

## **Lewisburg's Nineteenth Century Heavy Industries**

### **I: Canal Boats and Foundries**

**by**

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During the nineteenth century, Lewisburg was home to a number of businesses that can be classified as “heavy” industries—a canal boat building firm, several foundries, a nail works, several planing mills, grain mills, a knitting factory, woolen mill, and two furniture companies. Only a few of these businesses survived past 1900 and today, most of them are long forgotten by current residents of the Lewisburg area. This is the first in a series of articles designed to rectify this situation and bring to light a lot of information about these valued firms.

#### **The Canal Boatyard**

In 1845, William Frick and Eli Slifer opened a canal boat-building operation in Northumberland. They moved the business upriver in May 1849, still in Northumberland County on the east bank of the West Branch of the Susquehanna River a mile or so below the Lewisburg bridge. That year, the business built twenty canal boats for the Pennsylvania Coal Company. Slifer, born in Chester County in 1818, had come to Lewisburg years earlier but after both parents died, he was raised by relatives in Chester County. Slifer returned to Lewisburg in 1834, served as an apprentice hat maker and then entered the canal cargo business. He was Frick's brother-in-law, having married sister Catharine M. Frick in 1840. Frick's father, John III (born 1784) was involved in the canal business at Northumberland, so it apparently was natural for his son to also take an interest in the canal.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>. On Slifer, see his concise biography on the PA State Senate website: <http://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/BiosHistory/MemBio.cfm?ID=5478&body=S>. Information on the Frick family can be accessed at <http://files.usgwarchives.net/pa/northumberland/famhist/brewboat.txt>. Both of the above sites indicate that Frick & Slifer opened for business in 1845, as does I. H. Mauser,

In April 1850, Frick & Slifer relocated yet again, this time to the mouth of Buffalo Creek at the north edge of Lewisburg, then in 1852 moved south of the creek to “its present location.” By that time, the company had erected a wharf at the mouth of Buffalo Creek and had excavated a basin above the creek bridge to hold completed boats. In July 1852, Henry Frick (William’s son) entered the business at age 25, the name of the company changing to Frick, Slifer & Company to reflect the addition. Philip Billmeyer was added to the firm a year later in 1853.<sup>2</sup>



The Frick & Slifer canal boat business is shown on the 1857 map of Lewisburg, and is the earliest depiction of this business.

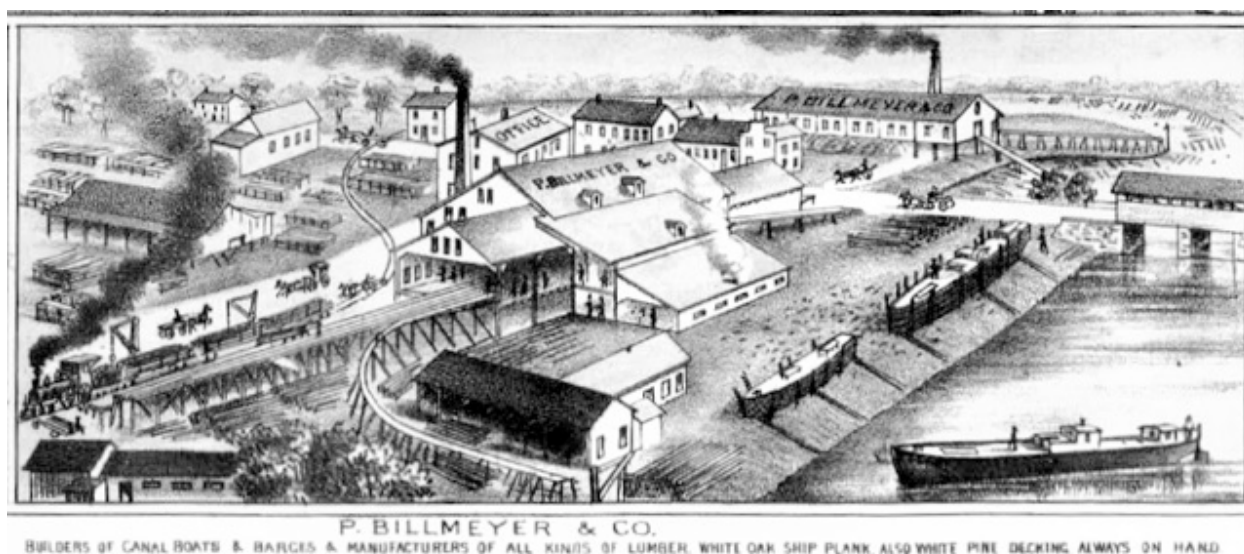
By the time the firm changed its name the employees were building 50-100 boats each year. An 1853 advertisement shows that the company was looking for 80 men to take boats from Lewisburg to New York City. In the 1850s, a story in a local newspaper

Centennial History of Lewisburg (Lewisburg: the author, 1886), 129. The May 1849 date is in “Frick, Slifer & Company,” *Home Gazette*, June 25, 1857.

