

CHESTER TIMES – November 13, 1886 – GLEN RIDDLE – The Riddle Mills and Other Industries of the Place

Glen Riddle, the seat of the great cotton and woolen mills of the Messrs. Samuel Riddle & Sons, is a beautiful little village nestled in the embrace of rafted hills, and as seen from the railroad presents a group of shining white houses, many of them stone and substantially built. The place gives a decidedly European air about it and reminds one of some of the busy manufacturing towns in South England. The place was called Pensgrove until 1845 when it took its name from the proprietor and principal owner, for the last forty-five years of the large mills at this place.

There are over one hundred houses in Glen Riddle, the majority of which are owned by the Messrs. Riddle. The waters of Chester Creek flow almost at its doors and two railroads, one on each side, and both less than a hundred yards distant, run past the place, carrying people and freight to and from the big city daily.

The mills at Glen Riddle have a history extending back nearly a hundred years, and were established in 1790 by Nathan Sharpless, who conducted a grist and saw mill here for a number of years. It was first exchanged into a mill for spinning cotton in 1822 and operated by Charles Kelly, and afterwards passed through the hands of Peter Hill, James Houghton and Eli D. Peirce, being sold by the latter owner in 1843 to Samuel Riddle, through whose enterprise and indomitable pluck and energy they have grown to the present large proportions, and is the most extensive plant of the kind in Delaware County, and one of the largest in the State.

Samuel Riddle had hardly come into possession of the property in 1843 when the great flood of that year washed the dam breast away, but this was quickly rebuilt and the mill property at this time consisted of one three-story cotton factory, 96x42 feet, and one two-story mill, 50x45 feet, with a machine shop, stone drying house, a half dozen tenement houses and the home mansion.

Today after repeated additions and rebuilding the Glen Riddle mills consist of five large mill buildings, which with the dye houses, engine house, drying house and all the different out buildings make up the finest plant of the kind in this section of the country.

The two stone mills which were on the property in 1843 still stand, though in 1845 Mr. Riddle made extensive additions to them and added many improvements. In 1872 he erected the large stone mill now on the premises, which is three stories in height with basement, 65x112 feet. In 1881 he built the new brick mill, 62x135 feet and four stories in height, and stocked it with machinery of the most modern construction.

The works are operated by both steam and water power, an engine of one hundred and fifty horse power and three new Leffel wheels of about one hundred horse power each, being used. The mills are lighted by gas made on the premises and also supplied with water from a series of springs carried by iron pipes, about one mile distant. A large reservoir has recently been erected at the crest of the hill for supplying the works with water.

The reader may gain some idea of the extent of these mills when it is stated that at present they contain about fourteen thousand cotton spindles, twenty-four hundred woolen spindles, three hundred and eighty looms, and gives steady employment to about four hundred hands. The goods manufactured here are tickings, chevots and doeskins, which are distributed to the retail trade by the agents' representatives in Philadelphia and New York. The goods are the best of their kind made and command a ready sale in all our large cities.

Samuel Riddle is one of the oldest manufacturers in Delaware County, and prior to purchasing the mills at Glen Riddle conducted a mill at Parkmount, a short distance above, for a number of years. He was born in Belfast, Ireland in the year 1800, and emigrated to this country in 1821. He came on a sailing vessel and after being shipwrecked and suffering many hardships finally arrived in New York after a voyage of several months. Shortly after this he settled in Delaware County and at once laid the foundation for his successful career. He has established several other mills throughout the county, and

which are still in operation before locating permanently at Glen Riddle. His life has been a most active one, and for many years he supervised personally his extensive business and it is only recently that he ceased his daily visits to and from his wholesale house in the city. He is a man wonderfully preserved for his years, and still takes a deep interest in everything that is going on about the mills, though for some time past the directing of the business has been in charge of Henry Riddle, his eldest son, who was admitted to a partnership in 1872. Later, Samuel D. Riddle, a younger son, was given an interest and the firm name assumed its present style of Samuel Riddle & Sons.

Mr. Henry Riddle, the active working member of the firm, has been carefully schooled in the business and possess all the energy and push that characterized his father in the early days of his career. All the departments of the large concern are under his direction and he supervises them with the precision of a general.

The Messrs. Riddle always consider the interest of their employees and furnish them comfortable homes and as good pay as is offered by any similar house in the county. A number of the employees have been with them for upwards of thirty and forty years, and could not be induced to work elsewhere at the same wages.

Beside the mill property, Mr. Riddle also owns a large farm here of over 200 acres, most of it very productive and containing fine pasture lands on the portions bordering on Chester Creek. Samuel D. Riddle takes much interest in the farm and the raising of stock and in horses has some of the finest thoroughbreds in the State, including the well-known Witchcraft, the stallion Frost, and the splendid mare, Virginia, with foal by her side.

The large Riddle mansion, located but a short distance from Glen Riddle station is the home of the senior member of the firm. It is a fine home, surrounded with all the luxuries that wealth and good taste can provide, and is presided over by Mrs. Riddle in the style of a queen. Here the head of the firm, still active for his years, and in apparent good health, lives in quiet surroundings. He began life without a penny and is today a millionaire.

KEITH LOCKHART COLLECTION