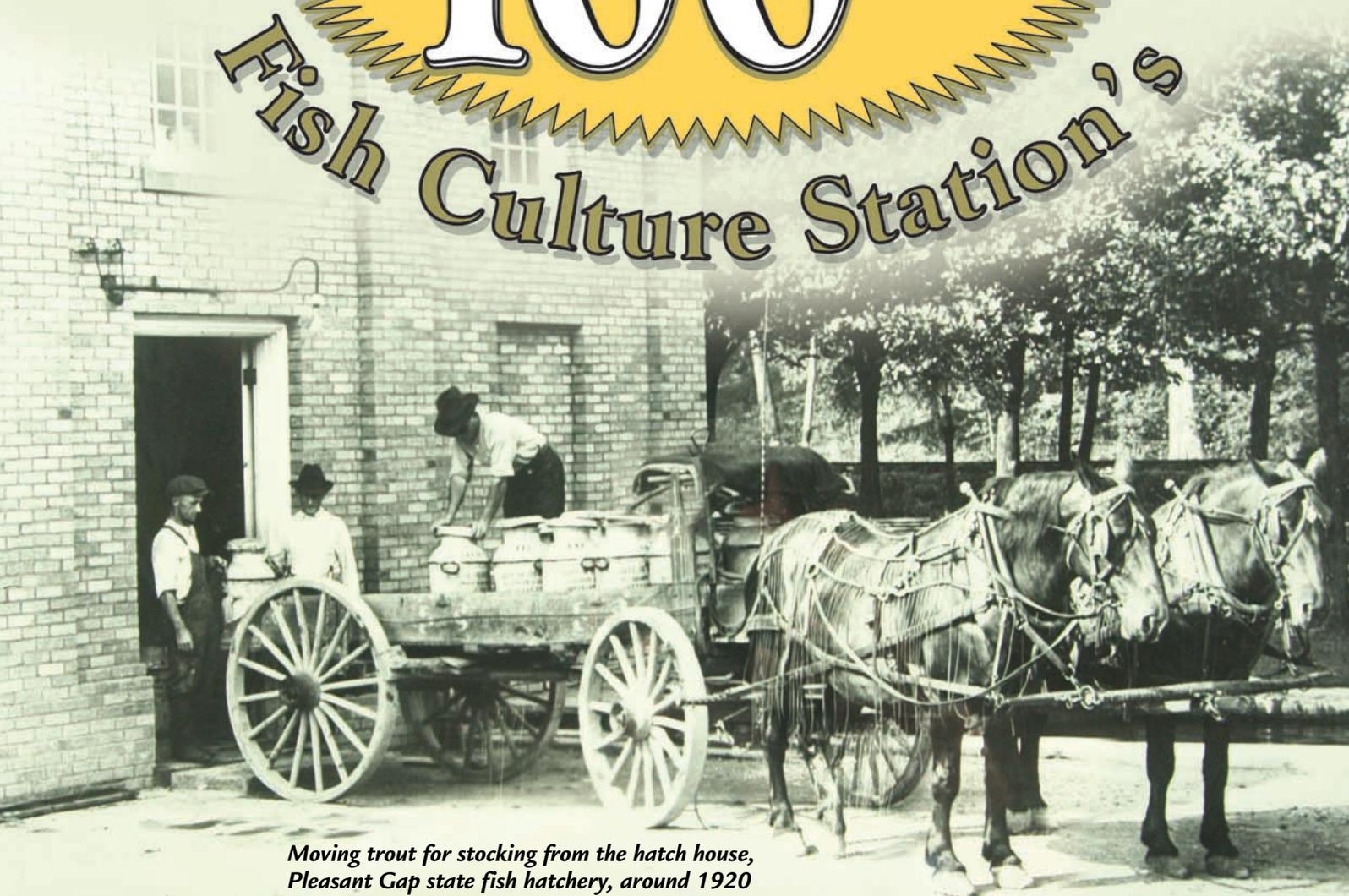


# Pleasant Gap

# 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

1903 2003

## Fish Culture Station's



*Moving trout for stocking from the hatch house, Pleasant Gap state fish hatchery, around 1920*

**by Bob Wilberding, Hatchery Manager**

In the early 1900s, Pennsylvania looked far different than it does today. Lumbering was a major industry and much of the state's timber was cut and removed for lumber, farming and mining, and to make charcoal, an important part of the iron industry. Small farms covered a far greater portion of the landscape than today. Railroads, not highways, crisscrossed the state, and automobiles had just been invented.

