

# **M. Dyer and Son Store, Winfield, PA**

**by**

## **Phyllis M. Dyer**

Mahlon Dyer started this journey in life and a history to last one hundred and seventeen years on August 8, 1868. He was born the son of Jinks and Deborah Dyer and was one of nine children. On Dec 31, 1891 he married Hannah Elizabeth (Lizzie) Dreese in Lewistown, Mifflin County, Pennsylvania. He was the father of one daughter, Sarah Estella Dyer on March 1893 and one son, Willard Isaac Dyer, Sr., on January 19, 1900. His daughter died on Dec 9, 1898 of diphtheria in Mt. Carmel and was buried in the Dry Valley Cemetery, Dry Valley Pennsylvania. His son, Willard I. Dyer would go on to follow in his father's footsteps.

Mahlon began his career as a store owner in Mt. Carmel Pennsylvania in the early 1890's. This venture continued for some time ending in bankruptcy. [I learned this in 2009 from Mahlon's niece in law, Mrs. Rudolph (Miriam) Moyer, who was 96 years old at the time. She was very hesitant to give me this information since it was told to her in confidence. She thought long and hard before telling me and only after I suggested that after one hundred years it really would not make much difference and I thought it would be relevant to this history—she agreed and told me.] From the information that I have gathered he purchased the store in Winfield during Oct 1893 while continuing to operate the store in Mt. Carmel, PA. He originally bought the business and not the property. The store in Winfield which was originally operated under the name of "Haines and Co." being operated by brothers - William and Anes Haines now became known as "M. Dyer". Anes Haines built many homes in Winfield including the store.

This story covers one hundred and seventeen years of history at the "store property" bought by the Dyer's in Winfield Pennsylvania.

M. Dyer & Son  
Winfield, PA

The first deed I have for the “store property” is dated Nov 1, 1900. It is between Anes Haines and Melinda Dreese Strickler (Lizzie Dreese Dyer’ sister). The description of the “store property” included a frame building constructed for use as two dwellings and store-room, also a warehouse, stable and other outbuildings. According to this deed the property was part of the farm owned by William Haines and conveyed to Anes Haines on Dec. 18<sup>th</sup> 1886. Melinda Strickler paid \$3,000.00 for the “store property”.

The second deed I have for the “store property” is dated June 23, 1902 and is between Melinda Strickler and Isaac Dreese, Isaac Dreese being the father of Melinda Strickler and the father-in-law of Mahlon Dyer. This purchase price was also \$3,000.00.

The third deed I found was dated June 8, 1912 and was from Isaac Dreese to Lizzie Dreese Dyer (Mrs. Mahlon Dyer). The purchase price was \$3,200.00.

The next time the “store property” changed hands was by inheritance. It transferred from Lizzie Dreese Dyer to Willard I. Dyer Sr. and his wife Nina Hummel Dyer. Nina Hummel Dyer Phillips, widow of Willard I. Dyer, Sr. later transferred it to her son and his wife, Willard I. Jr. and Phyllis M. Dyer. Today it is owned by Phyllis M. Dyer.

The store was built with a dwelling on either side. The operator of the store always lived on the right side when facing the store and the older generation lived on the left. Jinks Dyer, father of Mahlon, moved into the home in 1905 and died on the left side of the home in 1926, making him the first of four Dyer generations to live and die in the Winfield store property.<sup>1</sup> Mahlon and Elizabeth (Lizzie) Dyer moved into the home in 1893 and Mahlon died in 1942 in the same room as his father, Jinks. Lizzie Dyer also died in that room in 1952. Willard I. Dyer, Sr. died in 1953 of a heart attack on the sun porch over the kitchen on the right side of the home. Willard I. Dyer, Jr. died in the second living room on the right side of the home in 2003.

The story of the store takes on a very interesting tale and is being told by

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<sup>1</sup> An obituary for Jinks Dyer, “Jinks Dyer Dies,” appears in the Catawissa News Item, May 6, 1926.

Phyllis M. Dyer.



W I Dyer Store, Winfield PA, 2013

Mahlon Dyer operated both stores for about five years before the store in Mt. Carmel went into bankruptcy. He was very successful with the store in Winfield. According to the day book that I found dated Feb. 1904 thru Feb 1905 the items included - eggs, calico, butter, flour, sugar, shoes, shirts, oil, coal, salt, etc. The prices were eggs - \$ .20 a dozen, sugar \$ .10 a pound, flour \$ .05 a pound, coal \$ 7.50 a ton, shoes \$ 1.25 a pair.

Also recorded in the day book were the payment records. Bills were paid by cash, bartering, and labor. One of the ways labor was used was to pay a store bill was to carry x number of buckets of dirt out of the cellar to make it deeper and usable for storage. The dirt was carried to the creek.

The store sold items that were needed or popular according to the times. This is probably the reason the store was able to stay in existence for one hundred and twelve years.

When automobiles came into existence during 1919 the store was operated by Wendell Rohland and Willard Dyer, Sr. under the name "Dyer and Rohland". The store at this time sold items needed to operate an automobile, including tires, belts and a few frequently needed parts. Bicycles were also a premium item

during this time so tires, chains, and other repair items were sold for bicycles.



Original sales counter with merchandise price stampers,  
W I Dyer Store, Winfield PA, 2013

During World War II Nina Dyer drove a truck out over the county side and sold items off the truck. The store had one of the only telephones in the town of Winfield and was used as headquarters for bombing drills. Nina or Willard would go to the Evangelical church and ring the bell when the black curtains were to be hung in the windows. Some of these black curtains are still in the Dyer house. There was also a huge Red Cross banner, which is also still in the Dyer house, that was hung on the front porch. Willard I. Dyer, Jr. was drafted while attending Bucknell University and served in World War II, spending fourteen months in Europe.

In 1936 when the Susquehanna River decided to flood it raised high enough to fill the cellar full of water at the “store property”. In 1972 when the Susquehanna River decided to flood again it rose high enough to put twelve inches of water on the first floor of the “store property.” In 1972 when the water came onto the first floor it came in the back kitchen door on the right side of the store. The sidewalk in front of the store was filled with stoves, refrigerators, and washing machines which had been delivered just before the waters rose. These appliances were carried up the hill behind the barn to keep them dry until they could be added to the inventory in the store. The merchandise in the store was

carried from the basement to the first floor and ultimately onto wagons, and stored in a barn owned by Richard Klingler. When the health inspector arrived to check on the merchandise, he did not believe that the merchandise was moved. Willard Jr. (Johnny) got into the inspector's car and took him to the barn so he could see for himself that the merchandise was dry. The merchandise racks and freezers were raised and put onto crates to keep them out of the water. Of course, the doors were swollen and would not lock, so they were left open and customers could come in and purchase items they needed even when the store was closed.

There were never any items missing that were not paid for. Money or notes were left on the counter or customers came back later when a clerk was available. Many customers came to help with the clean up. Since Willard (Johnny) Dyer had been eleven when the 1936 flood hit he knew how to make sure the "flood mud" was washed out as soon as the water receded with sump pumps. The flood water outside was used to wash the mud off the floors. If the mud was allowed to dry it became like paint and was almost impossible to remove. The Winfield Fire Company did a terrific job taking care of the Winfield people. The men started moving furniture and appliances from the homes on a first water first help basis. Because Dyer's Store was the last in the community to get water in the building, there was lots of help in moving things upstairs and out of the way of the water.

When Willard (Johnny) Dyer, Jr. came home from the war, his passion was radio and television. According to his father's diary, he loved these new inventions and he traveled to Philadelphia to attend school to learn about these new additions to our lives. He installed many, many antennas and televisions throughout the area during this exciting time in history. Also, around this time electric appliances such as stoves, refrigerators, dishwashers, washers and dryers were added to the inventory. For about ten years until the death of Willard Sr. the merchandising of the store was handled by Nina and Willard Sr. while Willard Jr. (Johnny) sold, delivered and repaired radios, televisions and antennas, washers and dryers, and other appliances.

The store always seemed to have at least one employee besides the Dyers. Among them were Carson Brosius, Edith Forbes, Homer Forbes, Irene Hummel,

George Hummel, Ken Zechman, Tom Zechman, Wayne Mallick, Barb Hummel, Ginny Hess and Phyllis Miller who became Mrs. Willard (Johnny) Dyer in 1960. She is the person who is writing this history.



W I Dyer Store, Winfield PA, 2013

Nina and Willard I. Dyer, Sr. operated the store after the death of Mahlon Dyer. They were the parents of Elizabeth Irene Dyer Winters and Willard I. Dyer, Jr. They operated the store after the death of Mahlon Dyer in 1942 and until 1953 which is the anniversary of Willard Dyer's death.<sup>2</sup> The store was then taken over by Willard I. Dyer, Jr. who operated the store with the help of George and Irene Hummel until his marriage in 1960. Irene continued to work at the store until she retired in 1995. Johnny along with his wife Phyllis and their children Willard I. Dyer, III and Gwendolyn Dyer Moyer operated the store until the mid 1980's when the children went out on their own. Phyllis went to work for Northern Central Bank, now known as M & T Bank, in 1989. Willard (Johnny) continued

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<sup>2</sup> An obituary for Willard I. Dyer, Sr., "Winfield Native Dies after Heart Attack at Home," appeared in The Union County Standard Journal in March, 1953.

to operate the store until his death in 2003.<sup>3</sup>

It was the policy of all three generations that parents and children work in the store. Mahlon and Willard Sr. both died at an early age and their sons took over the store. Willard Jr. ran the store for the longest period time that being fifty years in total. Willard I. Dyer, III followed his father's love of new inventions and makes his career in computer programming. Gwendolyn Dyer Moyer makes her living working in the insurance world.

