

## A Brief History of the Tobacco Industry in York County and Dallastown's Prominent Role

Prepared for the Dallastown Area Historical Society October 1, 2023 Walking Tour of Dallastown Cigar Industry

Historical records indicate that tobacco farming and manufacturing existed in Pennsylvania back to the colonial days but were limited for many decades since early varieties of the tobacco plant were considered unsuited to the soil in York County. However, from 1837 onward with the introduction of new tobacco varieties and increased use of fertilization, tobacco farming started to thrive and by the early 1900s cigar making businesses employed more people than any other industry in York County. Local historian George Prowell, in his 1907 *History of York County Pennsylvania*, noted "The towns receiving the greatest benefits from the manufacture of cigars are Hanover, Red Lion, Dallastown, Yoe, Windsorville, Hellam, Seven Valley, East Prospect and the city of York ...".<sup>i</sup> While many cigar manufacturers were small businesses that employed family members and operated out of their homes or buildings behind their homes, others grew to be large enterprises operating at multiple locations, manufacturing cigars from tobacco obtained locally from farms in York and Lancaster Counties, along with tobacco "raised in other sections of the country and in Cuba."<sup>ii</sup>

One of the first "modern" cigar factories in Dallastown was established by L. W. G. Wierman before the Civil War. During the years after the Civil War "Dallastown became a prominent center. Augustus Sonneman, Benjamin Spatz and Joseph Secrist played an important part in the growing industry in Dallastown in those days."<sup>iii</sup> Statistics reported by the York internal revenue office, indicated that "there were in 1907 twelve hundred cigar factories within the limits of York County. The annual product of all these factories is three hundred million cigars, so that the annual revenue collected at the York office from the manufacture of cigars alone is nearly one million dollars."<sup>iv</sup> At this time half of the cigar manufacturers in York County were in Dallastown, Red Lion, Yoe, and Windsor. By the 1920s, the York County Cigar Manufacturers Association boasted York County as "The home of the five cent cigars."<sup>v</sup> and, twenty percent of U.S. cigars were produced in York County.

### Instructions for Access to Phone App

1. Scan this **QR code** with your cellphone camera
2. Click the **Download icon** on phone screen
3. Select **Add to Home Screen** (located under Copy banner)
4. Select **Code Studio icon** on screen to open App
5. **App Navigation**
  - a. Top window lists site address and name
  - b. Middle window lists historical information
  - c. Bottom window lists directions to next site
  - d. Scroll to reveal additional information in Middle and Bottom windows



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<sup>i</sup> George. R. Prowell, *1907 History of York County Pennsylvania* p. 632.

<sup>ii</sup> Prowell, p. 632.

<sup>iii</sup> York County Cigar Manufacturers Association *1927 Official Souvenir Yearbook*, p. 42.

<sup>iv</sup> Prowell, p. 632

<sup>v</sup> York County Cigar Manufacturers Association, p. 3.