

HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE BOROUGH OF SUGAR NOTCH  
by Daniel Greb-Lasky

Sugar Notch and other towns played their part in the early history of Wyoming Valley. The fertile farms lying along the Susquehanna River and those closer to the base of the mountains were claimed by the citizens of Connecticut and by the proprietaries of Pennsylvania. The years extending from 1755 until the Revolutionary War were rife with discord and bloodshed.

Royal grants to Connecticut and to William Penn overlapped, and this with the readiness of the Indians to sell their lands, again and again found both parties buying from the Red Men. A meeting of the Indians and the colonists was held in Albany, New York in 1754. There the Connecticut people bought this section, and in February 1755 their first contingent of forty men came to colonize the Valley. These were permitted to choose their holdings with the result that they occupied the fertile lands on the west bank of the Susquehanna River. Another two hundred frontiersmen arrived on May 1, 1775 and they staked their claims in Pittston, Wilkes-Barre, Plymouth and Hanover Township.

Sugar Notch was originally a part of Hanover Township. People from Connecticut, and some who were friendly to the claims of this colony, settled in this area, and with their compatriots, suffered the ravages and savagery of the Indians and the Pennamites. Toward the end of the last century there were log houses standing within the confines of this town. These had been the homes of the early settlers. One such house was located near the Finn-Caffrey home; another stood behind the O'Donnell grocery store; another one was in Old Row; and for many years the Wilverding family occupied one of these houses diagonally across the creek from the Holy Family Church.

Sugar Notch and Warrior Run were incorporated into one borough on April 3, 1867 according to a legislative enactment. Later, Warrior Run established their own borough in 1895. These two mining villages were situated a mile or so apart, the one being at the Sugar Notch Gap in the Little Mountains and the other at the Warrior Gap further west on the Warrior Path. Together they had at that time a little more than 500 inhabitants which were almost exclusively employed at the mines. A pretty place clinging along the mountain side, originally attracting people as a good place to make sugar from the maple trees in the vicinity. Sugar Notch was named after the notch or gap in the Little Mountain at the place called Sugar Notch because in the earlier times maple sugar was made there. There were hard maple trees in the notch and they were almost the only hard maple or sugar maple trees in Wyoming Valley.

The town began to develop when the Lehigh and the Susquehanna Railroad was pushed through to Nanticoke. This is now part of the Central Railroad of Pennsylvania and was built with a view not only to carry passengers and freight but mainly to convey coal from Nanticoke, Wanamie, Alden, Hanover and Sugar Notch to distant markets.

With the coming of the railroad, Number 9 and Number 10 mines were opened. In 1872 Number 10 was a slope with a large breaker, close to what was then known as the "Swamp". There was a tunnel in the neighborhood of the "Old Reservoir" and one down in the town which was familiarly referred to as Jimmie O'Brien's tunnel. The Number 10 Breaker was destroyed by fire in 1886.

Old timers frequently talked of the entombment of seven men and a door boy in the Number 10 mine that happened on April 23, 1879. For five days and five nights the men were entombed until they were rescued by fellow workers who toiled frantically digging a shaft to reach them in their underground peril. It is said they drank water which

dripped from the roof of the mine and having killed the mule that was with them, they lived on mule flesh. The rescued for years were in a measure heroes. They were William Hawkins, Edward Price, Patrick Green, Barney Riley, John Clark, William Kinney, John Green and the door boy.

The mines at Warrior Run were opened in 1837 on the George Crocker land by Holland and Hillman, but often three or four years the mines were abandoned because they lacked transportation facilities. There was a railroad station called Warrior Run once known as Plumbton. This was the old Blackman homestead. The post office name was Peely.

In 1885, Sugar Notch had three mines and breakers within its boundaries--Warrior Run near Plumbton, Sugar Notch Number 9 at Sugar Notch and the Hanover Coal Company on the side of the Little Mountain between Warrior Run and Sugar Notch. The last is a slope and tunnel, and shaft.

A school was built on the Back Road about two miles below Scrabbletown (Ashley) in 1840. It was small frame building. In the early days, and up to 1850, a term of school was three months in the winter, and in that age of vigorous mind and body our ancestors did not think two miles were too far to send their children to school, and they all went, from six years to twenty-one years of age. Any school taught in the summer was a "pay school." The school house was used by different denominations for church meetings.

George Parrish was the first burgess of Sugar Notch. On March 6, 1868, he administered the oath of office to the members of the new borough council. These included H. B. Plumb, David Caird, Samuel Roberts, Adam Schiedel and George Cyphrus; David Caird was president and Austin Gallagher, secretary of the new board. David Whitworth was chosen to be street commissioner and tax-collector. Patrick Convory, an outstanding citizen, was burgess early in the town's history. Later on, John T. Conway, Michael Fahcy, John J. Brislin and John E. Monahan were elected to borough council.

