

## **CHARLES PAGE PERIN AND KEOKEE, VIRGINIA**

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Big Stone Gap, Virginia

April 14, 2020

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This essay started out with two goals in mind, which were to discover and to document the origins of the coal camp of Keokee, Virginia's name; and to explain two unique features of the coke ovens in that camp, which are their use of dolomite refractories in their construction, and the incorporation of an 'air duct' within the ovens themselves. Both of these features are regionally unique. After nearly a decade of effort we have succeeded in attaining these goals. However, in the process of this research an unbelievable amount of romantic material was uncovered, and which is worth telling in its own regard. It is just plain interesting. The common

denominator is the personage of Charles Page Perin. Therefore, the work has turned out to be a biography of that gentleman.



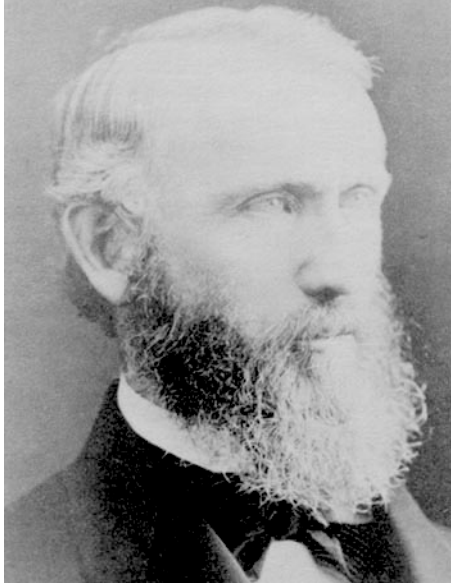
CHARLES  
PAGE  
PERIN

The industrial revolution created an insatiable appetite for iron and steel. To make iron one needs three things - iron ore, lime stone, and a source of high heat and of carbon. Historically charcoal had been used to smelt iron. It supplied both the needed heat and carbon. However, the trees consumed in making charcoal were largely gone within transportable distance of the smelters early in

the 19th century. Hard coal, also called anthracite, was substituted for charcoal, but by the end of the Civil War its supplies were becoming exhausted. Fortuitously, about this time it was discovered that soft coal, also known as bituminous coal, could be converted into coke just as wood was converted into charcoal. In both cases hot ovens were used in the process. Black Mountain, located on the border between Kentucky and Virginia, contained some of the best coking coal in the world, the Taggart seam. The Imboden seam was almost as good. Many hundreds of coke ovens were built in Wise County and adjoining areas. One of these communities was that of Upper Crab Orchard located at the head waters of the North Fork of the Powell River. It is located right on the Kentucky border.

The birth in August 23, 1861 of Charles Page Perin reads like a novel by Margaret Mitchell. Born into the First Families of Virginia at the very outbreak of the Civil War, he was related to the Randolphs, the Scotts, the Lees the Nelsons, and other southern luminaries. Four counties of Virginia, and one in West Virginia were named after these families. The most famous author in Post Bellum Virginia, Thomas Nelson Page, was a double relative. His birth at West Point, New York, where his father, Dr. Glover Perin, who was Assistant Surgeon General of the Army of the United States demonstrates the loyalties of that branch of the family. Charles' mother was

DR.  
GLOVER  
PERIN



Elizabeth Page Perin. Her father, Lemuel Page, had been a civil engineer. Dr. Glover was from Ohio, and had been a career army surgeon ever since the Mexican War. During the Civil War he became a Col. of the Union Army of the Cumberland, which was active in Eastern Kentucky, a circumstance that later provided many social and business contacts for his son. During the Civil War Dr. Perin had established a chain of army hospitals from Louisville to Kennesaw, Georgia, and organized the medical and surgical services after the great battles involving the Army of the Cumberland.

Charles got a BA in metallurgy from Harvard in 1883, and then an engineering degree from the prestigious Ecole des Mines in Paris, France. He was described as having been a geologist, metallurgist, a surveyor, and a businessman. He got positions in a number of professional engineering firms centered in New York City, and in Pittsburg. These positions propelled him into a dizzying number of foreign and domestic industrial developmental positions that are hard to sequence chronologically, as he occupied several positions simultaneously.

