MAUCH CHUNK

THROUGHOUT the nineteenth century businessmen erected boomtowns across the entire nation in order to develop natural resources. In Pennsylvania an abundance of anthracite and bituminous coal, iron ore, oil, slate, and timber offered the opportunity of easy exploitation if entrepreneurs would construct the necessary facilities to develop industry. Town-building was an essential part of the enterprise, for housing labor and storing supplies. These towns became commercial centers, supplying merchandise to the workers and serving as points for collecting and shipping resources to market. They required blacksmiths, carpenters, shoemakers, tailors, butchers, bakers, and other skilled craftsmen. Industries appeared in these towns in order to support the production of the resource and also for refining it into finished products. By 1900 some of Pennsylvania's boomtowns, such as Scranton, Wilkes-Barre, Hazleton, and Pottsville in the anthracite region; Williamsport in the forests of northern Pennsylvania; Oil City in the oil fields; and the steel-producing centers of Beaver Falls, Braddock, Duquesne, Homestead, Newcastle, Danville, South Bethlehem, and Steelton, became cities with populations in excess of 8,000 people. Others, such as Mauch Chunk, had 2,500 or more people and attained official
recognition as urban centers, but remained small towns. Initially these small towns, which dot Pennsylvania’s landscape, offered prospects of high profits and excited the imagination of many businessmen.

Mauch Chunk is one of Pennsylvania’s oldest and most famous boomtowns. Accounts which credit Josiah White and the Lehigh Coal and Navigation Company with establishing the town in 1818 have overlooked the initial plans of Jacob Cist, a Wilkes-Barre businessman, and his two partners, Isaac Chapman and Charles Miner. Their efforts to initiate the Lehigh coal trade during the War of 1812 are mentioned briefly in most histories of the anthracite industry as being premature and unprofitable. The manuscript collections of Jacob Cist and Isaac Chapman reveal a different story. The following documents illustrate the process of urbanization, the plans and activity of Cist and Chapman regarding Mauch Chunk (Coalville), and the fulfillment of their dreams as carried out by the Lehigh Coal and Navigation Company. Spelling, punctuation, and grammar have not been changed in order to retain the original flavor of the documents.

Springville, (Susquehanna County)
December 26, 1814

Jacob Cist, Esq.

Dear Sir

I have returned to this place and made a contract with the carpenter I mentioned to you for a short period, and have as-

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4 See Isaac A. Chapman Collection, Wyoming Historical and Geological Society (WHGS); Jacob Cist Collection, WHGS; Jacob Cist Collection, MS 152. Academy of Natural Science of Philadelphia (ANSP); Charles Fisher Wells Collection, MS 425, ANSP.

5 Springville was Chapman’s hometown. Charles Fisher Wells Collection, MS 425, ANSP.
certained that I can procure any number of good hands in this vicinity for such a turn of time as may be thought expedient. I would make a contract for a family to go directly to Lausanne but as it is not probable under your present arrangements that they could be accommodated with a house, I shall probably build one there. Before I do must at ark or boat building. My present plan is to build one which may be calculated for a store in one room and a resident family in the other with sleeping rooms above—which may answer eventually for a storehouse when a larger dwelling house shall be built. (Consider?) this view I feel much interest in such an arrangement as you may make relative to building on the Company's land. If they will grant a privilidge to build & leaving the property of the building in the builder and to be at all times transferable, so that when the lease has expired the owner of the building may sell them, or if this company will engage to take them at a valuation. In either case I will continue to build. But I think a safer way for the company, and a manner much better calculated for the interest of all, would be for the company to lay off a village plot and permit a certain number of the lots to be sold to any person who would build on them. They would thereby entice a number of mechanicks to build there, which would eventually be to the general benefit. I shall not calculate to build many boats for the Spring untill I see what quantity of coal I should likely have the opportunity to run, but be engaged in building. I shall not probably however get to work before the month of February. I request that you will be good enough to give me immediate notice what arraingement you may be able to effect relative to a privilidge for building by a letter to the Tunkhannock Post Office. . . .

Isaac A. Chapman

Springville, Susquehanna County
January 8, 1815

Jacob Cist, Esq.