**Moving trout for stocking in 2003**



photo-Cecil Houser



*Pleasant Gap state fish hatchery in 1903*

In 1903, Commissioner of Fisheries William E. Meehan and other members of the Board of Fishery Commission were given \$15,000 for fish propagation from a general state appropriation. They decided to use this money to build two new hatcheries. One hatchery would be used to propagate black bass and other important gamefishes, and the second hatchery would replace an aging hatchery at Allentown. The Allentown site, which had been used to rear brook trout for 20 years, was in a state of disrepair. Of the 19 acres, which were leased for \$500 per year, less than three acres were considered suitable for ponds and hatching houses.

A portion of their report is as follows: "After inspecting a number of eligible places the Board of Fishery Commission finally selected a site at Pleasant Gap, four miles from the town of Bellefonte. There was one large spring and one small spring on the premises. Logan Branch creek flowing many thousand gallons of water a minute, with headwaters less than one-fourth of a mile away, and with a maximum temperature for the summer of fifty degrees, runs close beside the grounds. Citizens of Centre, Clearfield, and contiguous counties purchased eighteen acres of land and kept their part of the agreement by presenting it to the State. Subsequently, Col. Edward Pruner, who owned what was known as the Hartranft farm, presented three acres in addition for the purpose of propagation of black bass. The grounds, however, had no buildings on it and consequently the Department purchased about two acres of land with a house, barn and a small spring, making a total of twenty-three acres of land, nearly all of which could be used for hatchery purposes. The site was definitely chosen on July 21st and on August 4th the deeds were turned over to the Department of Fisheries. Within two days thereafter ground was broken. A hatching house one hundred twenty feet long and thirty five feet wide, capable of holding one hundred and five double hatching troughs and ten nursery ponds thirty feet long and ten feet wide were built, and the third week in October, the establishment was ready for operation."

The report also states, "The Bellefonte Hatchery is nearly one-half mile long and about midway there is a railroad

station adjoining the premises. The Pennsylvania Railroad also ran a siding on the hatchery grounds at cost and the citizens of Centre County erected a building over a portion of the track as a barn in which to house the Department fish car, 'Pennsylvania.' Hence for the first time in the history of the fisheries of Pennsylvania the State has a hatchery from which fish can be shipped without any highway haul whatever."

The hatchery was formally dedicated on October 26, 1903, and was attended by "a large delegation of fish culturists and several hundred neighbors and citizens." On November 19, Governor Samuel W. Pennypacker, his wife, Fishery Commissioner Charles L. Miller and Commissioner Mehan paid an official visit to the hatchery and were given an extensive tour. It is reported that "The Governor expressed himself well pleased with the condition of the hatchery and dined in the hatchery dwelling." The dwelling continued to be used by incoming hatchery superintendents as a residence until 1989, and is now the location of the Northcentral Region law enforcement office.

Nathan R. Buller was appointed acting superintendent of the new hatchery on August 21, 1903, but he was there only a short time before he was sent to the Wayne County hatchery. His replacement, Howard M. Buller, reported, "More than 16 acres have been added to the establishment, making it the largest hatchery property in the state." He also reported, "The thirteen cement ponds that were built in 1905 have proven to be most excellent ponds for the work we have been using them for. Our yearly fish sorted into them last year grew well, with so small a loss that it is not worth mentioning."

Hatchery output for 1905 was listed at 1,704,000 fingerling brook trout to 1,114 applicants in 24 counties. The hatchery was also involved in raising goldfish, frogs and 150,000 "California trout" (possibly rainbow trout). Much of the early yearly reports from 1904 to 1918 describe work that was done to construct and maintain the hatchery, as well as problems that were encountered with fish diseases, fish culture and the weather.

