing with Donato and Pasquale Guidano over a garden plot in his back yard. It seems that Angelo Senecca and his wife, a sister to the Guidanos, rented a section of the house occupied by Dick, and they shared the garden in common. When the Seneccas moved to another location taking the Guidano brothers with them, the two young men insisted on having access to the garden which Dick refused. This led to a quarrel at noon that was continued after work at 4:00 P. M. at which time Dick was stabbed and the brothers fled into the woods. Suffering from a punctured lung, Dick was taken to the Harrisburg Hospital where his condition was reported favorably the next day. It is interesting to note that Assistant District Attorney, Robert Fox, Sr. who was married to Allen K. Walton’s daughter Lillie, was enlisted in the search for the brothers.

A report of petty theft was one of the more amusing accounts in The Sun. Several boarders of the Bellevue - Stratford were taking a walk. About a mile from the hotel they chanced upon a peach tree loaded with fruit in front of John Aldinger’s house.

“I never saw anything like that in Glasgow,” said John Monro. “And by the flat top of the Blarney Stone, I didn’t either,” said Mr. Peter Mackenzie of Belfast. “If I had my fiddle here I would play a two-step,” said Wm. Wood of London. “Peaches are my affinity,” said George Butcher swinging high into the tree. “It beats the Dutch,” put in Sam Burkey following suit. But it wasn’t beating the Dutch --- not much. About that time John Honnus was beating a big load of bird shot down into the muzzle of a large blunderbuss who proceeded to take station near the corner of the barn. “If big Jim Smith were here he would clean out

¹⁰ The Hummelstown Sun, loc. cit., June 23, 1899

this tree in a minute,” remarked Mr. Butcher. He can eat more peaches --- .” Bang went the blunderbuss at the corner of the barn and back went Mr. Butcher’s hand to his rear. Then he took a drop and not being particular where he fell lit on the hand of Mr. Mackenzie and both men took to the ground at once. John Monro was also in a hurry to get down and caught his foot in a tree crotch where he hung until he was released by Mr. Wood. He dropped from limb to limb making a descent from the tree to safety. All hands immediately made a mad dash for safety while John Honnus kept blazing away. Messrs. Butcher and Mackenzie took the lead in the hurried race and never lost it, reaching the Bellevue in ten minutes ahead of the rest. Going directly to their room they divested themselves of their clothing to pick out of their anatomy a few bird shot. Mr. Aldinger captured three hats and swears that the next time he catches stone cutters in his fruit trees he will use buckshot.¹¹

Afterward

With the demise of the brownstone industry, Waltonville withered away. One by one the company houses were razed. St. Lucy’s, the company store, Mrs. Sutcliffe’s Boarding House, the Berst house and barn, etc. all vanished. A few company homes were eventually bought, but only one or two of these remain, and having been renovated many times, it is now difficult to identify them as the clapboard and later asphalt shingled dwellings that once identified Waltonville.

The Fox executors of the Walton estate, gradually sold the tracts of land surrounding the quarries. In the early 1960’s a local contractor, Olin Miller, proposed buying quarry #4 and the land surrounding it to begin a residential development. His purpose in buying the quarry was to use its water as an emergency source of water in the event of droughts as well as using it in heating homes that would be furnished with heat pumps. To rid the estate of an attractive nuisance, the Fox’s agreed to the sale so long as Miller purchased the remaining quarries, which he did. With the beginning of this

¹¹ The Hummelstown Sun, loc. cit., Oct. 4, 1907.

development, all traces of Waltonville quickly disappeared. As one travels through this area on Quarry/Waltonville Road today there is little to indicate the old settlement of Waltonville or the brownstone industry that supported this thriving village other than the Berst Family cemetery crowding the road near Brookline Drive.