I have made conditional contracts for the services of several persons here, who are acquainted with such business as will occupy us on the Lehigh. A Mr. Weston, an industrious man with

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6 Lausanne was at the mouth of Nesquehoning Creek on the Lehigh River one mile north of Mauch Chunk.
7 Isaac A. Chapman Collection, WHGS.
a small family is willing to engage in the lumber business. He has for several years been acquainted with it. His family is a very pleasant and worthy one. He possesses a good farm here which he will rent, and move on to the ground. He will be enabled to furnish his own stock, a good ox team, one or two good cows and a year's provisions in advance. He will assist in meeting the expense of purchasing timber or timber-land, and receive a proportionable part of the lumber as his compensation. To secure the advantages of such a person, I have thought proper to intimate to him that I could probably procure him an opportunity of having a share in the lumber. I therefore contemplate if it shall meet your wishes, to become connected with him in the lumber only—as a means to procure the necessary materials for building arks and boats at a much less expense than we can procure them in any other manner. I therefore propose to you (if your arrangements have not been already otherwise made) to take the house and mill for the whole time, reserving to yourself such privileges as you may wish, relative to the accommodation of workmen in the house & to have Mr. Weston attend the mill, and with the assistants of another person with him, he always ready to forward that part of the business, his team when not employed about the lumber can haul coal. He will assist me, in furnishing men in the lumber woods, to cut timber and get it down, and superintend himself that part of the undertaking. All this however is with a provision that timber can be obtained either by the purchase of the land, or otherwise on such terms as will be proper. . . .

Isaac A. Chapman

Wilkes-Barre

March 14, 1815

(Isaac A. Chapman, Lausanne)

I send as I promised you a sketch or eye view draft (it shall be surveyed when the snow is off the ground) of the small flat on the Lehigh which would admit of a small village of sufficient size to accommodate a few mechanics, viz., a blacksmith, wheelwright, shoemaker, carpenter & together with boatmen—all which it is indispensible to have on the ground and that very

Jacob Cist Collection, WHGS.
soon if the company ever intend to have their mines worked to advantage & with economy & in a regular systematic. The canal will be necessary in case the Lehigh is ever improved to enable ascending loaded boats to pass the "Horse Race". It is already made being the race dug... by McMurray for his sawmill. When finished it will afford a complete harbor where boats and arks will be protected on the breaking up of the ice and can lay ready loaded at all seasons out of the reach of accidents occasioned by sudden rises of the river.

The lower (A) & (B) parts of this flat ought to be reserved for improvements or mills hereafter to be made by the company, that is the water power or mill seats at the Horse Race and at the lower part of the canal. The Nesquehony Hill (CC) breaks off very abrupt on to the flat. It would be desirable to have the waggons discharge their loads at the top of the hill & to deliver the coal from "staiths" a a a a or through at the canal. A & D there is a hallow where teams can get up, but it would be better that the company when they once work these mines, should have their stabling on the top of the hill.

The competition which will now be experienced from the Virginia coal has alarmed my associates and I shall not be surprised if they fly the ground. Indeed I expect it, but I shall not despair if the company only sanction the arrangements necessary to be made, of rendering this property valuable to them as well as myself both as a lessee & stockholder.

(Jacob Cist)

Tinicum, (Bucks County) 10
April 4, 1815

Friend Cist

... I saw thy plan of Coal Ville when I was in Town but could not understand it for want of knowing whether it extended to the mouth of Mochunk neither could the person who had it tell whether the company land extended so far or not a point I wish to know as I conceive there might be some useful improvements made there. I also suggested the idea of making some attempt at settling some of the land by giving long leases

9 Cist was referring to Charles Miner and two other Wilkes-Barre businessmen.
10 Jacob Cist Collection, WHGS.
SKETCH OF COALVILLE (MAUCH CHUNK) by Jacob Cist

Courtesy the Wyoming Historical and Geological Society
on liberal terms for I suppose that even the land on the top of the mountain would bring Oats as I find that the glades on the mountains to the Westward are excellent for oats and I think it would be as useful a grain as could be raised in that place as cut oats and meal is the best feed that can be found for team horses at least I think the experiment worth making I also proposed the attempt of making iron with the coal for I make very little doubt of there being plenty of ore in the mountain tho Rowland and Co.\textsuperscript{11} were detered from procurating their plan from an apprehension of a want of ore and of not in the want of faith in the coal answering their expectation for Morris Robeson told me that from the experiment made at Weymouth he had not the least doubt that it will one day be brought to perfection and that it will exceed every thing hitherto used in smelting and manufactory of iron as it produced mallable iron in the first fusion. . . .