After Willard I. Dyer, Jr. could no longer operate the store it was operated under the name of M. Dyer and Son by Wendy Yoder. This continued for ten months. The store has been closed since Feb. 2004. Phyllis Dyer continues to own the "store property". It is not an operating business.

John and Mollie Hummel, parents of Nina B. Hummel Dyer, lived on the left side of the building for several years before moving into the Evangelical Nursing Home in Lewisburg.

After Willard and Phyllis were married in 1960, they were the only generation to live at the store property so the dwelling on the left side was made into a part of the store. The rooms were used for storage, as well as, for displaying and selling of merchandise. The rooms were given names such as: the "grocery receiving room" where the trucks of merchandise were unloaded, the "freezer room" which held two large freezers of merchandise for sale and a large Pepsi display (this room was also known as the "egg room" because before eggs had to be refrigerated they were sold from here), the "soup room" where the excess soup was stored, and the "cold room" or "lettuce room" where all the fresh produce and fresh fruit were displayed for sale. This room was also used to store dry goods such as paper supplies, puddings, jello, rice, and tobacco products such as cigarettes, chewing tobacco, and cigars. The next room was the "shoe room" where sneakers, dress shoes, winter and work boots were sold from the time the store opened until it closed under the Dyers.

A little history of the Dyer men. Jinks Dyer helped to build the last wooded railroad bridge in Catawissa, PA. He was the last of the builders to pass

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<sup>3</sup> An obituary for Willard I. (Johnny) Dyer, Jr., "Willard I. Dyer Jr., 77, Winfield" appeared in The Daily Item on March 31, 2003, page B5.

away.

Mahlon Dyer was a 32<sup>nd</sup> degree Mason and founded the Winfield Cemetery in 1911 with the help of several men from the area. The first five directors in 1911 were: F. D. Reigle, Isaac Dreese, J. A. Roush, Sherwood Vance, A.E. Creamer and M. Dyer. All of these men resided in Winfield, PA.

Willard Dyer, Sr. sold Equitable Insurance for many years. He also ran for Union County Treasurer as well as operating the store. Some of his insurance clients were:

Winfield Clients:

P. O. S. of A.  
Evangelical Church  
United Quarries, Inc.,

Lewisburg Clients:

Beyer & Fortner, Inc.,  
Dr. James Muffly,  
Union County School District  
County Commissioners of Union Co.

New Berlin Clients:

First Reformed Church

Willard's wife, Nina B. Dyer, drove a truck around the county side during the war and sold items from the truck. She also served as the bus driver using the Dyer car to take the Winfield kids to Lewisburg to attend high school. She worked during the World War II in a factory in Milton.

Willard I. Dyer, Jr. served in World War II as a staff sergeant. He served abroad for just over one year before returning to operate the store.

The store building was used as an undertaker parlor, polling place for election, selling of dog licenses, and many bake sales were held in front of the store.



## **An Overview of the History of Firefighting in New Berlin, PA**

**by  
Harold E. Erdley Jr.  
and Diane Lengle**

Prior to the formation of the New Berlin Fire Company, the Borough owned some (non-motorized) equipment and a building, located on the northeast corner of Vine Street and Church Alley. The earliest known apparatus was a hand-pumping engine likely built in the mid-1800s. When the New Berlin Fire Co. No. 1 was formed in 1932 it was donated to the fire company by the borough. Within a few years the “fire wagon” as it was known was sold to the father-in-law of New Berlin resident Lewis Sassaman, who lived in Oklahoma. It was restored and used in local events there. Eventually a benefactor paid for its return and it was a highlight of the 2004 Fireman’s Parade. To do this a longer tongue had to be installed and horses strong enough to pull the engine had to be located. Area farmer Roy Marx agreed to bring his team, once he found help to feed the cows since the parade was the same time as milking.



Hand pumping engine before it was sent west.



Restored hand pumper



Hand pumper in the 2004 Firemen's Parade  
(three photos courtesy of Marvin Wagner)

The original firehouse was moved to the carnival grounds in 1949, where it is used as storage and serves as a carnival stand. Now equipped with an overhead door instead of the original hinged doors, it has also been sided to protect it from the weather. On July 14, 1932, the organizational meeting of the Fire Department was held in the town hall and officers elected: Russell H. Solomon, President; Emerson Seebold, Vice-President; Bruce M. Smith, Recording Secretary; Reno Maurer, Financial Secretary; Elmer M. Seebold, Treasurer.

On July 28, 1932, at the second meeting, all fire equipment and the Fire Engine House were accepted from the Borough of New Berlin. Elected to direct the Company at emergencies were: Russell H. Solomon, Chief, Bertram L. Albert, First Assistant Chief and J. F. Dunkelberger, Second Assistant Chief. Chief Solomon would serve until 1946; his successors are (in order) Ellsworth A. Snook, Carl Moyer, Ellsworth A. Snook Jr., Robert H. Maurer, Oliver W. Hummel, John S. Benfer, Harold E. Erdley Jr. and, currently, John S. Benfer.

Until 1949 (when a firehouse was constructed at 415 High Street) the old Evangelical Church (now the Integral Yoga Center) on the southwest corner of Market Street and Plum Street, then owned by Russell H. Solomon, served as meeting room and was used as a social hall for fund raising events, including Friday night movies.

On June 16, 1933, it was agreed to purchase a used Hahn Fire Engine from Hahn Motors, Inc. of Hamburg, PA. The truck would be fitted with a new 6

cylinder engine, new pump, new radiator, standard equipment and new tires, at a total cost of \$2,000.00. As the Firehouse was not heated, the Fire Engine was housed in Joseph VanHorn's Garage at 625 Market Street during the colder months, at a cost of \$2.00 per month. This truck would remain in service until replaced by a 1961 International/Central (which was, in turn, replaced in 1994).



Hahn Fire Engine in the 1951 Memorial Day Parade. (NB Heritage collection.)

In 1939, after purchase of a used Chevrolet Ambulance from the Americus Hose Company, Sunbury PA, the New Berlin Fire Company began to provide Ambulance service. President Stover Minnick appointed Russell H. Solomon, Reno Maurer and A. W. Nerhood to serve as an Ambulance Committee. As there was only room for one vehicle in the Firehouse, garage space was rented from Arthur Ritter for the Ambulance and an Emergency Patrol Truck, at \$20.00 per year. Mr. Ritter's barn was on the southwest corner of Union Street and Church Alley.

As the years went by, that first ambulance would be replaced by a used LaSalle Ambulance from the Beaver Springs Fire Company, in 1948; a new Chevrolet from Diehl Chevrolet-Cadillac, Lewisburg PA, in the mid-1950's; a used

Cadillac from the nearby Mifflinburg Community Ambulance Service in the mid-1960's; a new Dodge van in 1974, a new Ford/Blue Star in 1990 a 2001 Ford/Braun and the current model, a 2009 Ford/Braun.

Long before centralized dispatch centers, most communities relied on their own local system for reporting emergencies. May 1, 1947 was the first note of such a procedure here, where Kermit Maurer, proprietor of a funeral home at 321 Market Street, was accepting calls for ambulance service.



New Berlin firehouse in the 1950s. (courtesy of Marvin Wagner)

On February 1, 1951, Chief Ellsworth A. Snook reported difficulty among the truck drivers; they disliked taking the (open cab) truck out in cold weather. The Fire Chief had to drive it home from a chimney fire on January 26<sup>th</sup>, or leave it there. Several options were explored, including purchase of a new chassis to remount the fire truck body. On February 5, 1953, after a motion by G. R. Cornelius, seconded by Lester A. Snook, it was agreed to purchase a 1951 Hahn Fire Engine on a Ford F5 chassis, for \$6,750.00. This truck would be replaced in 1976 by an International/Maxim Fire Engine. Over the years, several developments in the community were positively affected by the Fire Company. The community band became the New Berlin Fire Company Band on February 3, 1938, until officially disbanded on October 2, 1947; in 1949, the instruments were sold to the Middleburg Legion Post. Beginning in 1946, and extending for an

unknown period of time, the Borough Council met in the Company's meeting room, and in the early 1950's, so did Boy Scout Troop 508. On March 1, 1951, William Dervin visited a monthly meeting and explained a proposed project to clean "the commons" (the Borough's nature park along scenic Penns Creek) and build a shallow pond for ice skating. The Company approved a motion by Ellsworth A. Snook, seconded by Paul R. Spangler, that they would donate services and money toward this proposal. In the 1950's, a baseball team from New Berlin was sponsored. In the 1990's, after purchasing a riding mower for use on the carnival grounds, the unit being replaced was donated for use on the new Little League fields, off the east extension of Water Street.



Fire Co. celebration -50 yrs -l-r Roy Kline, Harry D'Addario, Archie Miller, David Solomon, Carl Moyer, Ellsworth Snook. (New Berlin Heritage collection)

In 1970 a 1,200 gallon, 1963 Chevrolet Tanker was purchased. Tankers are used in rural areas without the support of fire hydrants; water is shuttled by Tanker from water sources to the fire. The first such vehicle used by New Berlin firefighters, it was replaced more than 20 years later by a 2,400 gallon tank on a used Ford chassis. That same tank was later nested on a 1990 Kenworth. As there was only room for three vehicles in the Firehouse in 1970, the Ambulance would be housed in Mrs. Mary Maurer's garage until a new addition was completed in 1971.

Courtesy of the Ladies Auxiliary, 6 tone activated radio receivers were purchased in 1975. Until this time, Ambulance crews were called by telephone. The Union County Sheriff's Office (and later, the 9-1-1 office of the Union County Office of Public Safety) could summon all personnel equipped with monitors simultaneously, by pushing one button. Today, all active members carry pagers.

