



SHARPSVILLE AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

As we enter 2026, the year will of course be the 250th Anniversary of the founding of our nation. Many of you will remember the 1976 Bicentennial celebration. It seems, however, that the lead up to this year's commemoration is much more subdued—almost absent—from that 50 years ago. The *Bicentennial Minutes* television segment ran for two years prior to the anniversary. The “American Freedom Train” went on a 21-month tour and battle re-enactments were part of the 66,000 events held across the country. Sharpsville's fire hydrants were even painted to look like Revolutionary soldiers.

Little seems to be going on with the upcoming anniversary. Some may point out that we now live in a too-cynical age. But the mid-70s had a similar atmosphere, following Vietnam and Watergate. Yet, the spontaneous outpourings of patriotism that marked the Bicentennial were a welcome surprise at the time.

Mercer County is at least trying to sponsor activities and commemorations, and the Borough is planning a celebration in July. But there appears to be no national coordination. A bi-partisan commission was set up by Congress in 2016, but, as has been widely reported, it has been marked by dysfunction during the prior Administration, and politicization during the present one. DOGE funding cuts further imperil plans for a celebration.

As far as what we and other local historical societies can do, is challenging. Our links to the American Revolution are thin. Yes, George Washington's route to Fort LeBoeuf in 1753 did graze against the northeast corner of the county, and Lafayette visited Mercer in 1825. But other than that, settlement here by Europeans, including Revolutionary War Veterans, didn't happen until the late 1790s. Yes, we could try to tell how our town connects with the larger story of America. But that is what we do every year.

For now, one suggestion is to watch Ken Burns' new six-part documentary *The American Revolution* on PBS. (All episodes can be streamed at no cost at PBS.org or on the PBS app.) The series depicts our founding Patriots not as idealized marble statues but as flesh-and-blood humans who had doubts and fears, rashness and quarrels, along with steadfastness and a lofty vision for this country. Perspectives from women, the enslaved, Native Americans, and Loyalists are included to tell a fuller story of what was essentially a civil war.

If you haven't thought much about the American Revolution since high school, this show will help you understand this world-historical event and perhaps instill in you some of the Spirit of '76.

Open House

As a reminder the Historical Society is open the first and third Saturday of the month from 1:00p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Come see the unique architecture—both interior and exterior—of our historic building and a large display of our artifacts, documents, and photos of Sharpsville history.

Our basement displays have been recently expanded and may include items you may have missed on a prior visit.

Check our Facebook page for any changes due to building renovations

Contact Us

website: www.sharpsvillehistorical.org

email: sharpsvillehistorical@hotmail.com

see our website for current board members

Headquarters: 131 N. Mercer Ave., Sharpsville, Pa.

Mailing address: 955 Forest Lane, Sharpsville, Pa. 16150

Meetings are held the Fourth Monday of the Month at 7:00pm at our headquarters

With Gratitude

We received generous donations from
The Sharon Historical Society
and Dorothy Bieber
in memory of Gregg Smith

A generous donation was also received from
Rod Alexander
in memory of Gregg Smith and Bob Rannard

A Look Back

Rural Free Delivery

The January 6, 1904 edition of *The Sharpsville Advertiser* announced that the Sharpsville post office would establish rural mail with free delivery. They were initially designated No. 54, 55, and 56 and each roughly the same distance of 22 miles. The number of houses served were 116, 107, and 106, respectively. The next week Washington announced the appointment of three carriers (along with three substitutes) for the routes, each having passed an examination the prior summer. Each of the routes was described in the newspaper. Mention of the roads travelled is largely absent, with reliance on now long-forgotten landmarks instead. As an example, the carrier's route on No. 54 was laid out thus:

Commencing at Postoffice in Sharpsville, thence northeast to Totten's corner, thence west to J. McMurray's corner, thence south to Dr. J. McMurray's corner, thence west to Moyer's corner, thence north via No. 14 and No. 6 School House to Pymatuning Bridge, then west to School House No. 7, thence north to Ward's corner, thence retracing to School House No. 7, thence southeast and southwest to Byerly's corner, thence west to Stambaugh's corner, thence north to Wheeler's corner, thence southeast to Jamison's corner, thence north to School House No. 7, thence west to Five Points, thence south to Clark's corner, thence southeast to Stambaugh's corner, thence south to Cemetery corner, thence northeast and southeast via Downing's to Postoffice.

This discussion of the rural mail delivery would be a recurring topic for the town newspaper throughout the year. Since it had been introduced elsewhere in the country earlier, the newspaper editor was familiar with the concept. Those of today, however, might be surprised that it wasn't something that had always been: Of course, the Post Office delivers mail to everyone, whether by a letter carrier on a walking route in town, or by truck to a rural mailbox.

