

Poems and Sonnets from *Saga of the Susquehanna*

by Chester Wittell



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FRONT STREET
(Marietta, Pa.)

Mile-long and kindred to the river shore,
It stretches fairly for the eye to see
How well the years have lent the charm of yore
To veil its face and balk senility

It saw the image of the Indian fade;
It waved in welcome to the boatman's hail;
It wore the transient robe that progress made,
And heard the clank of iron wheel on rail.

It knew the warmth of quondam brotherhood
When sons of men from vain desire were free,
And bore the havoc of the river's flood
With stoic imperturbability.

Demure its passive aspect if you will,
Its attributes have stood the test of time
Against whose hest aspersion renders nil
To contradict fate's wordless pantomime.

Doubt not with him thereon who lightly goes,
For it beyond all mortal span shall last
When we who flourish now shall be of those
Whose footprints mark the pavement of the past.

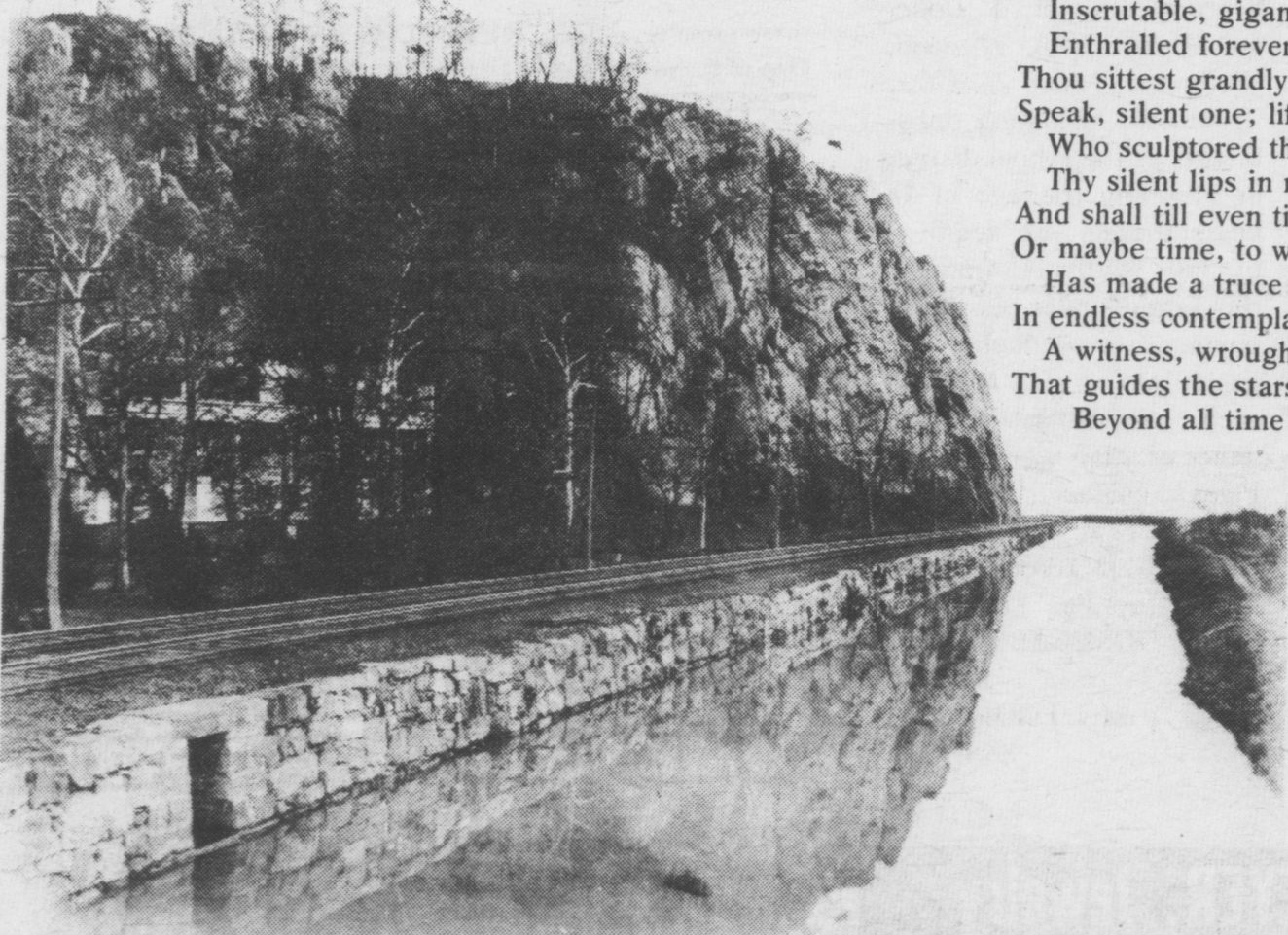


Photo by John K. Miller, around 1900. Courtesy of Joseph R. Balt.

THE OLD RAILROAD STATION (At Mount Joy, Pa.)

Deserted and forsaken, like to one
By fellowmen abandoned and ignored,
It stands - secluded, empty and alone,
To bide with desuetude in frail accord.

Scorned by the brazen trains that hurry past,
It seems to look afar with wistful gaze,
In dreams of silent wonder that outlast
The quondam glory of forgotten days,

When friend met friend and many a fond embrace
And fervent greeting, merged with smiles and tears,
Lighted with joy the long-awaited face,
Returning from the lapse of vanished years.



CHIQUES ROCK

Eternal guardian! rising steep and wild
Above the canyon of the restless stream,
That lookest down, as in a timeless dream,
Upon the flood below - thy ward and child!
What cyclopean hand reared thy facade
High unto heaven, where the fleeting cloud
Skims white and gleaming, like a spotless shroud
On winds blown thither by the breath of God?
Above thy crest the eagle wings its flight,
And fitful blasts assail thy stony brow.
