

PENNSYLVANIA'S COAL "DISCOVERY"

Good day everyone...it's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.

At one time, the most important product in the world was coal (it might still be!) and its discovery as the house fuel of the world--and as the fuel for the forges of the world in manufacture--occurred in Pennsylvania. History records that stone coal was used for heating a home at the garrison at Fort Augusta near Sunbury. It has been used by blacksmiths in the Wyoming Valley, and was utilized in the casting of cannons. Coal was conveyed downriver to Harrisburg, along the Susquehanna, but no domestic use was made of it. In the west, Pittsburgh had used fuel dug from a high bluff before the town and coal was known to have existed in Pottsville as early as 1790 when Necho Allen is said to have discovered some and tested its burning qualities. Philip Ginter, the hunter, and Quaker Farmer Isaac Tomlinson, near Shamokin and Mount Carmel and Ashland also made discoveries in 1791 and are credited with Allen with that honor. Ginter's, in 1791, is considered the discovery find, for out of it came the Lehigh Coal and Navigation Company originations. The important use of anthracite for domestic purposes, however, seems to have been discovered by Judge Jesse Fell of Wilkes Barre. In a memorandum on the fly-leaf of one of his books, he write that on February 11, 1808, he made the experiment of burning the common stone coal of the valley in a grate, in a common fireplace in his house. Fell wrote: " I found that coal will answer the purpose of fuel, making a cleaner and better fire, at less expense than burning wood in the common way". His was a popular name in the region, and his authenticating of the fuel properties of coal for home use began it all. Similar grates were soon constructed by Fell's neighbors and were in general use shortly. The word spread and Abijah Smith took two boat-loads of coal down the Susquehanna River to Columbia--it was stupidly discarded as poor home fuel. But the next year, Smith tried again--took with him a grate--he raised the grate, coals were burned on it--the result was the sale of the coal for the first time for fuel, and the beginning

of the immense coal trade of Pennsylvania. Perseverence of Smith--experiment of Judge Fell--and discovery by three Pennsylvanians, all rank important in Pennsylvania history. Judge Fell, by the way, distinguished himself as one of the first Easterners to back Lincoln for the Presidency; he was a direct blood ancestor of Vice President Adlai Stevenson and great grandfather of the late Ambassador and presidential nominee--and in Wilkes-Barre, the man who lent the distinguished Fell name to a delightful tavern in the town at which I have enjoyed old fashioned hospitality--occasionally toasting Judge Fell, who made "coal" a household word in the world.

This is Pete Wambach. It's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.