But until Rural Free Delivery was instituted, those in the country had to pick up their mail at the local Post Office. (We find a relic of this practice in Clark; there is no mail delivery in this small borough—everyone there needs a post office box. Since the Clark Post Office is an unofficial community center, complaints about this inconvenience presumably are low.)

House numbers specifying a particular address became universal when the adoption of 9-1-1 service in 1990s required them. Before that, one's address in the country was known only by the numbered route of your postal carrier—R.D. #2 or such. (R.D. stood for Rural Delivery; in some places it was R. R. for Rural Route; or R. F. D., as in the television show *Mayberry RFD*, for Rural Free Delivery.)

These assumptions about mail delivery are upturned even further when one learns that in-town delivery to private homes was not instituted until 1825 and the carrier's wage was paid for by the 2¢ surcharge payable by the recipient of the letter. In 1863, free delivery in larger cities (at first just 44) was instituted with the carrier paid by the Post Office. In 1887, the requirement for free City Delivery was reduced to a population 10,000 or \$10,000 in gross postal receipts.

For people in the country, a trip to the local post-office to pick up one's mail was required. Termed fourth-class post offices, these were generously scattered throughout the county at rural hamlets and crossroads. Their postmasters typically operated them out of their general store. While earning only a small salary, the fourth-class postmaster made money from rental of post-office boxes and from the merchandise they sold when a farmer came in to pick up his mail.

After President Benjamin Harrison was inaugurated in 1889, he appointed a prolific campaign fundraiser,



A rural free delivery mail wagon on display at the Grove City Historical Society

Rural Free Delivery, cont'd.

John Wanamaker (of the department store fortune), as Postmaster General. Even in an age where the position was expected to be political patronage, the appointment received criticism as blatantly mercenary. Nonetheless, Wanamaker dove head first into the job, stirring up controversy by proposing the Post Office take over telephone and telegraph service, proposing parcel post and a postal savings bank, and, eventually, Rural Free Delivery. While newspaperman John Stahl in 1879 first proposed the idea of free mail delivery to farmers, Wanamaker was its champion. Enlisting the support of organizations like the Grange, Congressmen were surprised at the support for Wanamaker's proposal. While the cost doomed consideration of nationwide service, a small experiment was authorized in 1893. With a change in administrations came a new Postmaster General, Wilson Bissell, who refused to implement the experiment. Only after Bissell's resignation and President Grover Cleveland's appointment of a new Postmaster General, were the initial three routes—in October 1896 in West Virginia—started. The following spring saw implementation of the full experiment, consisting of 82 routes spread out over a variety of climates and terrains in 28 states and one territory. Throughout this time, with only a couple exceptions, the Post Office bureaucrats opposed Rural Free Delivery as impractical and a waste of money. The experiments only survived because of the pressure that farmers (at a time when nearly two-thirds of population lived in the country) and their Grange organizations, applied to Congress. Once proposed, rural folk quickly saw how it would be a great benefit—saving a long trip over often bad roads to a tiny post office with haphazard handling of the mails. The country postmasters, though, opposed the plan which would put them out of a job and reduce customer traffic to their stores. They tried to organize opposition, but the Congressmen paid heed to the far more numerous farmers who would benefit from R.F.D.

The system, still in its experimental phase, grew in the 1890s with routes laid out at the request of any Congressman who was petitioned by his constituents. An experiment of delivery encompassing an entire Maryland county was first tried in 1899. The first Rural Route in Mercer County was begun on March 15, 1901 operating out of Jamestown. (The newspaper report included a reminder that a mailbox would need to be erected. Surprisingly, a mailbox was not required for City Delivery until 1926. Until then, the letter carrier would wait for the resident to come to the door. Yes, the Postman always rang twice!)

Finally, in 1902 Congress made this experiment a permanent system. The enormous task of laying out routes was largely completed by 1906.

Mentions of Rural Free Delivery by the editor of *The Sharpsville Advertiser* in 1904 were generally favorable, for example: “—The farmers are now happy on account of the rural free delivery service having at last become a certainty. —While the rural residents will have the advantage of a daily mail delivery we trust it will not lessen their visits to town.” “The Postmaster General reports that there are 25,000 rural routes and that more than 12,500,000 people are supplied with mail by this means. Nothing has grown faster than this service. With rural mail routes, telephones and traction lines the farmer has greater conveniences than many good sized towns.” Though it was noted that “[T]he rural free delivery service cost five times as much money as it brought in last year.” This implication was countered by “*The New York Independent* remarks that the fact that the rural free delivery does not pay expenses does not very much count. ‘It is a great convenience to the people of the rural districts, and they greatly appreciate it.’” Most of the reportage though was on statistics or change in the pay for the rural carriers or the requirement that mailboxes be erected by those on the route. Nowhere is it mentioned, however, that the citizens within the Borough of Sharpsville did not get free delivery; they still had to go to the post office to collect their mail. Sharon got free delivery in 1890, and Greenville in 1899, but Sharpsville never met the population or postal revenue for city delivery. Admittedly, a trip of four miles was more burdensome than a walk of four blocks, but a truism of human nature is to

