



The Pleasant Mount State Fish Hatchery's 100th Anniversary

by Tom Pekarski

photos courtesy of the author

The Honorable Samuel W. Pennypacker was governor of Pennsylvania when the Pleasant Mount State Fish Hatchery was established on October 16, 1903. The dedication was held in Pleasant Mount with many local and state dignitaries present. The Pleasant Mount State Fish Hatchery was originally named Wayne Hatchery #4 so that it wouldn't be confused with the Pleasant Gap State Fish Hatchery, which had been established two months earlier. The "#4" meant it was the fourth state fish hatchery. The original 14-acre property was donated to the Department of Fisheries by Miss Alison B. Sterling. James T. O'Neil donated two additional acres. A large house and barn on four adjoining acres were purchased from a Mrs. Freeman, and, finally, an additional 30 acres were acquired. At the headwaters of the Lackawaxen River is Beaver Meadows Reservoir (Belmont Lake), which was acquired in 1917, and it serves as the state fish hatchery's major water source.

Nathan R. Buller was named superintendent. During the first year, he laid up walls for the main spring and constructed the first hatch house. Inside the building, 24 Clark-Williamson troughs were constructed. These

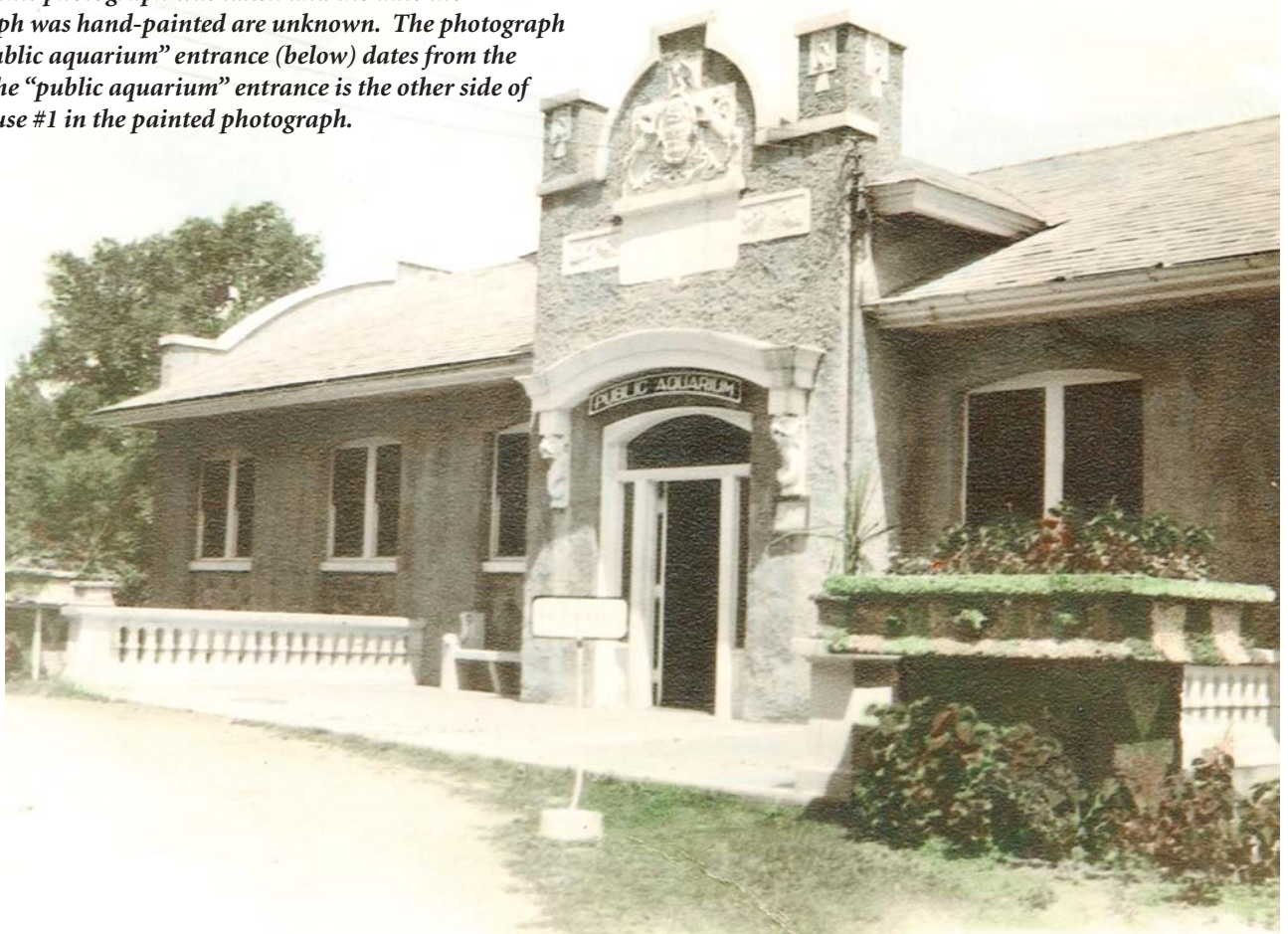
troughs were 20 feet long and shallow (6 to 8 inches). Gravel was placed on the bottom to imitate a stream bottom. Earthen ponds of various sizes were constructed outside as nursery ponds and grow-out ponds.