<sup>2</sup> *Home Gazette*, June 25, 1857; Mauser, 129; John B. Linn, *Annals of Buffalo Valley, Pennsylvania, 1755-1855* (Harrisburg: Lane S. Hart, Printer & Binder, 1877), 551.

stated that the boats were being sold to the Pennsylvania Coal Company and the Delaware and Hudson Canal Company. Each boat measured 98 feet in length, with a 15.5-inch beam and a 6.5-foot hold. A boat weighed about 40 tons yet could haul 120 tons of cargo. Each boat was valued at about \$1,400.<sup>3</sup>

In 1853, the company erected a steam sawmill that included a 40 horsepower engine to run the saws—a large circular saw, mulay saw, scroll saw, and edger. The company is said to have used four million feet of lumber during its first year in Lewisburg. Men were needed to build boats, cut timber, and perform other tasks associated with this construction business. An 1857 story specified that the company



This is how the canal boat yard appeared on the 1884 bird's-eye view map of Lewisburg.

regularly employed 75-140 men; they earned between \$1.12.5 and \$1.50 per day. The company's five acres included 400 feet of front along the river. In addition to the sawmill and associated smaller buildings, the property was used to store piles of cut timber ready for use, stored both in wooden sheds and outdoors. The company annually purchased 50-100 rafts of lumber that were floated down the West Branch from Pennsylvania's lumber regions west of Williamsport. During the winter, the firm used 4-6 teams hauling in timber from the surrounding area. There was always a need for

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<sup>3</sup> Home Gazette, June 25, 1857; Lewisburg Chronicle, February 25, 1853.

more lumber.<sup>4</sup>

In May 1858, William Slifer left the company, which was reorganized as William Frick & Company. William Frick left in 1860, selling the boatyard and sawmill to Henry Frick and Philip Billmeyer for \$18,300. The company was now Frick, Billmeyer & Company, having added A. H. Dill and William Nogel as partners. Henry Frick departed in July 1865 and the name was changed to Billmeyer, Nogel & Company. The company's name continued to change as partners came and went:

1870—M. R. Dill added as partner

1871—George S. Matlack added as a partner

1872—Nogel departed; new partners included William D. Himmelreich and H. C. Wolfe; company name is now Billmeyer, Dill & Company

1873—M. R. Dill departed, R. O. Learch added

1880—A. H. Dill departed, firm became Philip Billmeyer & Company

Billmeyer died in September 1885 but his estate continued to manage the company, which continued under the same name for some time. By 1892, the name had changed to Himmelreich & Company.<sup>5</sup>

Over time, the company continued to improve its property. In 1870, a railroad spur was completed to connect the boatyard and sawmill with the Lewisburg & Tyrone Railroad. Two years later, the company was said to have produced a model of a

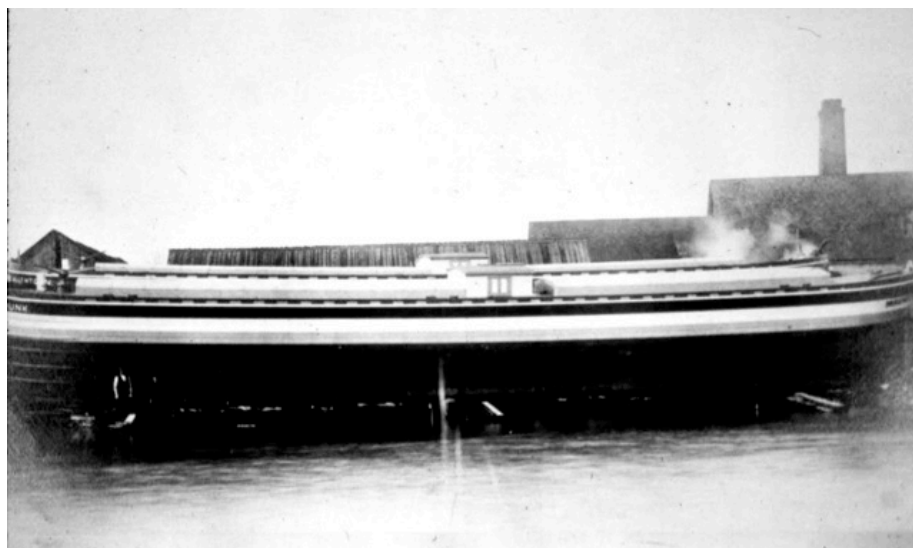
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<sup>4</sup> Home Gazette, June 25, 1857; Lewisburg Chronicle, November 19, 1852. See an advertisement for more lumber in the Union County Press, June 25, 1862, and an advertisement to buy 8-10,000 boat timbers in the Union County Star and Lewisburg Chronicle, March 29, 1864. A December 29, 1863, advertisement in the Chronicle wanted 100 men to work as wood chippers and heavers to lumber the Wrangler Tract, located some two miles from Lewisburg. The Wrangler Tract location may be a variant spelling of Rengler. The 1868 Atlas of Union & Snyder Counties Pennsylvania shows several Rangler properties between Buffalo Crossroads and Mazeppa.

