

The Grubbs, The Colemans, and The Iron Industry in Pennsylvania

The Grubb family were iron-masters in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, for over 165 years. Back in 1677, John Grubb came from Cornwall, U.K., settled in Delaware, and established a tannery. He had nine children, the last of whom, Peter Grubb, was a mason. Peter first learned stonemasonry as a trade, building a water, corn, and boulting mill in Bradford, Pennsylvania in 1729. Around a decade later, in 1737, he discovered the Cornwall ore hill – also known as the Cornwall Iron Mines, one of the richest iron ore deposits east of Lake Superior, in Lebanon County, about 21 miles north of Lancaster. There, Peter built the Cornwall Iron Forge and two forges nearby on Hammer Creek, called the Upper and Lower Hopewell Forges. Most of the property was eventually sold over to Robert Coleman, a former clerk of the Grubbs', who maintained the forges until his own forge, Speedwell Forge, was shut down. The forges produced at least 250 tons of materials in the year 1833.

Peter had two sons: Peter Grubb Jr. and Curtis Grubb, both of whom inherited the ironworks after Peter's death in 1754. After the lease had expired, the two took over the business and expanded it. Curtis Grubb, the older of the siblings, received the larger portion of the inheritance. However, due to issues, such as remarriage, all of Curtis' portions were eventually sold over to Robert Coleman by his children. Peter Grubb Jr., the younger of the siblings, received the smaller portion. Peter Grubb Jr. was more experienced in iron-masonry than his brother and made up for his smaller portion size by taking over the nearby Hopewell Forges, where he manufactured bar-iron from the pig-iron his brother had produced at Cornwall Furnace. Together, at the Cornwall Ironworks, the brothers made significant contributions to the American Revolutionary War, supplying munitions. Most of the Ironworks fell out of their hands before the 18th century to Robert Coleman.

What was left was eventually expanded upon by Peter Grubb Jr.'s second son, Henry Bates Grubb. Henry was often considered the first "true" iron-master. Along with his heirs, he rebuilt the family business. He and his brother, Alan Burd Grubb, inherited their father's holdings of the industry. Legal complications between their father, uncle, and Robert Coleman, had become contentious so much a jury was required to split up the holdings. They received Hopewell Furnace and their father's furnace at Mount Hope, as well as full access to the iron mines at Cornwall to extract whatever materials they needed for the operations at their furnaces. Henry's contributions made the Grubb family iron industry one of the largest producers in Pennsylvania over the next century. He built the Mount Vernon Furnace on Conewago Creek and purchased the Hellan Iron works, renaming it the Corodus Forge. Henry had also agreed to partition the common holdings between himself and Robert Coleman in order to pay off his brother.¹

Among the members of the Grubb family, both past and present, probably the most locally active of them was Paul Grubb Sr.. Paul M. Grubb was born 22 July 1897 to Aaron and Ida Grubb.² In his 98 years of life, Grubb left quite an impact on Elizabethtown, through involvement with the schools, church, chamber of commerce, college, and many more areas within the community.³ He actually sang in the choir and taught Sunday School at his church as well.⁴ In his personal life, Grubb was the owner of Grubb Supply Company, and he was associated with the business from 1928 to 1985.⁵ He had 8 siblings, only one of them outliving him, and one son who sadly passed 11 years prior to his own death.⁶ He is survived by 22 grandchildren and 23 great

¹ *Forges and Furnaces*, collection 212, accessed November 20, 2017,

http://hsp.org/sites/default/files/legacy_files/migrated/findingaid212foragesandfurnaces.pdf. Collection, 212.

² "Paul M Grubb, Sr," Find A Grave, 29 April 2006, accessed 15 November 2017, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/14117674#>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ "A Tribute to Paul M. Grubb '24," *Elizabethtown Magazine*, Winter 1997, accessed 15 November 2017, <https://archive.org/stream/elizabethtown1997eliz#page/n0/mode/2up/search/grubb>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ "Paul M Grubb, Sr."

grandchildren.⁷ His lasting legacy lives on through both his descendants and his years of influence in Elizabethtown.

