

## 5. HISTORY

AT THE INTERSECTION of Route 100 and Route 92, intersection improvements will require replacement of Bridge 70 over Wilson's Run and will cut through the race (FIGURE 2) that once powered a saw and grist mill. Adams Dam, which gave its name to the adjacent road, was built for this race and altered several times.

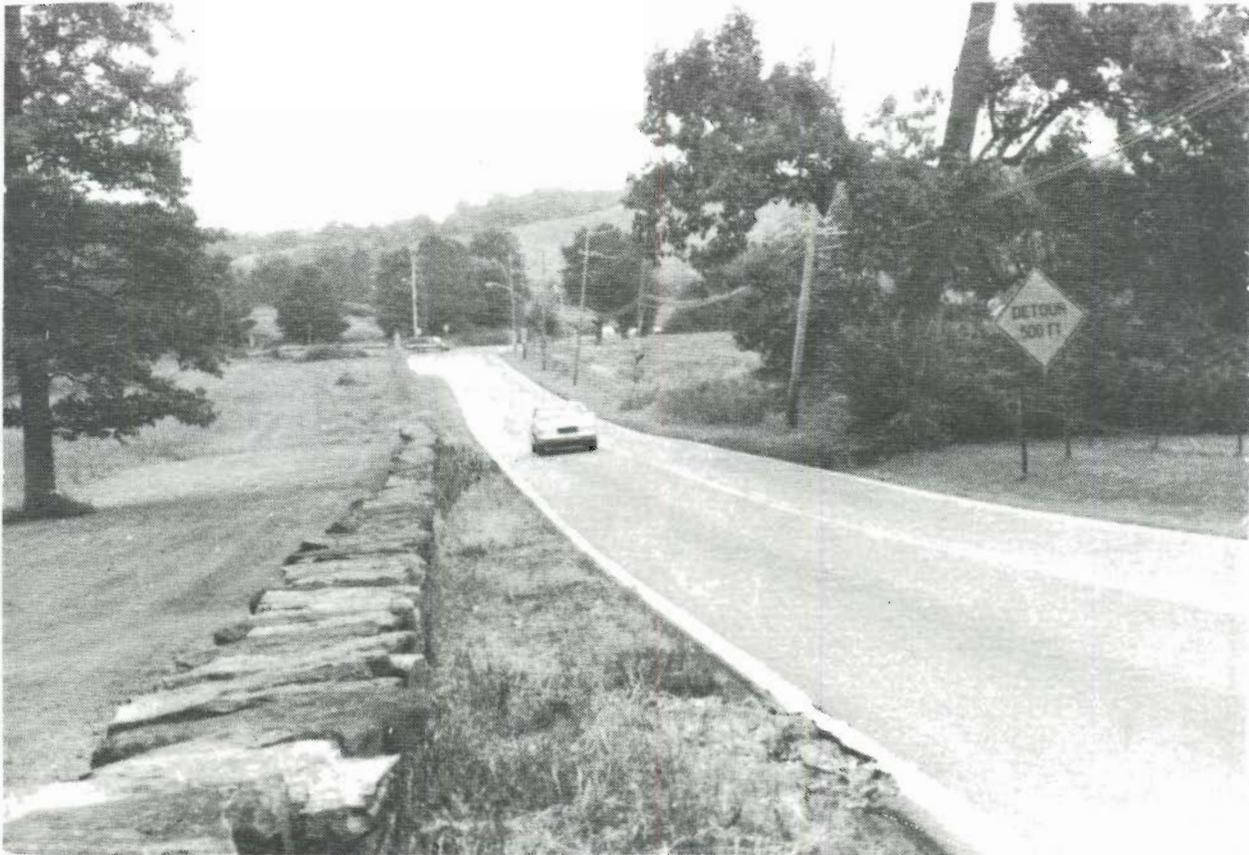
The present concrete and stone dam on the site contains a raceway opening, but the race is not readily evident between the dam and Route 92.

The project area was first patented as the "Warm Lands" tract by John Grigg in 1685 (New Castle County Warrants and

Surveys U<sub>1</sub> #43). Grigg probably did not live on the property, since he already was settled elsewhere nearby.

Samuel Underwood bought the tract, which was confirmed to him in 1692 (New Castle Deed Book C-1:66-70). He lived on the property when he died in 1722 (New Castle Archives Wills, 1722). Blume, Clark and Dunn (1990) conjecture that the Underwood house site was close to the creek, and not in the project area, but it has not been definitely located.

