

# VIEWPOINTS

## MADE IN YORK HAVEN



The view from a point near Hydro Park in York Haven looks at three prominent buildings on the hill overlooking the Susquehanna River. York Haven Borough Building, top left, a second building with remarkable brickwork on its facade and the landmark Hotel Haven. PHOTOS BY JIM MCCLURE

## York Haven can benefit from Northeastern York County history group's new museum.

Jim McClure

The York Daily Record talks about papermaking, and most York County people think about Spring Grove. But in its day, another York County town rivaled Spring Grove and its Glatfelter mill in the making of paper.

That's the tiny borough of York Haven where the Big Conewago Creek flows into the Susquehanna River in northeastern York County. International Paper Co. closed in 1971, so we tend to forget the mill's big presence in that small town. Its oversized footprint is papered over by Hydro Park, with its acres of greenery today.

But the papermaker left behind a building on a York Haven hill as a reminder of its eight-decade presence: a New England-style library and town hall built in 1920 and recently renovated with the help of federal funds to ensure a long life as it enters more deeply into its second century.

That town hall, or borough building as it's called, has long been home to York Haven's government on its first floor. And the library also operates next to the borough office, an independent book repository that resisted a merger into the regional Red Land Library years ago.

That library in York Haven's Borough Office will soon share space with a local history group: North Eastern York County History in Preservation (NeyChip).

As we shall see, this town and its 686 people need this new NeyChip museum - and similar gains. The story of York Haven since the paper mill has moved out is one of loss.

## *Made in York Haven*

Drive through York Haven with its wooden frame houses hugging Front Street, and you might not guess that it was a major industrial town for about 175 years.

An early American canal operated there: the Conewago Canal. Giant gristmills serviced farmers who transported grain as far away as Abbottstown through Dover and Manchester along a major York County road: Canal Road.

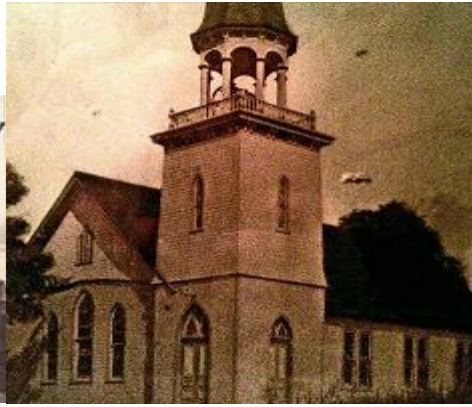
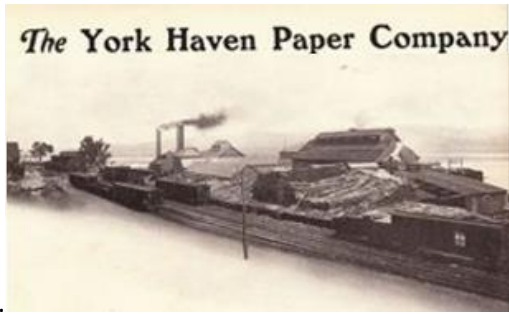
An early north-south road connecting York and Harrisburg ran through there, used by Marquis de Lafayette and Charles Dickens and other travelers. That's Route 181, Front Street, today.

The railroad went in in the 1850s, replacing the Susquehanna as a means of moving freight, and a train rolled through town 15 years later transporting Abraham Lincoln's body from Washington, D.C., on an American tour. That was the Northern Central Railway.

The giant paper mill covered the footprint of earlier gristmills in 1885. That originally was the York Haven Paper Co., later the International Paper Co. To give a sense of the paper mill's might, it was the No. 6 employer in York County in 1899 with 250 people. Glatfelter was the fourth-leading employer with 259.

A hydro plant was built on the Susquehanna beside the paper company in 1904 — and it operates as York Haven Power Plant. A coal-fired power plant, now transitioning to natural gas, was erected in the 1960s on a nearby island that loaned its name to the facility: Brunner's Island.

So, York Haven had everything, creek and river, rail, and highway transportation. And we haven't yet mentioned the trolley line that brought workers, freight and excursionists to York Haven from York and its hinterlands in the first 30 years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



*The above photos were added by Charles Stambaugh from NeyChip.com.*

## *Haven, no more*

In the 50 years after the paper mill went out in 1971, the town has lost a lot. Its bank and many other businesses closed. Its three main churches — Lutheran, United Methodist and Roman Catholic — closed or moved outside the borough.