In 1978, today's Social Hall was built, followed by new carnival buildings in the early 1990's. The Social Hall is rented for large gatherings, frequently for the purpose of wedding receptions. Over the years, the New Berlin Fire Company has become quite proficient at hosting meals for the profit of the Fire Company. The first meal was a sauerkraut plate in February 1934 that cost 35 cents. The first chicken and waffle dinner was served in February, 1935, also for 35 cents. Today's favorite dinner of ham or chicken potpie costs nine dollars.



Folks enjoy potpie, slaw, applesauce and dessert.



Wayne Resseguie ladles out chicken potpie.

Photos by Diane Lengle

On Mother's Day, a dinner of turkey, ham and all the trimmings are served, normally to a crowd in excess of 600. During the annual Firemen's Carnival, the Social Hall is used in the early evening as a platter stand, where crowds satisfy their appetites on a variety of fare, changing nightly. Later in the evening, after the food is all gone, bingo games are held in the Social Hall.

Pleased with the work done by their students' efforts on the Firehouse addition, the SUN Area Career and Technology Center was contacted in late 2002 and

construction was begun on an addition to the social hall. This addition provides needed storage, as well as some area to be used for the Carnival and a space to display the old hand pumper that was part of the original equipment once owned by the Borough and given to the Fire Company upon its formation.

Approximately half of the Firehouse was demolished, with new construction and rehabilitation of the remaining building done in the mid-1980's.

In the late 1990's, as a Paramedic Unit from Evangelical Community Hospital moved in, followed by the long term loan of a Brush Engine from the Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry (it stays here as long as we want it and it serves our purpose), we outgrew the building. The brush truck, a one ton pickup, was squeezed between the Engine and Engine-Rescue, while our Ambulance and the Paramedic Unit were crowded into the west addition, first built in 1971.

In response to this growth, an addition to the firehouse was constructed by students of the SUN Area Career and Technology Center, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Drive, New Berlin. Working only for the experience, the savings in labor cost enabled the Fire Company to complete the project for approximately one third of that estimated by the architect. The Engine and Engine-Rescue moved into this addition on May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2002. This addition allowed one overhead door for each of the five vehicles in the fleet. It also provided a space with overhead door for the Paramedic Unit alone. Evangelical Community Hospital paid rent for an office in the Firehouse, which covered the expenses created by hosting their staff 24/7.

This was not considered a profit making enterprise, but a cooperative venture that resulted in advanced life support being readily available to the New Berlin area. This was discontinued the end of 2010, when the Hospital moved Paramedics onto Ambulances contracted for staffing and the local Paramedic service moved to Mifflinburg.

The fleet continues to modernize. The 1990 Kenworth Tanker is gone. The 1976 IH Engine is about to be replaced with a used combination Pumper-Tanker (so the Tanker and Engine are both being replaced by one vehicle). The brush truck is being replaced by a new Attack unit (again, this combines the benefits of several types of vehicle with one). Photos of these new units are in the

archives of the New Berlin Fire Company's Facebook page:

<<https://www.facebook.com/mobileprotection#!/pages/New-Berlin-Fire-Company/132291026836677?fref=ts>>. While equipment and volunteers have changed, for 81 years the New Berlin Fire Company has responded to the fire and emergency needs of the area and provided fellowship and civic leadership to New Berlin.

✧ **ACCOUNTS** ✧

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## Major Fires in New Berlin

by

**Jeannette Lasansky**

New Berlin experienced various major fires before the 1932 founding of the New Berlin Fire Company. Photos exist for two of them, the Union Hotel fire in 1912, and the stocking factory fire in 1898.

The Union Hotel was photographed before and after a devastating fire on December 8, 1912. The hotel had been constructed by Christopher Seebold in 1818 and was later enlarged by owner Michael Kleckner (b. 1807-d. 1887). Five arched doorways were focal points in its handsome façade.



The blaze at the Union Hotel began at 11:45 p.m. on December 8, 1912, and was out of control before outside help could arrive. Having rained earlier that night and with no wind, the fire did not spread as it might have done. Thus the fire did not damage the adjacent brick home, partially seen on the far right,

and an auxiliary building, both owned later by Robert W. and Grace Miller. The Union Hotel was never rebuilt. Eventually a single family dwelling was built on the very corner of the lot leaving a very large side yard between it and the unaffected brick dwelling. In the 1970s, Grace Miller used the auxiliary building, formerly the office of the *New Berlin Reporter*, as a restaurant called The Towne House. Today, both buildings belong to David and Sally Farmer. (NBHA and UCHS 86.3.8)



A year and a half after the Union Hotel burned to the ground, so did New Berlin's Central Hotel. In the wintery picture (next page) the sign of the Central Hotel is barely visible on the left side of Front Street. It was located on Front Street, New Berlin. Labeled a "suspicious fire," its owner, A. M. Herman, was charged with arson. (NBHA.)



Some 14 years before the Union Hotel fire New Berlin experienced a factory fire. The first stocking factory in Union County was located in New Berlin on the 300 block of Front Street. Textile production in earlier times had been in homes and by itinerant weavers who made coverlets and woven yard goods. Below is real photo postcard of workers at the first stocking factory in New Berlin (UCHS #85.23.2)



The following photo is of umbrella-holding spectators on April 14, 1898, viewing the smoldering remains of the stocking factory's fire. (NBHA.)



Other clothing firms that were later established in town included two hosiery mills, a silk mill, a shirt factory, the New Berlin Garment Factory, Middleburg Sportswear, Sew-Comp, and most recently, starting in 1978—Tara Lee Sportswear.

✧ **ACCOUNTS** ✧

**Journal as Historical Resource:  
The Mark Shively Journal 1881-1894**

**by  
Marion Lois Huffines**

I presented a program on my recently published book, *Mifflinburg and the West End*,<sup>1</sup> at the West End Library in the fall of 2012. Afterwards I spoke with Gary Fluke of Laurelton, who showed me a journal that had been among the books he had purchased at a local estate auction several years ago. Gary kindly offered to lend me the journal and permitted me to describe its contents for this article. The journal of almost daily entries begins in 1881 and runs through 1894. It was hand-written by Mark M. Shively.

Mark M. Shively was born on December 24, 1866, and died on Mary 31, 1948, at the age of 81. Mark grew up on the family farm near White Springs, Limestone Township. He attended Cedar Run School near his home, Central Pennsylvania College in New Berlin, and Brethren Normal College in Huntingdon, Pennsylvania. He taught school in Mifflinburg and nearby townships for many years and served as a borough councilman for 20 years. He regularly attended church and participated in church activities throughout his life. He lived with his wife Sadie and children at 266 Green Street, Mifflinburg, from 1892 until his death.

Private journals or diaries are invaluable historical resources. Typically they tell the detailed story of one individual at the time of writing. That story provides important information regarding family history, not only of who begat whom, but also an inside view of the family's life and times. For some, this information resolves family mysteries and fills in lost pieces of information about personality, interests, and events that shaped the family's life. Daily journals go far beyond the story of an individual family. In the daily accounts, readers learn the tenor of the time—how life was lived day by day, how people

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<sup>1</sup> Marion Lois Huffines, *Mifflinburg and the West End*. Images of America Series. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2012.

survived challenges and disappointments, and how families came together to form communities. Journals bring national history down to the individual and to a single locale, where the larger sweep of history is experienced and played out. Mark Shively's story describes his life journey through more than a decade.

### **The Mark Shively Journal**

The Shively journal is a bound book, similar to a ledger, measuring 7.5 inches wide by 12 inches long by 1 inch thick and consisting of 376 numbered pages. The handwriting is clearly legible, written in ink by a steady, consistent hand. Comments inserted in the margins or between lines are few. Because the handwriting is so consistent, it is likely that Mark copied into the journal from notes he had made earlier. This is supported by a few pieces of paper found in the journal with notes in pencil and entries in a rougher handwriting not yet written into the journal. Each entry is identified by date and day of the week. One page often suffices for a month of entries. Somewhat less than half of the 376 pages contain entries. All other pages are blank except for a three-page book list and rough figuring in pencil on two pages. Mark often uses alternate spellings of people and place names, and his use of commas, periods, and capital letters varies from standard orthography.



The journal resembles a ledger with 396 lined pages. (Photo by Author)

Mark Shively identifies himself in the journal in only one place, after the last entry for the year 1882:

End of the Year of our Lord One thousand Eight hundred, and  
Eighty-two.

