Perspectives on Valley Forge Village

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This article has been compiled from resources provided by the listed contributors.



This excerpt from a lithograph entitled "Valley Forge, Pa. 1890" by Albert E. Downs of Boston, and published by James B. Moyer, Washington Camp No. 64 P.O.S. of A. Myerstown, Pa., wonderfully portrays the Valley Forge vicinity and provides a whimsical yet intriguing view of the bygone industrial activity amidst the generally agricultural surroundings. Many of the structures mentioned in this article can be identified: ❶ the bell tower of the cotton mill; ❷ the Rogers Store building; ❸ the original POSA building and adjacent Rowan's Store; ❹ the Riddle House and Workers' Cottages building; ❺ the Washington Inn; ❻ Washington's Headquarters, the paper mill complex and pump house; ❼ the railroad reservoir. Other noteworthy features include the large lake upstream of the dam, with the ❽ Knox Covered Bridge just visible at the last bend, and the many other smaller structures no longer present. Notes on this image can be found in "Valley Forge Industry" by editor Joyce Post on page 3 of *Tredyffrin Easttown History Club Quarterly* Vol. 41 No. 3 (Summer 2004), p. 3. **www.tehistory.org/hqda/html/v41/v41n3p074.html** — *Retrieved from the Library of Congress,* **https://www.loc.gov/item/gm71005360/**.

Some first-person memories of the early 1900s in the words of Edward TenBroeck—whose late son Craig was, and younger son Edward ("Ted") is, also a Society member—from his article "Some Memories of the Valley Forge Area" in *Tredyffrin Easttown History Club Quarterly* Vol. 17 No. 3 (July 1979). pp. 71–72

We came here to the Valley Forge area in 1903, when I was only eight years old, so I cannot vouch for the 100% accuracy of what I think I remember!

In those days the creek road was lower than it is now. In heavy rains, the creek would rise so that sometimes Dad would report driving to Valley Forge station through water up to the floor of the buggy.

There were the ruins of two old stone factory buildings between the creek and the road, one on either side of what is now State Route 23. I remember these quite well, as their walls were at that time decorated with lurid posters of Pawnee Bill's Wild West Shows. ...

There had been a big dam on the south side of Route 23, which I presume had furnished power to the two factories, but it had long since been washed out or torn out.

I think there had also been a few small houses for the mill hands on the right, or east side, of the creek road just south of where it ran into Route 23, but these too had completely disappeared.

On the northeast corner of Route 23 and the Creek Road was the old Washington Hotel. It was torn down some years ago to make room for the Bake House. West of the creek, going up the hill, was the village of Valley Forge, but most of it too has been taken over by the Park and torn down.

Then, if I remember rightly, a new dam was built about where the old one had been. There was also a small mill or factory on the southwest corner of Route 23 and the Creek Road. This dam was quite a high one, and backed the water up as far as the covered bridge. The Creek Road had been raised, but still the water level was only a foot or so below the road. The lake formed by the dam made a very pretty body of water, and a good view of it could be obtained from the sharp turn on the upper drive. The trees were cut down to give a view of the valley and the lake (which many people mistakenly thought was the river).

When this dam was built, the water covered the ruins of the "Valley Forge", which had been visible until then. ...

