

LANGELOTH, PENNSYLVANIA AND VICINITY

Henry Hellmers
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This write-up was inspired by the article written by David Demarest and Eugene Levy, published in "Pittsburgh History", and reprinted in the "Burgettstown Enterprise" on November 1, 1989. It is hoped the following will provide some additional information that the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania might find useful. This information was obtained through my long association with Langeloth and the American Zinc and Chemical Company plant, both directly and indirectly through my father, Henry Bernard Carl Hellmers.

Our family moved to Langeloth in 1916 before I was one year old. We lived in one house for a year, while the one at 501 West Fifth Avenue was being finished. I left in 1933 to attend Penn State, but came home to work in the summers through 1937. After that, I visited frequently until 1941, when I moved to California. My parents lived at that the same address until 1948. I have been to Langeloth several times since.

The plant opened in 1914. My father started to work in Langeloth in 1915 and moved his family there the following year. We came from Palmerton, Pennsylvania, the site of the New Jersey Zinc Company plant. My sister, Gertrude, was born in Langeloth in 1920. My father was one of the superintendents for practically the entire life of the factory and, at one time or another, headed every department. Also, he supervised the building of the Climax Molybdenum plant. He was a mechanical and chemical engineer having graduated from Karlsruhe Institute, Germany.

THE TOWN OF LANGELOTH

A three panel postal card showing the town shortly after being built, is enclosed. A legend for the picture is at the end of this article. The following message is printed on the back of the card:

"A beautiful place to live.

An excellent location for manufacturing plants.

Langeloth, Washington County, Pennsylvania,

30 miles west of Pittsburgh on the Panhandle Branch of the Pennsylvania Railroad.

A new and modern industrial town, adjacent to large manufacturing plants and in the center of rapidly developing coal acreage. The town has beautiful homes, filtered water, complete sewage system with disposal plant, electric light, coal and gas in abundance, railroad facilities and fine passenger station."--Langeloth Board of Trade.

The town was built and maintained by the American Zinc and Chemical Company. The 215 houses were spread over a 390 acre site. In order to entice and maintain a good working force for both their factory and coal mine, the town was made attractive. The town had good water and electrical systems. The water supply was from a dam at Dinsmore, several miles to the north. Before being piped to Langeloth the water was put through a purification processing plant. Originally, the electricity was produced by the factory, using heat from the furnaces to produce steam for the generators. Later, electricity was supplied by the West Penn Power Company. There was no fire department, but instead, a network of fire hydrants and sheds containing large wheeled reels of fire hoses. The water for the fire hydrants, both in the town and factory, came from a reservoir below the plant. In the event of a fire, large pumps at the factory could put tremendous pressure on the system, at which time several men were needed to control a hose. Until sometime in the early twenties, before most people

owned cars, there was a brick railroad station with regular train service to Burgettstown, connecting with trains to Pittsburgh.

The houses were constructed well and had routine maintenance. They were made with either brick, cement stucco, or wood sidings. We happened to live in a stucco house. It had natural gas, that we used for cooking and for heating hot water in the summer. As there was no thermostat on the hot water tank, care had to be taken in the summer to keep the flame low or out, when hot water was not needed. When the house furnace was operating, the water in the hot water tank was heated in a pipe that looped through the furnace. Thus, in winter the amount and temperature of the hot water could not be controlled, even manually, except to make it hotter. When it was cold outside and the furnace was kept going full blast, it was not uncommon to have high pressure steam instead of water come out of the hot water tap. The house was heated by coal, which in the twenties was delivered by horse drawn wagons.

Special efforts were made to make the town an attractive place to raise a family. The Company provided a supplement to the school teachers' salaries in order to hire excellent teachers. In addition, money was provided for materials and special activities. The school included a gym, which was not found in most grade schools at the time. Major theatrical shows were produced each year that involved most, if not all, of the students. The plays were presented in the local movie theater, the Lyric, that had a large stage, as did most movie houses of the day. One school play I remember, for no special reason other than it required a lot of flowers, was "Tulip Time".

There were special teachers for music, gym, wood shop, and home economics. The school building was constructed in such a way that the blackboards between rooms on the upper floor could be removed. This large room was used for special occasions, such as, the banquet for the graduating class. The meal was cooked by the students in the home economics class and served by the seventh graders. There were always Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and May Day parties in the gym and on the grounds

for the entire school. All of this extra curricular activity took a lot of time, but reading, writing and arithmetic were not neglected.

