

Running the River

Marietta's early history is steeped in the Pennsylvania lumber industry that reigned from 1810-1870. During the winter months, prized white pine and hemlock were cut from the towering forests along the Susquehanna River's West and North branches. In the spring, when the water was high, the logs were lashed together and guided by raftsmen miles downstream to Marietta. Some rafts were broken up here in Marietta to feed the planing mills, sawmills, and carpentry shops that supplied building materials and heating fuel to this rapidly growing region. Other rafts bound for Port Deposit, Maryland, stopped at Marietta to board a fresh crew of raftsmen for the short but dangerous run to Peach Bottom.

Photo of one of the last rafts floated down the Susquehanna River to Marietta, Pa. Landed in the spring, April 12, 1911.

Courtesy Stephen Bailey



After the Marietta raftsmen disembarked at Peach Bottom, they hiked back 30 miles on a riverside trail known as the Raftsmen's Path. Upon returning, the raftsmen would board another Peach Bottom-bound raft and repeat the process.

An 1814 list of taxable landholders attests to the impact of lumber on the makeup of Marietta. The list includes: 9 lumber merchants; 21 carpenters; 21 joiners; 10 cooper smiths; and 4 raft pilots. The availability of lumber explains why early homes in Marietta are wood frame and clapboard instead of brick and stone like other Lancaster County buildings constructed during the same time period.

Photo of B.F. Hiestand & Sons Saw and Planing Mill in Marietta, Pa., circa 1900.

Courtesy Stephen Bailey



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Susquehanna River Water Trail

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