<sup>5</sup> Mauser, 129-30; Union County Star and Lewisburg Chronicle, July 6, 1860; July 14, 1865; May 20, 1870; April 19, 1872; March 31, 1892. Andrew H. Dill (1836-1891) was born in Baltimore, graduated from Dickinson College in 1855, then practiced law in Gettysburg and the state of Alabama before settling in Lewisburg in 1860. Dill was a member of the state legislature and an unsuccessful candidate for governor in 1880. Dill then went to Somerset County as an attorney, then was the United States Marshall for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania until his death. He is buried in the Lewisburg Cemetery. See his obituary in the Lewisburg Chronicle, January 15, 1891. William D. Himmelreich (1842-1897) was a Union County native, born in Kelly Township. He clerked in a Cowan store, worked in the Lewisburg post office, then in the Sunbury National Bank. After he went to work with the Billmeyer firm, Himmelreich's job "consists mostly in representing its interests away from home, and he is known far and wide for his sunny disposition, and his great popularity." Himmelreich was vice president of the Union National Bank and was involved with many other area businesses. He was also an avid reader and book collector. Upon his death, Himmelreich willed funds to the First Presbyterian Church for a Sunday School library, which opened in November 1902. See a biography in the Lewisburg Chronicle, March 23, 1893, and see Lois Kalp, *A Town on the Susquehanna*, 1769-1975, with an Epilogue, 1975-1980 (Lewisburg: Colonial

proposed steam canal boat, but since this is the only extant notice, a steam canal boat was most certainly never put in production. The mid-1870s also saw the opening of a new sawmill that connected to a second basin (west of the original basin) to hold yet more logs. As a result of the new mill, the company, in late 1874, purchased the low meadow land on the north side of St. Anthony Street so there was more storage space for lumber.<sup>6</sup>

Contemporary sources for the 1870s-1890s are largely silent about how many canal boats were being built each year. The only mention of boat building is from the March 31, 1892, issue of the *Chronicle*, which mentioned that the company had just launched two boats that were going to New York City. The lack of evidence may suggest



This is one of only known images of the canal boat yard known to the author. The boat in the foreground is named *Mauch Chunk*; the name of the next one is partially obscured but reads *-runton*. This photo is undated, but a *Saturday News* article in the May 21, 1892, issue noted that photographer J. W. Cornelius had on display a number of images of the boatyard before the April fire that destroyed the main sawmill. Credit: Packwood House Museum.

that the canal boat business was in a general decline, which is not surprising because of the rapid rise of railroads during this period. Certainly by 1896 the canal boat business had ceased entirely. An article in the January 18 issue of the *Chronicle* included the

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Printing, 1980), 127-28, on his death.

<sup>6</sup> Lewisburg Chronicle, May 20, 1870; April 26, 1872; November 13, 1874; January 1, 1875.

following description of the business: “Now to the Saw Mill, the ancient Boat Yard. No boats are built here now, but the circular and muley saws still make saw dust and W. D. Himmelreich & Co. are among the most extensive dealers in lumber on the Susquehanna River.”<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, smart business decisions by the company allowed it to morph into the lumber business as the canal boat income continued its decline. In the spring of 1885, Himmelreich purchased two tracts of woodland in Jefferson County, one of 500 acres and the second with 1,100 acres. In April 1892, the company’s large sawmill, located just south of St. Anthony Street, was destroyed by fire. The 1896 Sanborn Map for Lewisburg shows that this mill had not been rebuilt, which may indicate that the company was having financial issues and perhaps in serious trouble. The last notice about the company appeared in a January 1896 Chronicle issue as noted in the previous paragraph.<sup>8</sup>

The above paragraphs accurately provide a brief history of the business started by William Frick and Eli Slifer in 1845. As can be seen, there are a lot of questions yet to be solved. The prime question is when and why the business ceased operations. The last year that the business was included in the Mercantile Appraisal list for Union County is 1883, but there is a lot of evidence that clearly shows Himmelreich & Company was active through at least 1896. Research into tax records and other related material may yield an answer to this question. Another vexing issue is the lack of photographs of the company. The image of two canal boats is one of only two photographs of the company known to the author of this article. Do any others exist? And yet, in spite of these unknowns, it is well understood that the canal boat company was one of Lewisburg’s valuable nineteenth century industries and employers.

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<sup>7</sup> Lewisburg Chronicle, March 31, 1892; “The Bucket Brigade,” Chronicle, January 18, 1896. An untitled article in the July 23, 1887, issue of the Saturday News described the operations of the saw mills but failed to include any material about boat building. One may surmise that by the 1880s boats were only built upon request, and it appears that requests for new canal boats were now few and far between. Mauser, in his 1885 book about Lewisburg, wrote that he company “does a very extensive business in building boats and barges, and in manufacturing railroad timber.” (page 130)

<sup>8</sup> Mauser, 130; Saturday News, April 18, 1885; Lewisburg Chronicle, April 21, 1892.

