



Jim Thorpe (Mauch Chunk) (Images of America)

John H. Drury, Joan Gilbert

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Mauch Chunk, now Jim Thorpe, was established on the Lehigh River as a shipping depot for anthracite coal in 1818 by Josiah White, a Philadelphia Quaker and brilliant engineer, and his trusted business partner, Erskine Hazard. By 1829, White and Hazard had founded the Lehigh Coal & Navigation Company and built an efficient transportation system that moved coal nine miles over the mountains to Mauch Chunk by Switchback Gravity Railroad, and forty-six miles along the Lehigh Canal to Easton. With the arrival of the railroads, the Switchback became a major tourist attraction. As rail excursionists descended on Mauch Chunk to experience a hair-raising ride on America's first roller coaster and enjoy the magnificent scenery, the coal shipping town, billed by the railroads as "the Switzerland of America," became a tourist destination second in popularity to Niagara Falls. In a story stranger than fiction, the town exchanged its name for the name of Jim Thorpe when the 1912 Olympic hero was laid to rest there in 1954. Through an extraordinary collection of photographs, Jim Thorpe (Mauch Chunk) tells the story of the athlete and his burial, the Switchback Gravity Railroad, the Lehigh Canal, the social scene, and the town's Victorian legacy.

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