Joseph Underwood, Samuel's son, owned part of the farm, plus some other land that he bought in 1735. This included the



**Plate 2**  
View of the project area, looking north along Route 100

entire project area east of Adams Dam Road. Before 1771, during William Underwood's tenure, there was said to be a mill on Wilson's Run (New Castle Deed Book Z-1:113-115).

William Underwood lost the tract in a lawsuit in 1788, and in 1789, it was sold by the sheriff to William Wilson (New Castle Deed Book H-2: 367-369). According to Zebley (1940: 106), Wilson built the first mill at this site on Wilson's Run.

Thompson's Bridge Road (PLATE 3), which passes through the mill seat, began in 1771 as a private road laid out for Thomas Wilson. When William Wilson died, he left the mill seat to his son, Samuel.

Growth of industries at Rockland led to the opening of the present road, known as Adams Dam Road, Road 232 and Rockland Road from Centre Meeting to Gunning Bedford's house, Lombardy Hall, on the present Concord Pike. The petition for the road cited the fulling mill for finishing wool cloth, a saw mill, a barley mill and an "extensive paper manufactory" at Rockland as the justification for opening a new road (New Castle Road Book 1794-1809: 79-80, 112).

Jesse Chandler built another mill on this seat around 1835, which soon burned. By 1854, Alexander Adams was keeping a mill on the seat, and the name Adams Dam became fixed to the place. The 1868 Beers *Atlas* shows a saw and grist mill on the site (FIGURE 3, PAGE 4).

After Alexander Adams died, Colonel Henry A. duPont bought the mill site. Scharf states that the grist mill still stood on the site in 1888, but the Baist atlas five years later shows only a sawmill. Scharf (1888:886) adds, "The water power being weak, it has a small capacity." Frank Zebley (1940:106) listed the last operators of the mill as Mr. Clark, Mr. Ewing, and Mr. Ed Ely.

Zebley also states that the mill closed in 1910; other sources indicate that Colonel duPont renovated the sawmill and operated it for some time thereafter. Over the years, he obtained title to the land now contained in the state park, which he operated as part of his Winterthur farms.



### Plate 3

Thompson's Bridge Road (Route 92)  
looking north from the present  
intersection.

Between this site and the Brandywine, Wilson's Run was harnessed for other mills. There was a fulling mill on the run during the colonial period, operated by Thomas Hollingsworth. About 1812 Caleb Kirk had a cotton mill on the run, which was later turned into a tinware shop by the Le Carpentiers.

#### DUPONT COMPANY FARM MANAGEMENT

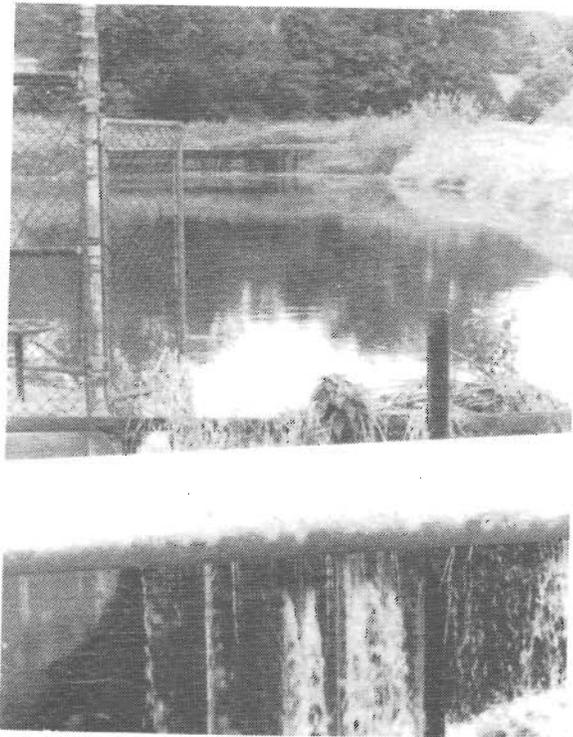
General Henry duPont, who died in 1889, was the son of the founder of the duPont powder enterprise. From 1850 until his death, he not only managed the powder works, but his own plantation of approximately 2,000 acres and a similar-size holding owned by the company.

General duPont was a trained engineer, West Point class of 1833, and supplier of half the nation's explosives during the Civil War, at a time when he was also head of the state militia (Wilkinson 1961:270). In 1862, when income tax returns are first available for the richest citizens of Delaware, he had the highest personal income in the state, \$270,000 a year; his nephews Irène and Lamot, received the fifth and sixth biggest incomes in the state (Hancock 1971: 257).