His father's contacts in Kentucky provided Charles a wife, Keokee Monroe Henderson of Louisville, Kentucky, whom he married July 7, 1887. She had been born Feb. 10, 1868. She was part Indian, and her first name is an English phonic spelling of the Delaware Indian words that translate as "thou woman". The Delaware / English dictionary uses a French Canadian spelling – 'Ki-Ochqueu'. Likely they also explain his association with the Louisville financier / industrialists with whom he was later associated in Upper Crab Orchard, Virginia – Rogers Clark Thruston and R. Stuyvesant Pierpont. These gentlemen formed the Interstate Investment Corporation, which we will revisit later.

Rogers Clark Thruston was a proud descendant of George Rogers Clark. He was connected to the College of William and Mary of Virginia, President of the Sons of the American Revolution, and a member of the Filson Club, a historical society of Louisville, Kentucky.

ROGERS  
CLARK  
THRUSTON



Rutherford Stuyvesant Pierpont was from New Jersey, but was distally descended from the upper class Dutch of New York. His extended family included the Roosevelts, du Ponts, and the Leisenrings. Recall that the Dutch Governor of New Holland had been Peter Stuyvesant. Pierpont is ensconced in the Hagley Museum of Wilmington, Delaware, which is a repository of artifacts on the du Pont Company, and of the Virginia Coal and Iron Company and its descendants. He was related to Chief Justice John Jay. One suspects that the connection between Perin and this upper crust from that region was through his wife, Keokee. The only other two references to this name trace back to the region around the Delaware Water Gap, which was the Delaware Indian trail from the

## R. STUYVESANT PIERPONT



States of Delaware and New Jersey to Mount Pocono in Pennsylvania, which was a sacred place to the Delaware Indians. A coal mine located between Imboden and Keokee Virginia on land once owned by the Interstate Investment Co. and Imboden, and belonging to Westmoreland Coal Corp., was named after Pierpont. This company was a descendant of VCI, and was largely owned by the Leisenring family. He was also a Director of the Stonega Coke and Coal Company, and of the Interstate Railroad, which was owned by VCI.

At this point Perin plunged into a whirlwind of international activities centered on industrial development. The dates are impossible to sequence, as he worked on these activities more or less at the same time. He would bounce back and forth between them, and the dates that are often cited for him working on one side of the world include dates given for working on the other, and then back again. He was contracted to go to Russia, after which he wrote "A Report of Fuel Supply of the Transiberian Railroad". He was instrumental in developing the "Birmingham of Canada", at Hamilton, Ontario. Of note this was also the major center of the development of Dolomite Refractories (fire brick) that were used in making coke ovens and blast furnaces. He developed Birmingham, Alabama as the "Pittsburg of the South", where he became Chairman of the Southern Steel Corporation and of the Williamson Iron Co. there. Developer John Inman was very active in Birmingham. We shall see him again. Perin developed and was director of the Eastern Cuba Railroad. He was an officer in the Pittsburg Westmoreland Coal Company of Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania, where the Leisenrings and Wentzes got their start. We will put all this on a back burner for a while, and pick up the beginnings of another thread of the story.

After losing its first empire, the United States, and after defeating Napoleon on the Continent of Europe, Britain moved its attention to the founding of its second empire, in India. They had great success, and soon cast their eyes upon China. While in India the British became acquainted with opium, which is and was grown in Afghanistan. The Chinese were not too keen on trade with the British, but some bright and shining soul conceived of getting the Chinese addicted to opium, and then of using that as a lever to bleed the Chinese of money and trade concessions. The British were only moderately successful at first. However, on the western coast of India, in the city of Bombay, there is an enclave of religious exiles from Persia (Iran) whose religion is neither Hindu nor Islam, but is Zoroastrian. They are called 'Parsi'. They get along with both Muslims and Hindus, and are naturals at commerce. They developed what they today refer to as a 'mercantile business', which was in reality an opium trade between Afghanistan and China via India. The Parsi succeeded where the British had nearly failed, and the opium trade with China became a thing of legend, and made the Parsi of Bombay immensely wealthy. The family that led this business was the Tata family.

