

## **D. B. Zimmerman Mansion**

In the turbulent decade of the 1860's, when America found itself torn apart by civil war, two boys were born at opposite ends of Pennsylvania, both of whom would rise to national prominence. One would become an architect of national and international renown. The other would become a member of America's Gilded Age industrial and financial elite. Their paths would cross 50 yrs later in Somerset Township to create a masterpiece of American architecture.

### **The Cattle Baron**

Daniel Burnside Zimmerman was born on Feb. 10, 1863, in Quemahoning Township, the son of a prosperous farmer and Civil War Veteran, Jacob Zimmerman, and his wife, Sarah Stufft. The second of five children, he spent his early years working on the family farm. He showed an early interest in business and to prepare himself for a business career he took correspondence courses from the Easton Business College in Poughkeepsie, NY. By the age of 14 he was already successfully breeding and selling calves and sheep. Within a year he had included horses and cattle in his fledgling livestock enterprise. At age 17 he taught a winter term in the local public school and the following year taught at the California school near Stoystown. The young Zimmerman made such an impression on the local Board of Education that he was encouraged to pursue an academic profession. However, his dealing in livestock was proving to be far more profitable than a teacher's salary. He soon outgrew the family farm and started acquiring additional farm lands in Somerset County to accommodate his expanding business.

Zimmerman would later say that his life changed forever in 1877 when he read a publication on cattle breeding that claimed the best land in the U.S. for breeding livestock was in Dickinson, South Dakota. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the great American West exerted an enormous draw on the rest of the nation. The highly romanticized notion of cowboys riding across endless plains, trackless deserts, and spectacular mountain ranges drew thousands of people from the crowded and increasingly urbanized and industrialized East to the West to seek open space and find their fortunes. It was, however, the expansion of railroad service that made the opening of the West feasible. All these things young Zimmerman kept in his mind as he continued to acquire more farm land and more livestock in Somerset County. His life would once again change forever when he took notice of young Lizzie Snyder, daughter of Judge Samuel and Mrs. Sally Snyder of Friedens. They were married on March 25, 1886, at her home by The Rev. J. J. Welsh, Pastor of Friedens Lutheran Church. On Jan. 4, 1887, the couple welcomed their first child, a son, Ralph Snyder Zimmerman. Four years later in 1891 second child, Sally Alma Zimmerman, joined her brother.

By 1890 the call of the West had proven irresistible to Zimmerman. He travel to South Dakota where he purchased a small holding, the Sitting Bull ranch, located next to a ranch owned by Teddy Roosevelt's family. His razor-sharp business mind soon realized that he did not have to invest his own capital by buying land when he could lease Federally owned land from the U.S. government for a few cents per acre. He could then use his own funds to increase his livestock herds thus vastly increasing his profits when the cattle were shipped to meat processing plants in Chicago and Kansas City by rail. Zimmerman expanded his western holding into Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, and Texas. By 1908 45,000 steers, each with the "DZ" brand, had made the 45 yr. old

Zimmerman a Cattle Baron on a grand scale and recognized as the largest independent cattle rancher in the U.S. As befitting his prosperity and status in the community, Zimmerman moved his family to a large frame home next door to St. Paul's Presbyterian Church on Somerset's fashionable E. Union St. The home was razed in 2006.

### **The Coal Baron**

The earliest settlers of Somerset County knew that coal lay under the rolling green hills. At some places veins of coal broke the surface in what were known as "out-crops". Many a local farmer dug these easily accessible sources of coal and used them on their farms. A few even dug small mines into the hillsides and dug a few bushels of coal for their own use. It wasn't until the 1890's that commercial coal production become profitable. The demand for coal soared as the nation's industrial machine burgeoned. The giant steel mills of Pittsburgh and Johnstown had an insatiable appetite for coal.