In 1946, during the remodeling of the Student Alumni Gymnasium-Auditorium, Grubb served on the College Alumni Memorial Committee which was to plan the erection of the Alumni Field House.⁸ His committee however, did more than expected and also contributed to the remodeling of the gymnasium to incorporate a memorial for those students who fought in WWII.⁹ Grubb ended up becoming the convocation chairman as well through his connection with the committee.¹⁰ In 1950, Grubb represented Elizabethtown while several surrounding towns planned to merge their schools into Elizabethtown Area School District.¹¹ He was then also instrumental in acquiring twenty five acres of farmland from a surrounding farm to build the school.¹²

Five years later, as a member of the Church of the Brethren, Grubb contributed to yet another construction as a member of the building committee for a new Church of the Brethren.¹³ Grubb was also a member of the Rotary Club on the Campus, which he had almost never missed a meeting of, for over forty-seven years.¹⁴

Aside from his many efforts to build a structure or help create something, Grubb additionally aided in efforts to stop a munitions factory from being built which would ultimately destroy 186 farms across multiple townships.¹⁵ Shortly after Pearl Harbor, members of the United States Army surveyed farmland in and around Elizabethtown looking for land to appropriate for construction of a large munitions complex. They chose large pieces of land across multiple townships, proposing they destroy 1,260 acres of farmland.¹⁶ Farmers panicked when these plans were made public and the citizens of the affected areas gathered to plan out a solution. They decided on sending a delegation to try to convince the Army to reconsider.¹⁷ In 1942, Grubb represented Elizabethtown among the group which went to the War Department to convince them to abandon this placement of the factory.¹⁸ He and the rest of the delegation successfully swayed the Colonel who was responsible for the plans, saving those countless farms and restoring morale in the towns which would have been effected.¹⁹ They did this by proposing many alternative areas for the complex, but the Colonel was only convinced when he received a telegram explaining how the people were gathered, praying for this delegation's success in changing the Colonel's mind.²⁰ He was moved by this, and finally decided to appeal to the citizens' request.²¹

On multiple occasions Grubb, a member of the Elizabethtown College Board of Trustees, presented the keys of a newly constructed building on campus to the president himself.²² One instance was during the opening of Meyer Hall in 1957. Grubb, who served as Chairman of the Building Committee, presented the keys to Meyer Hall to the President during the dedication ceremony.²³ Another event in which Grubb presented a building's keys to the president was during the dedication of an addition to the library in 1965. Grubb had the honor of doing this because he was again a Chairman of the Building and Grounds Committee.²⁴ His house was also bought by the college in the winter of 1960 to be used as a woman's dormitory, but it was later decided for it to

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Schlosser, Ralph W. History of Elizabethtown College, 1899-1970. Elizabethtown, PA: Elizabethtown College, 1971, 203.

⁹ Ibid, 203.

¹⁰ Ibid, 203.

¹¹ MacMaster, Richard K. Elizabethtown: The First Three Centuries. Morgantown, PA: Masthof Press, 1999, 242.

¹² Ibid, 242.

¹³ Ibid, 260.

¹⁴ Betty Weirich, Rotary Recognizes a Man of Many Talents

¹⁵ MacMaster, 236.

¹⁶ Ibid, 236.

¹⁷ Ibid, 236.

¹⁸ Ibid, 236.

¹⁹ Ibid, 236.

²⁰ Ibid, 236.

²¹ Ibid, 236.

²² Williamson, Chet. Uniting Work and Spirit: A Centennial History of Elizabethtown College. Elizabethtown, PA: Elizabethtown College Press, 2001, 198, 254.

²³ Schlosser, 198.

²⁴ Schlosser, 254.

be the house of the president of the college.²⁵ Its purpose was then changed again to house the admissions program.²⁶ Overall it can be said that Paul Grubb had a tremendous influence on Elizabethtown and its college.

