

Smethport's Gilded Era

At the beginning of the 20th century, Smethport reigned as a crown jewel of Victorian culture in Pennsylvania's northern wilds. These wilds yielded the raw materials for business empires in lumber, oil refining, leather tanning, railroads, and banking to amass the wealth so evident in Smethport's mansion district.

Begin at the McKean County Courthouse—the hub of civic life and history—and stroll west along Main Street. Imagine the early 1900s, when planked sidewalks lined the street, and bicycles, horse-drawn carts, and the occasional eye-catching motor car kicked up dust on the thoroughfare. In surrounding hills, industry laid the cornerstones for many exquisitely rendered historic mansions along the way.

By the early 1920s, Smethport's industrial heyday has passed, but its many mansions continue to link us to that gilded era. Behind them, reforested hills soften the skyline, living testament to resilience.

For detailed information about Smethport's mansion district, visit www.smethporthistory.org or contact the McKean County Historical Society located in the Old County Jail at the rear of the McKean County Courthouse.



In 1906 the Sparks Circus came to Smethport with a massive calliope.

Built from the land— The Hamlin Empire

A walk along West Main Street traces the history of one of Smethport's most influential families. Long before Smethport's heyday, Byron Delano Hamlin's 1860 mansion at 619 West Main attested to his wealth. Attorney and manager for the Keating Land Company, he bought, sold, and managed McKean County's vast forest lands. He built Smethport's first railroad, linking Smethport with the outside world's culture and commerce.

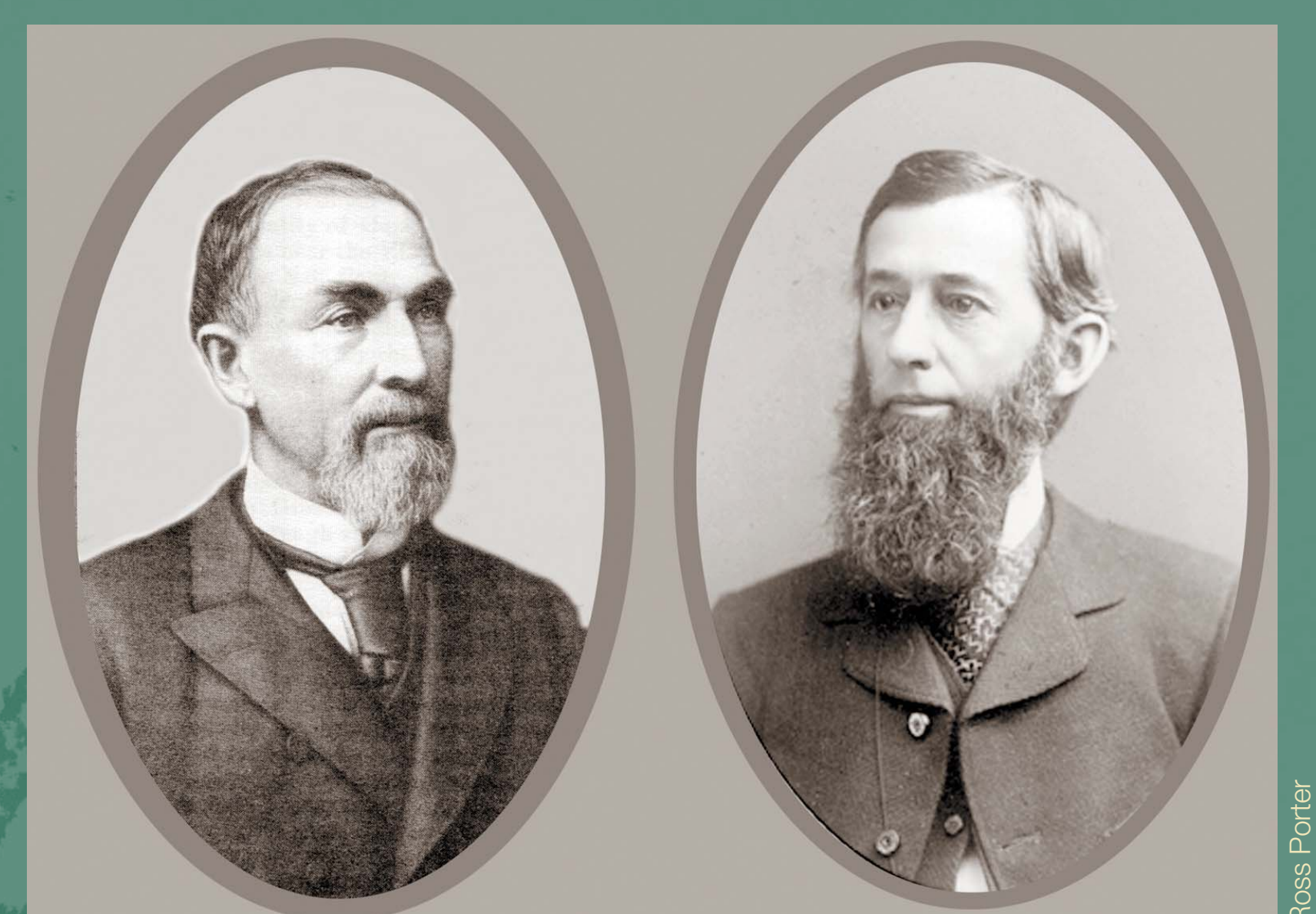
Hamlin nurtured his family's fortunes. His son Delano joined his law and real estate businesses, and his daughter Mary married another of Byron's law partners. Both built mansions nearby. His nephew Henry partnered with him on a store then shifted to banking and, by 1895, was reportedly the wealthiest private banker in the United States. Henry's children, too, built beautiful West Main Street mansions.



The Byron Delano Hamlin residence was built in 1860 and carefully restored in 1980s and 1990s.



Ralph E. Burdick was an banking executive at the Hamlin Bank in Smethport and an early automobile owner.



Byron and Harry Hamlin transformed Smethport in its Victorian heyday.



The county jail was built in 1875 and has served as the McKean County Historical Museum since 2002.
John G. Coleman Collection



www.lumberheritage.org



www.VisitPA.com



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