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History of Lock Haven

The City of Lock Haven was originally settled in the late 1700s, when a log house fort and stockade were constructed as a defense against attacks from the local Indians. Known as Fort Reed, it was one of many frontier forts situated along the banks of the Susquehanna River.

The first plan for Lock Haven was put together in 1833 by Jerry and Willard Church. They were the first to recognize the economic potential of the natural resources in the area, particularly timber. The construction of the Pennsylvania Canal, completed in 1834, provided the necessary transportation to get these products to market and set the stage for an era of significant growth for the town. The arrival of the railroad in 1859 provided a more reliable means of transportation and ultimately replaced the canal.

By the end of the century, the lumber industry was declining. Depletion of the forests and regular flood damage to the log booms and the canal finally put an end to an era for the City. Fortunately, other industries had begun to take hold that provided a new economic base for Lock Haven as it entered the 20th Century. Furniture, paper, fire bricks and silk were all produced in the City. In 1938, the Piper Aircraft Corporation began producing small planes on the site of the old silk mills.

Piper Aircraft remained one of the City's largest employers until a combination of major flood losses in the 1970s and an ownership struggle resulted in the relocation of the company to Florida in the 1980s. This was a huge blow to the City's economy, creating an unemployment rate of over 20 percent in the early part of the 1980s.

The City of Lock Haven has seen a number of boom and bust cycles through its history - much like many of the rural cities and towns that have grown up along the River. Broad changes in the manufacturing industry around the country have had far reaching impacts on the small communities that grew up around their factories, including Lock Haven. Today, there is still a manufacturing presence in the City, in fact 16 percent of the City's residents are employed in that sector. However, the major employers fall into the Educational, Health and Social Services Sector, which reflects the growing importance of both Lock Haven University and the Lock Haven Hospital.



Water Street Historic District

The Water Street Historic District was designated in 1973 and inventoried of approximately 368 historic resources in the City of Lock Haven; many historically associated with the wealthy lumber industry, government and commercial development. All of Lock Haven's Central Business District is included in the District as are the beautiful homes and churches on Water, West Main and West Church Streets.

In 1999 the City updated both the 1983-84 Historic Resource Survey of Lock Haven and the earlier Water Street Historic District (1973). Because there are many twentieth century

resources in the Water Street Historic District there was a need to evaluate the significance of the early to mid-twentieth century context and the identification of resources that contribute to this context. The earlier (1973) Water Street Historic District nomination addressed significance within only a nineteenth century context, not addressing twentieth century resources. The survey provided an inventory, assessment and catalog of the periods, styles and cultural-historical associations of the buildings located within the survey area. The survey was completed in 1999.

The 1983-84 Historic Resource Survey and 1999 Historic Resource Survey Update are available for inspection at Lock Haven City Hall, 20 East Church Street, Lock Haven, PA 17745.

Heisey Museum

The Gothic Revival style dwelling which houses the Heisey Museum was constructed on the farm that later became Lock Haven and is the town's oldest brick building. This house has served as a farmhouse, tavern, doctor's office and home to several other locally prominent families. First constructed as a Federal style building circa 1830, it acquired its Gothic character in a major remodeling circa 1865. The home was given for use as a museum in memory of Samuel Morse Heisey in 1962. Now restored to the mid-Victorian era, collections are displayed in room settings which reflect life as it was in Lock Haven 125 years ago.

Piper Aviation Museum

The Piper Aircraft Corporation, which maintained its headquarters in Lock Haven from 1937 to its closing in 1984, is well known for its "Cub" and for a series of aircraft bearing Indian names such as Aztec, Cherokee, Cheyenne, Comanche, Navajo, and Pawnee. Piper Aircraft Corporation grew to become the world's leading producer of general aviation aircraft, many of which can be seen in action during "Sentimental Journey" — an annual "fly-in" event at the William T. Piper Memorial Airport, held in June. In 1997, the Piper Aviation Museum acquired the former Piper Engineering building, which is located adjacent to the William T. Piper Memorial Airport.

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