M. M. Shively.

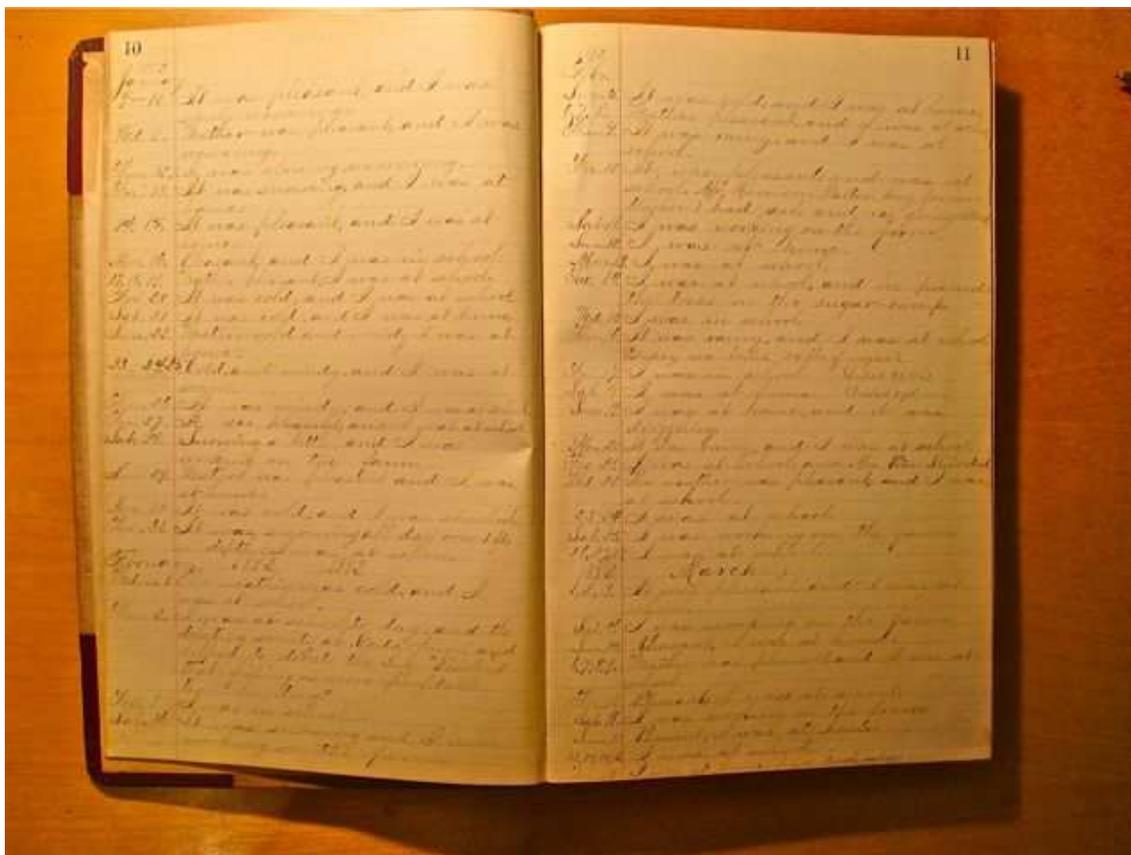
We learn M. M. Shively's first name indirectly. Two loose papers found in the journal were monthly grade reports during the time he attended the Brethren Normal College in Huntingdon, PA. On the top of each, one reads "Mark M. Shively."

The journal provides a day-by-day account of Mark's activities. Born on December 24, 1866, Mark begins the journal on July 2, 1881, when he was almost 15 years old. It begins on the day President James Garfield was assassinated, an event that seems to have affected Mark more than almost any other. He records it in a lengthy and formal entry:

In the year of our Lord 1881 July 2, President James A. Garfield was assassinated, while in the depot at Washington D.C. by Charles Guiteau, shooting the President twice, one bullet passing through his arm, and the other through his body the bullet lodging a little to the right of the naval entering on the back. After a great amount of suffering by the beloved president, and loosing a vast amount of physical ability. The government doing all in her power to restore their beloved president to perform the duties of the greatest office of this our free country, the United States, which he had so faithfully performed for a short time. his physician thinking that the moist air of the Atlantic might be of benefit to him. that government made proper arrangements, (by building railroad etc.) to convey him to Long Branch but the change did him no good and the president greatly weakened physically by long suffering departed this life at Long Branch on the 19 of September after lying in state at Long Branch on the 20<sup>th</sup> the remains of the martyr were taken to Washington, lying in state their [sic] for one day. it was removed to Cleveland, Ohio on the 23 where he was lying in state for two days.  
(July 2, 1881)

Most of the journal's entries begin with a description of the weather. Some follow with a general brief statement, such as, "It was raining a little, and I was working on the farm." Or "It was cold, and I was at school." Many entries are more specific as to activity: "It was pleasant, and I was spreading manure in the orchard." Mark also mentions individuals in the area who have died or were

injured. Only occasionally are regional or national events related. The month of April 1886 and the year March 1887 through March 1888 have no entries although blank pages would have allowed for those entries to be written in later.



These pages continue the entries for January 9 through Mar 17, 1882.

(Photo by Author)

## Farming

Mark's journal provides a detailed look at the farming work cycle as, year by year, he relates tasks that seem as endless as they are varied. Cleaning the stables and hauling and spreading manure are constants throughout the years. Fieldwork, in its season, demanded harrowing, plowing, sowing and cultivating, harvesting, reaping, threshing, binding, and still more hauling, whether the work took place on Mark's family homestead or on that of a relative or neighbor. Even when at school or away during the week at college, Mark had "Saturday work" at home, which always included cleaning the stables. He never worked on Sunday.

Mark begins recording his farm chores in September 1881. September and October ends the cycle of harvesting. Dominating these months are chores related to picking apples and making cider, boiling apple butter, hauling wood, cleaning fence corners, burning brush, and hauling fence post rails. Fieldwork included cutting off corn fodder, and sowing timothy and rye. Sample entries illustrate Mark's terse writing style and the variety of his work activities. They are given below, as written.

It was pleasant, and I was reaping cloverseed this A.M. and mowing this P.M. with the cradle. (September 18, 1883)

I was working on the farm. (This morning we had a heavy frost injuring the corn in some parts around us.) (September 10, 1883)

November and December are the months devoted to butchering hogs and beef, sawing wood, hauling away fences, and cleaning clover seed.

I was making a broom out of water birch the first I attempted to make this A.M. and cleaning the stables this PM (December 20, 1882)

Cold, windy and was putting away apples this A.M. and to Swengel for coal this P.M. (November 21, 1885)

January and February have the least number of mentioned farm chores, but Mark still needed to cut wood and shell corn, and he reports smoking meat. The Shivelys also owned what they called "Sugar Camp," a small island in Penns Creek with a number of very large maple trees. The island often flooded, and Tony Shively, its current owner, describes how his father, William Shively (b. 1924), as a child, saw small cabins on the island chained to trees to keep them from floating away at high water times. Mark reports that he and his family "pierced the trees on the Sugar Camp" at the end of February into March and "boiled sugar." When the sap would no longer produce sugar, the family made syrup or molasses.

It was rainy, and I was at school. (today we boiled 24 lbs of sugar) (February 16, 1882)

The first fine spring day for this season and I was helping to scatter the straw stack, clean the stables and get kindling from the saw mill. (March 22, 1884)

In April the work load picks up: plowing, digging the garden, sowing clover seed and oats, and planting early potatoes. He reports trimming apple and cherry trees and also “making fence.” Typically all these activities were carried out by working along with other members of the family. At the end of April, they “put the troughs on the Sugar Camp into the shanty.”

I was helping to haul manure on the potato-patch and finished plowing the corn stubble. (April 10, 1882)

It was windy, and I was helping to haul rails and make fence. (April 25, 1883)

It was pleasant and I was helping to pick stones and plow. (April 26, 1883)

In May and June, the number of farm activities increases substantially. For these months, Mark reports planting corn, getting wood for posts, and boring posts to make fence. The cattle are turned into the pasture. He white-washes the fence, prunes apple trees in the orchard, plows in the orchard, and replants corn where it failed to come up. He catches potato bugs, mows grass and grinds the reaper knives.

It was pleasant, and I was helping to get the truck-patch ready to plant and hauling brushes this evening. (May 23, 1882)

Pleasant, and I was cultivating corn, hauling shingles, and doing other work. (June 11-14, 1884)

It was raining part of the time and I was reaping etc. this A.M. and helping to patch the barn roof this P.M. (June 25, 1884)

He also does road work, working along with others under the direction of the road supervisor.

Farm activities seem to peak in July and August. Mark mows grass, hauls in loads of hay, cuts rye and wheat, and binds the cut grain “after the reaper.” He picks blackberries, cherries, and huckleberries, and continues to haul in loads of hay, wheat, oats, and rye. He reports thrashing and cleaning the wheat and flailing rye. He also shells corn and then takes it to Mifflinburg.

Messrs. Augustus and Levi Pick were cradling grain on the bottom-hill and father and I were binding. (July 14, 1882)

It was pleasant, and I was in Mifflinburg. took the spring wagon in to get it painted. (August 29, 1882)

Pleasant I was helping to wash and grease the gears and harvest this A.M. and and [sic] Frank to put away hay this P.M. (July 16, 1886)



The Shively family homestead was built in 1796 by Christian Shively, Mark's great grandfather. Mark's father, Jacob S. Shively, stands behind the fence on the left.

(Courtesy of Tony Shively)

## Weather

Weather is a big concern, so much so that Mark reports it in almost every journal entry. Most often, Mark describes it as “pleasant” and says little else. He reports rain and in the winter the amount of fallen snow, but seldom gives the temperature in degrees. Big weather events, local and national, are reported in some detail. His longest entry regarding the weather is given to the flood of 1889, which today is referred to as the Johnstown Flood. He writes:

The Great Flood along Penn's Creek was the highest doing an amt of damage that can hardly be estimated. it took all our fence along the bottom and washed the corn and ground all from one field. it also took all the fence and tent troughs off the Sugar Camp and Rearick's two saw-mills. about 8000 10,000 people were drowned at Johnstown, Pa. and a vast amt. of damage done along many other streams. (June 1, 1889)

## Education and Early Career

Perhaps the highlight of the journal for many readers will be the journey that this young farm boy takes that leads him to become a dedicated teacher. The journal begins when the 15 year-old Mark is attending school.