The town was awakened at five in the morning by a blast of the plant whistle. The factory day shift started at seven, except for those working the smelters. They started work at four AM. The men walked to work and the children walked to school.

A large bell on top of the school rang fifteen minutes before, and again when, classes started. School started at 8:30 in the morning and ended at 4:30 in the afternoon. We had several supervised play periods during the day but they occurred less frequently as one advanced up the grades. Also, we had an hour off at noon, and everyone went home for lunch. I was especially lucky, I lived only two doors from the school.

In addition to the main brick school building there were three wooden buildings, called "portables". Two contained two classrooms each, the third had one classroom. The single room portable was used for music classes. By the time I entered fourth grade, 1923, another classroom had been added using a portion of the second floor of the Company store with an outside entrance. Also, a manual training shop was located in a room at the end of a row of wooden garages located next to the store. Students in the upper four grades used the portables and changed rooms for each class. We walked in line, two by two, between the classes.

An excellent history of the Langeloth School was written by Katherine Pyle and published in a series of articles in the September-December 1977 issues of the Burgettstown Enterprise.

We went to Union High School, which at that time, was located on Main Street in Burgettstown, and was attended by all the students in Smith Township. There was no local school bus system, so most students walked to school from Burgettstown, Langeloth, and Slovan. Some parents drove their children to high school, and of course hitchhiking was common. The only students, who drove there own or the family car, were a couple seniors

living on farms. The only school bus was a green one that came from Eldersville, which is several miles west of Langeloth.

The central part of Langeloth consisted of the townsite building, the Company store, the school, and the movie theater, all of which, surrounded the playground. The post office was in a building across the street from the store. Eventually, the playground was moved to behind the school, and the old playground area was made into a park.

The coming of Christmas brought a special bit of excitement, when a large evergreen tree was erected in the lawn next to the townsite building. The tree would be trimmed with lights and ornaments.

The Company store sold everything from pins to furniture, fresh and canned fruits and vegetables, and meats. One could either pay cash or have the bill deducted from the following pay checks. This seemed to work pretty well, as I don't remember hearing any complaints. In the early days people would place their grocery orders by phone or in person for delivery. The deliveries were made with a horse drawn cart. It was very special when the delivery man would let me drive the horse. I can not remember the name of the man who cared for the horses and made the deliveries, but his pet expression and closest he came to profanity, I remember well. It was "Sac-ra-ment-o". In later life I often have wondered, where and why, he came up with that word. Everyone had iceboxes, and the iceman also used a horse drawn wagon. Several small stores operated for various lengths of time along the road between the center of town and the section known as miners hill.

The history of the town includes a real Horatio Alger success story, that started in the Company store. Gus Barbush, a Greek immigrant, was hired originally as the butcher in 1920. While working in the store he built a slaughter house, providing excellent meat for the store. People came from miles around to buy meat from Gus. Later, he bought out the meat department. At an even later date, when the Company wanted to get out of the store business, Gus bought the entire store and its stock. When the Company closed the plant in 1948, the Mellon Bank in Pittsburgh and others

loaned Gus enough money to buy the entire town, including the water and sewer systems. He was very concerned about the people, as well as, the buildings. Based on stories I have heard, he apparently helped many of the residents, especially the elderly, by never raising their rent and in some cases not even collecting it. Gus was rumored to have had a crush on one of the teachers, a Miss Mull, in the twenties, but it never developed beyond the rumor stage. He died a bachelor at the age of 90 in 1989.

The movie theater was a wooden building, and of course in the twenties, showed silent films. There was usually some one playing the piano to add mood music and atmosphere for the drama on the screen. Saturday night, in addition to the main attraction and the news reel, there was a continued western. Each segment ended with the hero in a precarious situation to entice your attendance the following week. I remember one mother who sat towards the rear and read the captions out loud to her children, who were too young to read. The price of admission was fifteen cents.

The post office was a place of special interest. There was no house to house delivery, so everyone had to pick up their mail at the post office. The mail came in each morning at about the same time, and the delivery window was closed, while the mail was sorted. This gave all those waiting a chance to stand around and discuss the events, rumors, and gossip of the day. The wait was exceptionally long on the days just before Christmas, when it often was quite cold in the unheated lobby.

