

Bicentennial 2013

Union County is celebrating its bicentennial this year. The March 22, 1813 act creating Union County (including present-day Snyder) from the area of Northumberland County west of the Susquehanna River, would be effective November 1, 1813.

Why a new county?

The distance to Sunbury to conduct court business was one of the reasons area residents sought a distinct county west of the river. Not only criminal trials, but civic matters required travel to the Sunbury courthouse. Deeds were recorded for newly purchased land. Wills or Letters of Administration were filed, dispersing property. Orphans Court appointed guardians for minor children whose fathers had died. The trip to Sunbury from Lewisburg – the river had to first be crossed by ferry – would have taken at least an hour by buggy, twice that in a wagon carrying goods. Adding one to two hours return trip, and business to conduct, a day was spent.

There was precedent to breaking up large counties. Northumberland had once included most of central PA. From 1772 to 1810 parts of Centre, Luzerne and Lycoming counties were taken from Northumberland. At the same time that the area west of the Susquehanna was seeking to separate, a portion in the east sought to break off, becoming Columbia County in 1813.

What was happening in 1813?

The Albright Brethren and United Brethren discussed the possibility of a union of the two groups. Bishop Newcomer visited Martin Dreisbach's in April and John Walter's in November, and preached at Mr. Mack's in New Berlin.

Among the residents of Lewisburg were George Knox, Henry Spyker, Robert Smith, Mathias Shaffer, Richard McClure, and Wm Evans, all on Front Street. Also in town were Mr. Garman, ferry man, John Sargent's nail factory, Wm McQuhae's store, George Kremer's storehouse, James Black's distillery and store, Wm Poak's tavern, and John Leisenring's pottery. The town was served by many business, including Burget's, Espy's and Rees' taverns; Thomas Poak's brewery, James Geddes' saddlery, Thomas Fisher's tannery, Frederick Freedley's mill, and stores run by Kimmel, Hayes and Graham. Wm. Shearer was a weaver; Caleb Fairchild and John Moore, blacksmiths; Sam Grove, a boatman. Jonas Butterfield ran a school on Market Street. Doctor Beyers lived at Third and St. Catherine streets.

In May, Justice Spyker fined Henry Burket, Edward Norton and Wm Keller \$20 each for horse racing on Market Street in Lewisburg.

In June, the town residents voted that the town president, secretary and directors would serve for free, and that this agreement would be in force forever.

Mifflinburg had its share of taverns and stores, its blacksmiths (Bogenreif, Cronmiller and the Groves); shoemakers (Boyer, Bray, Deitrick, Lenhart and others), gunsmiths (John and Samuel Dreisbach), hatters (Deatrich and Yearick), silversmith (Withington), brewer (Hassenplug), weavers, school masters, tailors, masons, potters, joiners, carpenters, a wagon-maker, wheelwright, saddletree-maker, cordwainer and more. Court was held (1814) in a house on Green St., then in the German schoolhouse, rented at \$10 for 6 months.

After New Berlin was chosen as the county seat, court was held in the newly-built courthouse.

During 1813, John Ray was elected sheriff, Simon Snyder, Jr., prothonotary/clerk of courts/register and recorder; Daniel Caldwell, Frederick Gutelius and Philip Moore, county commissioners. In November 1813, Flavel Roan was named clerk of courts, at a pay of \$1.33 per day when on duty. Roan traveled around the area and kept a journal of his visits and observations, some of which are quoted in John Blair Linn's *Annals of Buffalo Valley*.

Read All About It!

The *Annals of Buffalo Valley, 1755-1855* is a year-by-year accounting of events and residents. *Union County: A Celebration of History* by Charles M. Snyder, an updated edition of Snyder's original history of the county, covers the county's history from earliest times through the 20th century. Both are available for purchase from the Union County Historical Society: contact 570-514-8666, hstoricl@ptd.net or visit the website www.unioncountyhistoricalsociety.org for information on ordering.



New Berlin courthouse.