The winter term of the public school was opened by D. M. Sampsell and I was there at Cedar Run. (October 31, 1881)

The school year ran until the end of March:

I was examined in my studies and we the scholars of Cedar Run had an exhibition in the evening, had music by the Centerville Cornet Band. I had some dialogues. (March 30, 1882)

In October 1882, the teacher Oscar L. B. Thompson opened school, but Mark is unable to attend until almost a month later, on November 20, 1882. But he must have done well. On January 4, 1883, Mark reports teaching part of the day, and in March he does so again:

I was teaching this A.M. and Miss J. Thompson was teaching this P.M. and I was there. (March 26, 1883)

In the school years 1883-84 and 1884-85, Mark again does not start the school year until mid-November. This time Henry Filman is the teacher. In August 1885, Mark takes the teachers' examination. On February 20, 1886, Miss Emma Beaver, the teacher at Cedar Run, resigned teaching because of poor health. Mark reports:

I was at school and Prof. B. R. Johnson Co. Supt. Was here and gave me and Mr. J. F. Brouse a permit to teach the remainder of the term. (March 3, 1886)

The term had only one month remaining, but he must have worked very hard at it. The entries for March 1886 are very terse, and although the school year ended on March 25, there are no entries at all for April 1886. That summer Mark attended the Central Pennsylvania College in the building formerly occupied by the Seminary in New Berlin, which closed in 1883. Over the week of June 7, 1886, he was examined in grammar, geography, physiology, arithmetic, orthography, history, penmanship, and drawing—two subjects each day. He reports being in the teacher's examination in Lewis Township and in Limestone Township in 1886 and receiving a certificate. He taught at Cedar Run School for two years, in 1886-87 and 1887-88. His brother Greene was among his students.

His commitment to teaching was firm. He began attending semi-monthly local educational meetings, which were held in various school houses throughout the county. The teachers came together for what one would call today continuing education or in-service training. In January 1887, at the White Springs school, teachers discussed "Should supplementary reading be in our schools?" and Mark gave a recitation on the physiology of digestion and the effect of alcohol on it and a second recitation on hygiene. He presided at another meeting when the topics discussed were whether Limestone Township should have a graded school and how to obtain the attention and gain the interest of pupils in their work. At other meetings, various teachers gave sample class sessions:

Pleasant. I was teaching this A.M. and went to Pheasant Point to an Educational meeting. Gave a class drill in Geography and "map drawing" my method of the teaching the subject. The following were in the Class. Clyde C. Beckley, Emma M. Zimmerman, Gertie A. McClintic, Lottie J. McClintic, Lizzie C. Moyer. (February 25, 1887)

School closed on March 22, 1887, and on March 28, he was on his way to the Brethren Normal College in Huntingdon, known today as Juniata College.

The journal picks up again one year later, when on March 26, 1888, Mark went again to Huntingdon to attend the Normal College. His studies for the spring term included grammar, algebra, reviewing arithmetic with the senior class, the last book in elocution, bookkeeping, literature, and a vocal singing class. He was also a member of the Eclectic Literary Society.

**THE NORMAL COLLEGE,**  
HUNTINGDON, PA. 7-

**MONTHLY REPORT.**  
*Scholarship, Diligence, Department, and Absence*  
*of Mark W. Shively*  
for the month ending *April 27, 1888.*

FRANCHISE	TERM (PARTS)	GRADE (GRADE)	FRANCHISE	TERM (PARTS)	GRADE (GRADE)
Orthography			Zoology		
Elocution, Theory			Geology		
Practice	69		Physiology		
English Grammar	69		History, General		
Pennmanship			Biblical Antiquities		
Drawing			Composition	7	
Painting			Letter-writing	48	
Vocal Music	7		Punctuation		
Instrumental Music			Rhetoric, Style		
Book-keeping	7		Invention		
History, U. S.			Logic		
Constitution, U. S.			American Literature		
Political Geography			English Literature	7	
Map Drawing			French		
Written Arithmetic	72		German		
Mental Arithmetic			Etymology		
Algebra	7-		Latin		
Geometry			Greek		
Trigonometry			Latin Prose		
Surveying			Greek Prose		
Analytical Geometry			Mental Science		
Calculus			International Law		
Astronomy			Political Economy		
Physical Geography			Science of Teaching		
Physics			Bible Class		
Chemistry			Evidence of Christianity	7	
Botany			Ethics		

SCALE OF MARKS FOR SCHOLARSHIP: A, 90-100; B, 80-90; C, 70-80; D, 60-70; E, 50-60; F, 40-50; G, 30-40; H, 20-30; I, 10-20; J, 0-10.

Diligence, 9  
Department, 9

Mark W. Shively

The monthly report for Mark Shively of grades earned at the Brethren Normal College, dated April 27, 1888.

(Photo by Author)

On August 15, 1888, Mark signed an agreement at the Green Grove schoolhouse and began teaching at Green Grove on September 5, 1888. He attended the annual teacher's institute in December and heard lectures from various instructors, including "An hour with the old Romans," "The Pennsylvania Germans and their peculiarities," and "From acorn to oak." One local institute teachers' meeting was held in his home during which each teacher read a paper on how morals and manners should be taught in the schools. Another local institute at his home discussed how teachers could secure the cooperation of parents.

I was teaching this A.M. and this P.M. and evening we had a local institute at the Green Grove house. Each teacher had a class drill viz. Orthography by Miss I.A. Yearick of White Spring School, "Reading" by C. F. Sanders of Cedar Run Sch. "Physiology," by E. E. Mench of the Turkey Run Sch., "History" by C. C. Moyer of the Switzer " " "Arithmetic:" by C. M. Sanders of New Berlin School

“Grammar,” by J. F. Brouse of Penn’s Creek School,  
 “Geography,” by M. M. Shively of Green Grove School.  
 Supt. B. R. Johnson was there during the exercises. (March 1,  
 1889)

In April 1889, Mark and his brother Greene attended the spring term of Central Pennsylvania College in New Berlin. Mark’s classes included grammar, algebra, rhetoric, and typewriting. He delivered an oration on “American Enterprise” at a CPC public entertainment. In July, he took the teacher’s examination at Green Grove and at Swengel. On October 7, 1889, he began teaching at Swengel. The school year at Swengel closed on April 2, 1890, and as usual at the end of the school year, he reports scrubbing the schoolhouse.

The journal picks up again in July 1890. On July 13, he attended the teacher’s Examination at Green Grove and got a certificate with “the best average given there,” the only time Mark mentions his grades. He reports that he was “employed for the Zeller school in East Buffalo District this AM and at Milmont this PM.,” but on September 29, 1890, he “commenced teaching at the Mt. Vernon School in East Buffalo District,” having 11 pupils.

The journal at this point, after a decade-long run, ceases its day-by-day entries. Mark begins summarizing the years. In the winter 1891, he taught in Lewis Township at the Penn’s Creek school house for six months at \$30 per month. In the summer of 1892, he had hoped to earn money by canvassing for books, but he experienced a heavy financial loss when he paid for books that the company never sent to him. He taught the following year again at Penn’s Creek School for 6 months, also at \$30 per month. On September 11, 1893, he began teaching at Pontius School in Buffalo Township, and he lists his students there by name. He began the next school year in 1894 at White Deer Township, but after teaching three weeks, he was appointed by the director of Mifflinburg to teach School No. 4 of the borough. Mark ends the journal with this description of his colleagues:

The Principal of the Mifflinburg school is Mr. C. R. Neff and the rest of the teachers were No. 1. Mrs. Irene Ringler, No. 2. Mrs. Frances Ruhl, N. 3. Mr S. B. Hoffman No 4 Myself. No. 5 W. E. Wise and Miss Helen Heckman assistant to the Prin. Salary \$30 per mo.

Prin[cipal] \$70 term 8 mos. A Reading Circle was formed in January. With Mr. Neff Chairman and Miss Heckman Sec'y., meeting once a month, admission \$.50 and .10 cts per mo. only teachers as members.

It should be noted that Mark did not turn away from farming. Each summer throughout these years he performed farm work of all sorts, working at home and for farmers who hired him. Also, while teaching, he often spent Saturdays helping out on the farm.

### **Personals**

Mark Shively writes almost nothing of a personal nature in his journal. He never reveals his feelings or complains about people, work, or bureaucracy. His lengthiest entries report the assassination of President James A. Garfield and the death of Rev. James Guinter, President of the Brethren Normal College. Longer entries describe teaching institutes. He seems solicitous regarding the health of his parents, but seldom mentions his family except for his brother Greene. It comes, therefore, as a surprise to read the following three entries:

Pleasant and I was in Mifflinburg this AM and married to Miss Sadie F. Ruhle this evening in Lewisburg by Rev. L. L. Sieber. (November 17, 1890)  
 Pleasant and Wife and I went to Philadelphia and Stopped at the Washington Hotel. (November 18, 1890)  
 I was in Philadelphia and Wife and I were in the Zoological Garden and at various other places. (November 19, 1890)

Mark makes no other reference to his wife. He does not record the birth of their first child, Mary, on June 8, 1891, but in the final summarizing entry he does mention the birth of a second child, Ralph, on December 4, 1893.

A discrepancy in later records exists regarding his teaching career. His obituary states that he taught 17 years in Mifflinburg and nearby townships. The Shively family genealogy reports that he was "a teacher in the public schools for about 40 years, a mechanic, and a member of the Mifflinburg Borough Council for many years. He lived at 266 Green St., Mifflinburg, Pa."<sup>2</sup> His service on

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<sup>2</sup> Judith S. Wagner, A History of the Christian Shively Family. Mifflinburg, PA: privately published, 1987.

Borough Council stretched for 20 years. Mark purchased the lot on the northeast corner of Third and Green Streets in the winter of 1892 and moved in the spring of 1892.



Mark Shively purchased the lot for this home at 266 Green Street in Mifflinburg during the winter of 1892. He moved in during the spring and lived there until he died in 1948.  
(Photo by Author)

Journal entries indicate that he regularly attended Sunday school and “preachings” and frequently attended the Thursday evening German Baptist (Brethren) love feast. It was probably after his marriage that he joined St. John’s Evangelical and Reformed Church, where he served as elder and taught Sunday school for more than 60 years. Journal entries also indicate that he supported the temperance movement and the Republican Party.