## Lewisburg's Oldest Foundry

In 1834, Peter Nevius and Nathan Mitchell started a small foundry business after they purchased the site of the original Methodist Church in Lewisburg, near the intersection of South Water and St. Louis streets. By the time the foundry was purchased by Samuel Geddes and James S. Marsh in early 1848, it was known as the Lewisburg Foundry. The new owners promoted the Hathaway Stove, for which they had the authority to manufacture by the inventor. In February 1851, Marsh purchased Geddes's share of the foundry.<sup>9</sup>



James S. Marsh's Lewisburg Foundry and Agricultural Works placed this ad for a stove in the April 5, 1861, issue of the Union County Star and Lewisburg Chronicle.

In the spring of 1852, Marsh added several partners—Joseph W. Shriner, Elisha C. Marsh, and Frederick Marsh—and the firm became Geddes, Marsh & Company. The new firm switched production from stoves to agricultural implements, ornamental iron, railings, and mill gearings. The farm equipment included the Hussey reaper, Ross Patent Drill, Cumming's Feed Cutter as well as ploughs. In April 1855, Elisha Marsh withdrew from the firm, which now included Samuel Geddes, James S. Marsh, Joseph

<sup>9</sup> Home Gazette, May 21, 1857; Lewisburg Chronicle and West Branch General Advertiser, March 24, 1848; February 26, 1851. The Methodist Church building was erected in 1818; the congregation built a more substantial church on Third Street in 1832 (Mauser, 88, 90). The 1851 Chronicle story cited states that Marsh bought out Geddes, yet the firm continued with Geddes's name until 1858, according to stories about the business printed in the Chronicle.

W. Shriner, and Frederick Marsh, as Geddes, Marsh & Shriner.<sup>10</sup>

The foundry was reorganized in September 1858, when Geddes, Marsh & Shriner was dissolved by mutual consent and renamed James S. Marsh & Company. The company continued its steady growth, enlarging its property in order to manufacture Valley Chief reapers. In June 1860, the firm's name became the Lewisburg Foundry and Agricultural Works. Marsh's partners included Elisha Shorkley, C. C. Shorkley, and Peter Beaver. The foundry continued its steady work, in spite of occasional accidents, the most serious of which took place on March 28, 1862. Sparks from the foundry's smokestack blew onto the roofs of the company's tin and pattern shops, which burned to the ground and had to be rebuilt.<sup>11</sup>

In March 1872, Marsh purchased the foundry and became its sole owner. An employee of the *Lewisburg Chronicle*, which at the time was located a short distance to the west near the courthouse, visited the foundry in March 1878 and described it in detail as follows:

We found this establishment, in every department, running at the top of its speed, and piles upon piles of reaper sections in different stages of manufacture, stacked everywhere. The moulding room is one hundred feet square, and is one of the liveliest places in this neck of the woods. To get through that part safely, without getting sand in one's eyes, or having his shins burned, requires nice traveling, and a duly sober condition. This is, we believe, the largest moulding room in this section. Then there are the other adjuncts. The machine shop is a vast hive of wheels, belts, and the endless numbers of machines which they drive. Although this would seem amply large for an establishment of this character, the workmen have no extra room to indulge in a waltz, other than that which their duty requires. Above this shop is where the wood-work is constructed; and to keep up with the iron "butchers" below, these faithful artizans [sic], although quite numerous, have no time to throw away. The blacksmith shop conveniently located, has been recently enlarged, and here a large number of the disciples of Vulcan are also busy, breathing gentle zephyrs into their brilliant furnaces, and punishing their anvils at a fearful rate. Then come the paint shops, which are spacious and pleasant, and well stocked with men who understand how to put the finishing touches on the machinery sent to them. The pattern rooms are also ample, but they are not so lively, just now, as the energies of all hands are taxed to their utmost to manufacture articles over pattering [sic] already on hand.

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<sup>10</sup> Home Gazette, May 21, 1857; Lewisburg Democrat, May 18, 1852; Lewisburg Chronicle, April 13, 1855.

<sup>11</sup> Lewisburg Chronicle, October 1, 1858; November 5, 1859; June 15, 1860; April 1, 1862.



Across the street from the works are three very large sheds nearly filled with reapers and stacks of supplies, while more are constantly being added. And near by is the business office, where Mr. D. S. Kremer and several of Mr. Marsh's sons are apparently trying to beat each other in the "ruination" of white paper. The amount of stationery used up in this office is immense, as we have good reason to know.

On inquiry, we ascertained that Mr. Marsh now employs more men than he did since 1869. Five tons of metal are melted daily for the manufacture of reapers (this being the special business of this establishment). The stack of the boiler furnace has recently been raised, and a new and superior engine is in process of manufacture.

