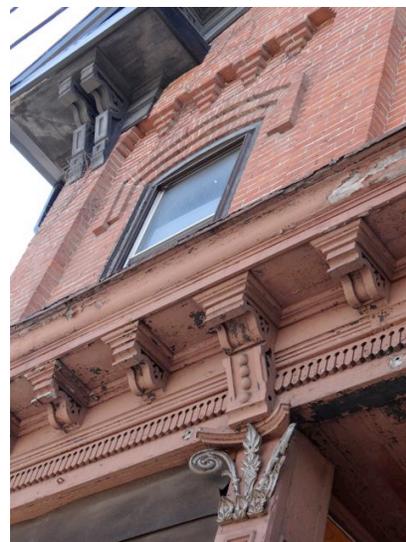
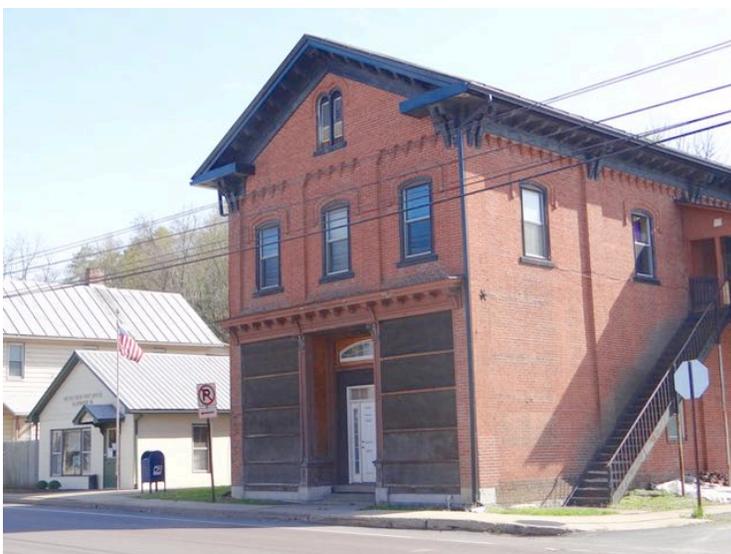


## **The Allens of Allenwood and Allen's General Store**

**by**

**Jean Claire LeVan Hormell**

I write this essay as the great-great-granddaughter of Isaac and Jane Piatt Allen. Like others and their late attention to family history, my earnest interest in this has increased since the passing of my mother Lina Mary Allen LeVan. (“I am sorry, Mom, that I didn’t listen more closely back then to the history you shared with me.”) But fortunately, she had accrued much information about her family’s history that I can share with you here.



On Rt. 15 in Allenwood this Italianate brick building was the site of Allen's General Store from 1880 to the late 1930's. Fancy brick and eave work marking the style are still preserved today.

Mention the name “Allenwood” to many today and their context is the Allenwood Prison Complex, carved out of farmland “up the valley” (as my mother would say) acquired by the government just outside the town of Allenwood in WWII. But locals know of a long history.....before it was cut in half by a three lane highway, before railroad access was discontinued and the depot abandoned, before it was near the center of a heated landfill battle.

In 1815 John McCurdy laid out the town under the name of Uniontown. Within 15 years of McCurdy, the Allens, Isaac and Jane Piatt, moved to the town from Linden, near Williamsport. Isaac engaged in lumbering, purchased a part of the present site of the town and conducted a hotel in the town. He died in 1845 at the age of 45, his wife in 1871. Their children, Julia, Herman P., Henrietta, William P., Jennie, Isaac and Helen who died in infancy, and Charles were born there. In fact, during the Civil War, Charles served in the 53rd PA regiment of the Union Army, and died in 1865 after a nine-month imprisonment by the Confederates in Libby Prison, Richmond, Virginia.

Their son Herman Piatt Allen (“HP,” my great-grandfather) remained in the village, married Elizabeth Jane Armstrong, and in 1861 became a storekeeper at a site on the main street where previous storekeepers had conducted business. Their children



Circa 1886, the family of Herman Piatt Allen and wife Elizabeth Jane Armstrong Allen. Left top, Charles W., Lina, Drew. Left bottom, Blanche, mother Elizabeth, Helen, young Frank, father Herman, Henrietta.

were Angeline (Lina), Charles W., Helen Jane, Andrew (Drew), Blanche, Henrietta, twins Herman and Elizabeth who died at birth, and my grandfather Frank Levan Allen born in 1882.

