

Early Postal Service and Lea the Postmaster

by Rev. Richard W. Davies

After the American Revolution, the only way public communication could reach frontiersmen and farmers was by mail. Hence, the new Federal Constitution in 1787 gave Congress the power to establish post offices and post roads.

At first, postal charges were paid by the recipients and the costs depended on the distance carried. In 1825 Congress allowed city postmasters to give letters to mail carriers for home delivery, but they received only what the recipient paid them. Obviously, the carrier would not leave the mail in boxes. Persons not wanting to pay the delivery fee told the postmaster to hold the mail at the post office.

In 1847 postage stamps were created, even though some complained they did not want to pre-pay. Businessmen also offered their own mail delivery in cities. In 1863 mail carriers were now paid by the government. Farmers still had to go to the post office where the postmaster was often the keeper of a general store, and the printer of local notices. Rural Free Delivery, or RFD, began in 1906.

William H. H. Lea, the grandson of Major and Dorathy Lea, the king's grant owners of the land where Old St. Luke's is situated, was a local postmaster. He was born in 1846 and educated in Scott Township. After serving in the Civil War he was a miller in the Woodville flour mill, situated just below Old St. Luke's site. He then became postmaster in 1870 of Mansfield, today's Carnegie, Pa. His post office was first named Rich Valley (from coal mining) in 1853, then renamed Mansfield Valley in 1865. (A Mt. Lebanon postal station in a general store was active by 1833).

One of the illegal acts in the Whiskey Rebellion was the theft of mail from a post rider on July 26, 1794, to see what local people felt about the burning of John Neville's Bower Hill Mansion. Initiated by the rebel David Bradford, Esq., letters were opened in Greensburg, including one from Presley Neville to his father-in-law Gen. Daniel Morgan

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11/15/2005