We understand that this manufactory will be compelled to work up to its utmost capacity to get out enough machines for the coming harvest. The western demand for them is great and increasing. In some sections, the farmers desire no other machine. This speaks well for Lewisburg, and more especially for our esteemed neighbor.<sup>12</sup>

The Marsh foundry was the height of its business when the end came suddenly on September 13, 1878. Early that morning, a fire broke out, and in spite of the exertions of the firemen, the blaze completely destroyed the moulding rooms, machine shop/woodworking shop building, blacksmith shop, and painting/woodworking shop. The second story of the office, located across St. Louis Street, also was destroyed, together with a small frame house belonging to a neighbor. The firm's loss was estimated at around \$100,000. About 200 reapers, stored in one of the wooden sheds, survived the flames. The payroll included the names of 180 men, who all lost their means of employment. Several men also lost their personal tools in the fire. Marsh immediately made an assignment for the benefit of his creditors to forestall any lawsuits against the company. It was probably the combination of paying off his debts, the inadequate insurance coverage (Marsh had \$10,500 in coverage), and the lack of capital that led to Marsh's decision not to rebuild the foundry.<sup>13</sup>

## **The Enigmatic Foundry**

A second foundry in Lewisburg opened in 1847. Its owners were Levi B. Christ

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<sup>12</sup> Lewisburg Chronicle, March 8, 1872; "What Neighbor Marsh is Doing," March 14, 1878.

<sup>13</sup> "Disastrous Fire," Lewisburg Chronicle, September 19, 1878. Harry Marsh purchased the Marsh foundry site for \$2,445 at a sheriff's sale in December 1882 (Chronicle, December 14, 1882).

and D. S. Bogar. In August 1849, Bogar left the firm and was replaced by Jackson McFaddin a month later. McFaddin died in June 1851; George A. Frick became co-owner with Christ in July. The partnership was dissolved on June 24, 1853, and the foundry was advertised for sale later that summer.<sup>14</sup>

None of the articles reporting on the foundry included a location. A February 1851 article noted that Christ & McFaddin had added a large 2-story warehouse, but again no location was given. The sale notice listed a “large brick foundry built six years ago.” The size was 80x60 feet and two stories high. The warehouse was 40x30 feet in size, with an attached 16x20 office. Based on the fact that the firm established in 1860 (Slifer, Walls & Shriner) leased the Frick & Lilley foundry, the building was located on



*Market Street - from Sixth Street - West.*

This 1885 photo shows the foundry building located on the northwest corner of Market and Sixth streets. The structure was erected in 1847 by Christ & Bogar. It was open from 1847-1853, then reopened in 1860 by Slifer, Walls, Shriner & Company, who ran the foundry from 1860-1864 before moving to North Second Street. Afterwards, this building was home to a planing mill, served temporarily as the armory for the local national guard company, and then as home to the Lewisburg Novelty Works before burning to the ground in 1904. A new brick building replaced the old 1847 building in 1908 and today houses the Town Tavern. Credit: Packwood House Museum.

<sup>14</sup> Lewisburg Chronicle and Union County General Advertiser, September 18, 1847; August 22, October 10, 1849; July 9, 1851; July 1, August 5, 1853.

the northwest corner of Market and Sixth. So now we know that the building that preceded the current Town Tavern structure was erected in 1847.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Short-Lived Foundry**

In February 1857, William Frick and John Lilley formed a partnership and started a foundry business in the old Christ & Bogar building at Market and Sixth. Thirteen months later, the partnership dissolved when Frick withdrew and advertised that the foundry was for sale (he must have been the senior partner and owner). The *Chronicle* announced that Lilley would continue the business for “a while.” In November 1859, the *Chronicle* noted that the foundry would be sold at sheriff’s sale on December 19; since there seems to be no subsequent notice that a sale was successful, we may assume that there was no interest in the business. After all, any buyer would be competing with the James S. Marsh foundry across town. The inability to compete with Marsh may likely have been the cause of Frick and Lilley’s failure. The foundry building was leased in 1860 by yet another hopeful foundry enterprise.<sup>16</sup>

### **Slifer, Walls, Shriner & Company**

In the fall of 1860, several prominent Lewisburg residents—Eli Slifer, Johnson Walls, Joseph W. Shriner, Samuel Geddes, Thomas Murray—formed a partnership and leased the Frick & Lilley foundry building at Market and Sixth streets. The new partnership was called Slifer, Walls, Shriner & Company and specialized in agricultural implements, a direct competitor with James S. Marsh’s foundry. The new business was called the Central Foundry and Machine Shop. The company secured the right to build the famous Buckeye Reaper and Mower, making it their chief specialty. In 1861, the firm produced about 100 of these machines, together with clover hullers, fodder cutters,

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<sup>15</sup> Lewisburg Chronicle, February 12, 1851; August 5, 1853; February 16, 1882.

