

## Giving thanks for floating pigs, inverted Jenny's and Moses (Thompson, that is)



Well, technically "floating pig iron," but yes, in this season of Thanksgiving, let us take some time to give thanks for how our region was established.

Prior to our Leadership Centre County 'history day', I'd been oblivious to the pieces that came together to form the Centre region. Of course, we all probably find it a bit odd to have a major university in the midst of fields and, although there is the general knowledge of the early agricultural component and Penn State's 'land grant' status, I venture that many of the newcomers to our area may not know about our earlier iron roots. I certainly did not, even having lived here 15 years.

Which leads me to the pig iron, which got its name from the iron's cast shape produced by the iron furnaces. Who knew that the Centre region was a core driver of the iron industry, creating a nexus of wealth to build on, having the ideal ratio of water sources, iron ore, limestone and trees to produce massive amounts of iron? Most of us simply drive by the stone iron furnace remains, not really knowing what they did or how they functioned; and most would not attribute the growth of the region to them. And, while PA was the the breadbasket to the early colonies, the Centre Region lead the iron industry, distributing iron throughout the colonies by boat and horseback. To find out more about 'pig iron,' you'll just need to go visit the Eagle Ironworks at Curtain Village yourself. It's the only fully restored iron furnace remaining from the industry.

This rich iron history was just one of the insights we gained throughout our journey.

All 49 of us prepped for the day, muting our cell phones (mostly), and trying to disconnect from our everyday work. We set out on new roads that

some had never travelled, to sites and buildings that some have never seen - even those who grew up in the area. This took us out of our ordinary and into 'the new', a great place for discovery and growth.

One stop was the Match Factory in Bellefonte, touring the national headquarters of the American Philatelic Society. Yes. The headquarters, right here in Bellefonte, which houses the Ebay for stamp collectors as well as two of the famous "Inverted Jenny's" - you know, that cool stamp with an upside down airplane. What a wonderful nod to the early American postal pilots for the society to make its home here, honoring those who risked their lives transporting airmail from Chicago to New York with no GPS, just a map on their leg and landmarks below. Their pit stop? Bellefonte, PA.

The Centre County Historical Society at the Centre Furnace Mansion became the bookends to our day as we set out from there through Bellefonte sites, on to Curtain Village, then stopping for a lesson from Ms. Lee at the Boogersburg School House on our return to the mansion. Each location gave us a glimpse into our county's past - the establishment of the Farmer's High school (aka Penn State), the many governors who lived in Bellefonte, and by the end of the day, we were all singing 'We owe our soul to the company store,' as it was Moses Thompson's company store that provided goods to the iron industry workers, and his farm acreage providing land for the university.

Fantastical floating pigs or not, our region was established by pioneering men and women who valued resources and understanding, carrying out vision and passion - a thread that is alive today.

*Submitted by William Snyder III, artist and designer with Keystone Designs in State College, PA and member of the Leadership Centre County Class of 2017. For more information about Leadership Centre County go to [www.leadershipcentrecounty.org](http://www.leadershipcentrecounty.org).*