The Wayne state fish hatchery was originally intended to rear black bass (smallmouth bass), pickerel and perch. Brook trout were considered incidental to the main production. Strangely, attempts to raise frogs were an important consideration. By 1910, all pickerel production in the state was carried on at Pleasant Mount. The "limit" on pickerel at that time was 20 pounds per day.

An icehouse was constructed in 1909 to supply ice for shipping eggs and refrigeration of the coarse fish, which were ground and fed to the fish. In 1914, a water-driven electric plant was installed. The idea was that the new lights were much better than the older lanterns. It wasn't until 1928 when electricity from the power company lighted the entire complex. In 1916, construction began on an additional hatch house. This hatch house is still in use today.

A major attraction for the state fish hatchery in the mid-1920s was fish displays. A report to the governor by

At left, Pleasant Mount State Fish Hatchery's hatch house #1, built in 1916. The original photograph was hand-painted. The date this photograph was taken and the date the photograph was hand-painted are unknown. The photograph of the "public aquarium" entrance (below) dates from the 1960s. The "public aquarium" entrance is the other side of hatch house #1 in the painted photograph.





This aerial view of the Pleasant Mount State Fish Hatchery was taken in 1988.

the Board of Fisheries Commissioners reads, "At the present time the Board maintains on the second floor of Hatchery Building Number One, an aquarium having approximately fifty different species of living fish, reptiles and amphibia on exhibition. The exhibition is visited annually by many troops of boy and girl scouts, biology and nature study classes from the nearby schools, and by hundreds of tourists from almost every state, as well as many foreign countries."

By 1928, the Bureau of Research had been established at Pleasant Mount. Projects included finding new food sources for growing fish. Daphnia or water fleas were grown to feed the young smallmouth bass. In 1935, the Bureau of Research was moved to the Pleasant Gap State Fish Hatchery to take advantage of its nearness to Penn State.

Early records indicate that most of the state fish hatchery employees were local residents. During the first year, four people were employed fulltime. Over the

course of the state fish hatchery's 100 years, the number of employees has varied from a low of four in 1903 to a high of 40 in 1925. During most of Pleasant Mount's history, 20 to 28 persons worked there. Currently that number stands at 10 fulltime positions.

It is amazing today to think that the original land was donated to the Fish Commission, and from this gesture, many local people derived a livelihood from working at the hatchery. Certain local names have been recorded almost for the entire period of the state fish hatchery's existence. A family tradition of working at the state fish hatchery is carried out to this day. One local name that first appeared around 1905-1906 is O'Hara. This name keeps appearing in pay records and reports, even to an employee of the present day.

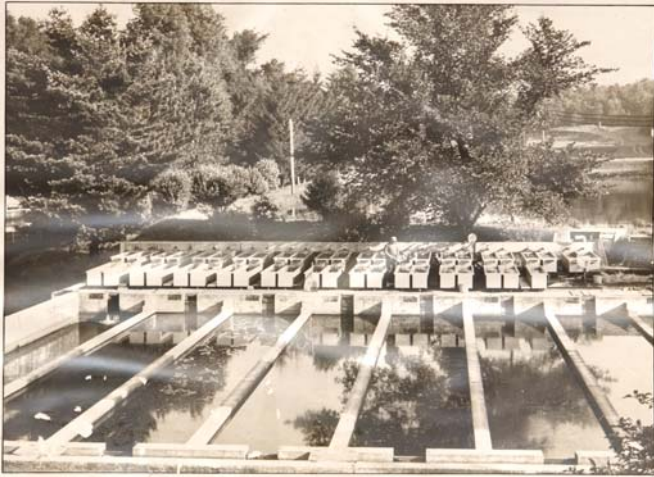
In the history of the Pleasant Mount State Fish Hatchery there have been 11 managers. One name keeps appearing: The "Bullers" appeared as the first three managers. They were apparently related. The hatchery managers are as follows:

1903 - 1911	Nathan Buller
1911 - 1933	Gay W. Buller
1933 - 1938	C.R. Buller
1938 - 1939	F.K. Riedel
1939 - 1961	J.L. Zettle
1961 - 1963	J.J. Wopart
1963 - 1968	Merrill Lillie
1968 - 1975	G.H. Sanderson
1975 - 1988	Z.B. Bean
1988 - 1995	Eugene Rozieski
1995 - present	Thomas A. Pekarski

Strange as it seems, more recorded information is available on the history of the first 25 years than the next 50 years. Little in the way of major construction was carried out during this later period. Construction changes that occurred then were carried out by employees over several years. Fish production varied from year to year with many additional species cultured. Legal-size trout production was ceased and restarted several times because of loss of flows and extremely warm water temperatures.