<sup>16</sup> Lewisburg Chronicle, February 6, 1857; March 5, 1858; November 28, 1859; Mauser, 130. The sources have various discrepancies. William Frick is listed as one of the founders of this business, but in the *Chronicle* of November 28, 1859, it is George A. Frick and John Lilley who are identified as the owners. This article also has the foundry building on South Sixth Street.

and other related implements. The firm's business doubled in 1862 and then again in 1863, severely crowding their limited space on Market Street.<sup>17</sup>

To remedy the lack of space, in 1864 the company purchased the Lewisburg Planing Mills property at the corner of St. John and North Second streets. This mill had opened in the later 1850s but was idle when it was sold to the foundry. A September 1865 article in the Chronicle detailed the business for its readers:

The front is on Second Street, extending 266 feet by 157 feet on St. John's St. . . . The foundry building, 80 by 30 feet, is capable of turning out the castings for ten Buckeyes per day. The cupalo is on an entirely new plan, and was designed by Mr. Stocker, the foreman of that department. Its peculiarity consists in its being square (instead of round) and in the

**Buckeye Reaper & Mower,**  
Manufactured by  
**SLIFER, WALLS, SHRINER & CO.,**  
Central Foundry, Lewisburg, Pa.

**T**HE Buckeye Reaper & Mower was introduced in 1858, and so perfectly was it adapted to the work designed that at the Greatest Practical Field Trial ever held in this country, in July of the same year, at Syracuse, it triumphantly carried off the

**Grand Gold Medal and Diploma!**

At the Indiana State Trial, held at Laporte, in 1858, nearly as many machines were represented and as thoroughly tested as at Syracuse, and the

**Buckeye was again the Victor!**

And so also at nearly all the field trials and exhibitions in 1858, '59 and '60, when it was a competitor. At a number of exhibitions it received the First Premium as a Mower, First Premium as a Reaper and First Premium as a Combined Machine. These numerous awards prove conclusively the correctness of the decision at Syracuse.

The combined opposition of the manufacturers of Mowing and Reaping Machines and their efforts to crush and to bring into disrepute the Buckeye, only served to prove its **SUPERIORITY**; and the tears they entertained of its final success and triumph were evidences of the real worth and merit of the machine.

The Machine has now passed through four harvests, and during the last three over Nine Thousand have been built and sold—and the farmer may judge of its reputation by the numerous awards made by committees both at field trials and at State and County Exhibitions, as well as from the numerous demands, which the manufacturers have never yet been able to supply.

**Slifer, Walls, Shriner & Co.,**  
Manufacturers of Bullock's Patent Mower and Reaper, Buckeye Reaper & Mower, Darling's Patent Horse Power, Willson's Patent Fodder Cutter, Roubin's Patent Iron Plow, and Michigan Double Plow; also, Stoves and Castings of all kinds.  
*Central Foundry and Machine Shop, Corner Sixth and Market streets, Lewisburg, Union Co., Pa.*  
Nov. 9, 1860.

This ad for the Buckeye Reaper that was manufactured by the Central Foundry and Machine Shop appeared in the Union County Star and Lewisburg Chronicle issue of November 9, 1860.

manner in which the blast is applied, which not understanding, we shall

<sup>17</sup> Union County Star and Lewisburg Chronicle, October 5, 1860; September 22, 1865; Mauser, 130.

not attempt to describe; suffice it to say, however, the cupalo works first rate, and the molten iron comes out of it in the best condition for filling the moulds or making a novice get out of its reach.

Passing from the foundry we enter the smith-shop, 40 by 25 feet, containing six fires, supplied with wind by a fan which never gets tired blowing. Here the brawny arms of the stalwart smiths make the sparks fly in such a manner that we cut our stay short.

Adjoining is the main shop, which is 70 by 57 feet, two storeys high, with a cellar under the whole. Entering the cellar first, we find the engine and boilers. The latter are supplied with Ashcroft's steam gauge, which shows at a glance how much pressure of steam is on the bellows. The engine drives a rotary pump capable of throwing one hundred gallons of water per minute, and fireing [sic] a three-quarter inch stream ninety feet away from the pump. In the cellar are stored the castings, each kind by itself, which are elevated to the floor above by steam, as they are required. Going up to the first floor, we find lathes, drill presses, planers for iron and wood, saw, both circular and scroll, boring machines, bolt cutters, punching and shearing machines, and small tools too numerous to mention, all to perfect and expedite their work. Many of these machines were designed and built in their shops, and with their automatic movements do their work very rapidly, and much more perfectly than can be done by hand. On the second floor Mr. Fore-Plane reigns supreme, for here the space is all devoted to the wood work. There is no machinery on this floor except one circular saw.

Descending we pass out into the paint shop, 52 by 35 feet. Here the admirable finish for which the Central Foundry is so noted is put on their machines. The machines pass out into the sheds, which are 24 feet wide by 400 feet long, and are stored until shipped.