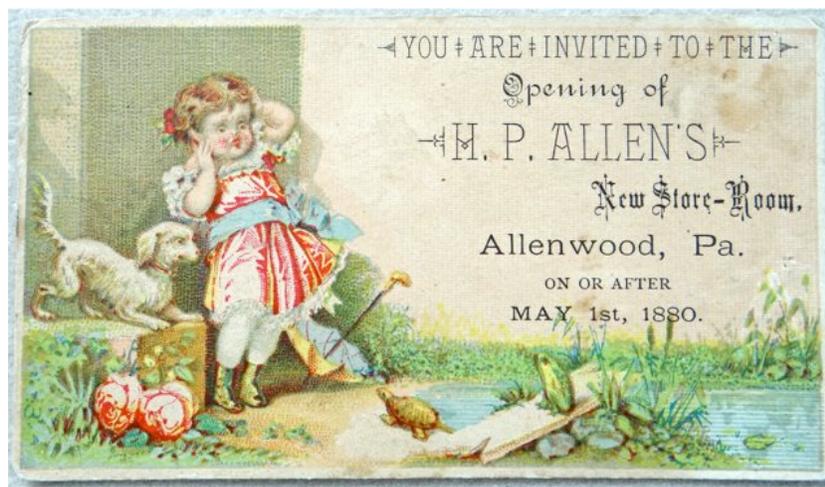
With Allen’s General Store, HP gained recognition. He soon gave to the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad Company the right-of-way through Allen land and a plot of ground 56 x 175 feet on which to build a station. He then laid out an addition to



This original Philadelphia and Reading Railroad Company depot was placed on land given by HP Allen for the building of a station resulting in the town being officially named Allenwood.

the town of 80 lots. The railroad company placed the name “Allenwood” on the depot.

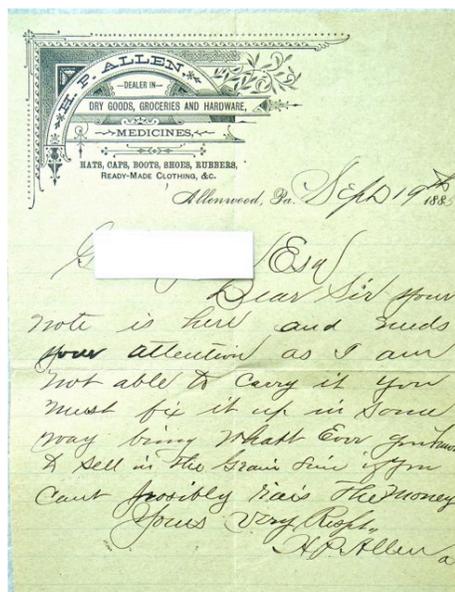
The village post office had gone through a variety of names - White Deer, Slifer, Cairo - but in 1871 the post office assumed the name of Allenwood as well, in honor of Herman Piatt Allen, securing the final name of the village. In 1880 Allen’s General Store took a step into the future when HP built a handsome two-story brick Italianate store building. What was for sale? Choice dry goods, groceries, hardware, medicines, hats, caps, boots, shoes, rubbers, ready-made clothes, etc. His advertising calling card said, “You are invited to the Opening of H.P. Allen’s New Store-Room, Allenwood, Pa, on or after May 1st, 1880.”



In the December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1882, *West Branch Star* a reporter gave a glowing review: “The front is a model of beauty, and is composed of two large show windows, the French plate glass in which are possibly the largest in this section.” “Naturally the attractiveness and completeness of the store and contents are appreciated by the good people of that

section, and Mr. Allen's business is second to none. His reputation for honest dealing is unquestioned and he is one of the most popular men in Union County."

In addition he wrote, "The second floor of the building is used as a public hall, and was occupied last week by Prof. Glenn's Musical Convention. It is handsomely finished and fitted to accommodate all ordinary demands for public meetings and entertainments."