For its first century, the company was a partnership of near relatives, one of whom

was the managing partner and head of the family. General duPont and then his son, Colonel Henry Algernon duPont, held that dual position until 1902, when the company was incorporated as a modern-style stock company under the control of a new generation of cousins.

Ancillary businesses sometimes became inextricably intertwined with the business of the company. Henry duPont was a founder and president of the Wilmington and Northern Railroad, the Reading branchline which served the area. It is now the Octoraro Railroad.



#### Plate 4

#### Dams on Wilson's Run

This picture, taken from Bridge 70 looking upstream, shows the upper dam, in background, on the site of the earlier Adams Dam. The smaller dam in foreground is more recent and was not part of the power system.

Colonel Henry duPont electrified the powder yards by installing a hydroelectric

plant, and then built service lines at his own expense to Winterthur; he then carefully paid his household electric bills to the company and reimbursed the company for powder workers who unloaded cars on the family railroad siding.

During the partnership period, family members living nearby could call upon company resources for virtually all the necessities of life. Book balances at the office kept financial arrangements in order, but the workers were unaware of the intricacies of management (Gentieu: 3, 11).

Hay was a major farm product; company hay books record sales to various family members, outside firms, and other individuals. Hay fueled the powder mill's carriages, which remained largely horse-drawn.

General duPont's personal account books with the company have survived; since virtually all of his personal business was handled through the company, the detailed accounts provide a running narrative of work on the Winterthur estates.

Powder yard workers could be detailed to the company or family farms, sometimes for months at a time. Powder workers fired for drinking were sometimes exiled to lower paying jobs at the farm until they took the pledge (Hancock 1958).

After General Henry died, company crews no longer routinely worked on the farms he had owned personally. Layoffs, especially of carpenters, followed. During the ensuing unrest, several company barns were torched, with considerable loss of hay and buildings, but no fatalities. When part of the mill exploded mysteriously in 1890, the barn burners were suspected. (Pryor 1977:61)

Barn burning was the kind of attack modern guerillas would call a surgical strike, cutting at the economic base without inflicting unnecessary casualties. The hay in the barns was vital to the company. Without its own hay supply, the company suffered a severe operational disadvantage, to say nothing of the expense.

The practice of company workers serving on family farms continued, however,

on a reduced scale, as Colonel Henry's papers indicate. Like his father, Henry Algernon duPont was a West Point graduate; he was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor during the Civil War and ended his public career with a seat in the United States Senate.

He acquired and improved the property now in Brandywine Creek State Park, which was dispersed among his relatives after his death. His son kept the core of the original Winterthur estate until his death, when it became the Henry Francis duPont Winterthur Museum.

The transition from the old company to the new company would result in massive changes to the landscape of Christiana Hundred and to the structure of American business. With one stroke, duPont was transformed from an archaic partnership structure into the prototype for the American twentieth-century corporation.

In the transition, the feudalism and paternalism of the company changed, if it did not completely disappear. A legacy of the old plantation system is the company's benefit system, still one of the more progressive in American industry.

#### STONEWORK, FARMS AND POWDER

In the project area, the most frequently cited relics of company labor on the farms are the stone walls. These precisely laid decorative walls are capped with dressed courses of capstones, their corners well squared. Obviously not a merely agricultural stone fence, the walls seem out of place on a minor road at the back end of a farm.

Several varieties of stone wall (PLATES 5-10) are found in and near the project area, ranging from extremely crude utilitarian walls to extremely decorative.

Just east of the project area, on the north side of Road 232 is a dry-laid retaining wall of coursed stonework (PLATE 5). The wall is unfinished, and may be the type called "temporary" on the estate maps. There is no attempt to square the capstones or to fit the stones exactly. Similar retaining walls are found throughout the Hagley yards and in

such places as the edge of the mill race farther down Wilson Run.

There is evidence that Colonel duPont used this kind of stonework, since the race in its present form was built under his direction.

Bordering the present Winterthur Museum property is a length of stone wall along Route 100 that is also coursed (PLATE 2), but not as regular as ashlar, masonry. In this case, the stones are well fitted and capped. The capstones have been dressed on the street side but are left irregular on the back; the top is well levelled (PLATE 6) This wall borders property that was owned by duPont relatives long before General Henry bought it in 1867.