The first large scale commercial mining operation in Somerset Township, the Listie Coal and Manufacturing Co. shipped its first coal from the Listie Mines in 1893. Having already demonstrated his business skills in the cattle business, and sitting on the profits from that enterprise, Zimmerman was one of the first to see the possibilities of developing Somerset's vast coal reserves. In partnership with Isaiah Good and Norman Knepper, they developed a mine at Goodtown, near Berlin, and another at Wilson Creek. Zimmerman later formed the Somerset Coal Co. and bought out his partners. He soon sold this enterprise to Consolidation Coal Co., a part of the Rockefeller empire, at a substantial profit. He then acquired large tracts of coal in Jerome and developed them in association with Hillman Coal and Coke of Pittsburgh. Later Zimmerman developed mining operations at Ralpton, Zimmerman, Rockwood, and other points throughout the county until he became the largest independent producer of coal in Somerset County. At the same time, as his fortune grew, he continued to acquire farms and livestock in Somerset and on his ranches in the West.

Zimmerman's coal and cattle empire introduced him to the titans of American business and finance. Having seen the grandeur of their city mansions lining Pittsburgh's Fifth Ave. and country estates near Philadelphia he started to think about a home of his own in Somerset where he could entertain his powerful, rich and influential guests in a "suitable" manner. He took his first step in this direction when he acquired a 44 acre tract of land on a hill overlooking Somerset. He often referred to it simply as "The Hill". Within the first few years of his ownership Zimmerman began clearing of the site and planting ornamental trees and fruit orchards with approximately 1,000 apple trees. He marked the estate's perimeter with spruce trees, many of which are still standing. At about the same time, he sent young Ralph off to Gettysburg College and then on to Yale, where he graduated in 1909.

### **The Architect**

Horace Trumbauer was born in 1868 near Philadelphia to very modest circumstances much like the young Zimmerman. He attend public schools until the age of 16 when he decided that his life's work would be in the field of architecture. He left school and began work as an

apprentice with the architectural firm of G. W. and W. D. Hewitt where he remained until 1890. During his stay with the Hewitt firm, Trumbauer produced mostly residential designs for wealthy Philadelphians' palatial country estates. However, when he opened his own design firm he began with a series of more modest residential designs for the construction firm of Wendell & Smith. Trumbauer drew his clients from the Philadelphia area but gradually, as his work became more widely known, his client list came to include many of the Gilded Age's newly rich industrialists. Soon, he was successfully competing with the renowned New York firms such as Carrer & Hastings and McKim, Mead & White. Much of his early work reflected his wealthy clients' appreciation for the ornate and opulent style of 18<sup>th</sup> century French architecture. He was, however, also equally at home with other European-inspired styles, especially English Tudor and Georgian architecture.

It is generally believed that Zimmerman, the Coal Baron, and Trumbauer, the architect came together through their connections with the Berwind family which owned large coal interests in the northern end of Somerset County. Trumbauer had recently completed the imposing mansion, The Elms, for the Berwind family in Newport, Rhode Island. He had also designed homes for other coal operators in both Cambria and Somerset Counties.

### **The House**

Zimmerman and Trumbauer decided that the house would be in the Georgian style, a design that was again becoming fashionable. The house resembles some of the great Georgian-style plantation homes along the James River in Virginia, such as Carter Hall and Westover Plantation. Between 1915 and 1918 Trumbauer's firm produced 65 blue-prints for the mansion. While it was modest when compared to some of Trumbauer's other residential projects for America's newly minted millionaires, the house was on a scale that Somerset County had never seen before. The newspaper, The Somerset Herald, described it as "Somerset's most pretentious home." Local engineer, Harvey Hostetler supervised construction on the house and local architect E. H. Walker claimed some responsibility for the house's design.

The structure is 136' in length. It consists of a central block with asymmetrical north and south wings. The north wing contained the kitchen, a breakfast room, and servants quarters on the second floor, along with an attached 4-bay garage with a second floor apartment. Sadly, portions of this wing were demolished in the mansion's most recent renovation. The south wing contains the conservatory with expansive views of Somerset and Lake Somerset. The five-hipped roof dormers on each side of the central portion's roof are an unusual Trumbauer feature. Marble keystones above each window, a marble cornice, and a marble belt course between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> floors are design elements found in several of Trumbauer's designs for homes in eastern Pennsylvania. The distinctive massive plain chimneys with banded marble, the brick porch piers with marble caps, and four plain marble columns at the main entrance are hallmarks of Trumbauer's design.