HP Allen wrote this 1885 letter to a debtor (name obscured), urging him to bring to the store whatever he had to sell, if he could not otherwise raise the money owed. Storekeepers often played the role of mini-banker, issuing credit and trusting that they would be repaid.

According to the June 4, 1890 *Watson town Record and Star* newspaper, the ownership stayed in the family but changed hands at that time. "The general store of H.P. Allen at Allenwood, was purchased by C. W. Allen (Charles W.), on the 19th of May, and the business will be continued at the old stand, which is one of the best and handsomest in Union County." At this time HP's son's name, "C. W. Allen," began to appear on store advertising. However, Charles died in 1899 in an accident on the railroad, and unfortunately, a year later, his father died as well.

HP's February 9, 1900, *Lewisburg Journal* obituary cites that "In the death of Herman Piatt Allen of Allenwood, PA, Union County has lost one of her best and most enterprising citizens. Mr. Allen was known as the pioneer merchant of Allenwood, and

all the large wholesale stores of Philadelphia and New York knew him personally.”<sup>1</sup> Beyond being the storekeeper of a “very handsome and commodious store,” he was “a lifelong Democrat, who was too busy with his own affairs to seek office for himself.”



Frank L. Allen and Mary Elizabeth Ault

We know that he was recognized for the energy and money he put into every enterprise that came to the town. He was a director of the Allenwood Planing-Mill Company and had been instrumental in the corporation that financed the building and the re-building of the Allenwood bridge. According to *Juniata and Susquehanna Valleys of Pennsylvania*, he served as treasurer of the board responsible for the 1852 building of the bridge after 1049 shares at \$25 per share were sold to finance the cost of \$26,225. Swept away in 1865, the bridge was then re-built for \$13,112.<sup>2</sup>

Living along the west branch of the Susquehanna River had its advantages and disadvantages. H. P. Allen owned property along the river near the Allenwood bridge. Subsequently, in the great flood of June 1, 1889, the *Watsonstown Record and Star* reported that about the middle of the afternoon one or two sections of the Allenwood bridge passed down, then two more spans, and by 7:30 “the last span, in one solid piece, floated past, and darkness closed the scene, with the water still rising slowly.” Even though damage in Allenwood was not nearly as great as in most other river towns, it was reported that at the west end of the Allenwood bridge, “the house of H.P. Allen was

<sup>1</sup> *Lewisburg Journal*, Feb. 9, 1900.

<sup>2</sup> *Juniata and Susquehanna Valleys in Pennsylvania*, p. 1420.

flooded up to the second floor. A fine piano was ruined, and the house badly damaged. Mr. Allen seriously contemplates moving his house back on the hill near the barn. Mr. Allen was in town (Watson town) on Tuesday, making arrangements for material and fixtures to put up a rope ferry.”

With his death, HP’s wife Elizabeth Jane and her two remaining sons, Drew and Frank, took over the store. On a 1904 calendar “E. J. Allen” was advertised as a “Dealer in General Merchandise, Hard and Soft Coal” with F. L. Allen, at the age of 18, as the Manager. By 1910, the store stationary said, “Allen Brothers, General Merchandise, F.L. Allen and D.A. Allen, Successors to E.J. Allen” so transition was underway.

During that decade and beyond, the original Allen advertising reveals the services of the store: General Merchandise, “Everything for the use of a farmer and other homes;” Hard and Soft Coal, “We always have a stock of egg, stove, nut, pea and a good grade of soft for steaming and smithing purposes;” “Weight Right and Prices Right,” vehicles, sleighs & harness, farming implements, “Everything in the line and a special effort on repairs for any make of machinery;” and agents for “The Delaval Cream Separators, the world’s standard.”