On either side of Thompson's Bridge Road are stone walls of a different, more affected, style. These walls are laid very precisely and mortared, but in imitation of rubble stonework. Like the wall at Winterthur, these walls have a course of dressed capstones.

In spite of the fact that the wall's face is quite smooth, the rubble effect has been carefully cultivated, to remove every hint of coursing, except in the capstones, which are closely fitted, with very few fillers. On the backsides, these walls are unfinished (PLATE 8). These latter walls represent a much higher level of finish than the others in the project area, and probably belong to the period after Colonel Henry bought the site. The wall on the west side of Thompson's Bridge Road seems to stop at the original location of the mill race, which Colonel duPont rebuilt.

#### THE STONE WALL LEGEND

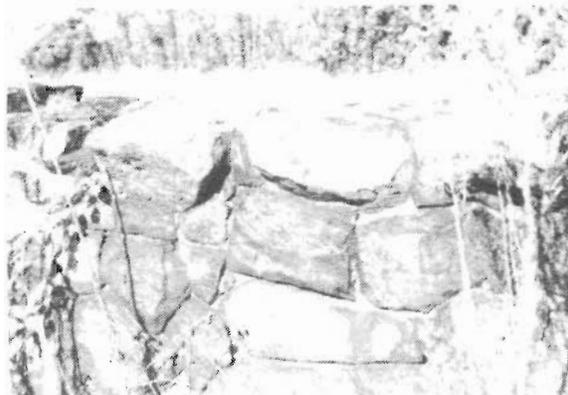
Oral tradition at Hagley relates that the duPonts kept a large force of largely redundant Italian stone masons on the payroll for a practical reason. The redundant Italians have become the stuff of legend.

Powdermaking is extremely perilous work, subject to frequent and explosive accidents. When E. I. duPont built the mills, he designed them with three strong masonry sides and one flimsy wall facing the Brandywine. When a mill exploded, the force of the blast, and the remains of its occupants, would be thrown across the Brandywine.



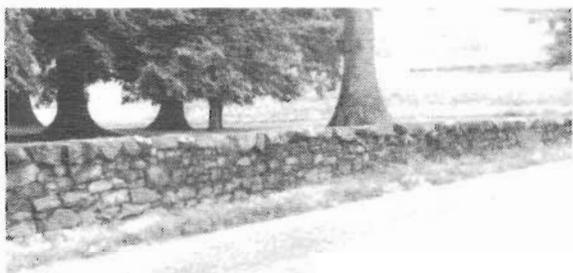
**Plate 5**

Rough coursed utilitarian wall along road 232 east of the project area, probably not intended to be permanent



**Plate 8**

Back side of the wall shown in plates 7 and 9



**Plate 6**

Coursed stone wall along Route 100 bordering Winterthur with well-dressed capstone course



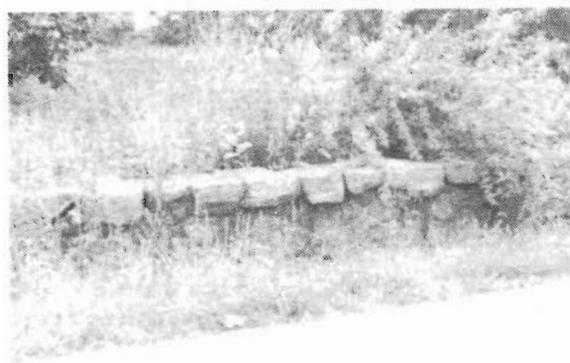
**Plate 9**

Detail of the finish of the wall shown in plates 7 and 8



**Plate 7**

Face of a rubble-style stone wall on the east side of Thompson's Bridge Road, in the project area



**Plate 10**

Wall along Route 92 between the intersection and Bridge 70

Being killed in an accident, was called "crossing the creek," and very few years passed without at least one explosion.

The first job after an explosion was to gather the frequently dispersed remains of the victims. The second job was to rebuild, eradicating all trace of the accident as quickly as possible. Grisly reminders of occupational hazards are bad for morale.

Blasts almost always precipitated a few resignations, and worker confidence plummeted as long as the ruins were visible. The Company cared for widows, paying them a pension and allowing them to keep their company houses and take boarders. Children of deceased powder employees were also cared for. Healing after an accident was a matter of extreme urgency.

Since the massive machinery was set in stone beds, precise stone masonry was essential to the operation of the mill; it was therefore necessary to employ the most highly skilled masons.