Originally, there was no church in town. Eventually, through the efforts of Reverend George U. Martin, a United Presbyterian Church was built in the twenties next to the baseball diamond. The building was financed through pledges, strawberry ice cream socials, suppers of various sorts, a food booth at the Burgettstown Fair each Fall, and of course a brick buying drive. A brick for the new building could be bought for a nickel. The church continues to operate to-day. No Catholic Church was built in town so Catholics continue to go to Burgettstown to attend services.

The nationality mix of the population, about 1500, was presented in the article by Demarest and Levy. I was very interested in the history they gave of the large Spanish representation in the town. Other than the fact that many had worked in smelters in Spain, I was not aware of how they happened to be in Langeloth.

THE ZINC SMELTER PLANT

My father often went to work at odd times during the day and evening to check on work in progress. I frequently would go with him in the evening. During my college years I worked at the plant in the summers. Some of what follows will repeat what Ceasar Prado and Joseph Abate have related in the Enterprise article. I have done so only to maintain the trend of thought, as I work through the operation of the smelter. Also, their article contains a picture of the general plan of the plant, that I found most helpful.

The ore came by train to the ore bin building, the site that now is a series of water and debris filled pits. The building was a long high corrugated sheet metal building with a moving overhead crane that transferred the ore in the various bins to and from the crusher building. In the early years the ore went from here via overhead conveyors to the roasters. By 1933 a magnetic separator had been installed that removed the iron ore and other ores that were amalgamated with iron, such as gold and silver. This was done in the crusher building, before the zinc ore went to the roasters. In the summer of 1933 I operated the separator on the graveyard shift, 11 PM to 7 AM, and was the only person in this large building. Occasionally, I would see Angelo Spanogians, who was working as a night watchmen. One of the clocks on his rounds was in the crusher building. He went on to get his Medical Doctorate and practiced in Burgettstown.

Originally, the roasting kilns were long ovens, in which the ore was heated to remove the sulfur. The ore was placed into the roasters and removed using scrapers on the ends of mechanically driven long rods. The sulfur in the form of a gas, sulfur dioxide, was piped to lead lined chambers. Water, sprayed into the chambers, combined with the gas to form sulfuric acid, one of the commercial products of the factory.

About 1930 the long roasting kilns were replaced by circular, continuous feed ovens. These ovens were more efficient at removing the sulfur. Also, they eliminated the slow and arduous task of having to charge and empty the roasters. My first job at the plant was not actually with the zinc company. I was a water boy for the wrecking crew from West Virginia that was hired to tear down the old roasters and their rods. There were only six men in the crew. It was on that job that I learned to swear from the pros, a habit I have long since abandoned. Ever since, I have been thoroughly disgusted with the use of profanity as used by people on the stage, in the movies, and in every day life. Most of them really don't know how to swear with emphasis and a meaningful voice inflection.

The ore was transferred in narrow gauge electric train cars from the roasters to the smelters. In route, the individual cars were weighted to obtain the correct amount of ore to charge each furnace.

The furnaces, where the ore was smelted, were long brick ovens. Rows of clay retorts were inserted in the two long sides at a tilt, causing the molten zinc to flow to the front. The retorts were about 5-6 ft long with two flat and two convex sides. They were about a foot wide in the longest dimension and had a solid back. The base of a clay cone fitted over the front of each retort. At night the small flickering flame on the front of the cones made a very colorful display on the sides of the furnaces. Several times each day the the zinc was drained from the retorts. The material that had been used to plug the small opening on each cone was removed. The molten zinc was drained into a ladle and poured into molds, forming pure zinc ingots weighting 25 pounds apiece. As Prado and Abate pointed out, during the cool of the day, starting at 5AM, the furnaces were drawn and recharged. After tapping the furnaces, the cones were removed, and new ore was placed in the retorts. It took three and half hours for a crew to do one side of a furnace. It was a hot three and a half hours. The temperature of each furnace was carefully monitored and controlled. The temperature was observed by noting the curvature on temperature sensitive rods inserted in a piece of fire clay, and placed in an open retort that was not charged with ore.

