

A BRIEF CALL TO A GREATER HISTORY

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Much of Pennsylvania is, from a historian's point of view, invisible. Once past the Pittsburgh area and its hinterlands, the Philadelphia area and its hinterlands, and the coal regions, only an occasional article has appeared on what processes, what events, defined the lives of those who occupied the great majority of the area we call Pennsylvania. We have only a few professional articles on the West Branch of the Susquehanna and very few on the upper regions of that valley. The Allegheny River Valley only becomes visible as the Allegheny River approaches Pittsburgh. The "northern tier" counties are rarely written about. Appalachian counties such as Fulton and Sullivan have almost no presence in any professional narrative. The region along the upper Delaware River has been rarely touched upon. How many who are reading this have ever read an article that focused on Jefferson County, that touched upon why Elk County has such a large Catholic population in the midst of an overwhelmingly Protestant region, which asked why Huntingdon County's African American population, as percentage of overall population, is much larger than any of its adjacent counties? There is, in short, a scarcity of scholarly articles and books, and at times a complete lack of such articles and books, for far too much of Pennsylvania.

The paucity of scholarly works about the Juniata Valley has been among the more puzzling aspects of the way in which Pennsylvania history has been traditionally written. The main section of the Pennsylvania Mainline Canal ran the length of the valley. The main line of the Pennsylvania Railroad ran the length of the valley. The main shops for the Pennsylvania Railroad were in Altoona, railroad shops that, by the mid-twentieth century, were one of largest such complexes in the world. The region is filled with a plethora of religious groups, many of them existing in regions that also contain large

mainstream Protestant populations. Different large industries lined the banks of the Juniata River for many decades through the nineteenth century. Although it is clear that a significant number of different ethnic groups settled in the Juniata Valley, there is only limited information concerning them and no comprehensive study regarding the region's ethnic diversity.

I wrote in 1998 that historians know less about the history of the Juniata Valley than we do about the early Middle Ages. This volume of *Pennsylvania History* starts to redress this situation and for that we should be grateful. Paul Fagley addresses an item much in need of being addressed: the nascent iron industry that flourished across the region during from the late 1700s to the mid-1800s. A glance at the list of furnaces and forges cited in Fagley's article demonstrates the volume of activity in iron smelting that ranged across the Juniata region during the period of "Juniata Iron." Fagley quite properly follows the iron production in the Juniata Valley past its peak and into the twentieth century, demonstrating the vitality of the industry in the region and the way in which it shaped the culture of the Juniata Valley. Jason Wilson and Victor Hart's work on "Clark's Ferry and Tavern" demonstrates not only the social and cultural aspects of entrepreneurship in the near frontier, but also, as the narrative progresses, the many strands of economic endeavor that flourished as the national economy expanded into the valleys and plains away from the seaboard. This last point needs to be emphasized. While the Juniata Valley is today one of many "Appalachian" valleys that have become backwaters as modern engineering, modern transportation, intense urbanization, and the increasing rural-urban divisions have encouraged the mainstreams of commerce and consumption to bypass the Juniata Valley, it was not always thus. Regions such as the Juniata area shared reciprocal commerce, consumption, travel, and cultural ties with the seaboard regions of the country.

The historical integration of what is now (2016) considered "rural" and, in some ways, "separate" into the broader national culture of the nineteenth century is emphasized in Audrey Sizelove's "The History of the Tuscarora Female Seminary." Sizelove points out that "by 1838, many Young Ladies Seminaries, or Female Institutes had sprung up as attitudes about governmental support of higher education were changing in the country." As she demonstrates, the location of the Juniata Valley did not insulate its population from such changes. We know, from the continued existence of institutions such as Juniata College (Huntingdon), St. Francis at Loretto, Wilson College (Chambersburg), and Susquehanna University (Selinsgrove) that many smaller schools were established in locations distant from the major

urban regions. What we do not know is how many have existed and for how long. The presence of various small academies, “normal” schools, and colleges of various descriptions existing in areas not generally considered urban (or, today, suburban) needs to be explored. These schools may demonstrate how differentiated rural areas were but, lacking any systematic exploration, we cannot narrate the cultural and intellectual life of the “invisible” parts of Pennsylvania.

Still, even as the valley became an important part of an integrating broader economy culture and culture, it also retained the ability to nurture groups, and prosper from groups, not generally seen as being part of “mainstream” American life. The richness of life in and the centrality of that life to regions such as the Juniata can be seen in Betty Ann Landis’s discussion of Mennonite history and life in Juniata County. Landis demonstrates how an active and growing Mennonite life flourished in along the shores of the Juniata. How many “non-mainstream” groups grew and prospered in regions such as the Juniata Valley? No one knows, for no one has made the inquiry. I have already mentioned the isolated Catholic population of Elk County, but it would be difficult to believe that the Anabaptist populations scattered through the region and the Catholics of Elk County are the only “different” groups in the regions outside of the Philadelphia and Pittsburgh areas, but since, with a few exceptions, we have not looked, we do not know.

Rebecca Smith’s discussion of what was essentially a “railroad war” in Perry County points, perhaps inadvertently, to something little remembered about the Juniata Valley. It was, at one point, significantly entwined with the rhythms of contemporary life. Just as much of the rest of the country battled with the issues of railroad ownership and the economic and social structures that surrounded railroads, so did the Juniata Valley, not just in Perry County, but all across the region. There is today very little to remind us of the valley’s industrial and railroading past, but railroads and industries, many of them now little more than green mounds in the landscape, sprawled across the region. There is a sadness in the presence of such a rich industrial past slipping into the unknown and, soon, unknowable.

This edition of *Pennsylvania History* is a good first step into one of the less-noticed parts of the Commonwealth. It is, however, only a first step into a mansion with many rooms and little light. Above the “place” of these articles is the central valley that begins at the Lewistown Narrows and, above that, the upper valley that begins near the present-day town of Water Gap (between Huntingdon and Tyrone). The different eras, pre-Revolutionary,

Revolutionary, Early Republic, Ante-Bellum, and so forth, moreover, had quite different histories in the different parts of the Juniata Valley. A handful of histories and an occasional article cannot supply the backgrounds needed to develop a real history of the region. And, if the Juniata Valley, so near Harrisburg and on the main routes between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, is so unsupplied, then it surely follows that even larger areas of the Commonwealth are even less supplied. Thus this issue is doubly important: it both calls our attention to the need to explore the complex history of a particular river valley at greater length and it draws notice to how much of the state's history has been left largely untapped.

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