



Looking down from a tower on stacks from the kilns, one can see the Susquehanna River and a railroad bridge at upper right.

Billmeyer history (cont.)

[continued from front page] houses, the church—everything belonged to J.E. Baker.

It all started in 1896, when J.E. Baker bought the Haldeman farm at Locust Grove with its deep deposits of limestone and dolomite. The dolomite was especially valuable because steel furnaces used it in extracting impurities from the metal. Baker was soon sending trainloads of the dolomite to Carnegie Steel in Pittsburgh.

He named his new operation Billmeyer, which was the maiden name of his wife, Mary Salome.

As his business expanded, Baker needed more and more men to do the heavy and often dangerous work in the quarries and processing plants in Billmeyer. During World War I, when the demand for steel in armaments peaked, so did the work at Billmeyer.

A lot of the heavy work at Billmeyer was done by blacks who had been recruited in the South.

Chief recruiter of the blacks was a large, well-dressed and generally impressive-looking black man named Harvey Arnett. He would go south, talk to black men there about the opportunities at Billmeyer and, if they were interested, he would pay their transportation north. On arrival at Billmeyer, they could buy clothes at the company store. All these initial

expenses would be taken out of their first wages.

By contemporary standards, life at Billmeyer in the 1920's and 30's seems hard—long hours, low pay, dangerous work. It is remarkable, therefore, how many black people who were born and raised in Billmeyer look back on their lives there with fond nostalgia.

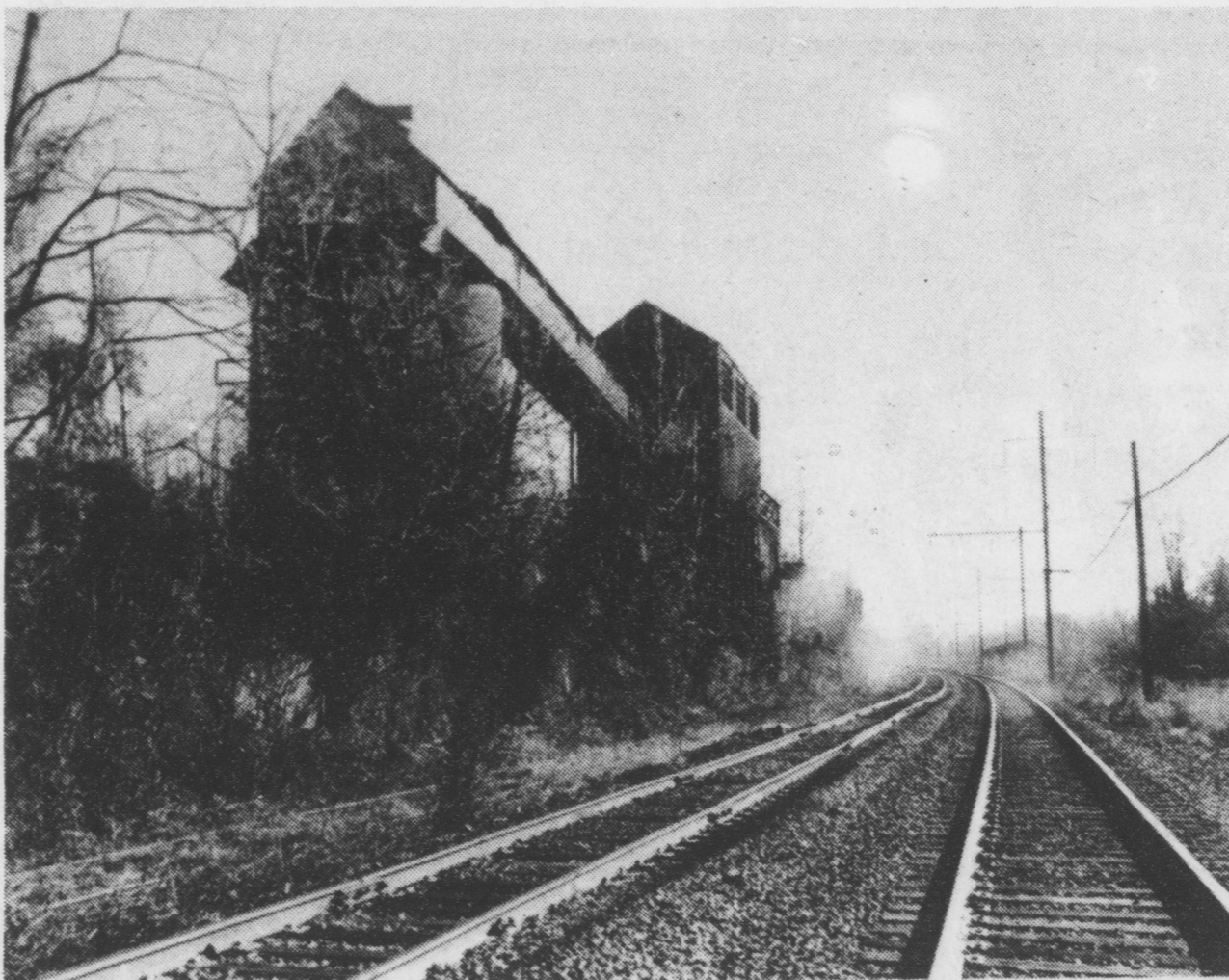
For black people especially, Billmeyer was a most unusual community. When segregation prevailed everywhere else, Billmeyer was an integrated community, where blacks and whites worked together, lived next door to each other, studied and worshipped together.