Joseph Smith

Lausanne\textsuperscript{12}
March 31, 1815

Jacob Cist, Esq.

I have this evening received yours of the 29th in which you enquire what quantity of coal I shall want dug, etc. On this subject I scarcely know what explicit answer to give. Peace (in public opinion at least) has had such an effect upon the coal business, that I may find it more difficult to raise funds than I should otherwise have done. I should perfer also to learn by experiment what effect the present state of things may have upon the business. I shall calculate to run during the present and approaching season about 140 tons, if I can procure the coal. And the quantity which I may want after another winter shall have passed, will depend on subsequent events and principally on our success in making sales. . . .

Isaac A. Chapman

\textsuperscript{11} Rowland and Butland operated a rolling and slitting mill in Kensington which produced shovels and spades. As early as 1807, they showed an interest in establishing their business either at Wilkes-Barre or in the Lehigh Valley. They remained in Philadelphia and became one of the city's leading nineteenth-century industrial establishments. Jacob Cist to Matthias Hollenback, Washington, D. C., November 13, 1807, Jacob Cist Collection, WHGS; \textit{The Manufactories and Manufacturers of Pennsylvania of the Nineteenth Century} (Philadelphia, 1854), 31.

\textsuperscript{12} Isaac A. Chapman Collection, WHGS.
Wilkesbarre\textsuperscript{13}
April 7, 1815

(ISAAC CHAPMAN)

Dr Sir

I send you enclosed a copy of Statement respecting the Lehigh Coal of which 200 have been struck off for distribution so that this ought to satisfy you that I at least have not abated in the determination to bring this coal into use & to prosecute the coal business on the Lehigh. Since the peace & the opening it presents for other pursuits I see none which promise to become so soon of as much magnitude and profit. I have received applications from two different persons for an ark load each for which they offer me 15 $ per ton—this at a time when Virginia Coal can be had at 27 cts say 7 to 8 Dr. per ton—is certainly far from discouraging.

The coal merchants on this river (Susquehanna) have got this spring 7.50 to 8, & 8.20 per ton.

If you should meet with any accident after you leave the Water Gap, Mr. Sigfriedt at Sigfriedt's ferry will be a good person to leave your coal in charge for sale or otherwise—or Wm Lattimore distiller & storekeeper, at Bethlehem John G. Paulus, lumber merchant at Allentown, the keeper of the bridge—or M Roth tavernkeeper, at Easton, Jno Nicholas tavernkeeper, or Burke & Minsell at New Hope bridge Lewis S. Coryell, at Tincum Joseph Smith, at New Hope Jacob B. Smith blacksmith, at Phila Binny & Ronaldson Typefounder will take an ark load at 15 Dr delivered at South Street wharf. White & Hazard, No 172 Arch Street will take an ark load at 50 cts per bushel—delivered at a wharf above Vine Street. Wm Thomas, at South Walnut Street wharves, will take one or 2000 bushels on commission.

Jacob Cist

Lausanne\textsuperscript{14}
May 11, 1816

(Jacob Cist)

Dear Sir

Yours of the 4th instant is arrived I regret very much that I cannot meet you in the city. My boats are afloat again, and I

\textsuperscript{13} Jacob Cist Collection, WHGS.
\textsuperscript{14} Charles Fisher Wells Collection, MS 425, ANSP.
wish once to see the novelty of a freshet at Lausanne. All our watermen prophesy a fresh soon, and the weather even this morning seems to argue it. I have so constantly been absent at high waters that I am unwilling to run off yet. I have therefore resolved to remain here most of this month for an opportunity to go down with my flats. . . . My principal wish to meet you in the city arose from an anxiety to obtain a lease from the Company of this lot which Klotz improved—to arrange the lot purchase with Dr James, &. I will pay the Co three dollars per acre annually for the rent of the lot—as long as I (am) here at least. . . .

I think it would be well for each of us to purchase a lot here. but I understand from Mr Jacob Weiss that Dr James has concluded not to have lots sold.