Through storm and calm; by day and starless night
Thou lookest down upon the stream below,
Where on the rocks and boulders - page on page -
Is carved the writ of immemorial age.

Like some colossus wrought of ancient stone,
Inscrutable, gigantic and supreme,
Enthralled forever in an endless dream,
Thou sittest grandly on thy lofty throne.
Speak, silent one; lift up thy voice and say
Who sculptored thee - and what secret, never told,
Thy silent lips in memory enfold,
And shall till even time has passed away.
Or maybe time, to whom all things are known,
Has made a truce with thee that thou might'st stand
In endless contemplation here alone -
A witness, wrought by His almighty hand
That guides the stars and shall forever be
Beyond all time unto eternity.

How often festive recreation found
A focal point within its friendly shrine,
When to the summer picnic outward bound
Duty to relaxation would incline!

How cordial was its service! Waiting there,
The freighted package, held in brief escrow,
Was yours for asking, as the ticket fare
For any place that you would want to go.

Yet through the limbo of its loneliness
Faint spirit voices tell the listening ear
Of things that were and shall be none the less
When we who flourish now shall disappear.

And sometimes when the eerie moon is full,
A phantom throng descends its weathered stair,
And ghostly whispers fill the midnight lull
Of coming trains that pause and vanish there.

WILDCAT FALLS

Deep in the bosom of the towering hills,
Lonely, forsaken, from the world away,
It lies - a little bosky glen where day
Knows twilight and a silvery cascade spills
Downward from step to mossy step and fills
The drowsy air with mist of diamond spray.
There sportive Naiads in the winter play,
And sweetly from the wood the songbird trills
Its plaintive lay; and if your breath you bate
To probe the brooding silence, you may hear
The Dryads in the drooping hemlocks prate;
Or - further where the torrent frets and foams -
All inarticulate, yet quaint and clear,
The elfin babble of the frolic gnomes.