About a dozen years before, Interstate 83 bypassed York Haven a second time. The first bypass came earlier in the century when the Susquehanna Trail drew motorists from York Haven's Front Street.

And significantly, the haven —port or harbor — that gave the town its name no longer serves river users. A longtime river access called "The Point," where the river and creek meet, is in private hands and is closed. A discharge channel that offered a popular warm water fishery has closed on Brunner's Island.

There's a river portage area around the hydropower plant and across Hydro Park that allows recreationists to carry kayaks and canoes. But boaters must use river access in Goldsboro, the next borough north, or bypass York Haven completely by using the Fallmouth Boat Launch across the river in Lancaster County.

Significantly, the borough has lost people, about 15% of its population since 2000.

So, York Haven, a papermaking town, has lost its mill. The borough, a highway town, has lost its motorists. And York Haven, a river town, has lost its boaters.



*Pictured Cynthia Owad, Cynthia Owad, and Charles Stambaugh. Sample of museum by NeyChip.*

## *Envisioning a museum*

But the prize of this town — its refurbished borough building — beckons for more use and offers promise. A high-energy occupant is in route.

Since NeyChip formed in 2016, founder Charles Stambaugh looked for a museum and meeting spot to talk about a region that covers York Haven, Mount Wolf and Manchester boroughs and Newberry, Conewago and East Manchester townships.

In recent months, he has worked with 30-year-plus librarian Cynthia Owad and York Haven borough to gain space in the first-floor library, and the new NeyChip museum should open in early summer.

Stambaugh notes some marquee points about the space: It will be a museum inside a working library, which he believes is the second oldest in York County. The library came with the building in 1920, and Hanover's library goes back to 1911. The museum, with rotating displays, will be open to the public three days a week: Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. That Saturday opening will give the public library an extra day for patrons each week. Further, the museum and library will be equipped with computers with access to newspapers.com, ancestry.com and other digital research tools. NeyChip has formed an alliance with Northeastern School District students on other projects, and Stambaugh expects them to be involved in this York Haven initiative.

That wonderful large hall on the second floor? NeyChip can use that to host audiences for its history programs.

The group has sponsored a steady stream of programs at Red Land Community Library and in Northeastern schools. Stambaugh has spearheaded a website filled with stories and photographs, NeyChip.com.

These types of initiatives brought the nonprofit NeyChip the prestigious York County History Center's Community Heritage Award for Local History Organizations in 2022.

Owad said she had already felt a new burst of energy from the spirited Stambaugh that has, in a good way, prompted her to get some things done in the library. A small display is already set up in the roughly 18-by-22-foot space designated for the museum. More artifacts are coming.



### *Deep, intriguing history*

A good handful of other things of promise are happening in the 132-year-old borough. The landmark Haven Hotel is hosting a Latin cuisine eatery, the Haven View Bar & Grill. There are new borough regulations in place to inspect leased properties with a goal of bringing housing improvements. Independent congregations have filled some of the vacant church buildings. Kickin' Kadiraks Bar & Grill remains a destination. And fishing in Hydro Park and around the neighboring hydropower plant remains popular.

Councilwoman Robin Isaacson sees the NeyChip presence as an opportunity for people to get to know the borough better. It will contribute to a growing sense of place and community and strengthen National Night Out, twice-a-year cleanups and other borough events. Those using the library will also have the opportunity to take in displays talking about the borough's past.

"I just feel the history center (NeyChip) will give people a sense of what we used to be," she said. And maybe inspire borough residents to build on this and do more community-minded things.

York Haven's needs as a community are immense. But the borough's history is deep and intriguing. The town is filled with compelling architecture and remnants of its past. Walk through Hydro Park where the paper mill stood, and you'll see old mill fixtures and what serves as the yard for the hydropower plant: old buoys and turbine blades.

It would be hard to find a .33-square-mile space in York County that has seen more and experienced more in York County's story. Now York Haven will be hosting a historical group that can help tell that story.

Sources: Stephen H. Smith's YorksPast blog, YDR files, NeyChip.com, Edmund M. Miller's "York County Heritage, York Haven Scrapbook."

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