

# The Cost of Dynamite

## The Atglen & Susquehanna in Conestoga Township



Columbia Historic Preservation Society, Columbia, PA.

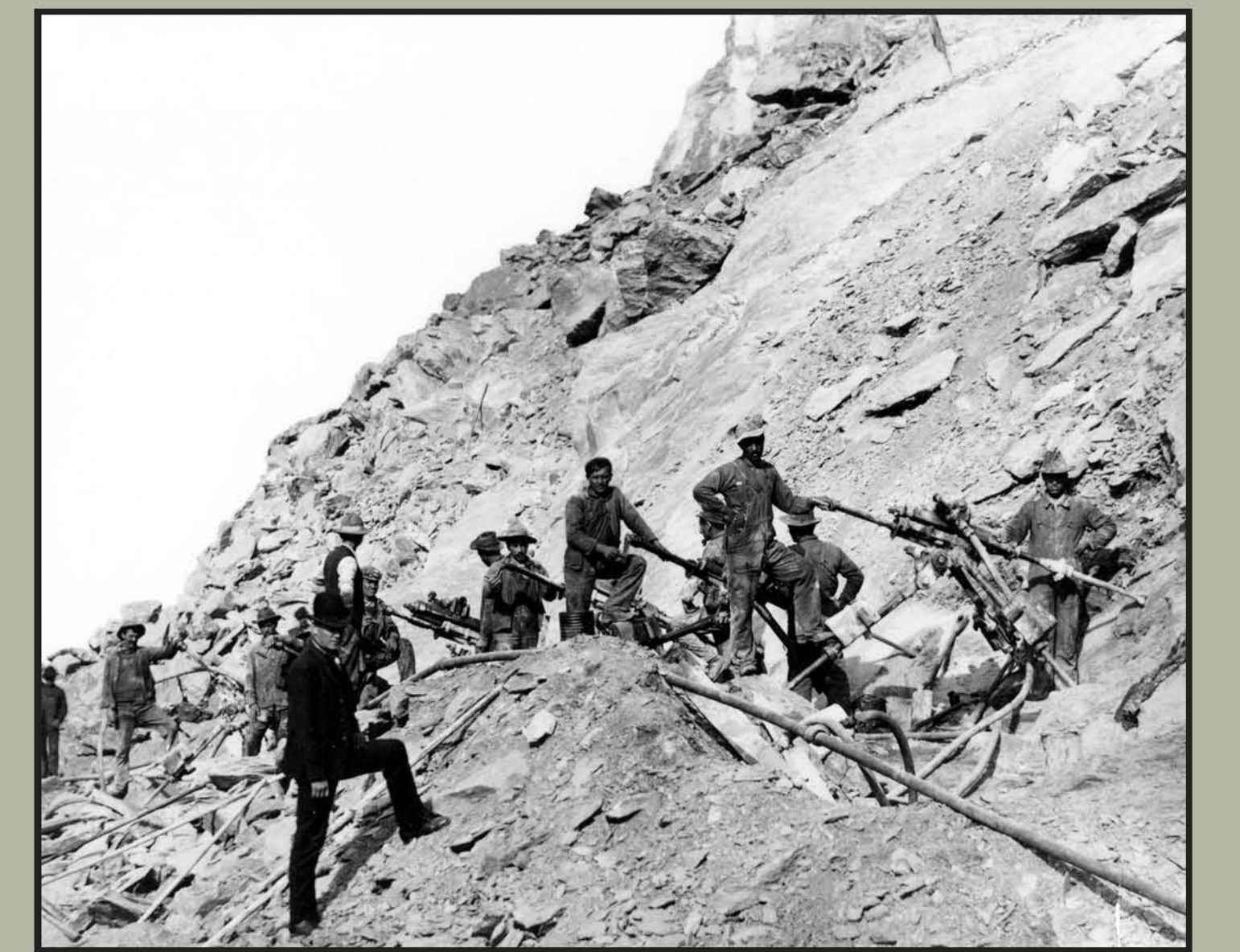
Dynamite was essential for expedient construction of the A&S. Rock cliffs on the Susquehanna River were blasted for months to create shelves that carried the rails northward, a lower route for the older Port Road and an upper route for the new A&S (lower right images). Both crossed the mouth of the Conestoga River at Safe Harbor on sweeping curves and new tandem bridges. Compressed air from a converted rolling mill in Safe Harbor was piped up the cliffs to drill pilot holes for filling with explosives. Boxed dynamite was passed by hand along the treacherous river face (upper right images). Hundreds of pilot holes were detonated simultaneously, debris removed, and the process repeated.