One enters the house from the marble porch into a marble floored entrance hall. A grand staircase, supported by marble columns curves gracefully to the second floor. This elegant entry once contained a mounted and stuffed steer from one of the Zimmerman herds which often

startled first-time visitors to the house. Immediately in front of the visitor is the Blue Drawing Room which also provides access to the rear marble terrace. The first floor also contains the paneled living room, and the dining room. The second floor contains five large bedrooms and a library. As was the custom of the day among upper class families, Zimmerman and his wife were provided with separate but adjoining bedrooms and baths. The third floor contains numerous small rooms which were used by visiting guests.

The mansion contains nine fireplaces, four on each of the first and second floors, and one in the basement. The basement itself contains the boiler room, a pantry, laundry room, and a room Zimmerman called the “Amusement” room.

When it was completed in 1918, the house was a showcase for Somerset County workmanship and native materials. Many of the rooms had been paneled with local hardwoods cut from Zimmerman’s various holdings. Before the family moved in, news reporters are reputed to have crept into the estate at night to describe to their readers the scale and opulence of the mansion. The house was reportedly to have cost \$ 300,000 to complete, equal today to approximately \$ 4.1 million. On May 8, 1918, The Somerset Herald reported that the Zimmerman family had moved into “The Hill”.

In 1918 Zimmerman received an offer to buy his 90% interest in the Quemahoning Coal Co. by a consortium of New York investors for \$ 4,000,000, the equivalent today to approximately \$ 55 million. He continued to retain his vast ranching interests. He was set to enjoy his new home.

### **Life and Death on “The Hill”**

Zimmerman intended to enjoy his lavish estate and throughout the 1920's he did so on a grand scale. He loved inviting his business associates and prominent politicians to week-end house parties at the estate. Perhaps the most renowned event was the party given for Sally Zimmerman on the occasion of her engagement to Alf Landon, former Governor of New York and Presidential candidate. (The engagement was abruptly terminated and she never married Mr. Landon!) U.S. Senators, Governors, Pittsburgh industrialists and financiers were frequent guests. Andrew Mellon, heir to the Pittsburgh banking and financial empire and Secretary of the Treasury often spent time at the Zimmerman mansion. Mrs. Zimmerman remained a country girl at heart. She devoted herself to her husband and children. While Zimmerman enjoyed socializing with the rich and powerful his wife usually retired to her private suite on the second floor and allowed her daughter, Sally, to fill the role of hostess at the estate.

D. B. Zimmerman only lived in the house for 10 yrs. Years earlier he had been advised by his physician to take life a little easier. For a brief time he followed his doctor’s orders and spent time visiting his ranches in the West, but a quiet sedentary life was not for D. B. Zimmerman. By February 1928, a chronic heart condition had become acute. He spent 15 weeks as a patient at Pittsburgh’s Mercy Hospital where he appeared to improve. He arrive back in Somerset at “The Hill” in late May where he received a few of his closest friends as visitors. However, he suffered a relapse and, attended by his wife and family; his physician, Dr. Charles Barchfield; and his Pastor,

Rev. I. Hess Wagner, of Trinity Lutheran Church, Daniel Burnside's Zimmerman, died early on the morning of June 6, 1928.

Zimmerman's body lay in state in the living room of the mansion he had loved and called his home. The funeral was attended by numerous dignitaries representing the highest levels of the business, financial, and political world Zimmerman had lived in. His Pastor and long-time personal friend, Rev. Wagner, conducted the funeral service according to the rites of the Lutheran Church to which Zimmerman had been a life-long member. His remains were buried in a simple plot at the Husband Cemetery, near the brick chapel. A very simple granite tombstone marks the grave. Today, one can stand at the site and look north towards "The Hill" and see Zimmerman's greatest memorial, the house he called his home.