

HANOVER JUNCTION, 2001

# Dedication of Hanover Junction Railroad Station Museum

**Text from a presentation by Dr. Charles Glatfelter,  
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Who among us has not heard of Francis P. Church's 1897 editorial in the New York Sun, in which he answered the young girl with the pressing question? "Yes, Virginia", he said, "there is a Santa Claus, and he lives forever."

But who among us has ever thought of an answer to a second question she might have asked? It would have to be: no, Virginia there has not always been a Hanover Junction.

Yes. there was a time when Germans only recently arrived in Pennsylvania, took up land here along the south Codorus valley, built homesteads, created religious and educational institutions, and reared families. We know their names, and some of them are not unfamiliar to us today: Bowman, Diehl, Henry, and Walter.

Although rather self-sufficient, these people wanted things they could not make for themselves. They needed a place to sell their surplus, whatever it might be.

As a market for these first settlers, York was too small and Philadelphia, too distant. The town and excellent port of Baltimore proved to be the market they desired. By 1760 there were two public roads in existence leading from York to Baltimore. One of them passed through what is now Loganville, and the other through what is now York New Salem. Farm families living in and near this valley had to travel some distance with horse and wagon to reach one of these roads to Baltimore.

There was a time when a new form of transportation made an appearance in the United States. The construction, development, and maintenance of the railroads made them the nation's first big business.

Sensing the tremendous potential of the iron horse, promoters in York, Baltimore, and points in between succeeded in building a railroad which

passed directly through this valley. The first train of the Baltimore and Susquehanna Railroad reached York in 1838. Its first published schedule stated that "passengers will be taken up and set down at the following places." There was a stop at what is now Glen Rock. The next one going north was at what is now Seven Valleys. At the end of the year 1838 there were still fewer than 2,000 miles of railroad in the entire country.

There was a time, and it came quickly, when people living both east and west of the Baltimore and Susquehanna tried to gain rail access to it. Promoters in Hanover and elsewhere secured an act in 1847 authorizing the governor to incorporate the Hanover Branch Railroad Company. In the words of the act, they were authorized to "locate and to construct a railroad of one or more tracks from ... within the ...borough of Hanover, to intersect the railroad leading from the Maryland line to the borough of York, at the nearest and most practicable point."

It was one thing for the promoters to get an act from the legislature. It was quite another to select a course, have it surveyed, buy land, and raise the considerable sums needed to put a rail line into actual operation. It took five years. The first train to travel from "the most practicable point" to Hanover did so in the fall of 1852.

"What better name for that most practicable point than Hanover Junction?" York County published in 1860.

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We have an excellent opportunity to view the history of Hanover Junction through the mind, memory, and understanding of Harry I. Gladfelter. In an autobiography which he wrote in 1938, when he was 88 years old, he reminded us that he was born on a nearby farm, was only two years old when the Hanover Branch began operations, and had been living at the Junction for 67 years. He was involved in almost everything that happened there for most of those years and still had a good mind in 1938.

Many of us who knew this man called him H. I. Let us call him that today.

H.I. remembered well being told that after the Confederates, or Rebels as he called them, had burned the bridge and turntable, and cut the telegraph line at the Junction, they crowded into the barroom of John Scott's tavern and began taking whatever they wanted. Scott, summoned from another part of the building, came into the room, stood there for a while, and then said: "I thought you were a set of gentlemen, but I see

you are nothing but a set of damn thieves." Whereupon, their commanding officer ordered his men out of the tavern and placed a guard at the entrances.

There were some things from the summer of 1863 H. I. remembered from his own experience. While a Union force paused near the Junction after the Confederates had left, an officer wearing a large sword placed his hand on H. I.'s shoulder and said: "Come with me sonny I want you to do something for me." Seeing no escape, he complied. Using a neighbor's grindstone, he turned the wheel while the officer sharpened the sword. In his autobiography, H. I. wrote that he had "often made claim that in this way I helped to fight the battle of Gettysburg."

As for the battle itself, for three days he and his family heard the terrific, ferocious noise from thirty miles away. Then, for several weeks he watched what he called the "many heartrending scenes" as "all manner of men bearing all manner of wounds" were transported away from the battlefield. His role then was to carry oranges from a Christian Commission car to the wounded, while the trains bearing them were halted briefly at the Junction.