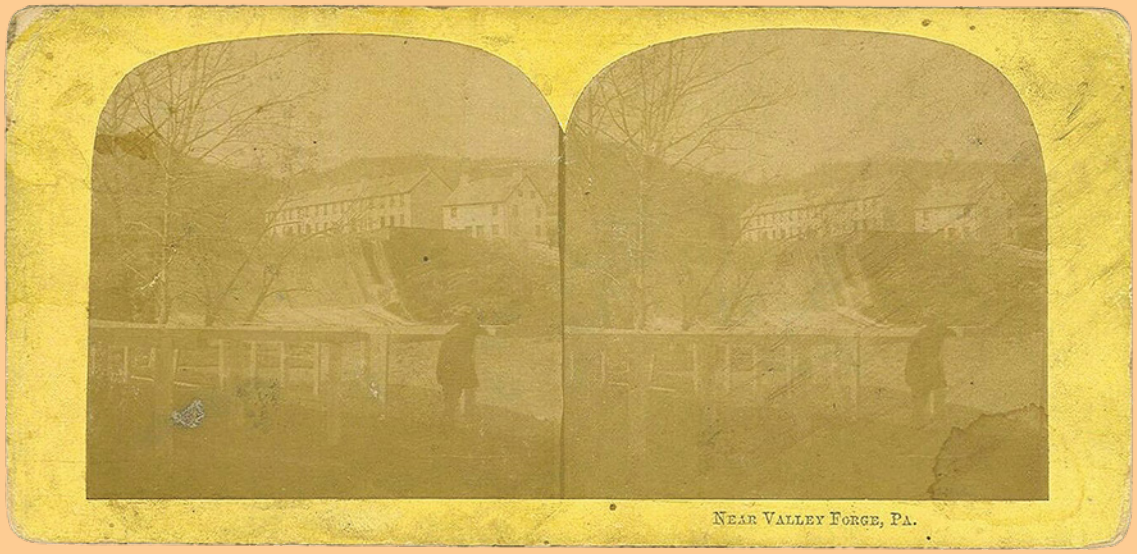
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An excerpt from an article by long-time Society member Sue Andrews titled "A Brief Historical Overview of Valley Forge Industry" and published in *Tredyffrin Easttown History Club Quarterly* Vol. 41 No. 3 (Summer 2004). pp. 85–86

If you drive north on Route 252 from the covered bridge to Route 23 you see nothing but grass and trees and Valley Creek meandering along toward the Schuylkill River. … A few centuries of industry have come and gone from this small area.

... From the 1860s until 1882 mill workers lived in a row of stone tenements across from the mill on the east side of the road that would eventually become Route 252. A pulp and paper mill near the Creek and a shoddy mill further away near the railroad station also provided employment. At that time Valley Forge was one of the most prosperous manufacturing villages in eastern Pennsylvania.

Then, one by one, the mills closed. They could not compete with the industries along the Schuylkill River near Philadelphia and when the pulp and paper mill moved away and the other businesses were abandoned, the village sank into rural obscurity.



The Langenheim stereoscope card showing a view of two buildings beyond the still-intact dam on Valley Creek. *Courtesy of Dave Madary.*

The Langenheim Stereoscope Card

An Early Photograph of Valley Forge

The item above is what is referred to as a "stereoscope" card. Stereoscope cards feature two almost identical side-by-side photographic images that were typically viewed together using a device called a "stereoscope." Since the two views were taken from slightly different angles or perspectives, when viewed through the stereoscope, they provide an apparent three-dimensional view. Stereoscope views were highly popular in the mid to late 19th century.

The stereoscope card discussed in this article is an original print made by the "American Stereoscopic Co." and printed by "Langenheim, Lloyd & Co." This was a partnership between photographers (and brothers) William and Frederick Langenheim, and William Lloyd. The Langenheim brothers were from Germany and in 1840 immigrated to America where they settled in Philadelphia (Cary Hutto, Historical Society of Pennsylvania). This card is copyright dated 1858. The partnership with Lloyd dissolved by 1859.

The Langenheim brothers printed several American landscape view stereoview cards in the mid-19th century. These cards were printed using photographs taken during the travels of the Langenheim brothers around the United States in the mid-1850s. In comparison, the earliest known photographs taken in the United States date to the 1840s. This photo is quite early in the overall timeline of photography in America. In fact, this photo was likely taken less than 80 years after the time of the Valley Forge Revolutionary War encampment!



The Holmes stereoscope, the most popular form of 19th century stereoscope. *Courtesy of Dave Pape via Wikipedia*

The stereoscope, which dates from the 1850s, consisted of two prismatic lenses and a wooden stand to hold the stereoscope image card. In approximately 1860, Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr.—an American physician, poet, and polymath—created a handheld, streamlined, and much more economical stereo image viewer than had been available before. Rather than patenting his device and profiting from its success, Holmes gave the idea away. This type of stereoscope remained in production for a century and there are still companies making them on a limited basis for the enthusiast market.

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This stereoview photo is the only original example of this particular view known to date. Certainly, others must exist, but this may still be a rather rare photo.

Improving the quality of one photo of the pair produces the more detailed image shown to the right.