One problem reported in 1906 noted, "One day during the summer, while train hands were running a car load of cement into our fish car barn, they lost control of the car with the result that it crashed through the end of the building knocking the whole out of it. The company promptly sent a gang of workmen and repaired the structure."

The fish car "Pennsylvania" was used until 1914 when it was turned over to the Board of Public Grounds, which sold it, although trains continued to be used to transport trout until the 1920s.

Severe flooding was reported in the fall of 1908. "The rain started in the evening and continued, one storm following another in quick succession, nearly all night until with a mighty rush the water came down from the mountain following the pike in its natural course until it had increased in volume to the extent that the road was overflowed and everything that was not absolutely tied down was carried along with it. All of the ponds back of the hatchery, 11 in number,

were filled with fish and the result was when that great volume of water came down and passed over them fully one foot above the highest walls, there was much damage. Three small ponds were submerged to a depth of three feet.”

A loss of 10,000 adult trout was listed, but it was not a total loss because it was also reported that “Brook trout were so plentiful in Logan Branch after the storm that a woman living along the stream in dipping up a pail of water for use in the house found to her surprise that it contained a fine specimen and ducks were noticed along the stream coming ashore to kill and swallow the trout that they had caught. That fish were plentiful was further demonstrated by the fact that one hundred and five fishermen lined the stream from the station to Bellefonte as early as 6 o’clock in the morning of the first day of open season and nearly all reported good catches.”

In 1910, Superintendent William F. Haas reported a yield of 6.5 million trout eggs, but also reported, “The two springs have felt the severity of the dry weather and are reduced to half of their normal flow. There is, however, an abundant supply from the creek for operating and also plenty of spring water to care for about four million fish in hatching houses.”

The 1912 report indicates a shift from supplying applicants with fingerling fish to yearlings. Superintendent Haas wrote, “There is no question from what my messengers tell me of what they hear that the larger fish satisfy the public better than the tiny ones, because the average man appreciates more what he can see before him than what depends on a promise which the little ones seem to be to a man not versed in raising fish. In fact, a large majority of my fish were really over the legal size of six inches and the recipient knew that he could indulge in hopes of getting some of them next year without falling in the clutches of the law.”

In the same report, he also stated, “One of the greatest difficulties with which a Superintendent has to contend is the illegibility of the handwriting of the applicants for fish, and while sometimes it is

funny, yet in most times the Superintendent is called up from the Department to know why he did not send so and so some fish. The name does not seem like anything he has ever seen, but it finally turns out that the puzzle he has worried over was the application in question. While I appreciate that the Department of Fisheries has only juris-

**Hatch house in 1915**



**Another view, Pleasant Gap hatchery in 1903**

diction over fish, I wish there could be some way in inducing the Department of Public Schools bringing their influence to bear upon the growing generation so that the future Superintendents of Hatcheries will be able to read the names of applicants and the Post Offices where they live.”

A number of renovations were made to the station in the early years, including one still seen today. As described in the 1915 report, “The old frame hatching house which has stood at this hatchery for a great many years was torn down about the middle of August and replaced by a modern and up to date hatching house. The contract for the erection of this new hatching house was awarded to Gehret & Lambert, contractors of Bellefonte, and by the first of December the building was completed, accepted by the Department, and the water turned into the hatching troughs ready for use. The new building is absolutely fire proof, being constructed of concrete, brick and steel, and adds very much to the attractiveness of the grounds. The building is two stories high of very attractive design and will facilitate the work at this station.”

In 1917, steam heat was added to the Superintendent house as well as electric lights to “the dwelling, hatchery building, barn and some in the yard.”