We now find ourselves in the rear of the office and ware-room, 86 feet long by 16 wide and learn that from employing fifteen hands and building one hundred machines, this firm now employs on an average fifty-five hands, and can turn out from two to three thousand Buckeyes in a year. The foreman of this establishment, Mr. S. D. Bates, is a gentleman in every way qualified to conduct a business of this kind. He is a thorough machinest [sic], and has been eminently successful in the management of this establishment.<sup>18</sup>

In 1866, the company was incorporated as the Slifer, Walls & Shriner Manufacturing Company with capital stock worth \$75,000. The company was very financially successful; by 1867 the firm had paid \$32,000 in dividends in addition to the

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<sup>18</sup> Lewisburg Chronicle, September 22, 1865. The reporter misspelled "cupola." A cupola furnace is a vertical furnace used in foundries to melt iron. The traditional shape was round, not square, hence the reporter felt he had to comment on the unusual shape of the Central Foundry furnace.

original \$10,000 used to start the foundry. Shriner and Geddes left the company in 1867 and Johnson Walls died, leaving Eli Slifer the only original owner (Thomas Murray had left in 1863). W. C. Duncan, John Randolph, and Samuel D. Bates had come into the partnership in the 1860s. In 1880, the firm became the Central Manufacturing Company, a name chosen to honor the firm's original name. By that time, even though the improved Buckeye Reaper was still a best-seller, the company had begun to manufacture the Bates Harvester, in addition to stoves, ranges, and other agricultural implements.<sup>19</sup>

In 1880, A. H. Dill was the firm's president, Duncan was treasurer, Jonathan Wolfe superintendent of agencies, J. W. Zeller secretary, S. H. Slifer general agent. S. D. Bates was the mechanical superintendent. Although very little information about the company's growth was included in the local newspapers, it seems that there was steady growth in the 1870s and 1880s. The company motto was "the best material and careful workmanship." A variety of products were shipped far and wide; in February 1890, an order of cataract washing machines was bound for Australia.<sup>20</sup>

But there must have been some underlying problems that went unreported by the local press, for in July 1891 the foundry was closed by the Union County sheriff, who announced that the company's assets would be sold at public sale on August 4. S. D. Bates purchased most of the foundry's assets and reopened the business in January 1892. Although details are not forthcoming, it seems that by the time the foundry reopened, the manufacture of agricultural implements had become a thing of the past. A February 1892 advertisement informed readers of the Chronicle that the company was making terra cotta drainpipes, among other useful items.<sup>21</sup>

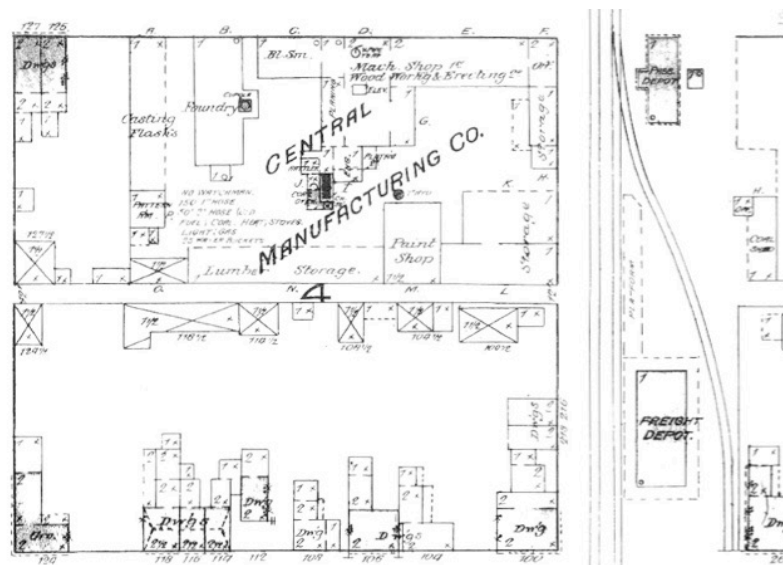
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<sup>19</sup> Mauser, 130-1; Lewisburg Chronicle, September 23, 1880; February 16, 1882. Samuel D. Bates (1833-1906) hailed from Vermont and was a machinist by trade. He relocated to Lewisburg at an unspecified date and went to work for Slifer, Walls & Shriner. Bates served in two Civil War militia units, was a member of the Lewisburg town council, a school director, and served on the boards of the Nail Works, Bridge Company, and was superintendent of the Water Works. Bates was elected to the Pennsylvania Senate in 1889 and 1891. See his all too brief biography at <http://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/BiosHistory/MemBio.cfm?ID=4678&body=S..> This biography wrongly credits Bates as the inventor of the Buckeye Reaper. The Lewisburg Chronicle of January 5, 1907, has an obituary.

<sup>20</sup> Lewisburg Chronicle, February 16, 1882; February 27, 1890.

<sup>21</sup> Lewisburg Chronicle, July 30, August 5, 1891; January 20, February 18, 1892; Lewisburgh Saturday News, August 8, 1891.