Cont'd. on p. 6



Ours, Yours and Uncle Sam's Favorite."
THE CENTURY
Rural Mail Box



Approved by the P. O. Dept.
The Carriers speak of it in the highest terms. The best, largest, most accessible and safest Mail Box on the market. The best is always the cheapest.

Send for Circulars.
MADE BY THE
CENTURY POST CO.,
Tecumseh, Mich.

Agents wanted in unoccupied territory.
We also manufacture the Tecumseh Rural Mail Box.

An ad for a roadside mailbox that appeared in *The Sharpsville Advertiser* in 1904.



In commemoration of America 250, Mercer County has had a quilt made with each patch representing of the county municipalities. It was recently completed and is on display in the courthouse. Sharpsville's is in the lower left corner with the Santa Clause Visits Every Home sign.

Further information about what the County has planned is available on their website at mercercountypa.gov/America250/Default.htm

Items for Sale

Traces of Old Sharpsville

A thoroughly researched history of Sharpsville with short, readable articles grouped into themed chapters and many photos — \$40

Charcuterie Boards

Engraved with images of Pierce Mansion, First Universalist Church, or the Jonas Pierce House — \$40

Santa Collection

Featuring images of Sharpsville's beloved Santa visits

Mugs — \$15

Ornaments — \$15

T-Shirts — \$20

Bookmarks

Engraved with the 150th Anniversary Logo — \$5

contact 724-877-9958 or visit sharpsvillehistorical.org

BUY-A-BRICK

Please consider an "In Memory of" or "In Honor of" brick for a loved one.

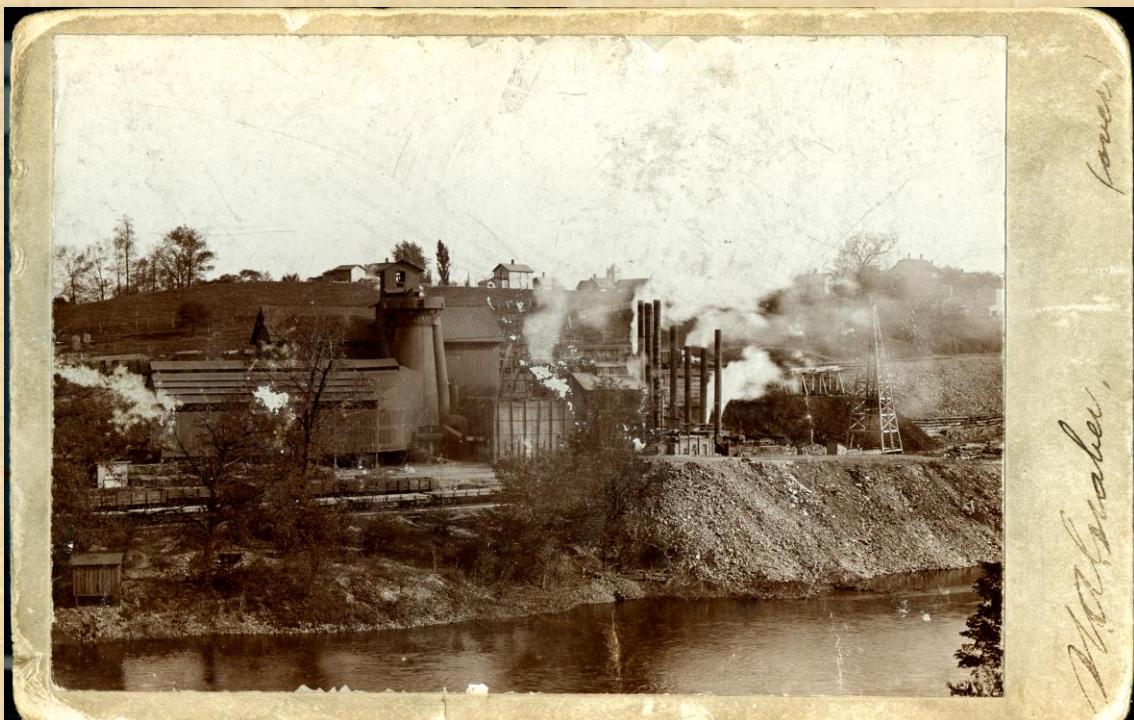
4" x 8" bricks with three lines of inscription — \$75

8" x 8" bricks with six lines of inscription — \$125

The bricks will be placed in the town park.