The son of the founder of the Parsi opium trade was Jamsetji N. Tata. He was an Indian patriot, and became convinced that India needed a steel industry. He went to England, where he interviewed Lord George Hamilton, the Secretary of State for India. He did not get much

JAMSETJI N. TATA

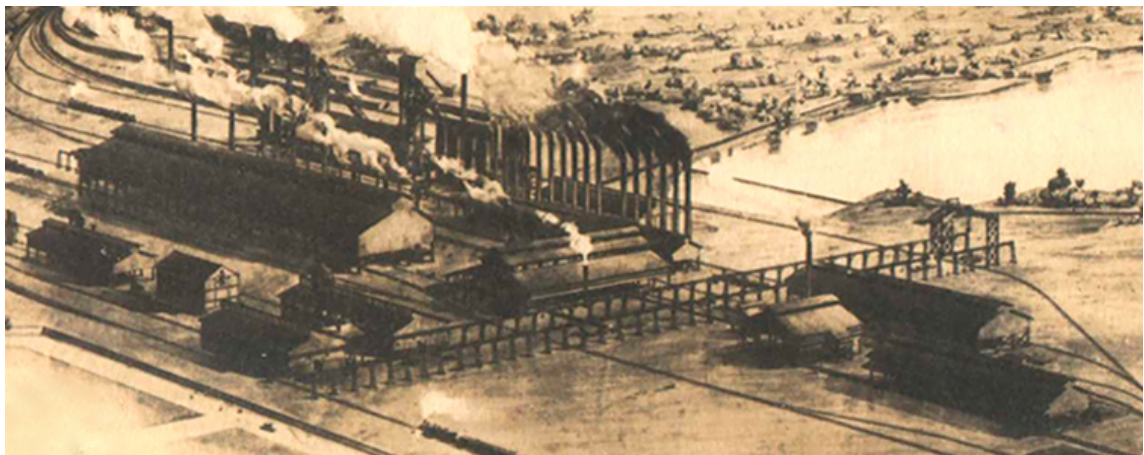


encouragement. Therefore, Tata travelled to Pittsburg, and talked with “the best firm in the field of metallurgical engineering”, who then referred him to Perin, who was described as being “a surveyor of international repute”. Tata asked Perin to go to India and to explore for iron ore, coal and limestone, and to build a steel mill. Perin built the great Tata Steel Works at Jamshedpur, in northeast India. Perin was in and out of India for several years.

During this same time period he involved himself with the Louisville, Ky. Investors mentioned above, and by 1906 we find the Interstate Investment Company deeply involved at both Upper Crab Orchard, and on adjacent Looney Creek operating as the Interstate Coal and

Iron Company. John Inman and the Virginia Coal and Iron Company of the Leisenring family were also deeply involved. A former Confederate General, John Daniel Imboden was the pivot man in all this, and he set up the coal camp of Imboden, adjacent to Upper Crab Orchard.

TATA STEEL  
WORKS AT  
JAMSHEDPUR  
INDIA



Interestingly, Col. Perin had been in the Union Army of the Cumberland, and Inman had been in the Confederate Army of Tennessee, and the two groups has opposed each other in some of the bitterest fighting in the Civil War.