Isaac A. Chapman

Drumhellers

January 7, 1818

(Jacob Cist)

Dear Sir

Josiah White proprietor of the wire manufactory at the falls of Schuylkill with two other Gentlemen were last week viewing the coal mine & Lehigh. they came for that express purpose. And are much pleased with the appearance of the mine & river, especially the latter. they are anxious to have every information relative thereto, and will take a lively interest to further its immediate improvement. . . . The interest you have in the coal mine prompts me to write upon the above subject. I think it would not be amiss for you to communicate with White—with whom if I'm correct you have an acquaintance. . . .

Jacob Weiss Jr.


11 Jacob Weiss was the original promoter of the Lehigh Coal Mine Company in 1792. He was also Jacob Cist's uncle.

12 Jacob Cist Collection, WHGS.

13 For White's part in developing the Lehigh coal trade see (Josiah White), Josiah White's History Given by Himself (n.p., n.d.); Eleanor Morton, Joseph White, Prince of Pioneers (New York, 1946).
Proceeded in the morning . . . toward the landing at the Lehigh. Stopped a short time at the Beaver Meadow, at Quakake Valley, and arrived at Klotz’s, at Lausanne, about 3½ P.M. Here being informed that the gentlemen who have undertaken the improvement of the Lehigh navigation were at Lehighton, I proceeded to that place and found them at Hagenbuch’s. Spent the evening in conversation with Messrs. White, Hazard, and Hauto, on the subject of the Lehigh navigation.

Mauch Chunk
October 12, 1820

Dear Sir

I had the pleasure this morning of receiving your letter of 6th inst enclosing M. Baird’s draft of his furnace for which I am obliged to you. I have copied it and now return it enclosed. The Englishmen you mentioned made their appearance here. I went with them to the coal mine. They had to confess they never saw the like in England. They made no stop at all, but I ascertained that they are particularly visiting all the iron works they can hear of & have it in contemplation to establish themselves, in some part of the country where they can be supplied with ore & coal in an extensive iron business & transferring the hands etc from their English works. We are not without hopes that we can offer them such advantages as will induce them to fix on the Lehigh. . . .

Erskine Hazard

Susquehanna Democrat, Wilkes-Barre, January 30, 1824

The following account of Mauch Chunk is furnished by a gentleman of this county who recently visited that place. From
this will be seen the importance of coal mines, and of improving the navigation of our rivers—Montrose Gazette.\textsuperscript{22}

The Coal Mines & Mauch Chunk village are situated on the Lehigh River and Bethlehem and Berwick turnpike road 80 miles from Philadelphia and 31 from Wilkes-Barre by a road recently laid out. Many are looking forward to connecting the Lehigh and Susquehanna via water near Wilkes-Barre and the great western canal by Seneca & Cayuga Lake. . . .

The (Lehigh Coal and Navigation) company has built 54 dwelling houses (many of them stone and frame), 21 shops and stables, one furnace, one grist mill, 4 saw-mills working 8 saws, one of which has sawed 12,000 feet in 24 hours. They have also built a store the present season, a store 50 by 36 feet and a tavern 3 stories high and large in proportion, beautifully situated and furnished with conveniences to accommodate people on business & pleasure.

About 100 persons inhabit Mauch Chunk and its dependence: from 400 to 600 hands are employed by the company, plus 120 first rate horses and working oxen: they need 500 bu. of grain annually. Thus a market is created.

Pittsburgh Gazette, July 29, 1825\textsuperscript{23}

“Journey to Mauch Chunk” by Charles Miner. Copied from his paper the Village Record (West Chester, Pa.). (Miner described the growth of the coal business and the boomtown.)

The first large and elegant building is Atherton’s Hotel; . . . Three stories high, upon my word! and those double plazas give it an airy and agreeable appearance.

We found the house excellent; the beds good, the tables well

\textsuperscript{22}The anonymous author may have been Isaac Chapman, whose hometown was near Montrose and who showed continuous interest in the Lehigh coal trade until his death in 1827. He worked for the Lehigh Coal and Navigation Company in 1826-1827 as chief manager of the coal mines. Isaac Chapman, Account Book 1816-1827, Isaac A. Chapman Collection, WHGS.