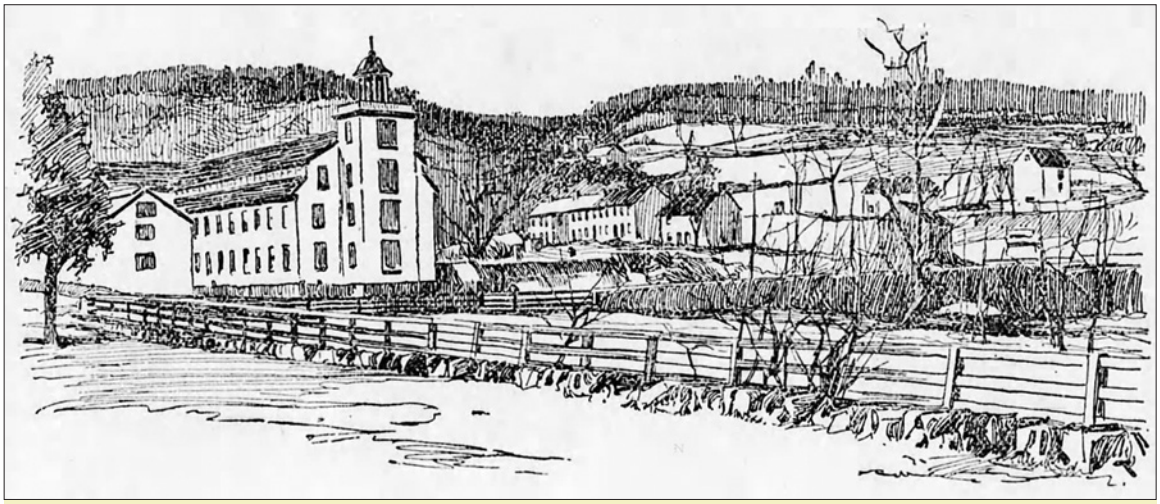
The building on the right side is the Riddle Mansion, also referred to as McIntosh's Quarters, which was torn down in 1907. The larger building in the center was worker housing and eventually became, in smaller form, what is now known as the second Patriotic Order, Sons of America (POSA) building. More details on both buildings can be found in the following pages.

After the Revolutionary War, in the late 1780s, a new dam was built across Valley Creek to service a forge and a rolling and slitting works. This large dam, seen in the center of the photograph, was rebuilt a number of times over the years, before its final demolition in 1920 during the expansion of Valley Forge State Park. More information on the dam can be found in an online article titled "The History of the Valley Forge Mill Dam" (**http://documents.tehistory.org/docs/doc350.html**).



An enhanced version of one half of the Langenheim stereoscope photo, more clearly showing the two buildings—The Workers' Cottages and the Riddle Mansion—beyond the still-intact dam on Valley Creek. *Courtesy of Dave Madary.*

Special thanks to Dave Madary for sharing the Langenheim stereoscope images and his collaborative efforts with Mike Bertram on interpreting them.



A similar view from a newspaper article published in the *Philadelphia Times* on May 9th 1893 showing the cotton mill in the left foreground as well as the buildings shown on the Langenheim photo in the center background.

For further reading on the industrial history of Valley Forge, please see two informative articles in the *Tredyffrin Easttown History Club Quarterly* (Summer 2004) Vol. 41 No. 3: "Water And Fire, The Power behind Valley Forge, The Rise and Fall of Valley Forge Industry" by Mike Bertram, pp. 75–84, **https://www.tehistory.org/hqda/html/v41/v41n3p075.html** and "A Brief Historical Overview of Valley Forge Industry" by Sue Andrews, pp. 85–86, **https://www.tehistory.org/hqda/html/v41/v41n3p085.html**

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In addition to the Langenheim image, two other photographs, containing the same two Valley Forge area buildings, and taken from different locations and angles, are shown on this page. These alternate perspectives provide an enhanced understanding of the layout of the buildings in the area.

In his 1850 newspaper articles on the history of Valley Forge, Henry Woodman makes this interesting observation "… on the west side of Valley Creek, at Valley Forge, Gen. McIntosh was quartered at the house of a respectable colored person, named Joseph Mann."[1] While Joseph Mann has not been found in the deed records, a Joseph Mann is associated with the Forge, but he did not own any property.