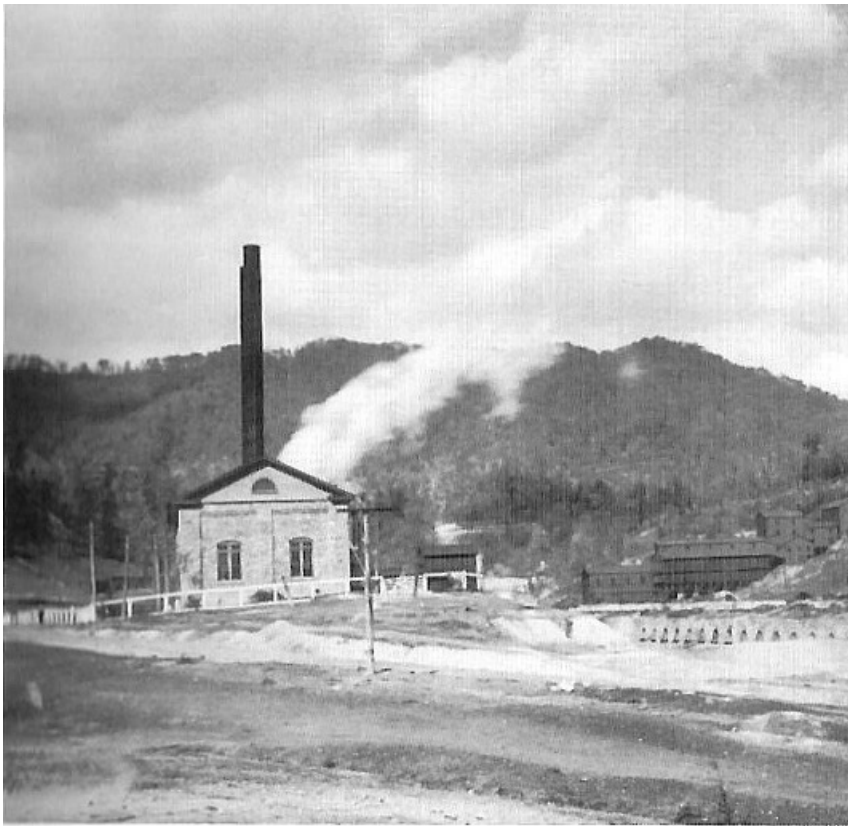
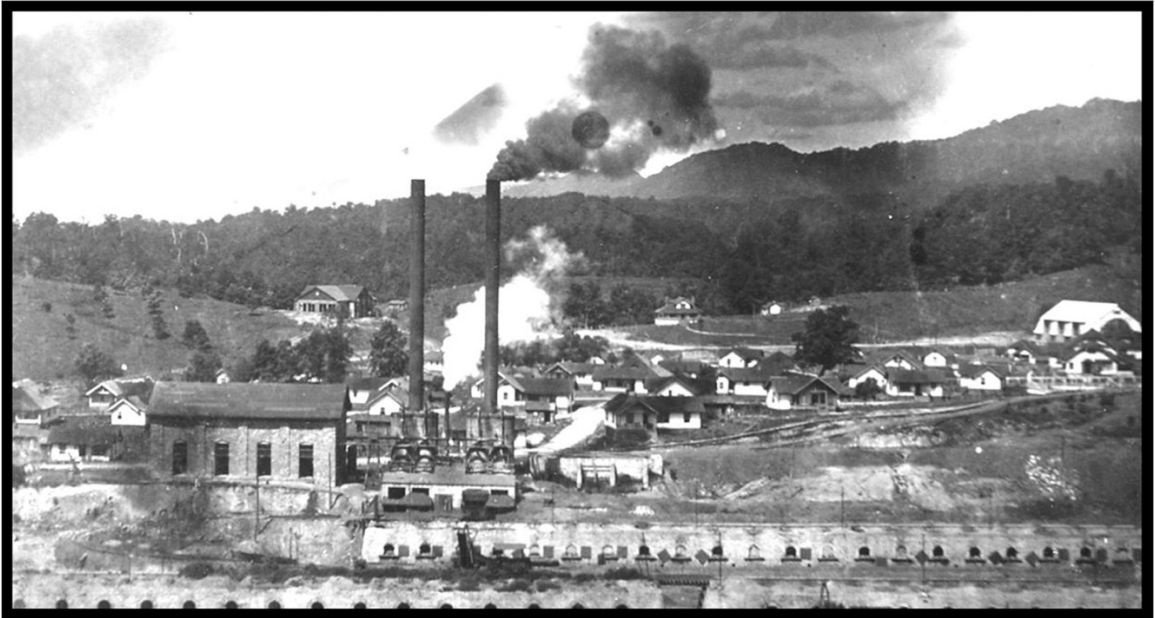
The Interstate Investment Co., under the guidance of Charles Peron, started building a model coal camp at Upper Crab Orchard in 1906. There had been a post office at Upper Crab Orchard for several years, but when the railroad tried to name their new depot there, they found that the name was already in use somewhere else in the United States, and another name was required. Perin named it after his wife, Keokee. The operating mining company was named the Keokee Coke and Coke Company. Peron was managing the Imboden Coal Company, and Pierrepont was set up as Superintendent and manager of the Keokee Coal Company. Thruston moved on to buy and to manage the iron furnace in Big Stone Gap, and bought General Imboden’s house there. Thruston, along with Fox, was a model for Jack Hale of The Trail of the