When I was attending Union High School, my father was superintendent of the smelters. He got up at 4 AM to be there for the drawing and charging of the furnaces, which began when the whistle blew at five. That was when I learned to get up early to do my studying. A policy I followed through college and until I retired from teaching Botany and Forestry at Duke University in 1983.

My father would leave home shortly after 4 AM, come home for breakfast about seven, then return to work, and I would leave for school. He came home for lunch and again for dinner, but returned each evening to check the furnaces. The normal day shift at the factory during the early years was seven to five. Those were before the days of the eight hour day and the forty hour week.

Heat for the furnaces came from burning coal gas, which was produced in special equipment located below one end of the furnaces. On the opposite end of each furnace block, there was a tall brick stack. The coal came from the company owned mine that underlaid the factory, town, and surrounding country side. The entire factory was located on a hill, and the entrance to the coal mine was in the valley. The coal was moved to the gas producers from the mine by an incline. The entrance to the mine was across the creek from the town of Slovan, where many of the miners and factory workers lived.

While sulfur dioxide from the ore roasters was used to make sulfuric acid, sulfur dioxide from the high sulfur content coal, used in the gas producers, went through the furnaces and was vented into the air through the tall stacks. One summer, Junius Parham and I had the job of going various distances down wind from the plant and measuring the sulfur concentration in the air. We also would make similar measurements down wind from burning slag dumps of several coal mines in the area. Apparently, the local farmers were continually threatening law suits, so, a continuous record of wind velocity and direction was made in the company laboratory. The primary purpose of the laboratory was to check the quality of the ore received by the plant. In the summer of 1935 Thad Dodds, who was killed in

World War II, and I surveyed the newly acquired Shilo farm on the facing hill to the east and laid out the fields for contour farming. The company bought and managed the property to try to show that with proper agricultural practices, good crops could be grown down wind from the plant. I never did learn of the results.

To assure continuous operation of the smelters there was a whole set of auxiliary operations. These included a large carpenter and machine shop, where equipment was repaired and special parts and equipment produced. As the hot gas left the furnaces, it was used to produce steam. This steam was used to produce electricity in large generators located in the power house. A highly visible structure in the plant was a tall, square wooden cooling tower. Water was sprayed in the top to condense the steam from the power plant. This increased the efficiency of the generators by increasing the pressure differential between the intake and exhaust side of the generators.

The retorts and cones, made with fire clay, were formed by an extrusion process in a pottery. The retorts had to be cured slowly to prevent their cracking. This curing was done in rooms, where the temperature and humidity were regulated by automatically operated steam traps and valves below the slotted floors. If, the retorts and cones were dried too rapidly they cracked, and, if, the humidity got too high they would melt and become deformed. The drying process was slow. The production rate had to correspond closely to the breakage rate at the furnaces. The summer after graduating from high school, when I worked the graveyard shift, I changed clothes in the pottery. At night the clanging of valves, the hissing of steam, and occasionally meeting a cloud of white steam as I rounded a corner, took some getting used to, as there was no one else around. Another memory of the pottery was the time Angelo Spanogians and I painted the narrow gauge train bridge. A couple times, we swapped parts of our lunch and I got to eat his squid sandwiches, a real treat.

THE MOLYBDENUM PLANT

The Climax molybdenum plant, and the tall stack that can be seen for miles around, was designed by my father, who also supervised the construction. The plant was built by the parent company of the zinc works. When the molybdenum plant was built, the tall front section housed a circular continuously fed furnace. The long lower part of the building was used to store the ore, lime, iron chips (the small pieces left from cutting points on nails), and the finished products. As I remember, there were two products. Calcium molybdate was made in the furnace. Ferrous molybdate was produced at the opposite end of the plant by heating a molybdenum ore-iron chip mixture in vertical fire brick lined cylinders, set on a bed of sand. After firing the mixture, the cylinder was removed by a crane, and a molten button, covered with a layer of slag, was left in the sand. When cool, the metallic button was crushed and packaged.

What is now the long part of the plant, was originally the building where zinc oxide, used in making white paint, was produced and bagged for shipping. This operation apparently was not profitable and must have been stopped in the early or mid twenties. I vaguely remember visiting it once with my father.

My most vivid recollections of the Climax Molybdenum plant are of the jobs I held there during parts of several summers. One job was to unload molybdenum ore, iron chips, and lime from boxcars and to load the packaged products into boxcars. The second job was keeping the furnace fed.