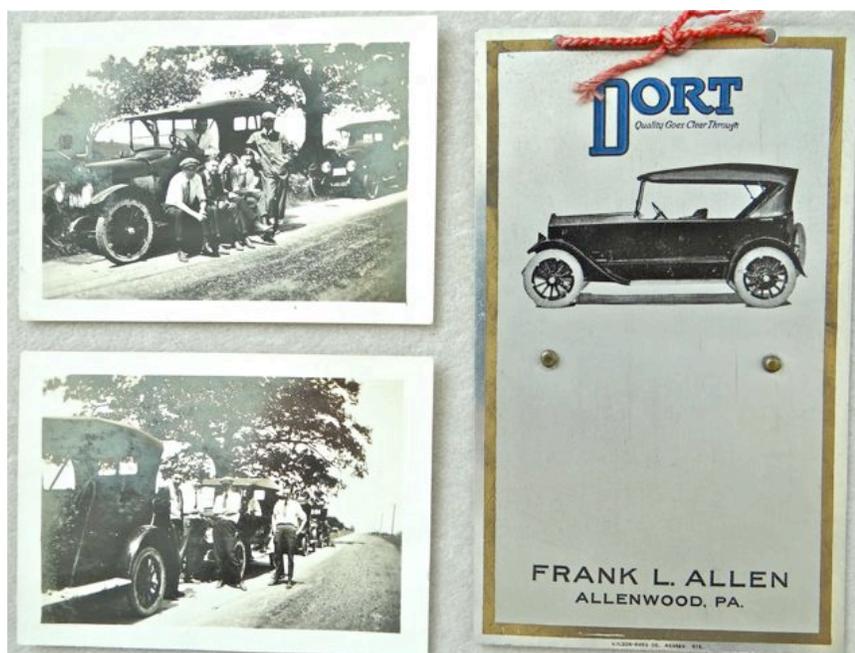


The site at side of Allen’s Store for the sale of tractors, cars, farming machinery, plus repair shop.

Gradually a garage and warehousing space were added to the store, especially as the sale of cars and heavy equipment was added. You could buy a model T for \$440 from the Allen Brothers in 1915. They also sold the upgraded Dort - in 1917, a sedan for

\$1065, a convertible sedan for \$815, a tourer for \$695, and a Dort roadster for \$695. Dorts were made in Flint, Michigan, and used a Lycoming engine made in Williamsport.

Before Frank's mother died in 1913, Frank had married Clara Griffey Hain in 1910 and they became parents to Frank L. Allen Jr. in 1915. But within a year Clara died and Frank's sister Helen Jane, "Aunt Daisy" to the family, moved in and kept house for her brother and nephew above the store.



The Dort automobiles, built in Flint, Michigan from 1915 - 1924 by the Dort Motor Car Company, were delivered by car crews to Allen's Store.

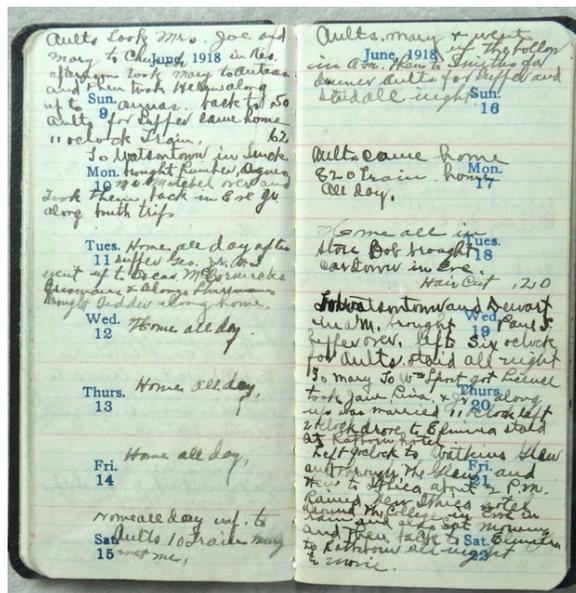
From the tiny handwriting in my grandfather's 1918 Plankenhorn diary,<sup>3</sup> I have gleaned what life was like as a storekeeper in Allenwood. His daily entries focused strongly on his comings and goings and the forms of transportation he used. I was struck by his reliance on the frequent daily trains that stopped in Allenwood, traveling north and south. He often took the train early in the morning and returned later in the day for business or pleasure. "Was home in AM. To Montgomery on noon train. Home 5:43 train."