Mark M. Shively, son of Jacob S. Shively and Sally Boop, died on May 31, 1948 at the age of 81 years. His wife, Sarah “Sadie” F. Ruhl, daughter of Jack and Mary (Grove) Ruhl, was born November 26, 1870 and preceded Mark in death by about 5 months. They had two children. Mary I. Shively, born June 8, 1891, died July 29, 1986, at the age of 95. Mary never married and had no children. She had been employed by the Kurtz and Son Overall Factory and Kool-Tex Knitting Mills, both in Mifflinburg. She taught Sunday school for 50 years at St. John’s United Church of Christ in Mifflinburg. It was at her estate sale that the journal surfaced and was purchased by Gary Fluke of Laurelton.

Mark's and Sadie's son Jacob Ralph Shively was born on December 4, 1893 and died September 20, 1908. He was 15 years old.



Mark M. Shively (left) and Greene Shively in their later years pose for the camera. Mark lived to be 81 years old and Greene to be 84 years old. (Courtesy of Tony Shively)

### **The Journal/Diary as Historical Resource**

Journals are primary historical resources, i.e. eyewitness accounts of personal experiences of everyday work, life, social interactions, challenges, and achievements. As in Mark's journal, one often finds descriptions of weather events, funeral customs, the educational system, and the role of religion. Individual descriptions of local events pile up, and taken altogether, they ultimately explain large social movements in both the regional and national arenas.

In his journal, Mark reflects little on his life and times. He reports events in the home and community, and he describes his work on the farm and his teaching responsibilities, but readers never learn what these events and his work mean to him. He never uses the journal to work out solutions to problems or pose philosophical questions, or reflect on his religious beliefs. This lack of self-reflection is, perhaps, the most frustrating and surprising aspect of the

diary, which otherwise offers an eye-witness account of the daily life of the generation following the Civil War.

Readers also never learn why Mark wrote the journal. Was it to keep an account of his achievements? He brags only once of any specific accomplishment (having made the highest average on a teacher's examination). There is no evidence that he intended the journal to be read by others. The journal was important enough to his daughter Mary that she kept it; at least she never disposed of it. It is likely that as Mark aged, the journal languished in the back of a closet, but for readers today, it fills a tiny space of history that would have otherwise been lost: daily rural life from 1881 to 1894 in this corner of central Pennsylvania.

The journal reflects larger social movements of the time. Mark reports that several neighbors and relatives moved west, to Illinois, Nebraska, and Iowa, and the community received brief visits from those who had already settled in the west. One learns that local residents themselves built road and bridges; that teachers met together and learned from each other on how to improve their teaching; and that visiting, also called "neighboring," was highly valued as was sharing labor and equipment. Another trait characterizes this community: In the home, Mark's parents always spoke Pennsylvania German, also known as Pennsylvania Dutch. Pennsylvania Germans often settled in groups, making it unnecessary and difficult, especially for the women, to learn English well. Mark does not mention it, but his transition from home to grade school must have been a difficult one, as his brother Greene reports for himself in his own journal.<sup>3</sup> That his first language was most probably Pennsylvania German makes the quality of the writing and expression in this journal all the more remarkable.

Journals tell the story of survival, of inter-connectedness, and of the effort to build a better life. Journals show the strength of character and the discipline needed to achieve goals and the piety that elicits a moral and good life regardless of the burdens and difficulty. Although Mark does not share his feelings in this

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<sup>3</sup> Jacob G. Shively, *A Brief Biography of Elder Greene Shively 1870-1954*. Millmont, PA: privately published, 1965.

writing, he describes the events that occurred on the very ground on which the communities of today now stand: the lifestyle of almost 150 years ago that formed the basis from which the people and the community of today grew. There is no other place to find the answers to questions of how and why families and communities became what they are. These reasons live in the journals of yesteryears, journals like the one written by Mark M. Shively.



## The “Genealogy” of your House and Land

by

**Carl R. Catherman**

In recent years people, especially those who own property in historic neighborhoods, have become interested in learning about the previous owners and determining when their house was built. Although genealogy refers strictly to an investigation of one’s ancestors and relatives the techniques used in tracing the chain of ownership of your house and land are somewhat similar to genealogical research especially in the sense that legal records filed in courthouses are the primary sources of information.

Union County residents who want to pursue such research will need to use the resources in the Union County Courthouse in Lewisburg and the Northumberland County Courthouse in Sunbury. Most of the research will be done in the Register and Recorder’s offices that are charged with recording deeds, mortgages, wills and some other legal documents. In some cases it might be necessary to visit the Prothonotary’s offices that are charged with maintaining records of court proceedings.

Another very useful tool is the 1868 atlas of Union and Snyder Counties.<sup>1</sup> This is a cadastral atlas which means that it shows the names of the owners of all properties on which structures have been erected. This atlas was reprinted in 1975 and a copy of the reprint is available at the Union County Historical Society.<sup>2</sup> A copy of the original printing is available for inspection in the Union County Prothonotary’s office. The original is somewhat easier to read than the reprint. In either case a magnifying glass will be helpful.

If your house is an old one it will almost surely be necessary to search tax records to determine when it was built. This is the most difficult aspect of the research.

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<sup>1</sup> Beers, D. G., compiler, *Atlas of Union and Snyder Counties Pennsylvania*. Philadelphia PA: Pomeroy and Beers, 1868. Reprinted by The Mifflinburg Telegraph, 1975.

<sup>2</sup> In addition to a reference copy, the Union County Historical Society has a limited number of the reprints available for sale.

## Getting Started

The starting point for your research is the most recent deed. If you are researching a property that you do not own or if for any other reason you do not have the deed you will have to go to the Union County Assessor's office in the Union County Courthouse in Lewisburg. All you need to know is the location of the property and a clerk will be able to tell you the Deed Book and page number where the deed is recorded.

All recorded deeds can be found in the Register and Recorder's office in the Courthouse. This office is in the process of computerizing the deeds so you will have to ask a clerk to show you how to use the computer and make copies. Since the computerizing is incomplete you will eventually have to search for deeds recorded on microfiche. A clerk can show where the microfiche are located and how to use the microfiche reader and make copies. (Having done courthouse research in over 50 counties in 17 states I can assure you that Union County Courthouse officials are among the most helpful and knowledgeable to be found.)

Every deed contains a lot of legalese that is of no importance to your search. The three most important things you need are the names of the *grantor* (seller) and the *grantee* (buyer), the description of the property, and the *recital*. The recital is a passage that refers to one or more previous owners and in most cases a reference to where (book and page number) the most recent previous deed was recorded. You may not wish to make copies of the entire deed but you should copy any page that contains the aforementioned information so that you can compare deeds to ensure that you are staying on the right track. The deed will also include the date of the transaction and the selling price. Part of a deed is shown in Figure 1. The grantors and grantees are named in the second paragraph as well as the indentation at the upper left. The description of the property is in the fourth paragraph. The recital is in the fifth paragraph.

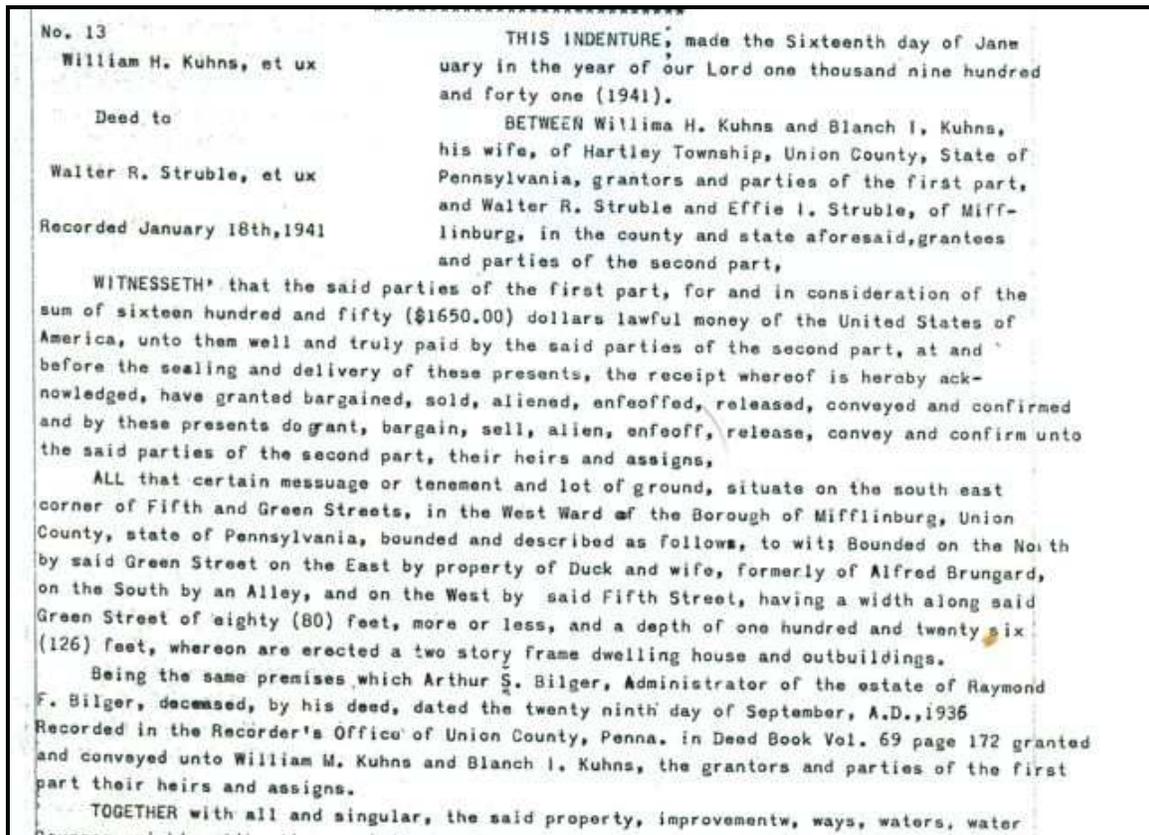


Figure 1

## Overcoming Obstacles

Ideally every deed will contain all the information you need to continue your search but that is extremely unlikely. The most common obstacle is the failure in a recital to indicate the location of a previous deed. In fact, there is no legal obligation to record deeds and many were not recorded, especially in those days before the invention of the automobile when a trip to the courthouse might have taken up too much valuable time. Nevertheless, in most cases this obstacle can be overcome.

