

Samuel Hager's Ghost Town

As the North Pennsylvania expanded its railroad system in 1856, local real estate investor Samuel M. Hager built a general store and several houses near the new Landis Ridge tunnel's south entrance in the current-day location Perkasio. Hager also bought Strassburger's Mill in Bridgetown in the same period. Newspaper records show that Hager often speculated in land in Bucks and Montgomery counties, and also in Philadelphia into the late 1870s. Hager's hopes of profiting from train service were dashed when the railroad declined to build a depot near the tunnel's south end.¹⁶ Much of the Hager's general store building in Perkasio at West Market Street still exists, along with several additions. (Parts of its Victorian-Era additions were later lost in a 1988 fire.)

Hager's development project experienced problems at the start. Between April 1856 and June 1857, the store and mill were robbed four times. By that June, Hager stationed a guard at the store, but the thief struck again when the guard was given a night off. Hager soon confronted Joseph R. Rosenberger, who admitted he took flour from the mill. Rosenberger escaped from custody, and it was discovered he was the serial thief.¹⁷

In April 1860, Hager's investment property in Bridgetown was sold at auction. The land included an apple orchard.¹⁸ By April 1862, he advertised a large sale of goods at his store and mill in exchange for cash or "county produce," with the incentive that buyers could avoid paying taxes if they paid with cash.¹⁹ Then Hager was robbed again as he prepared to liquidate the store's contents. This time, someone had access to a key to the front door, and they made off with "50 to 75

dollars” worth of goods of the \$3,000 of property up for the sheriff’s sale.²⁰ The Bucks County *Intelligencer* called it at “alleged robbery,” stating “the whole affair is involved in considerable mystery.” By that time, Hager had moved to Philadelphia to conduct a real estate brokerage business.



Figure 11. Hager's store expanded in the Victorian Era. The original section is on the right.

In May 1866, a “firm from Philadelphia” bought Hager’s former store and turned it into a woolen mill that made stockings.²¹ But not much more was heard from that business. Part of the reason for the development’s failure in the 1860s was apparent animosity between investors and the North Pennsylvania Railroad’s president, Franklin Comley. Another rumored reason was that Comley was upset that his name was used for the settlement without his permission in an attempt to get an official railroad depot near the tunnel.

Another investor, Joseph A. Hendricks, bought the former Hager property in 1869. Hendricks owned a coal

and lumber business in Sellersville, which he sold to finance his investment.²² Hendricks grew up in Hilltown and was a carpenter by trade until he started his retail business in Sellersville. By September 1870, Joseph A. Hendricks, his brother Abraham, and Joseph's store clerk, Mahlon Myers, had set up a "flour and feed store, a coal and lumber yard, and a hay pressing establishment" in Comleyville.²³ In December 1870, Hendricks held a sale of 35 building lots at Comleyville "nicely located" along the railroad line.²⁴ However, for the investment to prosper, Hendricks needed regular train stops.

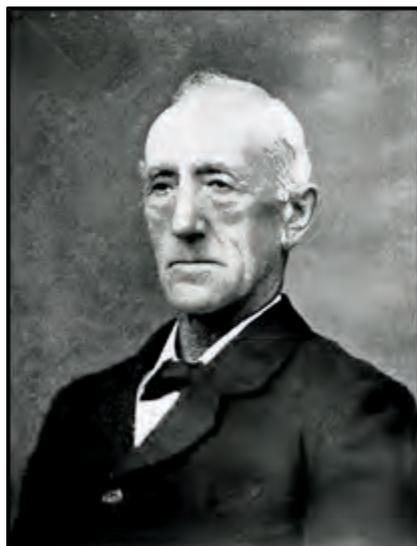


Figure 12. Joseph A. Hendricks

Andrew Jackson Croman, a bricklayer who was involved with the tunnel project and later much construction in Perkasio Borough, told the *Perkasio Central News* in 1908 about how Hendricks and his friends convinced railroad president Franklin Comley to allow regular service at the Perkasio location in 1871.

“Comley was far from being flattered by having his name attached to the colony in those early days. He not only refused a station but also declined to stop trains,” Croman said. For Christmas, Hendricks and who Croman called “the boys”—the Moyer brothers (Joseph and Henry), Mahlon Myers and Tilghman Angeny—sent Comley a gift basket with “turkeys, rabbits, cider, apples, pumpkins, and walnuts.”²⁵ So after that, the name “Perkasie” appeared on official train schedules, Croman claimed. More than likely, the granting of an official post office, named Perkasio, in Hager’s former general store on July 25, 1871, was a significant factor in establishing the village. The tunnel and the railroad stop were eventually a boon for the area, as was Hendricks’ real-estate development.

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WHOLESALE AND RETAIL DEALER IN
BITUMINOUS and LEHIGH COAL,
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Address: Perkasio P. O., Bucks Co., Pa.

Figure 13. An 1871 ad for the Hendricks brothers in newly named Perkasio.

Hersey's *Business Directory and Gazetteer of Bucks County*, published in 1871, mentioned the earliest buildings in the "lately established" village of Perkasio, which contained "a store, several shops and from 15 to 20 dwelling houses. It was named for the old Manor of Perkasio of which Rockhill, in the early part of the county's history, it was a part."²⁶ The investors offered more land in November 1871. Lucky buyers could bid on 23 building lots.

Hendricks' group had divided the former Stout tract into two sections. The largest, lower part of the Hendricks property became Perkasio's village center, as he sold more lots to businesses and families by 1876. A smaller, upper portion was called Perkasio Park. By 1872, the village of Perkasio was mentioned for the first time in Doylestown's newspapers.

"The thriving village of Perkasio just above Sellersville still continues its rapid growth. There have been erected no less than 8 or 10 dwelling houses this summer with others in prospect. ... The new hotel opposite the site of the new station house is fitted up for the reception of guests," reported the Bucks County *Intelligencer*. It also mentioned the future location of the Perkasio Park Camp-Meeting grounds. "One-eighth of a mile from the station is a splendid grove with springs of fresh water and other attractions for excursionists. A large party from Allentown numbering over 1,100 people accompanied by a cornet band occupied it for the first time. Last Thursday an excursion of the Sunday school attached to the Reformed congregation of Hellertown visited it."²⁷ In 1874, the North Pennsylvania Railroad built a wooden train depot next to Hendricks' store, where passenger tickets and freight had been handled.