Besides the Grubbs, who were quite influential in the iron industry in early Pennsylvania, one of the most famous industrialists of the time was Robert Coleman. Much can be said for Pennsylvania's first millionaire.²⁷ Coleman was born 4 November 1748 in County Donegal, Ireland.²⁸ He migrated to America in 1764 and took up a job as a clerk.²⁹ Nine years after his initial settling in Pennsylvania, he acquired a lease on Salford Forge.³⁰ He found a profitable market in the production of cannonballs and shot which provided him with a sizeable wealth.³¹ Much of this wealth was used to purchase shares of different iron forges and furnaces in Pennsylvania. Coleman bought shares of Cornwall Furnace, Elizabeth Furnace, Upper and Lower Hopewell Forges, and ownership of Speedwell Forge.³² After years of profiting from them, Coleman purchased eighty percent of Cornwall Furnace, the entire Elizabeth Furnace, and the ore mines near Cornwall Furnace. He also built Colebrook Furnace around the same time, bringing the total number of forges he owned to six.³³ Soon after he acquired these forges, his family decided to move to Lancaster and settled there in 1809.³⁴ With the ownership of these forges, he was able to bring in an extraordinary amount of money, quickly making him the first millionaire in the history of Pennsylvania.³⁵ His four sons inherited the fortune and furnaces and they continued their father's legacy until February 11, 1883 when it was shut down.³⁶

The most well-known of the Pennsylvania iron forges was Cornwall Furnace. Peter Grubb founded the furnace in 1734 after buying 300 acres of land rich in magnetite iron ore.³⁷ At the time, many who owned iron furnaces smelted iron into impure products due to their furnaces not having enough heat to efficiently melt the iron. Grubb solved this problem with a thirty-foot-high blast furnace which provided a much better supply of heat.³⁸ The furnace was made of sandstone and more common stone, separated by a layer of clay and mortar.³⁹ The structure was similar to an elongated, geometrically shaped teardrop on the inside. This allowed for charcoal to be fed in from the top and iron ore to be placed in a crucible in the wide bottom for a concentrated blast of heat. An air duct was used to pump air by use of a water wheel into the bottom of the furnace, stoking the fire tremendously. This incoming air would elevate the temperature from 2,600°F to 3,000°F, making for a much more efficient process of melting and purifying ore.⁴⁰ Between the 1840s and 1850s, long after Robert Coleman had already bought the furnace and his children had inherited it, Cornwall Furnace was remodeled to compete with the new anthracite coal furnaces. The air duct was remade to incorporate a dual-piston system to more uniformly pump air into the furnace.⁴¹ The water wheel was also replaced by the steam engine in 1841.⁴²

Molten iron could be utilized in two ways. It would be either formed into crude ingots or poured into molds for stoves, cannons, or other rigid objects. The crude ingots would be taken elsewhere to be refined into quality wrought iron.⁴³ The crude ingots, called pig iron due to their irregular shape, as well as cast iron were too brittle to be used for the creation of products needing to be stress and impact resistant. However, cast iron was

²⁵ Schlosser 194.

²⁶ Benowitz, Jean-Paul. Elizabethtown College. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2014, 26.

²⁷ "Robert Coleman (industrialist)," Wikipedia, last modified 31 December 2016, accessed 15 November 2017, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Coleman_\(industrialist\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Coleman_(industrialist)).

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Sharon Hernes Silverman, "A Blast From The Past: Cornwall Iron Furnace," Pennsylvania Heritage, 1998, accessed 15 November 2017, <http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/portal/communities/pa-heritage/blast-from-past-cornwall-iron-furnace.html>.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

still a suitable material for cannon barrels.⁴⁴ To make objects which needed to be resistant to these factors, workers used wrought iron. This was the strongest type of iron which could be made, and it was used largely for horseshoes, plates, bars, and nail rods.⁴⁵ In 1750 England passed the Iron Act to encourage the importation of these colonial iron products due to the burden which was their dependence on iron from Sweden.⁴⁶ This was very good for the American iron industry, even though the Iron Act put restrictions on the building of forges and furnaces. These restrictions were largely ignored so there was little opposition to the Act.⁴⁷