The two examples that follow refer to properties in Mifflinburg. However, the techniques used apply equally to properties located in any town with numbered lots and to a lesser degree to properties outside of towns.

Consider the Kuhns-to-Struble deed shown in Figure 1. The recital in the fifth paragraph tells you that Raymond Bilger was a previous owner. Although

that is not actually the case, let us suppose that when the administrator of Bilger's estate sold to Kuhns there was no indication in that deed telling how Raymond Bilger acquired the property.

In this case the first option is to consult a Grantee Index. Since Bilger's administrator sold to Kuhns in 1936 Bilger obviously bought the property before that so you would have to look at a Grantee Index that covers grantees whose surnames begin with B and years prior to 1936. There are two of these, one spanning the years 1813 – 1924 and one beginning with 1925 so you begin by looking at the more recent one. (These indexes are shelved toward the back of the Register and Recorder's office on the left hand side.)

TO LOCATE NAMES IN INDEX						
Determine the first key letter following the initial letter in the Family Name for which you are searching. Find the section number in the column headed by said key letter, opposite the given name initial desired. Names not containing a key letter after the initial letter in the Family Name, will be located under "Misc." All names other than those of individuals will be located under "CORPORATIONS, ETC." Always omit the article "The."						
Given Name Initials	Key Letters and Section Numbers					
	l	m	n	r	t	Misc.
ABC	11	12	13	14	15	16
DEF	21	22	23	24	25	26
GHI	31	32	33	34	35	36
J	41	42	43	44	45	46
KLMNO	51	52	53	54	55	56
PQRS	61	62	63	64	65	66
TUVWXYZ	71	72	73	74	75	76

Figure 2

The first page of the index explains how to use it. (See Figure 2). Use the Key Letter l since that is the first key letter in the name Bilger. Raymond Bilger's given name begins with R so going down the l column to the PQRS row you see that you have to look at Section 61 in the part of the book that contains surnames beginning with B. Figure 3 shows the top of the first page of Section 61 and you quickly find Raymond Bilger's name in the third row. You see that he bought a property in Mifflinburg from Emerson Albright and that the deed was

GRANTEE		GRANTOR	RECORDED	YEAR OF RECORD	LOCATION OR NATURE OF INSTRUMENT
Book	Page		Book	Page	
Bilger	Robert F.	Rufus F. Boop et al	55	112	1926 Hartley
Bilger	Robert F.	Olin B. Oelschlag	"	113	" "
Bilger	Raymond P.	Emerson D. Albright	"	212	" Mifflinburg
Blair	Robert W.	Laura E. Albright	"	220	" 2 tracts 13-14-16

Figure 3

recorded in Book 55 on page 113. When you find that deed it is important that you look at the description of the property to ensure that it is the same property that his administrator sold to Kuhns. It is, but if it had not been, you would continue looking in this Grantee Index or the earlier one for other properties that Bilger purchased.

### Using the 1868 Atlas

Now let us suppose that you could not find a previous deed by using the Grantee Index. In that situation the 1868 cadastral atlas can be a very useful tool although it is only useful when you have encountered an obstacle after that year (1868). The atlas will enable you to determine who owned the property in 1868 and you can then attempt to trace the ownership forward. The first 15 pages contains maps of the ten townships in Union County plus the six towns, *viz.*, Lewisburg, Uniontown (Allenwood), Hartleton, New Berlin, Mifflinburg and New Columbia, which were laid out in numbered lots. Properties in towns laid out in numbered lots are easier to trace than others. The difficulties involved in tracing farmland will be discussed later.

As an example let us assume that you have encountered an obstacle in trying to trace ownership of a property on the southeast corner of 5<sup>th</sup> Street and Green Street in Mifflinburg. When you find the map of Mifflinburg in the atlas the first thing you notice is that the names of the streets have changed. 5<sup>th</sup> Street was then called High Street and Green Street was called Thomas Street (See Figure 4). The atlas indicates that the owners in 1868 were R. and U. Weirick.

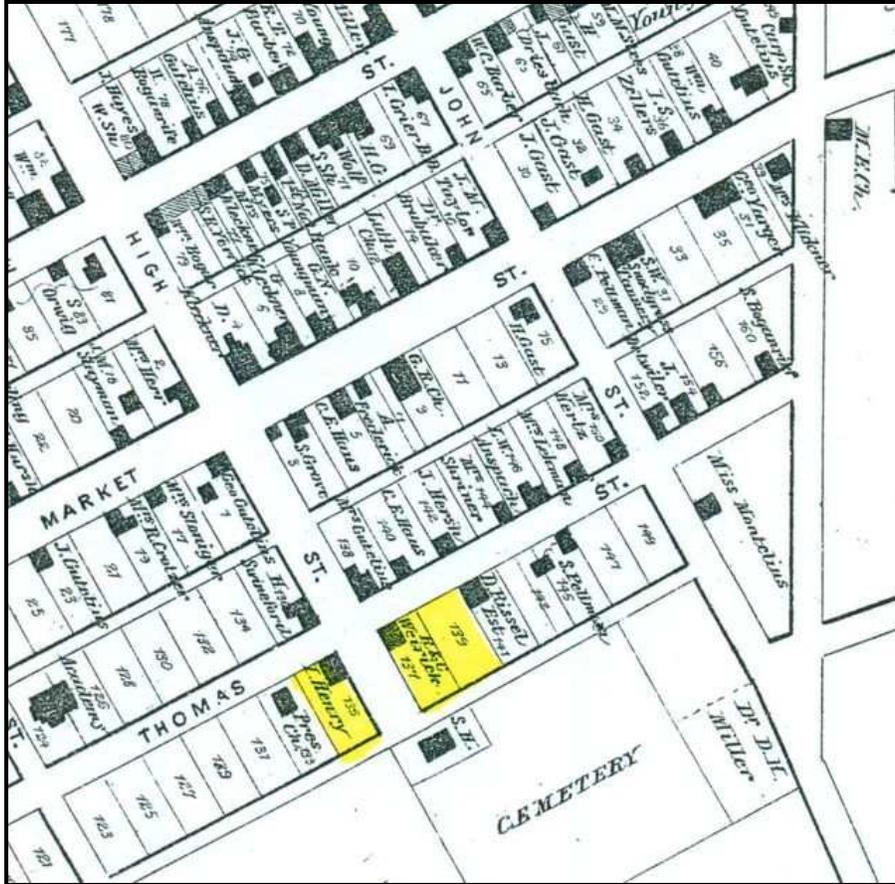


Figure 4

Now you can use a Grantor Index to try to determine when this property was sold. The Grantor Index for this time period has a different system from the Grantee Index you used earlier (See Figure 5). You are looking for a grantor named Weirick. The first key letter in Weirick is r so you have to go to Section 4 under the letter W. The top of the first page of Section 4 is shown in Figure 6. Here you see that the surnames beginning with W and having r as the first key letter are sub-divided into five groups based on whether or not there are other key letters in the name after the r. There are no other key letters in Weirick so you find the name in the first column under R. The number 3 opposite the name directs you to page 3.

In using this index there are three important things that enable you to use it efficiently. First, the next to last column indicates the year when the transaction was recorded (not always the same as the year of the transaction). Since the Weirichs owned the property in 1868 you can quickly scan that column

### TO LOCATE NAMES IN THE INDEX

Determine the first Key-letter after the initial letter in the Surname. In the column headed by the Key-letter in the name for which you are searching, the number of the section is designated where the name will be found. Surnames not containing a Key-letter, are found in the section designated by the number in the column headed "Misc." All names other than those of individuals are found in the section designated by the number in the column headed "Corps., Etc."

Key Letters	l	m	n	r	t	Misc.	Corps., Etc.
Section Numbers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Figure 5

**GRANTOR INDEX**

**4**  
1

All Names contained in this section are arranged in these columns. The number following a name indicates the page of this section where all entries of that name may be found.

Frey	1	Weaver	5	Wareham	9	Wirth	10
Wear	1	Weber	5	Worley	9	Wirtz	10
Wheir	1	Weiser	6	Wormley	9	Werth	10
Whears	1	Weiser	6	Woernly	9	Worth	10
Wear	1	Weisor	6	Wickersham	9	Wortz	10
Weire	1	Wasser	8	R H		Wartz	10
Worck	2	Weiker	8	Warntz	9	Worty	12
Ward	2	Weykar	8	Warren	9	Werritt	12
Wary	2	Wiker	8	Warner	9	Wertman	12
Weary	2	Woodruff	8	Woerner	9	Wharton	13
Warford	3	Woodward	8	Warrener	9	Weikert	8
Weirick	3	R L		Worden	9		
Worick	3	Worley	8	Waring	10		
Weirich	3	Warley	8	Woodring	10		
Wirick	3	R M		R T			
Werick	3	Wirman	8	Wright	10		
Wardasee	5	Weirman	8	Wirt	10		
Watschuck	5	Wurman	8	Wirtz	10		

Figure 6

and eliminate earlier records. Second, the grantors are separated into three columns based on their given names. The third of these covers letters Q-Z so this is the column you need to use in looking for names beginning with R or U. Finally the last column gives the locations so you can ignore everything except Mifflinburg. Thus, it is not until you get to page 4 that we find appropriate entries (See Figure 7).

