

"Carroll's First R.F.D. Delivery."

Carroll County Times Article for 17 January 1999

By Jay A. Graybeal

In last week's column, I presented an March 1899 newspaper account about Edwin W. Shriver's upcoming first delivery of mail with his "Post Office on Wheels" scheduled for Easter Monday. Shriver was able to complete the experiment and the April 8, 1899 issue of the American Sentinel described the journey:

"The Postal Wagon Experiment.

The postal wagon projected by Mr. Edwin W. Shriver, of this city, and adopted by the Postoffice Department at Washington, D.C., began its trips from this city, over the thirty mile route heretofore described in the SENTINEL, on Monday morning last at 6:40 o'clock. The time of starting has been fixed for 7 o'clock and numbers of persons who desired to witness the beginning of the initial trip were disappointed to find, upon their arrival at the Westminster postoffice, that the hour of departure had been anticipated by fully twenty minutes. The wagon went out in charge of Mr. Shriver and his assistant, Mr. Horace G. Reese. It was driven by the contractor, Mr. H. H. Herbaugh, who held the lines over a pair of stylish and handsome horses, which whirled the vehicle out of town at a spanking pace. Mr. Clayton Babylon, one of his employees, sat with him. A carriage, containing Postmaster M. Schaeffer, of this city; Mr. Walter Raleigh Hough, a representative of the Baltimore American; Mr. Joseph H. Krichton, photographic artist, and Constable Elias N. Davis accompanied the moving postoffice.

The first letter from the wagon was delivered at the residence of Mr. Geo. Baird, near this city, and the first newspaper, a Baltimore American, at the residence of Mr. H. Price Goodwin, about a mile from the city limits. At Dennings the first letter was collected. It was addressed to Mr. Thomas G. Kelley and was delivered to that venerable and worthy citizen at his own door. The first postal card was sent by Mr. D. a. Haines.

The wagon received a varying reception from citizens along its route. Nearly all were curious to see it, but while many gave it a hearty greeting, some were indifferent and others exhibited unmistakable hostility to what they evidently regarded as an innovation. At Crawford's Store a large crowd had assembled and manifested a lively interest in the novel project. A large crowd also greeted the traveling postoffice at Winfield, where a picture was taken by Mr. Krichton. The time made was excellent and by eleven o'clock the wagon and accompanying carriage were at the home of Mr. Francis J. Albaugh, near Gist, having passed over two-thirds of the route.

Mr. and Mrs. Albaugh entertained the entire party at dinner in a very handsome manner, refusing any compensation for their trouble. A picture of the family was taken in a group by Mr. Krichton, as an acknowledgment of the courtesy extended and the party making the trip was also photographed in Mr. Albaugh's parlor.

The wagon stopped at the home of Mr. Howard T. Smith, father of the late Sergeant Charles Hampton Smith, of the U.S. States Marines, who was the first American who fell on Cuban soil in the war for the independence of the "Gem of the Antilles."

One application for a money order was received on the route. It was from Mr. Ellsworth Gardiner, at Bird Hill, and was for \$5.78, payable to the Methodist Protestant Publishing House, Wm. J. C. Dulany agent, Baltimore. The letter, unsealed, was entrusted to Mr. Shriver, who brought it to this city, and Postmaster Schaeffer issued the order and, enclosing it in the letter, forwarded it by the fast mail the same evening.

The wagon reached the postoffice, in this city, at 3:50 p.m., having made the trip, stopping an hour for dinner, in eight hours and fifty minutes.

The mail matter delivered and collected on the trip was as follows: Delivered-Ordinary letters, 238; postal cards, 6; newspapers and circulars, 261; packages, 5; total, 510. Collected-Letters, 36; postal cards, 4; receipts for registered letters, 2. These were in addition to the money order letter. Three letters were collected and delivered at points further on the route.

It is perhaps too soon to predict the success of the experiment with confidence, but Postmaster Schaeffer feels assured that it will work. If so, its effect will be to practically terminate the star route system and to diminish the number of fourth class postoffices. An impression has gone abroad that it would entirely superseded the latter. This, however, is scarcely probable. It is the introduction of a new idea, which may, in the end, simply take the place of the star route system, making the "traveling postmaster," as he is now, practically a letter carrier.

The system certainly offers great mail facilities to citizens living along the route traveled by the wagon and can hardly fail, in the end, to receive general approbation, if it can be introduced with out greatly multiplying the cost of the service to the government. Of course it adds nothing to the cost of sending and receiving mail matter by the citizens, beyond the expense of erecting a box for its reception. The government supplies the boxes for collecting."

Edwin Shriver perfected his delivery system and received approval to start county-wide delivery on December 20, 1899. The inauguration of county-wide delivery in Carroll County was the first in the nation and a model for other regions throughout the county.

Photo caption: Edwin Wilmer Shriver of Westminster was instrumental in creating the first county-wide Rural Free Delivery system in America. Historical Society of Carroll County collection.