In 1880, the population of the town was 1,560 as against 724 residents according to the census taken in 1870. More than three hundred men and boys found work in and about the mines while others were employed in the Lehigh Valley Railroad shops and out on the road. Some helped to build company houses in the Old Row and the New Row.

Before any churches were built in Sugar Notch, the people had to walk to Wilkes-Barre to attend services. The Catholics, which made up the larger proportion of the populace, had a good friend in Mr. Charles Parrish the owner of the mines. He gave them permission to use the carpenter shop at Number 9 Colliery for Sunday services. Holy Mass was said twice a month. Later Mr. and Mrs. Robert Yates and Mr. and Mrs. Peter O'Donnell, who lived in a double block called the "Boarding House" offered their homes for divine service. St. Charles Borromeo's Church was built in 1875. The upper church was left unfinished and Mass was read in the lower church. Some of the stalwarts on whom Father O'Haran depended for loyal support were: Cornelius O'Donnell, Michael Farrell, Robert Yates, Peter O'Donnell, Patrick F. Caffrey, Michael Finn, James O'Brien, John J. Brislin, James Corrigan, Anthony Kane, Martin Loughney, Lawrence Dean, James Dolan and others. When immigrants from Lithuania and Poland became more numerous, they felt the need of having the gospel preached in their own languages. The

facilities of St. Charles Church were placed at their command. These faithful souls were the nuclei of the flourishing Holy Family and Saints Peter and Paul Congregations.

By 1893 there were ten hotels and restaurants, six general stores and five fancy stores in Sugar Notch. The post office was first kept in the Sugar Notch end in the company's store. In 1885, Peter T. Riley who had lost his eyes in the mines, was appointed postmaster.

Since the foot of the mountain had been undermined, All the wells and springs dried out. The water now flows out through the mines. This caused the building of the present reservoir and conducting water pipes.

### PROMINENT PERSONALITIES OF SUGAR NOTCH

Dr. J.J. Smyth was an institution in the town. He was country doctor, dentist, and druggist. His place of business was on Main Street almost across from the present Town Hall.

John J. Brislin was for many years the best-known man in these parts. A county office holder, a Justice of the Peace, a friend to everyone, he made the trip to Wilkes-Barre daily, where he cared for legal business of interest to our citizens. The only means of transportation to the city in those days was by train or by horse and carriage. He used the Lehigh Valley Railroad.

Marquis George MacDonald, of Warrior Run, had humble beginnings but he advanced to high distinction. As a boy he passed Sunday papers in Sugar Notch. Learning telegraphy, he was employed by the Lehigh Valley Railroad. At one time he was part owner of the Maffit mines here. He became one of New York's wealthy and outstanding citizens.

The Medical, Dental and Legal professions had there attractions for many Sugar Notch residents. Dr William O'Brien, who for several years was principal of the Sugar Notch Schools, studied medicine. He practiced in Philadelphia. His brother, Dr. Michael O'Brien, located in Pittsburgh. Dr. Hugh Lenahan was chief-of-staff of the Pittston Hospital. Dr. Anthony Caffrey had a large clientele in Wilkes-Barre and John Caffrey stayed in Sugar Notch.

Dentistry called Dr. James Shields away from Sugar Notch. He practiced in Philadelphia.

Attorney Patrick Thornton was the first native of Sugar Notch to practice before the Bar of Luzerne County. Two attorneys ascended to the Bench of the Court of Common Pleas, Judge Thomas Farrell and Judge Michael F. McDonald. Other attorneys were: Edward Moore, Joseph Finn, Philip P. Kane and Frank Lenahan.

Those who prepared for the teaching profession were: P.J. Caffrey, Dr. William O'Brien, Matilda Convery, Mary Finn, Joseph H. Finn, Philip P. Kane, the Honorable Michael F. McDonald, Edward Moore, John J. Love, Anna Mulholland, Anna Curley, Norah Dolan, Andrew Lenahan, Clement Lewis, and Peter Sincavage with others too numerous to mention.

#### Source of material :

History Of Luzerne County by H.C. Bradsby copyright 1893

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History of Saint Charles Forromeo's Parish by Nihil Obstat: Rev. Thomas J. McHugh, Censor librorum and Imprimatur Jerome D. Hannan, D.D., Bishop of Scranton

Population: 1960 Census- 1523 Area: 1.073 Square Miles  
Total dwelling units 487