Bates changed the name of the company to the Central Electric & Foundry to indicate the changes that were taking place as the company switched to the manufacture of dynamos to make the new-fangled electricity available to potential customers. By



This is the layout of the Central Manufacturing Company in 1885, as shown on that year's Sanborn Map.

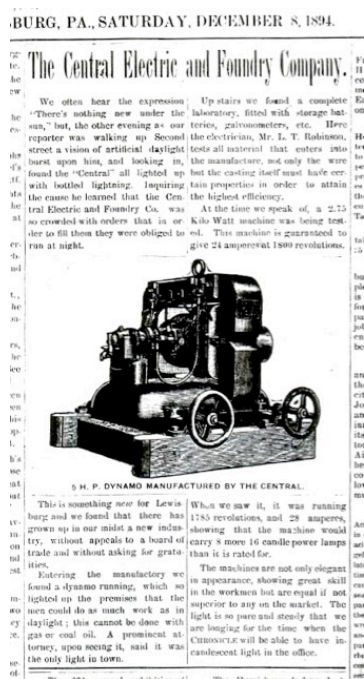
late 1894, a local reporter was able to write that the company was so busy that the men worked at night, the old foundry building aglow with its own dynamo. In 1896, Magee Carpet contracted with Central Electric & Foundry for a 600-light dynamo; the same news story reported that a 300-light dynamo had been delivered to a customer in Elizabeth City, North Carolina. The company was also building a three horsepower machine for the laboratory at Bucknell University.<sup>22</sup>

However, just like Marsh's foundry, the Central Electric & Foundry met a sudden end when the cupola caught fire on Friday afternoon, April 6, 1900. A stiff wind from the north quickly fanned the flames; at one point, at least sixteen buildings in Lewisburg were on fire as sparks spread all the way to Market Street. Among the structures affected were the Baker House, parsonage of the Christian Church, the Music Hall, and the Beaver Block (northeast corner of Market and Third streets). Lewisburg's valiant fire fighters alerted neighboring departments. But the local men were able to contain the flames and only the foundry buildings and a barn on the Sheller estate were total

<sup>22</sup> Lewisburg Chronicle, December 8, 1894; August 8, November 21, 1896; Lewisburg Journal, November

losses.<sup>23</sup> The connection with Elizabeth City, NC, is interesting. Some additional research might reveal an old central Pennsylvania connection. Palemon John, the Quaker owner/editor of the Bloomsburg Republican during the Civil War, sold the paper after the war and moved to Elizabeth City, where he encouraged northern investment in the battered northeastern corner of North Carolina. John sent copies of his North Carolinian newspaper that he founded across the Northeast to entice development money. There may be a link between John's efforts and a Carolinian manufacturing order to a distant Lewisburg foundry.<sup>24</sup>

Even though the Central Electric & Foundry had insurance coverage, Bates did not rebuild. In May 1900, Cam Young, Ira Catherman, and Frank Dietrich purchased



The *Lewisburg Chronicle* issue of December 8, 1894, depicted a dynamo manufactured by the Central Electric & Foundry.

the pattern shop and patterns from the company and announced that they would move the foundry building to a vacant lot owned by R. A. Lawshe on the northeast corner of North Fifth and St. John streets, then add a blacksmith shop. The New Central Foundry

15, 1893; November 20, 1896.

<sup>23</sup> Lewisburg Chronicle, April 7, 1900; Lewisburg Journal, April 13, 1900.

<sup>24</sup> See Richard A. Sauers and Peter Tomasak, *The Fishing Creek Confederacy: A Story of Civil War Draft Resistance* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2012), 142, 208 n3, 213 n8.



opened in July, with S. D. Bates acting as secretary and treasurer of the new firm.

“The shop is thoroughly equipped to do all kinds of machine work, and especial attention will be given to repair work.” The physical plant of the New Central Foundry was much smaller than its predecessor. A May 1902 advertisement in the Chronicle is the last notice about the company that this author has seen in local newspapers. The foundry appeared on both the 1906 and 1913 Sanborn maps. The 1913 map indicated that the blacksmith shop was closed. The next available Sanborn map is dated 1925; the foundry building was still standing but marked as “not used.”<sup>25</sup>

The author hopes that the information presented in this article helps readers understand the histories of the five business firms included here. These firms ceased operations long before it became fashionable to preserve company archives and papers. As a result, there are no records that certainly would have provided much useful information about these businesses. The notes to this article show that much of the information was gleaned from local newspapers. These repositories of local history do not tell the entire story, for they were written and printed for readers who knew where buildings were located and did not print information that the editors assumed people took for granted. Over one hundred years later, these omissions force modern researchers to look for connections between widely-spaced articles and blurbs in an attempt to piece together the histories of businesses that were the backbone of local pride.

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<sup>25</sup> Lewisburg Journal, July 13, 1900; Lewisburg Chronicle, May 31, 1902.