The loading and unloading was done by two of us, and we were paid by the railroad boxcar. The iron chips and lime came one car at a time, but the ore cars from Climax, Colorado, always, came in groups. Frequently, there would be no work for days, then there would be five to seven cars to unload. We worked under a time restriction, because the railroad charged demurrage on cars held past 48 hours. Consequently, we put in long days when the ore cars arrived. I worked with a Serbian fellow who was about my age, but whose name, unfortunately, I can not recall. He taught me how to lift properly and how to handle heavy objects.

The ore came in burlap bags that must have weighed close to 100 pounds because neither of us could lift one alone. The ore was a very fine powder that made the working surfaces slippery, so we had to be especially careful. In transit the bags became very tightly packed, which made it difficult to unload the car. We took turns; one would unload the boxcar using a two wheeled hand cart to move the bags to a belt conveyor, while the other one would be on an upper floor to catch the bags. The trick of the job on the upper floor was to grab the bag as it fell off the elevator on to a tray, keep it moving, and drop it on to another two wheeled cart. It was possible to stand two bags on the lip of the cart, and lay two more across the top. Done properly, the load was balanced, and you could wheel the bags to the location on the floor, where they were stored. If, they fell over, or one bag fell off the tray or truck, the operation had to stop. Then, the person working in the boxcar had to come upstairs to help stack the bags. This was time consuming and avoided, if, at all possible.

The lime came in paper bags that leaked. We never could decide whether it was better to wear loose or tight clothes when unloading lime. Regardless of what we wore, once we started to perspire, our skin would be rubbed raw.

For part of a summer I worked at charging the furnace on the afternoon shift. I remember this job because I lost so much weight. The ore and lime were mixed by hand, shoveled into a wheel barrow, and taken to a hopper on top of the furnace. This was all done on the top floor, which was also the top of the furnace. Even though the furnace was insulated, the metal floor got very warm, plus the sun shining on the metal roof added heat. I used to lose about five pounds every shift and then eat and drink water in the off hours to gain back my weight.

WORLD WARS I AND II, THE DEPRESSION, AND UNIONIZATION

The operation of the zinc plant and life in the town of Langeloth, as would be expected, was strongly affected by the events of the times. The plant was built at the start of World War I, when the steel industry in the Pittsburgh area was on the rise. I was too young to remember anything about that war, but everything must have been booming as the town was so well maintained.

I am not sure I remember the actual recession of 1922, but I do remember, I was continually reminded of it for many years. The Burgettstown Bank closed its doors in 1925 and a lot of people in the area lost money. The bank eventually paid ten cents on the dollar. The Washington Bank, the other one in Burgettstown, stayed open. This low point was followed by good times for the factory and the town until the stock market crash in 1929 and the depression that followed.

During the depression unemployment was extremely high, particularly in the cities. I remember going to Pittsburgh and seeing men standing on every corner selling pencils and apples -- apples that were polished until you could almost see your face in them. In 1932 a private contract was let to tear down the old ore roasters. The contractor hired six men at twenty-five cents an hour, which was pretty good wages for the times. I don't know how many men were there that first day, but during the job at least a dozen men would be at the site each morning, hoping to get work in case one of those hired did not show. Six years later, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt got the minimum wage law passed in 1938, it was for twenty-five cents an hour.

It took many years to get out of the depression. The national Public Works Administration (PWA) had programs that were operating as late or later than 1941. One WPA job in 1941, that provided up to 300 jobs, was bank stabilization and beautification of the Pennsylvania Turnpike. The western terminus was, at that time, the Irwin Interchange. The road bank sloping and planting, as well as, the cutting and laying of stone for the riprapped drains was all done by hand.

The zinc works at Langeloth continued to operate all through the depression but at a reduced level. While everyone, including the supervisors, had their time and pay reduced, the Company kept everyone employed. In those times people were not striking or bickering over annual raises. Rather, concern was about how big the pay cut would be or if there would be a job at all. I remember my father was placed on furlough for six months at half pay and then returned to work at a reduced salary.