He chronicled the local news by the day - "Ollie Jones shot himself today, Albert Confer's barn burned, Rained all day. Snowed. Heatless pipes froze up. Stuck in the mud on Penny Hill. To Newberry with sleighing party. Old Corner Hotel for dinner.

<sup>3</sup> Daily calendar book compliments of F. W. Plankenhorn Co., Wholesale Grocers, Williamsport, PA.

Visited John Ravert.” But very frequently, the only notation for the day would be - “Home in store all day, very busy.”

His diary also reveals his courting in early 1918 of my grandmother-to-be, Mary Elizabeth Ault. She was an English teacher at Williamsport High School, a 1913 Cornell University graduate who lived with her parents in Linden. “Home all day. Went to Newberry on 10:00 train. Mary met me.” “At Aults all day. Came home 11 o’clock train.”



Daily account entries for June 20<sup>th</sup>, 1918 by Frank Allen, his wedding day.

Eventually, things got serious with marriage and honeymoon reported! His diary for June 20: “haircut 20 cents. On June 19, “got license.” On June 20, “Took Lina, Jane and Frank Jr. along. Was married 11 o’clock, left two o’clock, drove to Elmira, stayed at Rathbun hotel.” June 21: “Left nine o’clock to Watkins Glen and through Glen, went to Ithaca about 2 pm. Rained. New Ithaca Hotel around the college.” June 22: “went back to Elmira to Rathbun, to movie.” June 23: “left Elmira 11 o’clock, arrived at Aults 4 pm, stayed all night.” On June 24, they return home with a “belling in the eve.”<sup>4</sup> The next day, “delivered feed.” Life was back to normal.

Children followed with son John Ault Allen born 1919, twins who died at birth in 1920, and the birth of my mother Lina Mary Allen in 1922. But in 1924, sadly their

4

A noisy mock serenade made by banging pots and pans to a newly married couple.

mother Mary Elizabeth passed away and their father Frank was now left with 3 children. Luckily “Aunt Daisy,” kept house and cared for them all in their home on the second floor of the store building.

In 1916, with the death of Frank’s brother, Drew, at 45, only one Allen brother was left. From then on, the store notices listed Frank L. Allen as the sole proprietor. His 1926 calendar calls the store the “Universal Provider” proclaiming “Star Brand Shoes are Better - Solid Leather Throughout.” He married his 3rd wife Caroline Nicely in 1926 and she became stepmother to the three Allen children.



Left: Frank Allen beside his store. “FRANK L. ALLEN, GEN. MDSE.” on the window, 1920. Right: the store in 1907, before the road through Allenwood was paved and before the second floor balcony was constructed.

Ten years later, in May of 1936 and three months before his death at 54, the *Lycoming Automobile Club Newsletter* published an article about Allen citing him for recently being appointed the Allenwood postmaster. It said, “The Allen business today is one of the leading enterprises of the Allenwood district. In addition to the store, Mr. Allen operates the agency for Dodge and Plymouth automobiles, International trucks and tractors, Philco radios, Kelvinators, and Maytag washers.”

Over 700 people attended his funeral Sept. 6, 1936, at the Washington Presbyterian Church in Allenwood. Within several years, Allen’s General Store, a landmark in the community for over 75 years, closed due to bankruptcy. The original two-story brick building and warehouse still stand in Allenwood a block northwest of the traffic light.

At the top of the hill behind the store lies the Allenwood Cemetery where members of five Allen generations are buried. On one side of the drive are memorials to the family of my great-great-grandfather Isaac and to the family of my great-grandfather Herman Piatt. The earliest Allen grave (1841) is that of Isaac W. Allen, son of Isaac and Jane Piatt Allen, who lived just two months. The father Isaac died just 4 years later at the age of 45, while the mother Jane lived 40 more years.