Lonesome Pine. In 1910 VCI bought out the Keokee Consolidated Coal and Coke Company, the name used after Keokee bought out Imboden. At the same time VCI spun off an operating company, the Stonega Coke and Coal Company, and Perin became its operating President. This situation did not last long, as within months Perin and Keokee were back in India.

THE CENTER OF  
THE KEOKEE OF  
CHARLES PERIN

COKE OVENS IN  
THE  
FOREGROUND,  
THE STEAM  
ELECTRIC PLANT  
IN THE CENTER

THE PERIN  
HOUSE IN THE  
CENTER  
BACKGROUND



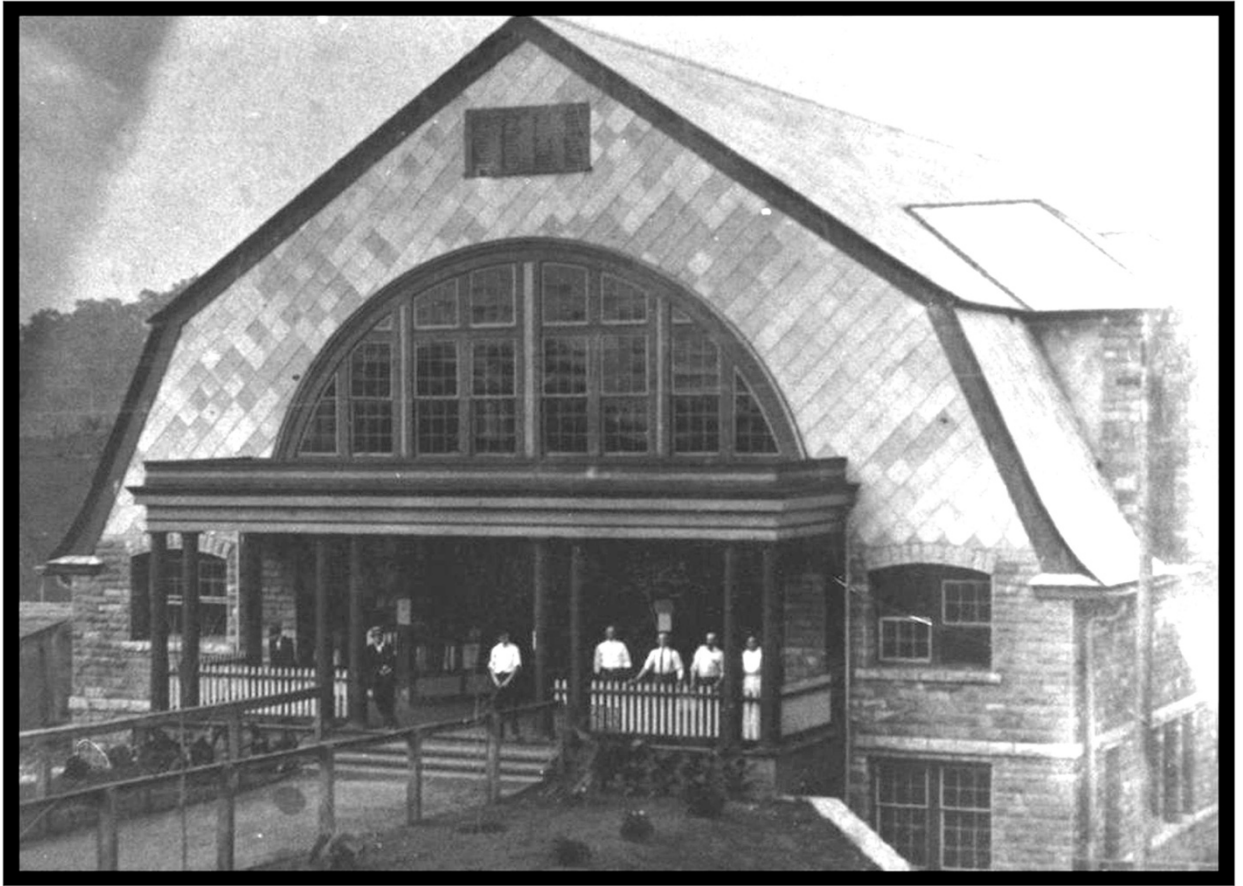
TIPPLE IN THE RIGHT BACK-  
GROUND

COKE OVENS IN THE RIGHT  
FOREGROUND

STEAM ELECTRIC PLANT ON  
THE RIGHT; IN THE DAYS OF  
STONEGA CO.  
MANAGEMENT THIS  
BUILDING WAS THE SILENT  
MOVIE HOUSE

THE STATE LINE WITH KY. IS  
ON LITTLE BLACK MT. IN THE  
BACKGROUND





COMMISSARY IN THE FIRST KEOKEE – IT WAS LATER THE GYM FOR THE SCHOOL



INTERIOR OF THE KEOKEE COMMISSARY



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC AND OHIO RR LONESOME PINE SPECIAL DRAWN UP AT KEOKEE JUNCTION ABOUT 1910 – THE SA&O HAD JUST BOUGHT THE BLACK MOUNTAIN RR & THE LOONEY CREEK RR WHICH JOINED THE LOONEY CREEK RR AT KEOKEE – THEY ALL BECAME THE VIRGINIA AND SOUTHWESTERN RR, AND THEN THE SOUTHERN RR

Keokee Perin was no shrinking violet. While in Birmingham in 1897 she and other ladies incorporated the “Society of United Charities of Birmingham Alabama”. That summer she took a course at Harvard in ‘Physical Training’.