The Company was able to keep operating, only because it borrowed large sums of money and stock piled the zinc ingots. Each ingot weighed 25 pounds and I estimate was about a foot long, six inches wide and two inches thick. The ingots were stacked in piles, about five feet high, and by 1933 covered all the open areas between the buildings. I remember some one figured; there were enough ingots, if laid end to end, to reach from Langeloth to New York and back, and they were worth about 80 million dollars. That was a lot of money when the average worker in most industries wasn't even making twenty-five cents an hour.

By 1933 the Company started to sell its stored zinc. Regular employees, including me, as I worked at the plant that summer, made extra money by loading box cars during off hours for a fixed price per car. Consequently, everyone worked as fast as possible. A crew of six was needed per boxcar as each ingot had to be handled three times. These were from the pile to a truck, then tossed into the boxcar, where the slab was picked up and stacked. Lifting 25 pound zinc ingots for a couple hours at top speed was a real workout.

In the summer of 1933 a chapter of the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers (A.F. of L.) was formed. I was a charter member of the Union and left in good standing, when I went to college. I wasn't very happy with the new rules, when the Union was formed. I had been working the graveyard shift seven days a week and had to go to a five day week, which disrupted my daily rhythm. Instead of having a set time to work and sleep every day, I was faced with a problem at the end of the fifth day of work, 7 AM. If, I slept during the day, as I normally would have done, then I

couldn't sleep at night. Consequently, I tried to sleep only a short time in the morning. By the end of the second day I was adjusted to staying awake during the day and sleeping at night, but then it was time to go back to work on the night shift.

As my father was one of the superintendents at the plant, I felt it prudent not to attend any of the Union meetings. In addition to bargaining for the five day week the Union threatened to go on strike for a ten cent an hour raise. They did so because two other near by zinc plants were paying the higher wages. The Company's argument was that they had kept everyone employed during the depression, while the other two plants had shut down and had no large debt. The Company wanted the Union to hold off until enough stockpiled zinc had been sold to reduce the Company debt. The Company lost that battle and several others during the next fifteen years when the Union threatened to or did strike.

One of the big problems during a strike was the furnaces. They had to be kept heated, because, if they cooled, the fire brick from which they were made would go to pieces. Then, no ore could be smelted for several months, while the furnaces were being rebuilt. To prevent the loss of the furnaces during strikes, the administrators and office personnel would keep the furnaces heated but did not smelt any zinc ore.

In June 1947 the Union representatives went to New York to negotiate a new contract for increased pay and additional vacation days. During the course of the negotiations, the government announced they were discontinuing the five cents a pound subsidy on zinc. At that point, the Company gave the Union the choice of working under their present contract until the end of the year or having the plant close immediately. It was decided to continue to work. My father said that the people of Langeloth, Slovan, and Burgettstown just couldn't believe the plant would close. However, when the Company announced they had split the coal mine and sold it to two different operators, everyone knew that the end was near. The plant closed the end of December. In 1948 the plant buildings were sold to the local junk dealer, who demolished them for scrap metal. So ended the

history of the Langeloth zinc plant. The molybdenum plant continues to operate.

My father retired December 1946 and was deeply saddened to learn in June of 1947 of the plant's closing. His last job had been to make an estimate of the cost to refurbish and modernize the entire plant. He was sure that the cost was reasonable and that it would be done.

Earlier, my mother and father had bought a house on Cape Cod next to my mother's sister, and were to move there in October 1948. The house was smaller, and by October dad had given away most of his things.. He had been very active in the Masons as a Past Master and teacher. Some of the younger members had been very good about taking him to area meetings, so he gave them all his Masonic material. On the Friday before the Monday that the movers were to come, he went through Langeloth, Burgettstown and Slovan saying good-bye to his many friends. Friday night he had a massive heart attack, and even though the two local doctors and the Burgettstown and Slovan fire departments did all they could to save him, he died on Saturday, 2 October 1948, at the age of 68. Mother died 11 August 1981. He and mother are buried in Rhode Island, my mother's birth place.

THE AREA SURROUNDING LANGELOTH

Langeloth is located in Smith Township, which does not have a separate high school. Students from Langeloth, Atlasburg, Burgettstown, Cherry Creek, Eldersville, Florence, Slovan, and the many farms in the area attended Union High School in the borough of Burgettstown. Until the school burned in 1963, it was located on Main Street near the junction of Church Street. Businesses of the area, in addition to the zinc and molybdenum plants, were coal mining, railroading, and farming. Besides the high school with its extra curricular activities of football, basketball, and plays, Burgettstown was the financial and commercial center for the area. Banks, theaters, garages (a livery stable in the early twenties), and stores of all types were located in town. Each Fall there was the festive Burgettstown

Fair with rides, food stands, gaming booths, agricultural and home economic displays and awards, and harness horse racing.