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <b>FUNERAL OF<br/>FRANK ALLEN</b>  |  | <b>CI</b>  |
| Hundreds Attend Services Held Sunday Afternoon in Washington Presbyterian Church at Allenwood  |  | P/   |
| <p>One of the most largely attended funeral services conducted in this section in recent years was held Sunday afternoon at 2:30 o'clock in the Washington Presbyterian church at Allenwood for the late Frank L. Allen, widely known merchant, automobile salesman and postmaster, of Allenwood, who died last week in the Williamsport hospital. Approximately seven hundred relatives and friends attended the services which were conducted by his pastor, Rev. W. D. Hevner, assisted by Rev. T. C. Baxter, of Wyandust, a former pastor of the church. Interment was made in Allenwood cemetery.</p> <p>The carriers were: Roscoe Hain, Harry Jamison, Vincent Michener, David Watson, Neston Braucht, Roscoe Schooley, George McCormick and Harry Blair.</p> <p>The floral offerings were many and beautiful.</p> <p>Mr. Allen, member of a family from which Allenwood took its name, lived in that community all his life. He was born August 27, 1882. He took over his father's general store at the age of 16, at the death of the father, and conducted the business up until the time of his death. In recent years he added a garage and other sales departments to the store. Since March, 1935, he had been serving as postmaster at Allenwood. He was a leader in the community and will be greatly missed throughout Allenwood and the entire valley.</p> |  | <p>Phone</p> <p>MEN-<br/>Jobe<br/>Prepa<br/>amina<br/>unnee<br/>usuall<br/>list pe<br/>tests<br/>Frank<br/>Roche</p> <p>FOR S<br/>stock<br/>busine<br/>to Mill<br/>Address</p> <p>FOR S<br/>10 fu<br/>tric. 7<br/>Broadw</p> <p>FOR S<br/>ed ho<br/>quire o<br/>phone</p> <p>FOR S<br/>Fran<br/>D. I.</p> <p>PCR S<br/>Actio<br/>good<br/>North</p> <p>FOR S<br/>ten b</p> |

September 8<sup>th</sup>, 1936, announcement in *The Milton Standard* of the Washington Presbyterian Church funeral service of Frank L. Allen at the age of 54.

Across the drive is a large memorial commemorating the family of my grandfather Frank L. Allen which includes his grave, two of his wives including my grandmother, three of his children, and two of his grandchildren. His grandson Frank L. Allen III was buried there in 1981, I suspect the last Allen to be buried in that family plot. Particularly poignant about the graves of each of these five generations was the incidence of child death, either at birth or in childhood.

Of note during this early time in Allenwood was the development of Devitt's Camp in 1912 as a tuberculosis sanitarium outside town. After WWI, veterans who had

been gassed comprised more than half of the patients there for rehabilitation. We can surmise that the Allenwood train station played a large part in the transfer of patients during that time. My mother Lina Mary later worked there after high school graduation in 1939. I remember going there with her as a child in the '50's to visit a friend who was an employee living in a small white cottage on site. Devitt's Camp remained a sanitarium until the late 1960's. It is now White Deer Run Treatment Center.

Moving forward with the Allen legacy, Frank L. Allen Jr. became a railroad engineer, had 3 children, Jane Kay, James, and Frank L. Allen III (all deceased), and died in 1974. Sadly Jane Kay died at a young age of a fall from the second floor balcony of the Allen store building. John A. Allen married Rita Cromis, had 2 children, Nelson Allen (deceased) and Susan Allen, was the owner of Boice Builders Supply of Pontiac, Michigan, and died in 1994. Susan is responsible for much helpful research into the Allen family and Allenwood. Lina Mary Allen married Clair LeVan of Watsonstown and had 4 children, John Allen LeVan, Thomas Vincent LeVan, Mary Elizabeth LeVan (Hagerman), and myself. She returned to her Allen roots in the store business as the owner of LeVan's News Store in Watsonstown for many years, and died in 2009 at the age of 87, the longest living family member of any of her Allen ancestors.



ALLEN monument in the Allenwood Cemetery commemorating the family of Frank L. Allen.

If you have knowledge of history related to this subject, I invite you to contact me through ACCOUNTS at [greaves@bucknell.edu](mailto:greaves@bucknell.edu). The editor will relay your message to me.

## **Acknowledgment**

The author expresses her thanks to Mr. Anthony Mike, current owner of the Allen store building, for hosting a tour of the building and sharing information on its history since the closure of the store.

✧ **ACCOUNTS** ✧

ACCOUNTS Vol. 6, No. 2, 2016  
Union County Historical Society