H.I. was not there when Abraham Lincoln passed through in November 1863 to and from Gettysburg, nor did he make any reference in his autobiography to the funeral train on April 21, 1865.

We must turn to a Hanover newspaper, the Spectator, for an account of what happened on that day. The train reached the Junction about 6 P. M. An estimated 300 persons, many from Gettysburg, New Oxford, and Hanover, were there to pay their respects, According to the Spectator, many were disappointed that the train did not stop long enough to permit them to board it and "see the corpse." Instead, as the paper put it, the train "glided along at the rate of twenty miles an hour," on its way to York. All anyone could see was that the locomotive and cars were all draped in mourning. The railroad sold a round trip ticket from Hanover for sixty cents. Perhaps a few wanted their money back.

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If there ever was a golden age for the Hanover Branch and its junction, it began early. On the more than sixteen acres of land it acquired in 1851, the railroad constructed what it needed to support a thriving business. Within a few years there were two large buildings: a hotel on land the railroad sold in 1852 and a station house. Edmund Snodgrass had a tavern license as early as 1853 and was appointed the first postmaster in 1854. In addition to the station house, the railroad created the facilities necessary to supply both coal and water to the locomotives.

By the fall of 1859 there was a telegraph; it reached Hanover by the next spring. There was soon an Adams Express agency.

After the Civil War, John Scott and Cornelius Gladfelter began to manufacture ice cream in quantity, much of which was shipped by rail to Baltimore and other places along the line. About 1880, H. I. started making cigars. At one time he had 52 persons working in the factory; other employees did their work stripping tobacco at home. For 7 years he had a contract requiring him to ship 115,000 cigars to Baltimore each month.

But the central enterprise at Hanover Junction was always the railroad. For many years traffic through the village was heavy. In 1881 the Glen Rock Item reported that in a recent 24-hour period, 79 trains had passed through that town. Surely an equal number passed through Hanover Junction.

Although persons now used the line to ship many commodities other than ice cream and cigars, including flour, milk, and fresh vegetables, and although passenger service was brisk., for about a quarter century the most important product was iron ore, taken from nearby open pit and shaft mines, most in North Codorus Township. The ore was brought to the Junction by wagons, weighed, and then shipped out.

Golden ages have a way of losing their luster. Nowhere is this more likely to happen than in a free enterprise, competitive system.

It was inevitable that, sooner or later, businessmen in York and Baltimore would demand ways of reaching Hanover by rail more easily than having to go the long way around through Hanover Junction. Already in the 1870s they had succeeded. For example, there was now a direct road, known widely as the Short Line, linking York and Hanover.

While this was happening, and while the national demand for iron and steel was increasing at a phenomenal rate, the quality of York County iron ore was decreasing and vast deposits of high-grade ore were becoming easily available elsewhere in the country. North Codorus could never hope to compete with the ore found in the Mesabi Range in Minnesota.

Even before 1900, one could easily see the handwriting on the wall for Hanover Junction.

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In 1938, H. I. wrote that "Hanover Junction as a Rail Road Junction [had] died a natural death."

The hotel, ice cream plant, and cigar factory were long since gone. Both freight and passenger service on the old Hanover Branch line had been discontinued a decade before and eventually the tracks would be removed.

In 1929 the Western Maryland Railroad, which then owned what remained of the original 16 acres, including the station house, sold the property for what the deed described as "certain valuable considerations and \$10."

After 87 years in operation, the post office closed on December 31, 1941 and its business was transferred to Seven Valleys. When Tropical Storm Agnes hit in 1972, what still remained of the old rail service north and south came to an abrupt end.

Yet Hanover Junction had not become a ghost town. In 1938, H. I. counted 27 families and 85 persons in the village, as well as one general store. People continued to dwell there and live, if they wished, useful lives.

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In 1978, after having passed through four hands since 1929, the station house came into possession of the County of York.

And now, the chief symbol of its reason for being, and what gave Hanover Junction its name, has been fitted out to serve as a strong reminder of an important part of our past, set in the context of the larger history of this part of the south Codorus valley, indeed in the context of the larger history of York County.

Without a doubt, we have here what someone has called a "wonderful York County treasure."

We have it. We should be grateful to every individual and every agency whose efforts over many years have made it possible. We should urge all to use it, for entertainment, for instruction, and for inspiration.

*Presented with permission of the author.*