The many species that have been reared at Pleasant Mount include: Alewife, American eel, American shad, Amur pike, black crappie, bluegill, brook trout, brown bullhead, brown trout, Atlantic salmon, chain pickerel, channel catfish, chinook salmon, cisco, coho salmon, cutthroat trout, rainbow trout, rock bass, fathead minnow, frogs, goldfish, golden shiner, golden trout, grass carp, kokanee salmon, lake trout, largemouth bass, muskellunge, northern pike, smallmouth bass, striped bass, threadfin shad, tiger muskellunge, walleye, white catfish, white crappie, white sucker, white bass x striped bass hybrid and yellow perch.

In 1977-1978, a major reconstruction process began with the help of federal funds. The entire state fish hatchery was renovated and brought into a new era of fish culture. All ponds and raceways were reconstructed



NURSERY TANKS STATE FISH HATCHERY PLEASANT MOUNT, PA.

These hatchery raceways were used to raise warmwater species. The photograph was taken in the 1960s.

so that the state fish hatchery could grow more and healthier fish. Twelve earthen ponds were built with 16 small concrete raceways designed for rearing coolwater fish. Thirty raceways were built of concrete. The two hatch houses dating from the early years were remodeled into state-of-the-art production facilities. In these buildings the water was filtered by large sand filters, ultraviolet lights disinfected the water, oxygen was injected into the water and the temperature could be manipulated to grow fish best. Two additional wells were drilled to provide more water.

These renovations allowed the Pleasant Mount State Fish Hatchery to make significant advances in the production of muskellunge, tiger muskellunge and walleyes during the next few years. The modern advances allowed more work to be accomplished by fewer fish culturists, thus reducing the cost of producing fish. The improved environment made state fish hatchery operations less dependent on chemicals to control diseases, further reducing costs and having the added benefit of not adding more chemicals to the receiving stream or the fish.

During the 1980s, Pleasant Mount was involved in projects to restore American shad to the Susquehanna River.

In 1993, Pleasant Mount State Fish Hatchery and Mansfield University began a study of walleye production to increase numbers and reduce cost. The large number of ponds made the state fish hatchery the ideal location for this work. Interns from Mansfield University worked each summer with fish culturists to improve the hatchery's ability to raise these fish. Because of this study, costs have dropped and the number of walleyes raised has become more stable.

Visitors to Pleasant Mount enjoy the large viewing tank stocked with native fish. This viewing tank was added in 1989 to replace the aquariums that were removed during the last major reconstruction. In 1995, roofing was constructed over all outside growing tanks. The roofs provided protection from bird predation, and they

reduced solar heating of the water. In 1997, production of legal-size trout for stocking was assigned to other state fish hatcheries because of unstable water flows and temperatures.

In 2003, the Pleasant Mount State Fish Hatchery enters its second millennium. Cost increases and changes in production will prove formidable obstacles in the next 100 years. But if our long history is any consideration, the Fish & Boat Commission and the Pleasant Mount State Fish Hatchery will meet the challenge. ☐

Tom Pekarski is manager of the Pleasant Mount State Fish Hatchery.

Pleasant Mount State Fish Hatchery's First 100 Years

- 1903** July 28 meeting of local people to offer land for state fish hatchery to Fish Dept.
- 1903** Aug 6-13 survey work for state fish hatchery
- 1903** Oct 16 official dedication ceremony
- 1903** Original hatch house built
- 1904** First propagation of chain pickerel in Pennsylvania and in the United States
- 1907** First walleye production
- 1908** Severe drought killed many fish
- 1908** First catfish produced (brown bullhead)
- 1909** Well #1 drilled but no power to run it.
- 1909** Ice house constructed
- 1914** Power plant installed (water-driven)
- 1916** Current hatch house #1 building completed (see photo on page 12)
- 1916** Barn constructed for housing horses and equipment
- 1917** Obtained Belmont Lake and White Oak and Miller ponds from Delaware & Hudson Canal Co.
- 1928** All grounds electrified (power company)
- 1928** Public aquariums in hatch house #1 and at least five trucks in use
- 1935** Research unit moved to Pleasant Gap
- 1953** Acquired Douglas Pond for additional production
- 1978** Major reconstruction of all outside ponds, raceways and buildings
- 1982** Construction of maintenance garage and carpenter shop
- 1989** Viewing tank constructed
- 1995** Roofs over raceways constructed
- 1995** Storage garage constructed
- 2003** 100th anniversary