A Brief History of Mount Joy Township

Mount Joy Township, part of a large, original Donegal Township, was organized in 1759. The township of Mount Joy is located between the boroughs of Elizabethtown and Mount Joy. The flowing Conewago Creek and the counties of Dauphin and Lebanon bound it on the north. Rapho, East Donegal and West Donegal are the neighboring townships.

The pioneer settlers were Scotch-Irish who arrived around 1735, followed by large groups of Germans. Many of these descendants continue to occupy the patented land of their immigrant ancestors.

Small settlements and villages were established.

Milton Grove, originally called Centerville, came into existence in 1849, when Squire Frank B. Grosh built a house and store. A post office in the store, with Mr. Grosh as postmaster, was a place where residents for miles around could get their mail. Rapid growth occurred when a hotel was built, and individuals established businesses and bought homes. These businesses included the Centerville Nurseries, a creamery, a blacksmith and other trades.

Another thriving village resulted when the Coleman family built a railroad that started in Lebanon County and continued to Conewago in West Donegal Township. The Colebrook Valley Railroad, with a passenger station in Bellaire, was opened October 1, 1883. After this opening, as recorded in early deeds, lots were laid out in the Town of Bellaire. A post office, store, creamery, mill, and shaking fork and broom manufacturer were an outgrowth of the railroad enterprise. The railroad ceased to exist, and this linear area is now the Conewago Recreation Trail.

The Lancaster, Elizabethtown, Middletown Turnpike was an early important road. This much traveled roadway proved to be conducive for business ventures. The village of Rheems grew on both sides of the turnpike. This turnpike became, and continues to be, the boundary line between the townships of Mount Joy and West Donegal.

In other locations, known as Anchor, Beverly and Poseytown, there were homes and business buildings.

Mills located along local creeks played an important role in the development of Mount Joy Township.

Farmers used the three and one-half story limestone Horst-Risser Mill in the past. A historic covered bridge that was a passageway between Mount Joy Township and Rapho Township was destroyed by arson in July of 2002. To this day the mill, located near the intersection of Mount Pleasant Road and Rissermill Road, creates a picturesque scene in the township.

Following are examples that contributed to the establishment and growth of the township: The Moravians, a religious denomination, received a land grant from William Penn. In 1744, they built a log church on this land. The burial ground that surrounded this church is part of the present-day Milton Grove Cemetery. Catholics, Mennonites and various other religious denominations built houses of worship.

In 1882, Mount Joy Township had 13 one-room schools. These one-room schools provided education for grades one to eight within a six-month school year. The Milton Grove High School was built in 1903. This facility enabled students to extend their education for two or three more years.

These, and other businesses in the township, provided services to community members. The John G. Kreider Printing Shop was beneficial to persons desiring advertisement notices. In August of 1855, the Mount Joy Township Fire Insurance Company was formed.

Growth brings change. Many business establishments, family homes and landmarks of the past have been replaced by new structures. Mount Joy Township, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania continues to be a desirable place to live and prosper, just as it was for early inhabitants many years ago.