Pictures of the Past

Graber photos



Part of a recently donated collection of photos taken by W.A. Graber in the early 1890s were shown in the September newsletter. Here are two more. Above is a view of the Old Sharpsville Furnace, seen across the river from South Pymatuning. The steeple of what was once the Baptist Church can be seen in the background, on Church Street. Below is the Mercer Avenue (or Second Ward) School, later known as the Deeter School. It gives a good view of how the building was built in three stages. The northern half of the front (to the right in the photo) was the original structure, built in 1869. It was then twinned with an 1876 addition to the south. The addition's architect was Samule Foulke who designed the First Universalist Church (and current Historical Society headquarters) here. Finally, the back section, along with the bell tower, was erected in 1883.

Rural Free Delivery, cont'd.



Rural carrier J. R. Hum outside the Sharpsville Post Office

resent a benefit your neighbor gets unless you get the same. Eventually, those in town did get their mail delivered, in what was termed Village Delivery. In 1912, Congress mandated that free delivery for towns and villages not qualifying for free City Delivery be started on an experimental basis. In next year's annual report the Postmaster General claimed the experiment was not a success and argued that once-daily delivery was "regarded as inferior by the patrons, who in such communities live near the post office and are in the habit of calling two or three times a day for their mail." Despite these misgivings, Congress extended the experiment in subsequent years until it was made permanent in 1921.

So, what became of the class-four post offices that served the rural districts before R.F.D.? Twenty-six across Mercer County were abolished in February 1904 (though New Hamburg got a reprieve a week later). This gives some indication of the large number of post offices that used to be here beyond today's eighteen. In 1888, there were 52 post offices strewn throughout the county. Those that are still in existence are: Carlton, Clark, Clark's Mills, Fredonia, Greenville (originally called West Greenville), Grove City (originally Wolf Creek), Hadley, Jackson Center (originally Satterfield), Jamestown, Mercer (originally Mercer's), Sandy Lake (originally Brownsville), Sharon, Sharpsville (originally Sharpsville Furnace), Transfer, West Middlesex, and Wheatland (originally Wheatland Furnace). There was also a post office at Hermitage, at the intersection of State Street and Route 18 but that then referred to a much smaller locale and was closed in 1903. (Sharon took over with the current Hermitage Post Office an outgrowth of what was once a substation of Sharon.) Farrell has since been added. Of the names for some extinct post offices, some are current names of a township or borough, even if a post office no longer stands there: New Lebanon, New Vernon (originally called Sandy Creek), Otter Creek, Sheakleyville (originally called Culbertsons), Stoneboro, and Worth. Other post offices consist of villages or crossroads that are just known locally: Within the present City of Hermitage was the once the thriving village of Neshannock, the original terminus of the Sharpsville Railroad. Worth Township was home to Kilgore and Millbrook; Henderson and Perrine post offices were likely at the villages of Hendersonville and Perrine Corners there. Centretown post office stood in Wolf Creek Township. East Lackawannock Township had the Hoagland post office. Kremis and New Hamburg were located in Delaware Township. Springfield Township had post offices at Leesburg (originally called New Lodge), London, and Balm. In Sugar Grove Township, there were post offices at Kennard and Leech's Corners. Also north of Greenville was the Osborn post office in Salem Township. Indian Run was located in Wilmington Township. East of Mercer, in Findley Township stood the Pardoe post office (originally named Irishtown). Milledgeville was in the northeast corner of the county in French Creek Township; North Sandy was also in that direction in Mill Creek Township. North's Mills was in Jackson Township, and North Liberty in Liberty Township. A little more digging indicates the location of some puzzlers: Hill post office was in Lackawannock Township, near Charleston. Also in that township was the now defunct borough of Bethel whose post office was called Wheeler. Kile was likely located in Jefferson Township, and Hazzard in Jackson Township. Fairview Township appears to be where Harthegig post office stood, named for a Cornplanter Indian. Lutton post office was established in 1884 with John G. Lutton as postmaster; he seemed to have lived in Mill Creek Twp. There was also a Five Points post office, but it is uncertain where that stood since Mercer County contains five different locales going by that name.

Finally, these lists don't even include the sixteen post offices that were discontinued—some lasting just a year or two—before 1888: Bay, Bristow, Crockettville, Delaware Grove, Forest, French Creek, Keel Ridge, Maysville, Mehard, Pleasant, Pymatuning, Salem, Valley, Western Reserve, West Salem, and Willow Brook.

These poetic names are more than just quaint reminders of long-ago days. They, not one's township were where one identified his home.