When they were not building or rebuilding the factories in the powder yard, the Italian masons were kept busy on the farms, building fine walls if there were no buildings to erect. At least this is the folklore.

The present stone mason in Hagley Yard, Donald Blevins, learned his trade from his uncle, Worth Blevins, who in turn had learned from the last of the Italian stone masons. Mr. Blevins pointed out that walls of the type found in the project area are located throughout the company and family farms, everywhere exhibiting the same fine finish, including a razor-sharp edge which was cut after the capstones had been set in place. In the yard, some of the utilitarian stonework is not nearly as well finished as the stone walls on the farms.

#### THE MONTCHANIN ITALIANS

The legend of the company-employed Italian stone masons is deeply ingrained in the folklore of the powder yards, but the truth is somewhat more complex and just as interesting.

Powdermen were, by and large, Irish. The Company even helped them come to America. Italians were outsiders.

In Montchanin was a small settlement of Italian stone masons, who have been credited with having built most of the work at Winterthur and Hagley (Thompson 1983:33).

First of the Montchanin Italians was said to have been Marcellino Festo, who arrived after the Civil War and soon became a foreman of the stone masons.

Michael Gallo, who arrived in Delaware in 1882, worked for the Wilmington and Northern as a stone mason, as did his neighbor and countryman Ralph Tavani. They worked along the railroad as far north as Reading, living in a private car that was spotted in Montchanin over the weekends.

Michael Gallo, the only Italian stone mason listed along the Brandywine in the 1897 state directory, never appeared on the duPont company payroll. Gallo later went to work for the city of Wilmington; Tavani later worked for Colonel Henry A. duPont and his son Henry Francis, until he died at Montchanin in 1939 (Errigo 1947:628-629).

The first Catholic church in the neighborhood was St. Joseph's on the Brandywine, an emphatically Irish institution surrounded by Irish social organizations. Since there was friction between the Irish and Italian communities, the Rockland and Montchanin Italians tended to fraternize whenever possible with their countrymen in the Wilmington neighborhoods.

Italian powder workers at Hagley rented pews at St. Joseph's and subscribed to its construction fund, according to the company payroll or "petit" ledgers. At least eight Italians on the company payroll in the 1889 petit ledger had their pew rents deducted from their pay.

Although they attended St. Joseph's, Tavani and Gallo were among the builders of St. Anthony's Church in Wilmington, the Italian national parish.

## STONEMASONRY AND ETHNIC FOLKLORE

Although they are popularly credited with building both the farms and the mills, the Italians were not the only stone masons in Christiana Hundred. At the village of Henry Clay, near the powder mills, were company-connected stone masons, at least three of them named Conly, Conley or Conelley.

When General Henry was renovating the Winterthur farm for his newly-married son in 1874-1875, he reimbursed the company for a large amount of construction work. Company carpenters are named individually in the records, but all the masonry work was provided by John Conly, who also billed the company for fuse, hauling, and cement. (Hagley Museum and Library, E. I. duPont de Nemours and Company papers, Series 1, part 2, series M (9), miscellaneous bills 1871-1878).

Throughout the last fifteen years of General Henry's life, Conly provided masonry work in lump sums, while individual workers from the powder yards did other chores on the General's farms (Hagley Museum and Library, papers of Henry duPont, Group 7, Series B, Box 11).

John Conly's accounts indicate that he was more than a simple crafts foreman. Company General Ledger 6, for 1878, shows John Conly paying \$236.41 for three months rent; James Conly paid \$37.50 rent for the same period. For January 1878 alone, John Conly was paid \$2,830.13. At the same time, powder workers made about \$40 a month and paid \$9 a month house rent.

In the 1871 state directory, James Connelley, mason, is listed at Henry Clay; by 1891, there was a James Conly, mason, at 819 West Fifth Street in Wilmington. Neal Conly appears in the 1882 state directory as a coal dealer at Henry Clay.

In the petit, or payroll, ledger for 1889, John Conly was on the company payroll at \$3.15 a day and Frank Conly was listed on the page with him at \$1.45 a day, probably reflecting a father-son relationship, since they were paid together. Their combined pay, about \$1,500 a year, equalled that of junior members of the duPont family.

Stone mason Samuel Frizzell was paid \$2.65 a day. Stone masons on the company payroll typically worked about 21 days a month, while powdermakers worked a six-day week and were paid by the month.

By 1891, Neal was listed in the directory as a mason at Henry Clay and John Conly was listed as a foreman. John was still on the payroll in 1894 at \$3.15, but Frank had been promoted to \$2.65, the pay of a master stone mason.