The Pennsylvania Railroad obtained coal for its system from this area. There was a large railroad yard in Burgettstown that shipped about 800 cars of coal a day. Also, there was a booster station, where extra engines were maintained and supplied for long freight trains going over the hills on this section of the Pittsburgh to St Louis main line. Unfortunately, the closing of the zinc plant and the acceptance of diesel engines by the Pennsy coincided. I say "acceptance" because the railroad tried unsuccessfully for several years to develop a coal fired stream turbine engine to compete with the diesel. The diesels required neither coal nor booster engines. By 1948 the rail yard was shipping 400 cars of coal a day. To-day the coal mines are closed, and the railroad yard is the site of the downtown highway bypass. Thus, almost simultaneously, the area lost its primary industries: the coal mines, the railroad yard and booster station, and the zinc plant. A crisis from which the area has never fully recovered.

What did recover was the vegetation. While the zinc smelter and all the coal mines with their burning slag dumps were operating in the area, the vegetation on the hills was sparse. Some plants were more tolerant than others. Elderberry and blackberry plants were very common. I can remember people coming in trucks to pick the elderberries on the smelter property. Even though this was in the days of prohibition, everyone knew the berries were used for making wine. Whole families would pick blackberries. The Burgettstown cemetery had a few sickly looking trees. The slope to the east of, and facing, the smelter and burning slag dump was practically devoid of any vegetation. Langeloth was located west of the smelter, so the prevailing westerly winds kept the town relatively clean. That was only relative, because east winds occasionally would blow. From the sidewalk in front of our house there was a clear view up the street towards the factory. The sycamore trees in front of our house would get their young leaves damaged at least once each spring. I went to Forestry School at Penn State and in the Spring of 1934 brought home some young spruce seedlings. I planted them in our back yard where they were protected by the buildings and other trees. They did quite well. After several years my father moved two trees to the front by the sidewalk. Then, about every two years, he

would have to rotate two from the back to the front because the front ones were not doing very well. Later, I planted a row of black walnut trees along the drive. They grew very slowly, but since the closing of the plant they and the spruces are doing much better. The vegetation of the area has recovered to the extent that tall trees and shrubs hide many of the old buildings and vistas that used to be highly visible landmarks.

The last time I visited the town, and then only briefly, was in 1988.

Henry Hellmers
1646 Marion Ave.
Durham, NC 27705
17 May 1990

LEGEND FOR THE THREE PANEL POST CARD OF LANGELOTH, PENNSYLVANIA
(Picture probably take in 1914 or 1915)

In general the town was laid out in three sections. To the left is a section composed of brick buildings. The houses are in rows on numbered streets. The block in the middle of the picture are primarily cement stucco buildings on numbered avenues. The zinc smelter with its tall stacks can be seen on the horizon of the third panel. The end of the large building between the stacks and the water tower is the zinc oxide bag house which later was converted to part of the Climax Molybdenum plant. To the far right is what was known as miner's hill. These, for the most part, were buildings with wooden sidings.

In the center of the middle panel is the large Lolla Building, operated by Tony Lolla and his wife. It contained a combination of rental rooms and apartments. The row of buildings just below the water tower formed Fifth Avenue, where the administrative personnel for the zinc plant and company owned mine lived. The home of the General Superintendent, and where Gus Barbush lived after buying the town, is not visible but is to the right of the large square home on the highest point in the picture.

I believe most of the building in the original town, except for the Lyric theater, which was a wooden structure, and the railroad station are still standing.

In the whole picture starting at the left and going to the extreme right there are five oil wells with their wooden derricks. The wooden structure, housing the gas engine that ran the pump, can be seen for the well in the foreground of the third panel. There were many oil wells in the area and the sound of the pumping engines could be heard every morning.

Also, in the foreground of the third panel is the railroad bed and tracks. The railroad station had not been built at the time that is picture was taken.

The statement by the Langeloth Board of Trade, printed on the back of the card, is given on page 2 of the article.

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