In the 1798 Glass Tax records, the buildings on the Chester County side of the creek were: Log Dwelling house 25' x 22'; Slittin [sic] Mill; Occupier Lawrence Baylits – Two Stone Dwelling houses 18' x 19'; Log Kitchen 12' x 12'; Stone Springhouse 10' x 8'.

One of these 18' x 19' buildings may have been the house occupied by Joseph Mann during the encampment, and where General McIntosh stayed.

It is not clear that any of these 1798 buildings survived, but in the second half of the 19th century there are two buildings on maps that correspond to those shown on the Langenheim photo.

McIntosh's Quarters

The building associated with General McIntosh is described in the 1910 book *Valley Forge Guide and Handbook*[2] by Rev. James Riddle: *"It is more than likely that the house was one which stood on the present Riddle property near the creek, a hundred or more yards above the present dam. This was the old farm-house on the place in the time of the Revolution. Lately having fallen into decay, it was torn down in 1907. A pillar of the ruins is preserved, and near it a hundred feet to the west is the ancient spring and spring-house."* The spring mentioned is commonly known as Sterling Spring, and remains to the present.

The property described by Rev. James Riddle was owned by his wife Anna S. Riddle from 1905 until her death in 1909, and then by him and their three children until the tract was sold to Valley Forge State Park in 1919. (see "Forge Tract deed history, Branch E.1.4 - Schuylkill township Mill tract"—**http://charlestown.tehistory.org/ManorofBilton/Table2ForgeTracts.html#E**).

A Closer Look at the Buildings in the Langenheim Photograph



FIGURE 1 – In this section of an 1851 map of Schuylkill Township, the red arrows show the approximate orientation and location of the cameras that took the photographs: ❶ Langenheim photo; ❷ FIGURE 2; ❸ FIGURE 3. The two buildings of particular interest, as identified in the photos, are enclosed in the red box. The large U-shaped structure close to position 1 is the Cotton Mill. *Courtesy of the Phoenixville Area Historical Society.*



FIGURE 2 – This annotated photograph shows a very different perspective on the buildings shown in the Langenheim photo. ❶ Workers' Cottages (partial), and as described in the 1798 Glass Tax records: ❷ First "Stone Dwelling" [Riddle] house; ❸ Second "Stone Dwelling" house; ❹ "Stone [Sterling] Springhouse." Image identifier VAFO 63599. *Courtesy of Valley Forge National Historical Park.*

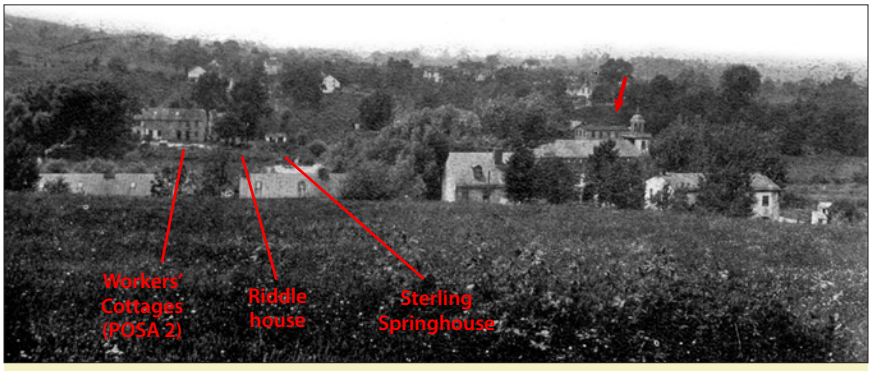


FIGURE 3 – Here is a similar view from the 1890s, with the Riddle mansion behind a tree, but the Workers' Cottages (later POSA 2) building and the Sterling Springhouse can be seen. Behind and to the left of the Cotton Mill bell tower, the upper floor of the POSA Hall is visible. Note that there is more vegetation and tree cover than in the earlier photo. From *Cultural Landscapes Inventory – Village of Valley Forge*, Valley Forge National Historical Park, 2009.

