

Photographers and Post Cards

The US Post Office issued the first post cards in May 1873, which were used mostly for business advertising. In 1898, the post office allowed privately printed post cards to be mailed at the same one-cent rate as official post office cards. The message or an image would be on one side, and the address and stamp on the other. After 1907, one side of the post card was divided to hold the address and stamp plus a message, while the other side had an image. Post cards became increasingly popular means of communication.

Photographers

Lewis "Lewey" Thomas worked during the hey-day of real photo post cards, from 1906 to 1917, initially on his own, and later at the Swanger Studio in Milton. The "view camera" he used had glass dry plate negative film and it took some skill to produce a good photo. When the photographer looked through the lens, the image he had to focus and compose was upside down and backwards.

Lewey photographed people and places in Allenwood and Spring Garden in the White Deer Valley, giving us a pictorial history of that place and time in rural America.

Urs H. Eisenhauer of Millmont was one of the area's photographers who took photos of private homes, with the intention of selling photo cards to the home's owners. The owners would mail these cards to relatives and friends.

Stephen B. Horton of West Milton took photos all over Union and Snyder counties, covering a wide range of subject, including stores, street scenes, schools, churches, and private homes. William Bierly and Maurice Royer of Mifflinburg occasionally worked as photographers.

In addition to the scenic photos, were pictures of individuals and families, an alternative to the more expensive formal portraits taken by studio photographers?

Studio photographers, not to miss a good opportunity, also made real photo postcards. John C. Slear's studio was on Chestnut Street, Mifflinburg. John D. Swanger and Arthur R. Ishiguro had studios in Milton. Fred W. Lindig's studio was in Lewisburg; photographer Ellen H. Shields worked at Lindig's.

Photo Post Cards

Many photos show local buildings and stores, landmarks and country scenes. Other cards show groups, such as bands and sports teams, parades and local residents. Photographers also documented fires, floods, train derailments and other disasters.

Lithographs of popular scenic views were efficiently made into post cards in great numbers. Color lithograph post cards were printed in Germany and Belgium, as well as Chicago, New York and Philadelphia, and offered for sale at local stores. It is possible to find the same image as a black and white lithograph card, a color lithograph, and a real photo postcard.

A "real photo postcard" is an actual photograph, made from a negative, and printed on postcard stock. Some photographic cards are really lithographs - copies of photos printed on the card using a lithograph printing press. How do you tell the difference? Magnification reveals the thousands of tiny dots that comprise a lithographic image.

Lewey's work and story are preserved in the recently released book "Looking through Lewey's Lens 100 Years Ago" by his son Marlin Thomas. Other real photo post cards, and a detailed history of picture post cards, are the subject of "Rural Delivery: Real Photo Postcards from Central Pennsylvania 1905-1935." Both books are available at the Union County Historical Society.

The Society has a collection of photographs and post cards, used in publications and research, and accepts donations and loans of photos in any format.

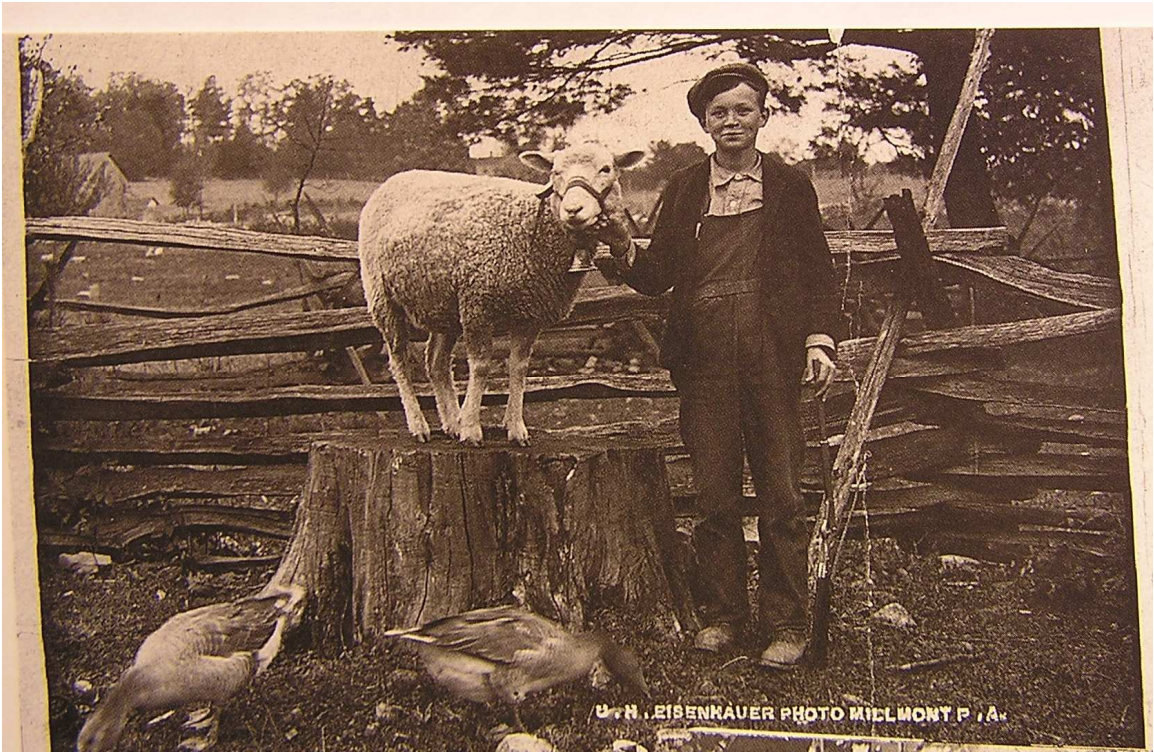


Lewey Thomas' Camera

Cont.



Thomas' Post Card Image of Spring Garden Mill and Dam



Eisenhauer Post Card Photograph