Weirick	Mary A		Derr Geo L	V 34	1872	P of A
Weirick		Robt	Lytle Chas H	V 316	1873	Mifflnbg
Weirick	John	al	Union Co Recdr	V 499	1873	P of A
Weirick	Mary	al Saml	ux Glover Robt V	W 585	1875	Hart Tp
Weirick	Danl	ux	Kleckner Michael	X 618	1877	Dd of Asgmt Tps
Weirick	Daniel By Asgn	al	Yarger John L	Y 352	1878	Limestn & Lewis Tps
Weirick	Catharine By		Yarger John L	Y 352	1878	Limestn & Lewis
Weirick	Mary	al Saml	ux Beck Saml L	CC 85	1884	Asgmt
Weirick	Harriet N	al Wa H	al Wilson Jane M	EE 574	1888	P of A Hart Tp
Weirick	Harriet N	al Wa H	al Wilson David B	EE 577	1888	Hartn So & Tp
Weirick	Harriet N By	Trus & al	Wa H By Trus & Wilson Sarah L	EE 581	1888	Hartn So & Hart
Weirick		Robt	Heise Wm A	NN 256	1902	Mifflnbg
Weirick		Robert By Exr	Brown Ralph F	OO 78	1904	Mifflnbg
Weirick		Uriah	Weirick Franklin Exr al	Ms 3 435	1905	Rel
Weirick	Harriet L		Weirick Franklin Exr al	Ms 3 435	1905	Rel
Weirick		Robert By Exr	Gutellus Flaher	OO 264	1905	Mifflnbg
Weirick	Kate A By Treas		Loas Amnon A	OO 469	1905	Lewis Tp
Weirick		Robert By Exr	Kostenbader David H	OO 545	1905	Mifflnbg
Weirick		Robert By Exr	Yohn David	PP 111	1905	Mifflnbg

Figure 7

Now you can begin looking at the deeds whose book and page numbers appear in the sixth and seventh columns. There are six of them so you will have to read the description in each one until you find one that matches the last deed found earlier before you met an obstacle in trying to trace the property back in time. You can continue to use the Grantor Index to trace the property forward in time and hopefully reach the point where you had encountered the obstacle. For example, in this case the correct deed is the third one. The grantee in that deed is Ralph F Brown so you could now continue the search by looking for his name in the Grantor Index.

After finishing the process you can then go back to the appropriate Grantee Index and continue tracing ownership back in time beginning with the Weiricks, using recitals when they appear. If all goes well you will reach a point at which you find a recital to a sale prior to 1813 with a deed recorded in Northumberland County. Then the search continues in Sunbury.

The Grantor and Grantee Indexes in Northumberland County use a somewhat different system from those in Union County but with the experience you have gained already you should have no problem figuring it out. Here you will have to look in the original deed books that are stored in the basement. You

can obtain a key to the storage rooms at the main desk in the Register and Recorder's office. The earliest deed books can be found in a second room to the left after you enter. There's a copy machine but you might have difficulty using it.

### **Properties Outside of Towns with Numbered Lots**

Generally speaking, town lots are of uniform, easily described dimensions. Other properties, especially farmland, are usually irregular in shape and descriptions found in deeds are more complicated. Farmland has often been subdivided, either to divide it among heirs of the original owner or parts of it have been sold off to create building lots of unusual shapes.

Farmland in Pennsylvania is generally described in deeds using the system of "metes and bounds" which uses compass directions and distances along with the names of adjoining landowners and sometimes geographical features. The directions and distances are normally spelled out in words.

The following is an example from an 1843 deed for land in Hartley Township. (To save space I have given the distances numerically and used the abbreviations N, S, E and W for the directions and ° for degrees.)

"...Beginning at a post thence by land of Thomas Barber N 8° E 313 perches to a post thence by land of George Rhule S 64° W 67.3 perches to a post thence by land of David Stitzer S 3° W 69.2 perches to a post N 87½° W 44.5 perches to a post thence by land of William Frederick S 2° E 85 perches to a post S 11° E 38 perches to a post N 79° E 12.6 perches to a post S 7° E 92.2 perches to a post thence by land of John Shively S 83° E 29.5 perches to the place of Beginning Containing 105 Acres..." (1 perch = 1 rod = 16.5 feet).

Software exists that can be used to sketch the outlines of properties like this. Although it is time consuming you can also sketch it by hand using a protractor and ruler using ½ mm = 1 perch as your scale. However, a sketch is not necessary.

You can trace the ownership of farmland such as this using the same techniques described above for town lots. Comparing the description from one deed to another is more time consuming and there are a few problems that you might encounter. You might notice minor differences in the number of degrees. This is because compass bearings are based on magnetic north and the position

of the magnetic pole shifts back and forth over time. You can ignore these minor differences.

Another problem is that sometimes the clerk who recorded the deed made an error and omitted one of the courses. Errors of this nature can be easily spotted and ignored. You should also not be concerned about differences in the names of some adjoining landowners since this is merely an indication of a transfer of ownership.

Sometimes a new survey is made by going in the opposite direction around the boundaries. That changes the compass bearings and reverses the order of the courses. For example, using the tract in the example above the last course would be first in the new survey and the direction would be N 83° W instead of S 83° E. Similarly, the first course would be last in the new survey and the direction would be S 8° W instead of N 8° E.

Virtually no farmland tract in Union County has remained intact from the day it was first settled until today. For example, in the deed cited above the description is followed by these words, "It being part of a larger tract of land..." This is followed by a recital indicating the location of the deed that was executed when that larger tract was sold. Reference to that deed enables you to continue your search.

Finally, if your search has been successful you will eventually find a deed that refers to a *patent*. In this context a patent is a deed that was executed by either the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania or the Proprietors of Pennsylvania, i.e. the heirs of William Penn as grantors and a private citizen as the grantee. Patents can be found at the Pennsylvania State Archives in Harrisburg. You can also obtain copies of original surveys and warrants, documents that gave permission to have a survey made. For more information visit the web site by typing PA Land Records and then click on Land Records – Home – Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

### **When was Your House Built?**

If you are lucky your house might be one of the sites listed in Historic Preservation Plan of Union County. This loose-leaf booklet is available for

inspection at the Union County Historical Society. Most of these sites are in towns and many are commercial properties but there are some farm houses. It includes addresses, photographs and descriptions of hundreds of sites throughout the county. The descriptions often include the date when the structure was built, the names of the contractors and the person for whom it was built, but there is no guarantee that this information is accurate.

The best way to determine when your house was built is to use tax records. However, you first need to limit the search of these records to a time period that you can determine using the deeds you have copied. The descriptions in the deeds always refer to structures on the land if there were any. You need to find the earliest deed that contains a reference to a house on the land and the previous one which contains no reference to a house. The dates of these two deeds determine the time period that you need to search. The name of the grantor in the later deed tells you the name of the owner when the house was built.

The tax records are available on microfilm at the Union County Historical Society. Depending on the time period you are searching you might encounter two types of assessments. A part of the first page of the triennial assessment for East Buffalo Township in 1814 is shown in Figure 8. All names of residents are

East Buffalo Triennial Assessment for 1814		Valuations & Tax											
Occupants Names	Owners	Acreage	Buildings & other	Joining/lot	Real	Real	Real	Real	Real	Real	Tax		
Anderson James	Widow Beaty				1	Weaver	12	100			3	25	
Stuple Christopher	John Seabolt				1	Weaver	12	100			3	25	
Durant Abraham		151	LH & Barn	Solomon Beaty	1	Single	50	50			6	50	
Tit		70	6	W.L. Run Hill			420				55		
Albiston Jacob					1	Farmer	46				2	10	
Alpauch Matthias		133	18	LH & Barn	Friedrich Thier	2	4	Farmer	2394	148	350	24	10
Alpauch Jacob						Single						50	
Anderson Andrew					1	Single					6	50	
S. I. .... A. I. ....		25	30	LH & Barn	Christman	1	Cropper	570	12	70	3	25	

Figure 8

listed in roughly alphabetical order by surname. If the occupant was a renter the property owner is listed in the second column. The most important thing to notice is in the fifth column headed "Buildings." Here were listed any structures

on the property under the name of the owner. Note that the initials in “L H and Barn” means “log house.” Thus, you can see that Abraham Aurant owned a property on which there was a log house.

Triennial assessments were conducted every three years. Assessments in the intervening years do not contain references to buildings. The example in Figure 9 is from White Deer Township in 1791. Using the triennial assessments

Persons Names	Land	Horse	Cow	£ s	Persons Names	Land	H
Falls James	...	2	2	" 1"	Moore George	150	5
Fullerton Alex	300	2	2	" 13"	Moore Joseph	100	5
Gray W <sup>m</sup>	190	3	1	" 9"	Moore David	100	5
Gray John	50	1	2	" 3"	McLanaghan W <sup>m</sup>	110	5
Croninger Leonard	200	3	2	" 5"	McLanaghan And <sup>rs</sup>	150	5

Figure 9

you will be able to find two successive ones, the earlier of which does not list a house while the later one does. There should also be a substantial increase in the valuation of the real property from one to the next. This narrows down the time period for the building of the house to three years. Now you can look at the valuations in the intervening two years to determine exactly when the valuation increased. The earlier of those two years will be the year in which the house was built.

Unfortunately this is very time consuming. Each reel of microfilm contains all of the municipalities in the county for each year covered by the film. There are no page numbers and there is no index. Furthermore, the only pages that indicate the name of the municipality are the first page for each one which charges the assessor with his duties and the first page of the list of taxable residents. Finally, it is important to remember that towns with numbered lots will not be listed separately until the year in which they were actually

incorporated, or at least well established. Thus in the earliest years Lewisburg residents will be found in East Buffalo Township, Mifflinburg in West Buffalo Township, etc.

Searching these records can be very frustrating but the rewards are worth the effort. Good luck!