In 1902 the Perins moved to Nagpur, India. While there Keokee started the first school in Jamshedpur. During this time period the Perins were also living in Keokee, Virginia in a house on the north side of town. Charles Perin is well documented as having been very busy in both Virginia and India during this time period. This reality is hard to fathom. In 1906 Perin bought out the works at Imboden, and in 1910 VCI bought him out, and he became President of the Stonege Coke and Coal Co., the operating company for VCI. In 1914 Keokee died in Nagpur. The “New York Times” stated that the Perins lived at “1,066 Fifth Ave., New York City”. In Keokee’s memory Charles endowed the “Keokee Monroe Perin Memorial College in Jamshedpur. In 1986 Tata Steel Co. endowed this school and changed the name to “Mrs. Keokee Monroe Perin Memorial School”.

Charles continued his peripatetic life style, having worked at Hamilton, Ontario; India; China; the Philippines; South Africa; Cuba; and back in the USA. In 1920 he married Miss Jeanette Bean in Paris France. They honeymooned at White Sulfur Springs, West Virginia. They divorced in 1925.

Perin was a wealthy man, but the Great Depression wiped him out. He had a reputation for impulsivity, and expensive tastes, and for wanting his industrial operations to be 'first class' all the way. He had many successes, but also many failures. In 1935 he went to Iraq in an attempt to recover his fortunes, but instead contracted dysentery, from which he never recovered. He did make it back to New York City, where he died of pneumonia. He is buried at Rock Creek Cemetery, Washington DC.

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