Local manufacture of dynamite employed local residents, unlike the PRR construction crews, which engaged thousands of transient immigrant laborers (lower left images). A dynamite factory explosion on June 9, 1906, near Colemanville occurred a few weeks before public dedication of the A&S. The accident claimed eleven lives, eight between the ages of 16 and 25. Decimation of the bodies was extreme; mostly unidentified fragments were collected. Such instantaneous death and destruction was a modern horror, unfamiliar to the rural community.

Funeral services were held at the Colemanville United Methodist Church. A single casket was interred for the remains of ten of the victims (lower center image). Although the factory was no longer producing dynamite for the A&S, the PRR would not escape association with the event then reported by the *Lancaster New Era* as “the most horrible accident that has ever occurred in Lancaster County.”



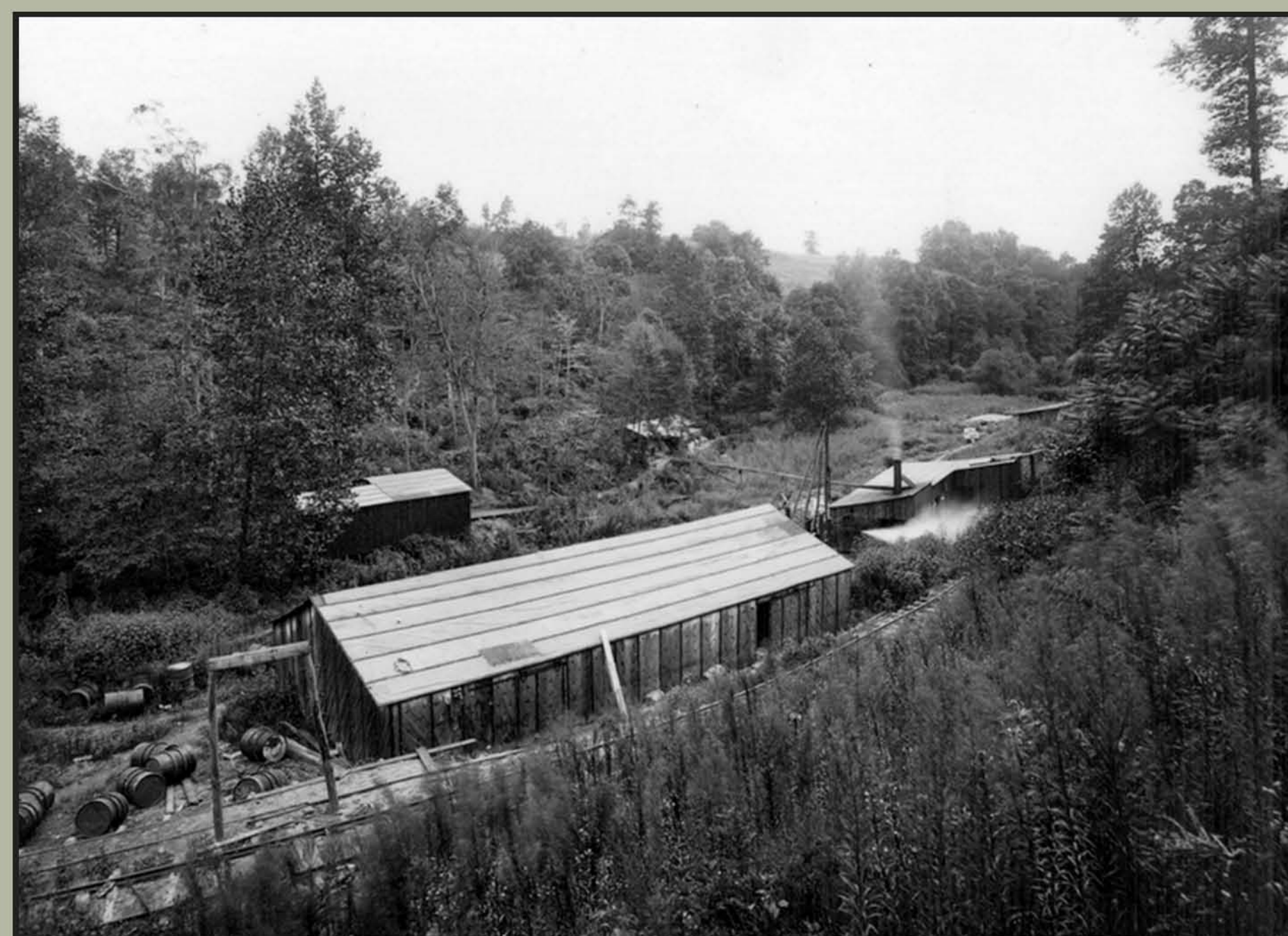
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Kline Collection, Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania, PHMC.



