

HISTORY OF THE PRODUCTION
OF ZINC (SPELTER)
IN HARRISON COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA
1903 - 1969

By

A. B. Morrison
Stonewall Jackson Hotel
CLARKSBURG, WEST VIRGINIA

THE GRASSELLI CHEMICAL COMPANY
GRASSELLI ZINC PLANT
HARRISON COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA

During August 1903, Lynn S. Hornor and E. R. Davis purchased 453 acres of land (the Ash and Smith farms) East of Clarksburg. Guided by Thomas G. Brady, industrial promotor, the men named the site "Steelton". By deed dated October 17, 1903, they sold or donated 68.08 acres to the Grasselli Chemical Company of Cleveland, Ohio. The B&O Railroad Company built two (2) miles of track to the area where future industries would locate. The Grasselli Chemical Company immediately started construction for a zinc smelting plant and a small townsite which soon became known as Grasselli. The plant consisted of 20 horizontal retort furnaces. Each furnace was 20 sections in length, 4 rows high or a total of 320 retorts per furnace making a grand total of 6400 retorts. The plant started production during late 1904 and at that time it was one of the largest horizontal retort zinc plants in the United States.

The Grasselli Plant operated successfully until it was closed down during August 1927, and the townsite is now known as Anmoore.

The Grasselli Chemical Company also owned and operated a natural gas field to furnish fuel for Meadowbrook and Grasselli Plants. This gas field extended over much of Harrison County. They operated a gas compressor station at Wolf Summit and trunk

lines for gas extended from the wells located at Wolf Summit, Lost Creek, Lumberport, Grasselli (now Anmoore), Glen Falls, and Meadowbrook. The gas wells and lines were sold in 1927 to the Hope Natural Gas Company.

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CLARKSBURG ZINC COMPANY

NORTH VIEW PLANT

September 5, 1907, Joseph La Tourette of St. Louis, Missouri, purchased six (6) acres of land in North View and constructed a small zinc smelting plant. The plant was located near the properties of the Liberty Glass, Lafayette Glass and the Peerless Glass Plants. All of the four sites are now owned by the Rolland Glass Plant.

The early operation of the zinc plant was not successful and the property was purchased in 1909 by local businessmen for \$40,122. It was later sold to M. M. Perlman of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, who operated it effective June 29, 1911, under the name of Perlman Company, Inc.

The plant had six (6) horizontal type retort furnaces, four rows high and each furnace had 288 retorts or a total of 1,728 retorts. The plant was closed down during 1918 and was sold to Hector F. Rucquoy on June 12, 1920.

Mr. Perlman returned to Philadelphia.

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BLACK POWDER PLANT
POWDER HILL
HARRISON COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA

During the year 1899, the Du Pont Powder Company and the Fairmont Powder Company had a lease or agreement with the Monongah Company and the Fairmont Coal Company owners of the land to construct a Powder Mill seven miles North of Clarksburg. The Black Powder Mill was constructed and also five large homes for their employees, the location was known as "Powder Hill" (now the community of Spelter). The powder mill operated for two years when a terrific explosion during the year 1901 closed it down.

From the records in the Harrison County Clerk's Office the Fairmont Powder Company and Du Pont Powder were both incorporated under the law of Delaware and Alfred I. Du Pont was the President of both companies, also, Alexis I. Du Pont was the secretary.

Lease dated June 27, 1902, gave the Fairmont Powder Company a 98 year lease to the property.

Deed dated February 9, 1910, and signed by Fairmont Powder Company, Fairmont Coal Company, Monongah Company and the Guaranty Trust Company of New York, conveyed all the agreements, leases and property to the E. I. du Pont Powder Company.

By deed dated April 7, 1910, the entire property was conveyed to the Grasselli Chemical Company of Cleveland, Ohio. This same property was again owned by E. I. du Pont de Nemours and Company on November 1, 1928, by the merger of Grasselli Chemical Company with Du Pont.

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THE GRASSELLI CHEMICAL COMPANY
MEADOWBROOK PLANT
HARRISON COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA

By deed dated April 7, 1910, the Grasselli Chemical Company purchased about 200 acres of land on "Powder Hill" (now known as Spelter) from E. I. du Pont Powder Company for \$10,000. The Grasselli Chemical Company immediately built a passenger swinging bridge over the West Fork river to the interurban station known as Ziesing (named for Richard Ziesing, manager of Grasselli's Zinc Division).

They also started construction for a zinc smelting plant and building homes for their employees at Spelter. The plant started production during late 1911 and by 1916 the townsite consisted of 175 homes, two churches, three stores and a good school building and had a population of 1500. The plant by 1916 had 20 horizontal retort type furnaces in operation, each furnace had 420 retorts or a grand total of 8400 retorts, which at that time was the largest zinc plant in the United States. The furnaces were first fired with natural gas and later by coal burning gas producers.

The plant was owned and operated by the Grasselli Chemical Company until November 1928 when Grasselli Chemical Company by merger was taken over by E. I. du Pont de Nemours & Company. During 1929, and 1930 all of the old horizontal retort furnaces

were closed down and 16 vertical type retort furnaces were constructed. The new type furnaces started production late in 1930, and operations continued under Du Pont until August 31, 1950, when the plant was sold to the oldest incorporated (1858) zinc company in the United States, the Matthiessen & Hegeler Zinc Company, LaSalle, Illinois.

An extensive modernization program was started during 1952, by adding four new vertical type furnaces and numerous other improvements to make it modern and up-to-date. The plant has operated for more than 58 years with but very few interruptions.

Each of the following men had more than 50 years service at the Meadowbrook Plant when they retired, Herman A. Gronemeyer, Albert B. Morrison, Samuel C. Loria, Eugenio Alvarez, Joe M. Vasquez.

The townsite, dwellings, and passenger swinging bridge over the West Fork river were sold by Du Pont in September 1950, to John J. Mochetta who immediately dismantled the bridge and sold the houses to the employees occupying them at that time.

Zinc is a very old non-ferrous metal. Zinc ore is mined in 17 states and many foreign countries. It is processed or roasted before it is shipped to Meadowbrook Plant. Zinc is usually cast into slabs or ingots (Spelter) and its uses are quite numerous. The main ones being for galvanizing (protecting steel against

corrosion); die casting; galvanic protection; electroplating and zinc dust paints; industrial chemical uses; sheet and rolled zinc products; roofing and siding materials; downspouts, gutters in home and industrial building construction, etc.

During the 58 operating years the Meadowbrook Plant produced more than four billion pounds of slab zinc; 400 million pounds zinc dust; 100 million pounds of anodes; and 50 million pounds other alloys.

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