

PROFILE OF A COMMUNITY IN WHICH FOREST USE SHAPED HISTORY

The town of Oakville is imaginary. The purpose of this profile is to highlight how a community developed and evolved. The key component to consider is how this community's economy was based on using and, in some cases, exploiting the forest.

Founded in 1841 and located in the northern tier of Pennsylvania, Oakville arose around an iron furnace. This operation produced iron that fueled the development of the local and state economy. To produce iron, workers would cut trees, preferably oaks and chestnuts, and through a slow burning process made charcoal. This charcoal was then used as the fuel for the iron making process. Typical of early iron furnaces the Oakville furnace needed one acre of trees a day for this operation. This specific furnace continued its iron making operations until 1861 when the distance and cost of getting trees for it became too expensive. Though the iron furnace only operated for twenty years it was the driving force in the development of the Oakville community. For the time it prospered a town with stores, schools, churches, and other community services emerged. Now that the furnace was no longer in operation the town had to look at other means to earn a livelihood.

The next economic stage in Oakville's development was the logging industry. During this period, loggers stopped using rafts to transport logs to the lumber mills. Instead, booms, something like a gate, were placed across the major rivers of the state to collect the logs that were harvested and then sent downstream. With this development, mills could be moved further inland and away from rivers. In the early 1860's a lumber mill began operation in Oakville. Loggers were now able to access areas that the iron furnace's energy needs hadn't reached. They utilized splash dams, which deepened and widened local streams, and therefore allowed loggers to move deeper into Penn's woods. Because of these advancements the logging industry in Oakville prospered. The economic impact was felt throughout the state and led to cities such as Williamsport and Bellefonte to become major economic forces within their regions. In fact, to this day Williamsport's high school's nickname is the Millionaires. Another advance that propelled the lumber industry was the crosscut saw. With this new tool, loggers, in the 1880's put down their axes, and could harvest trees at a faster rate than ever before. The next technological advance was the impact of narrow gauge, logging railroads that provided even deeper access into the forest. Soon the inevitable occurred, loggers had removed all the hardwoods that they could reach and the Oakville lumber mill closed.

The closure of the mill brought hard times to the Oakville community. A local entrepreneur realized that loggers had left behind extensive tracts of hemlocks. Recognizing an opportunity, a tannery was opened in Oakville. The remaining hemlocks were then harvested and stripped of their bark to provide the key ingredient in making

leather, tannin. For the next twenty years, the tannery prospered. Unfortunately, much like the situation after the lumber mill ran out of hardwoods, the local forest was depleted of its hemlocks. In neither case did the community look to the future and plant trees to replace those that were removed.

Now with the closure of the tannery hard times hit Oakville. The surrounding forest, which had provided a living for many townspeople, was gone. By the late 1920's, formerly forested areas, now depleted with trees, were unable to hold soil and terrible erosion problems began. This erosion caused extensive siltation of the local waterways. Indiscriminate logging caused significant damage to local wildlife populations. The native brook trout was being choked out of its streams and the local deer population dropped so low that the sight of a track was cause for celebration. As if things weren't bad enough, blight struck the American chestnut tree in Pennsylvania. Soon the chestnut was gone from the forests; a tree that once comprised 40% of the Pennsylvania's forest. In addition to environmental damage, the town of Oakville was fighting for its economic life. Some locals were able to pocket some money when the Pennsylvania Game Commission and the Department of Forests and Waters purchased large tracts of the environmentally damaged lands. Most folks struggled to make a living. Further complicating this situation was the stock market crash of 1929. The crash ushered in the Great Depression. Now, not only was Oakville struggling but so was the state of Pennsylvania and the United States as well. In 1933, a new president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, was inaugurated. He quickly began numerous federal work programs to get the country back on its feet. Enlarging on an idea borrowed from then Governor Gifford Pinchot, Roosevelt authorized the Emergency Conservation Work Act. Out of this act came the Civilian Conservation Corps popularly referred to as "Roosevelt's Tree Army". Young men, from around the United States, joined the CCC and were put to work in a variety of conservation projects. By 1935, there were more CCC camps in Pennsylvania than any other state with the exception of California. A local camp was erected outside of Oakville. Not only did it provide much needed work for some of the local men, who were hired as foremen, but the camp set to work planting trees to arrest erosion, built roads, and began developing areas for outdoor recreation. During the existence of the CCC, across the United States, 3740 fire towers were erected, 4,135,000 man hours were spent fighting forest fires, 2 billion trees were planted, and erosion control in 500 camps saved an estimated 20 million trees.

On December 7, 1941 the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and the United States entered World War II. Many of the young men in the CCC entered military service, as did the men of Oakville. During the war some tool and die works developed in Oakville to provide parts for the Piper Aircraft Company and the town began to prosper once again. Following the war, Oakville developed some small industry and continued to survive. In the post-war economic boom, Pennsylvanians began to appreciate and use their public lands. The work of the CCC in developing the majority of Pennsylvania's state parks and their conservation efforts began to pay dividends. The forest was growing back, streams again held native fish, forest regeneration fueled a deer population explosion, and many people traveled to the areas in and around Oakville. The economy of Oakville became dependent on these tourism dollars.

Today, Oakville, still a small town, is once again dependent on the forest for survival. Outdoor enthusiasts travel to the area to pursue their favorite activities. Especially important dates for the local economy remain the opening days of trout and deer seasons. Aside from tourist dollars, once again, Oakville is home to the logging industry. Now practiced in a manner that does not destroy the local habitats, the local logging industry provides much needed employment and often, is done in such a way that it benefits many wildlife species. In areas where cutting has occurred ruffed grouse, wild turkey, and black bear populations are thriving. One particular species, the white-tailed deer has rebounded to the point that the population is damaging the very forest the species depends on. Many locals recognize the problem and look to balance the needs of the local logging industry with wildlife. To insure continued timber operations proper forestry practices, which includes regeneration strategies, are employed. Due to over-browsing, deer fencing has to be utilized. The Oakville community recognizes its dependence on outdoor enthusiasts and the logging industry. It welcomes hunters to help balance the deer herd with its habitat and welcomes the new deer management strategies implemented by the Pennsylvania Game Commission. A strategy that will increase the harvest of does and allow the forest to regenerate. With this regeneration locals hope to widen the opportunities for hunters to pursue other game species, especially, the wild turkey. The goal is to increase the number of hunters coming to the area in the spring as well as during the traditional deer season. There are also other threats to the forest. As more Pennsylvanians look to the forest for recreation, their impact is also damaging the resource. ATV riders, mountain bikers, and equestrians are impacting the trail systems in the area's public lands contributing to erosion and other problems. The people of Oakville, long tied to the forest, prosper from this eco-tourism but also recognize the threats to the northern tier of Pennsylvania. Oakville survived the collapse of the local iron industry, the lumber mill, the tannery, the Great Depression, and World War II. Now at the beginning of a new century, Oakville faces new challenges. The common denominator in Oakville's history remains its continued ties to the forest.