The 1897 directory lists Frank Conly as a mason at Henry Clay and still lists John as a foreman. The other masons resident at Henry Clay were named Samuel Frizzell and Thomas Montgomery.

Unlike their Irish and Italian neighbors, the Conly family were not Catholics. In 1887, James was a warden and John and Neal were vestrymen of Christ Church. Henry A. duPont also sat on the vestry of this Episcopal church his family had built on company ground (Scharf 1888:892).

Neal and John Conly eventually became partners in a firm called Conly Brothers, listed in the 1908 Wilmington directory as dealers in coal, wood, lime, sand, cement, and crushed stone, who provided light and heavy hauling from the corner of Front and Madison in Wilmington. John continued to live at Henry Clay, while Neal lived at 620 West Front Street, near the business.

The Conly connection with the company appears to have been peripheral; they were all stone masons at some time in their careers, and they were residents of the company's powdermaking community at Henry Clay.

John appears from the record to have been a labor contractor and supplier of masonry supplies to the company under the General. Later he joined his brother Neal in the coal and bulk building materials business. Between these two ventures, John was employed as a company foreman.

What remains undocumented is the ethnicity of Conly's crew. They may have been Italian, and they may have lived at Montchanin.

His relationship with the Montchanin Italians remains unclear, but the tradition connecting the Italians with stonework on the farms is so strong that he must have been the middle man.

The connection of Italian stoneworkers with the powder yard and with the farms appears from the record to have been less direct than has been traditionally assumed. The details of this chapter in ethnic history must be left for future labor historians to decode.

#### ITALIANS IN THE HAGLEY YARD

At the time of the Civil War, the Hagley workforce could be described as mostly Irish, with a few Frenchmen and Germans. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a few Italian names began appearing on the petit ledgers as powder yard workers, but not as stone masons.

In the 1874 petit ledgers, the only Italian names are of Joseph and John Ferraro, both of whom lodged with Mary McPherson. They were paid monthly salaries of \$41 and \$36.50, typical of powder workers. Five years later, the Italians were Joseph and Samuel Ferraro and Peter Vescovi.

In the 1884 ledger, the Italians in the yard were Edward Beaconi, Samuel Ferraro, James (Giacomo) Persoglio, Francisco Rodino, and Charles Sicco. Persoglio's pay amounted to \$70 a month, while the others made from \$40 to \$42.50. The Italians by now were enjoying company-financed passage from Europe for their relatives.

Rodino's cousin, Joseph Consano, borrowed his passage money from the company. Only one Italian, Beaconi, rented a house from the company; Rodino boarded with Mary McPherson, but the others found their own housing. Beginning about this time, Italian given names were rendered in the original, rather than being anglicized.

By 1889, Consano was making \$47 and his son Joseph, Jr., was on the payroll at \$40 and paying board to the father. Rodino was the only Italian renting a house from the company; none were boarders at company

houses. All the Italians were paying pew rent to St. Joseph's Church through the company. Giacomo Persoglio still was the highest-paid Italian in the yard, at \$70, and was joined by a kinsman, Joseph.

The 1894 ledger lists only Samuel Ferraro of all the Italians from the earlier lists. He was joined by Luigi and Joseph Bonifacio, Charles Gaino, and Dominique Pissano. Only Joseph Bonifacio rented a house from the company, and none were boarders.

This brief survey of the records suggests that Italians working in the yards were socially outside the predominantly Irish Henry Clay community, since most of them lived off the company property. The folklore bears this out.

None of them worked at the day rate characteristic of the known stone masons, such as the Conlys, the Frizzells, and Thomas Montgomery.

Nor did the Italians stay in the yards for generations, as the Irish families had.

Sons of Italians moved away, and only Samuel Ferraro stayed more than ten years on the payroll of the old company.

During the period, Italian powder workers began to partake of company paternalism, including loans for passage, but their entry into the community was very slow. They tended to live away from the property; even though they participated in the religious activities of the predominantly Irish church, they had their own ethnic pursuits and social organizations.

Since they represented a detached element of the Henry Clay community, the first Italian powder workers may have become confused in the folklore with the Italian stoneworkers, who did not work directly for the company during the same period.

The extremely personal nature of duPont company and family management during the nineteenth century leaves the division lines blurred, except in the ledgers, which are filled with code that some future historian must decipher if the full story of labor on the farms is ever to be understood.