Lilly Fortune Kenney (wife of Patrick Kenney, Jr., director of the Human Relations Committee of Lancaster County) grew up in Billmeyer, where her father, John Fortune, was employed. Lilly has many happy memories of her life in Billmeyer. She says she did not know what racial prejudice was until she went to work as a clerk in Middletown.

J.E. Baker was a practical man who certainly knew how to make a dollar, but he also seems to have been a very generous and humanitarian man who really cared for his workers. A common expression among old Baker employees is, "The J.E. Baker Company takes good care of its people." This

concern for employees was apparently not restricted by race or creed.

In the days before civil rights, the cozy, protected, egalitarian little community at Billmeyer was attractive



The "crusher," where stones were smashed and then sorted by sizes. A conveyor belt transported stone through an enclosed ramp to the near tower.

to black people. Among other things, they were proud of the high status achieved in the Baker Company by that dignified black man, Harvey Arnett.

According to Louise McCowan, whose father and husband worked for the J.E. Baker Company, it was Arnett who suggested to J.E. Baker that the community should have its own church. Previously, Methodists had been holding services for blacks in Arnett's house. Baker, who seems to have been interested in building community morale, accepted Arnett's suggestion and built the Rebecca Chapel, named for Baker's mother.

Despite many pleasant features, life was not entirely idyllic in Billmeyer, by any means. There was a barracks for single working men in the quarries where craps shooting and drinking hard liquor went on every night.

According to one account, a local policeman who liked to gamble would often come out to the barracks to shoot craps. He would lose money, get angry about it, and return later with a deputy, to arrest the winners and confiscate their winnings.

One time a gambler was discovered to have loaded dice. His body was found with a slit throat, outside the barracks window; his murderer or murderers were never apprehended.

In the old days especially, accidents were frequent. Men were killed by dynamite blasts. They were caught in looped cables suddenly drawn tight. They were dragged into the stone crushing equipment, caught in stone slides, etcetera. Louise McCowan's father was killed when he was crossing the traintracks on his way home for lunch.

Safety programs became more and more important. George Emswiler, a former foreman at Billmeyer, says he never forgot the first safety lecture he heard, about the fatal danger of "that one unguarded moment."

Louise McCowan tells the story that during a funeral in Rebecca Chapel a blast went off in one of the quarries; a rock from the blast came through the roof of the chapel and then through the lid of the coffin; in that case, no further damage could be done.

Billmeyer was shut down in 1957, because the Baker Company had by then acquired other, more plentiful deposits of limestone and dolomite. As early as the late 1930's, the company noted that the supply was dwindling at Billmeyer, and a search for other sources began.

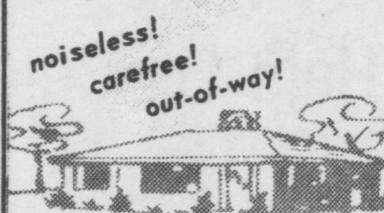
A couple years ago the Baker Company sold the Billmeyer property to W.S. Frey Company, a producer of lime and limestone. The Frey Company is not working the quarries, which are filled with water.

A watchman keeps trespassers away. There have been some near-drownings in the quarry. One of a group of students from Penn State Capitol Campus dived from a cliff into the quarry. His ankle became entangled in vines two-thirds of the way down. His friends did not know how to extricate him. Finally, they succeeded in cutting the vine. Their now unconscious friend fell into the deep water. In the nick of time, they managed to rescue him.

Billmeyer, deserted, haunted, is off-limits. Keep away.

Its only life now is in the minds of those who once lived and worked there.

TODAYS' MODERN APPLIANCE DEMAND A MODERN WATER SYSTEM



DESIGNED FOR PRESENT AND FUTURE NEEDS.

OUR FINEST! SUBMERSIBLE PUMP

BY LANCASTER only

FOR WELLS DOWN TO 500 FT.

FOR GREATER THAN CITY WATER PRESSURES



ANOTHER FAMOUS PRODUCT

R.V. RICHARDS & SONS, INC.

COLUMBIA R.D. 1 426-1836 VISA & M/Ch

True Value
HARDWARE STORE

Hardware value of the MONTH

PLUS A \$2 FACTORY REFUND OFFER!

While Supplies Last

now **3.44**

33-Gal. TRASH BAGS

Extra strong bags hold up to 60 lbs. 40 per box with twist ties. Come in for coupon and refund details.

QUANTITIES LIMITED

Hostetter Hardware Inc.

93 East Main Street
Mount Joy, Pa.
Phone 653-1861