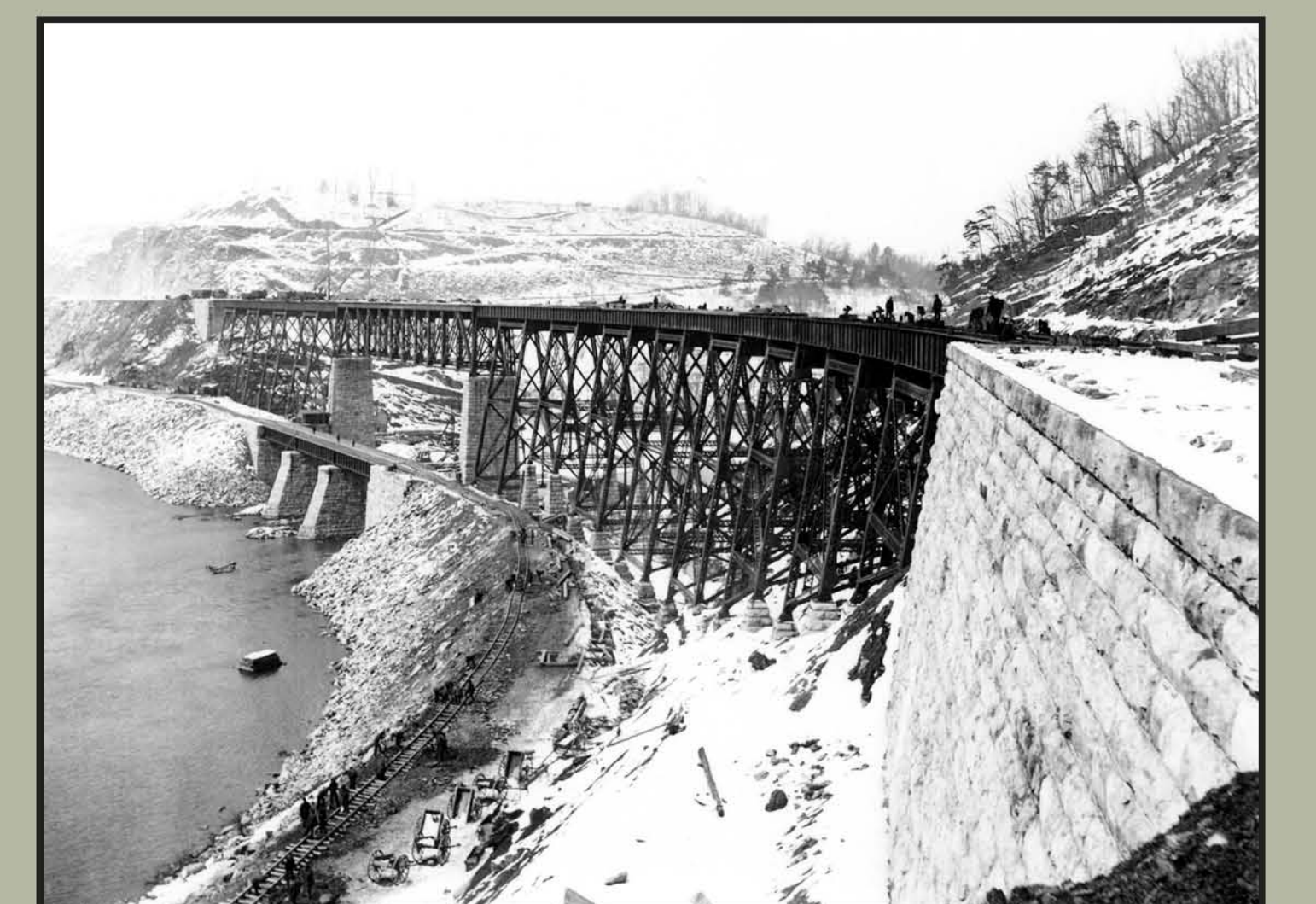
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Personal collection of Charles R. Heim, Columbia, PA.



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