Around the time of the end of the civil war, fortune began favoring the Colemans less and less. There was much more competition with the British iron industry, which effected the majority of American forges.⁴⁸ Besides international competition, new advances in America became a problem for many of those who could not keep up. Steel production was on the rise and production methods were becoming more efficient, which slowly began to drive out the iron industry.⁴⁹ Iron deposits in Lake Superior also became a problem for many who worked with less plentiful sources.⁵⁰ The rising use of anthracite and the building of furnaces closer to railroads for quicker transportation was yet another nail in the coffin for Cornwall.⁵¹

Robert Habersham Coleman, not to be confused with Robert Coleman, kept the family's fortune alive even through these hard times by improving the family's thousands of acres of farmland, opening a rolling mill, gaining control of a bank, and acquiring a railroad construction company.⁵² He was also a very generous man, using part of his fortune to build houses, schools, and churches for his community.⁵³ Around 1891, he lost a law suit to the Pennsylvania Trust Company amounting to one and one half million dollars. This was one of two suits he lost, the first being to the Grubbs who were supposedly stealing ore.⁵⁴ In 1893, when low gold reserves caused panic in the stock market, the Colemans' time at Cornwall had ended.⁵⁵ Cornwall however, continued to be used until the 1960's when the mining and production of iron in America ceased.⁵⁶

Paul Grubb Sr. was born on July 22, 1897 in Elizabethtown and died on July 4, 1996.⁵⁷ He was a member of the Elizabethtown Church of the Brethren, where he was the chairman of the building committee, sang in the choir and taught Sunday School.⁵⁸ Grubb was also an alumnus of Elizabethtown College and was a part of the Rotary Club on the Campus, which he had almost never missed a meeting for over forty seven years.⁵⁹ Grubb still managed to have an active role in the college, even after graduating. He was voted onto the Board of Trustees of Elizabethtown College and became the chairman of the building committee.⁶⁰ Grubb also became a part of the Elizabethtown College Alumni Memorial Committee and became the convocation chairman.⁶¹ Grubb ran the Grubb Supply Company as his job for fifty four years before retiring and giving the company to two of his sons, Paul Jr. and Richard.⁶² Grubb used to live near the campus in a ten room house on 307 College Avenue.⁶³ He later sold his house to the college in order for it to be turned into a woman's dormitory, but it was later decided for it

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Gerblady, Paul M Grubb, Sr. Find a Grave Memorial, April 29, 2006, accessed November 14, 2017, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/14117674#>.

⁵⁸ A Tribute to Paul M. Grubb '24. Elizabethtown Magazine (Winter 1997): 42. Accessed November 14, 2017. <https://archive.org/details/elizabethtown1997eliz>

⁵⁹ Betty Weirich, Rotary Recognizes a Man of Many Talents

⁶⁰ Ralph W. Schlosser, History of Elizabethtown College, 1899-1970 (Lebanon PA, Sowers Printing Company, 1971), 198.

⁶¹ Ibid, 203.

⁶² Weirrich.

⁶³ Chet Williamson, Unity, Work, and Spirit: A Centennial History of Elizabethtown College (Elizabethtown, PA. Elizabethtown College Press, 2001)

to be the house of the president of the college.⁶⁴ Grubb, in addition to his contributions to the college, also represented Elizabethtown on a number of occasions. One such occasion is when he was chosen to help fight against the government's desires to build factories over farmland to make planes for World War II.⁶⁵ Grubb won this case, and was later chosen to represent Elizabethtown when the town wanted to get twenty-five acres of farmland from a surrounding farm to build a junior senior high school.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Schlosser 194.

⁶⁵ Richard K. Macmaster Elizabethtown: The First Three Centuries. (Morgantown, PA: Mastof Press, 1999), 236.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 242.