\textsuperscript{23}This article appeared just one week before the Harrisburg canal convention of August 4-6, 1825, and should be viewed in light of these events. For accounts of the situation see Avard L. Bishop, “The State Works of Pennsylvania,” Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, XIII (1907), 167-205; Julius Rubin, “Canal or Railroad? Imitation and Innovation to the Erie Canal in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Boston,” Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, New Series, LI, Part 7 (1961), 15-62; H. Benjamin Powell, “Coal and Pennsylvania’s Transportation Policy, 1825-1828,” Pennsylvania History, XXXVIII (April, 1971), 134-151.
The lower rooms are devoted to business men chiefly—the sitting parlor and dining room are on the second floor. As we had been detained by business on the road it was near sunset before we arrived, but our impatience to see would admit no delay, and we walked up through the town. Several hundred buildings gradually open to your view—the streets were thronged by a multitude like a crowded wharf—the rapid dash of the saw mills; the hammers of the boat builders, the “Gee Bright” of the lumber carters, the “Who-e come hither” of the coal haulers, and the combination of a thousand other sounds “stun the glad ear,” and you stand and gaze and wonder if it be possible that all this can have been created within seven years. If such a town and place of business had grown up in New York in that time, it would have been told, repeated, echoed and re-echoed until we all should have been led to wonder at the enterprising people, and to regret that Pennsylvania was fast asleep. We venture to say that nothing in New York surpasses it—in the growth of any village—or the important business created or concentrated in one spot.

The saw mills run day and night, one set of hands working from noon to midnight, the other from midnight to noon. . . .

Saturday morning (June) the 29th—rose early and went on board a coal boat which was about to sail.

Observing on the eastern shore of the river, extensive works like a long wharf or battery, I was told it was a place in which logs, brought from the great swamp up the Lehigh, are kept. . . .

The mine itself is a wonder of the world; it is one of the greatest natural curiosities in America: On the highest point of the highest mountain in the Kittatining ridge, the indications of coal are abundant over a large tract, the mine is open to the north. As you enter, it presents an amphitheater of 100 feet wide and 500 feet long. It is worked on several benches, and the coal is broken out by bars, picks and wedges, often in pieces of a ton weight at a time. . . .

After our return we visited the boat building house—the place for weighing and unloading the coal—the foundry—the smitheries—the perpetual lime kiln—the new steam boats building—and on our way we passed through different streets, one of which, built directly over Mauch Chunk creek, is a neat row of two story buildings, numbered on each side, as in Sansom’s row, and has
MAUCH CHUNK, 1814-1825

quite a city effect. To describe every thing that is curious, would be to describe every thing we saw, and would be impossible. We ran from sight to sight with childish wonder and delight. The teams are driven under an iron arch way, and the wagon is stopped on a floor by an ingenious adjustment of levers, this floor is the bottom of a scale, and by small weights, an ounce weighing an hundred, the load is weighed in a minute, and the carter drives on. A few rods further, he drives on another floor, and stops, it is a circular rail way, and the wagon is turned round without any strain or effort; the ground now descends a little, and the wagon is backed a rod, when the horses being taken off, rings are fastened round each hub, to which chains are fastened, and by machinery turned by a horse, the whole load is raised twelve feet, and emptied into the great reservoir, with the ease that a farmer unloads a horse cart of apples. The reservoir has a bottom lined with sheet iron, is an inclined plane, and projects over the water; under this boats come, and are loaded with the utmost facility.24

There is not a starling in the great state of New York, but what is taught to cry "Rochester, Rochester," and to tell the wonders of that thriving village.25 It is well, and Mauch Chunk has scarcely been heard of; but if the works which have been done, and the ingenuity displayed at Mauch Chunk, had taken place in New York, the whole union would have resounded with it, and we, Pennsylvanians, should have raised our heads to wonder in the enterprise of our extraordinary people! I do not mean to complain of the New Yorkers, they are right. But it is just that we should look at home, realize the works that are going on in our state, and do justice to the enterprise and talents of our own citizens.


25 The population of Rochester went from 331 in 1816 to 1,502 in 1820 and reached 9,207 in 1830. For the rapid growth of Rochester see Blake McKelvey, Rochester: The Water-Power City, 1812-1854 (Cambridge, 1945).
Census of the Resident Population of Mauch Chunk

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