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Workers' Cottages / Second POSA building

In the accompanying photo showing the dam, the building on the left appears to be the structure originally built as workers' housing or "cottages." The date that these cottages were built is unclear but they are likely dated between 1816 and 1851. The building's length seems to have varied over time, for some time had a covered porch, and it appears to have been renovated around the time that the Riddle building (McIntosh's Quarters) was demolished.

Following the sale and demolition of the building that originally housed the Patriotic Order, Sons of America, (POSA) meeting hall, the group acquired and significantly renovated the former Workers' Cottages structure, which they occupy and maintain as an organizational headquarters to the current day.



This photo from c. 1907–20 shows the dam rebuilt in 1907, with decorative spherical bollards on either side of the spillway, and on the left, what appears to be the Workers' Cottages building adjacent to the site of the former Riddle house demolished in 1907, as reported by James Riddle in his 1910 book[2]).

Notes and References

1. *The History of Valley Forge*, by Henry Woodman. Published by John U. Francis, Sr., Oaks, Pa. 1922, p. 58. Originally published in *The Doylestown Intelligencer*, 1850.
2. *Valley Forge Guide and Hand-book* by Rev. James W. Riddle, A.M. Published by J. B. Lippincott, Philadelphia, Pa. 1910, pp. 109–110. Available online at: **https://archive.org/details/valleyforgeguide00ridd**

The History of the Valley Forge Meadow

When William Penn started selling land in Pennsylvania, he reserved about a third of the land for his own use. Two of these parcels of land, called 'manors,' were located on either side of Valley Creek. Penn gave the Manor of Mount Joy on the east side of the creek to his daughter Letitia. On the west side of the creek he gave the Manor of Bilton to his niece, Margaret Lowther. The deed history of the Manor of Bilton is described in some detail on the Charlestown Deed History website at **http://charlestown.tehistory.org/ManorofBilton/ManorofBilton.html** and in particular the Forge Tracts section—**http://charlestown.tehistory.org/ManorofBilton/Table2ForgeTracts.html**.

Prior to the encampment of 1777–78, various businesses developed in the area of Valley Creek near its confluence with the Schuylkill River, including two forges ("upper" and "lower"), a grist mill, sawmill, blacksmith, wheelwright, and store.

The forges were destroyed by the British Army in 1777 as they campaigned through the area, but other commercial assets remained mostly intact. The history of the upper forge is described in Mike Bertram's article, previously referenced, and available online at **https://www.tehistory.org/hqda/html/v41/v41n3p075.html.** In the area of the lower forge, a new dam was built in the later 1780s, together with a new forge on the Montgomery County (east) side of Valley Creek and a Rolling and Slitting Mill on the Chester County (west) side. The new forge did not seem to be successful and soon disappears from the records. The Rolling and Slitting Mill was later converted into a gun factory (see Scott Houting's article "The Evans Family of Valley Forge: The U.S. Model 1816 Flintlock Musket" in the *Tredyffrin Easttown History Club Quarterly* Vol. 40, No. 4 (October 2003) and available online at **https://www.tehistory.org/hqda/html/v40/v40n4p115.html**). After the encampment, William Dewees, the iron master, was no longer involved in the forge business and slipped into bankruptcy.

The meadow at Valley Forge, on the opposite (west) side of Valley Creek from Washington's Headquarters (also known as the Isaac Potts house), was originally part of the Forge tract, and covered an area of 9 acres and 113 perches. It was purchased in 1796 by Jacob Paul, a miller, from David and Mary Potts. Paul also purchased 105 acres in nearby Montgomery County, including the Grist Mill and the Washington's Headquarters site. His son Joseph Paul sold the property in 1826 (see the accompanying 1825 newspaper advertisement).

In 1874, Hannah Ogden and Nathaniel H. Jones, who at that time owned the meadow parcel, sold two tracts on the Philadelphia road. On the larger tract, Sarah Miller built a new store (there were already other stores in Valley Forge village). The smaller tract was purchased by the trustees of Camp 150 of the Patriotic Order, Sons of America (POSA), who built a new meeting hall. (More on POSA may be found on the following pages.)

Sarah Miller died in 1886 and the store descended to Mary Kay. Mary sold it to John Rowan in 1887. The store stayed in the Rowan family until 1918 when it was sold to David Midgley. (More information on the Rowan family and the store may be found on the following pages.)

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