I was unable to locate any additional reports to the Department of Fisheries for 1918 to 1923. However, in 1924, biennial reports were sent to the Board of Fish Commissioners. These “new” reports deal less with occurrences at individual hatcheries and more with total output from the increasing number of stations and more general topics such as water pollution, fish

life history, stocking and fishing-related topics. The 1928 report describes changes in fish distribution from using trains to using trucks, because of restrictions by train companies and discontinuance of train routes. The trucks had no mechanical aeration, but were able to haul up to 80 pails of fish in double rows. Trips as long as 300 miles (15 hours) were made safely.

A milestone was reached in 1932 when over one million legal-size (6-inch) trout were distributed statewide. In 1933, Spring Creek hatchery (now called the Bellefonte hatchery) was started, and was operated as part of the Bellefonte hatchery until 1976. At the time of purchase it consisted of 90 acres (the former Bertram tract), including about one mile of Spring Creek (today's Fisherman's Paradise). In the mid-1930s, the Bellefonte hatchery consisted of the Upper Spring Creek unit, the Lower Spring Creek unit, and the Pleasant Gap unit. It used over 300 ponds and 46 employees to produce a variety of fish species. At the time it was probably one of the largest fish hatcheries in the United States.

Pleasant Gap Fish Culture Station received its current name in 1938. In more recent years, the Cedar Springs

substation was operated as part of "the Gap" and also the present state hatchery at Tylersville. Today, in addition to the hatchery, Pleasant Gap is also the home of the Commission Bureau of Fisheries, the Division of Environmental Services, the Bureau of Administration Procurement and Warehousing Unit, the Division of Fisheries Management, the divisions of Trout Production and Warmwater/Coolwater Production, the Bureau of Property and Facilities Management, and the Northcentral Region law enforcement office. It is the Fish & Boat Commission's second-largest complex.

Trout production at the Pleasant Gap state hatchery for 2003 is expected to be about 518,000 adults and 293,500 fingerlings. Many changes have occurred in trout production over the last hundred years. Today we have oxygenation systems, backup generators, mechanical aeration and many other helpful innovations. But much of the basic fish culture work remains the same as it was when it began. We've learned a lot in the last 100 years. We have a rich history, and we are looking forward to the future. □



## CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

The Pleasant Gap state fish hatchery is part of the Commission's infrastructure—buildings, accesses and properties that support the Commission's mission of providing fishing and boating opportunities. The Pleasant Gap Fish Culture Station faces two main challenges: Water supply and effluent quality.

Now and in the future, water supply will be an issue. The hatchery receives its water from several sources, including springs, nearby quarrying operations and wells. The Commission is working with the PA Department of Environmental Protection and the quarry owners to maintain and protect flows to the hatchery. The flow from the wells could diminish or degrade, and opportunities for additional use of well or spring water are limited. The springs feeding the hatchery have already been affected by development in the area. Closure of a major manufacturing plant located in the watershed may also affect the amount of water available for hatchery use.

Effluent is the waste produced by fish hatchery operations. The Pleasant Gap state fish hatchery discharges its effluent to a designated high-quality coldwater stream. The high-quality designation appropriately increases the standards that dischargers are required to meet. The Commission

is currently negotiating an interagency settlement agreement with the PA Department of Environmental Protection.

The Commission has already made operational and other changes that have resulted in improvements at the Pleasant Gap state fish hatchery and at other state hatcheries. Act 208, signed into law last December, authorizes the Commission to borrow \$54.5 million from the Commonwealth's Capital Debt Fund to effect major hatchery improvements statewide, primarily at dams and hatcheries. This money must be paid back or the Commission must use operating expenses. The \$54.5 million total is more money than PA anglers and boaters can afford to pay back with Fish Fund and Boat Fund revenue alone. In December 2002 the Commission had a special meeting at which it directed staff to move forward with six projects, including improvements at the Tylersville, Bellefonte, Benner Spring, Huntsdale and Pleasant Gap state fish hatcheries, and at the Blue Valley Fish Hatchery. The Pleasant Gap Fish Culture Station is part of the overall hatchery upgrade/improvement program. Let's hope that all the challenges can be met and in another 100 years we can celebrate the hatchery's bicentennial.

For more details on Act 208, visit the Commission's web site, [www.fish.state.pa.us](http://www.fish.state.pa.us).