

Upper Mifflin Township

In 1886 Mifflin Township was divided into two townships, and the western section became Upper Mifflin. This township is bounded on the north by Perry County, on the west by Hopewell Township, and on the east by Lower Mifflin. To the south is North Newton Township which is separated from Upper Mifflin by the Conodoguinet Creek.

At the time of the founding of Upper Mifflin the population was almost exclusively engaged in agriculture on family owned farms under 200 acres. Many of the farmers who lived near the mountain owned mountain ground where they cut wood for the winter and grazed their young cattle during the summer. Even when farming operations had been mechanized in other parts of the nation, the hilly ground and poverty of the farmers meant that horses and mules were an important part of the scene in Upper Mifflin.

Most of the farming families here were of German descent with a sprinkling of Scotch-Irish. They were general farmers and raised most of what they consumed, selling their surplus in the surrounding communities and shopping there when the small crossroads general stores did not stock what they needed. They took their grain to the mill to be ground for flour and feed for their stock. They grew, harvested, and preserved their fruits and vegetables for the winter, and raised pork, beef, and poultry for their families. Life was hard, but also rewarding for these self-reliant farmers.

The first paved road in the township was the Roxbury-Enola Highway, now Route 997. This was completed in the early 1930's. With the ending of World War II more roads were paved, and now most of the roads in the township are paved, the notable exceptions being in the game lands and in the mountain.

One of the most important events in the history of transportation in the United States occurred on October 27, 1938 on the Frank Eberly farm on Upper Mifflin. This was the ground breaking ceremony for the Pennsylvania Turnpike. Since the ceremony was so hastily arranged to comply with requirements for the federal funding, only a few person other than the officials involved were in attendance. Among these were Mr. and Mrs. Eberly and their five children. Because Mrs. Eberly had recognized the future importance of the future road she insisted that her husband bring the children from school so that they could be there to see history being made as a new era of road building was started.

In the late 1930's the Pennsylvania Game Commission began purchasing land for conservation and recreation. Now there are nearly 2500 acres of game lands in Upper Mifflin. This reduced the acreage devoted to agriculture as well as available land for housing causing a drop in population near the end of the Great Depression.

With the coming of World War II many changes occurred in Upper Mifflin. The young men had gone to war and the older folks and children pitched in to keep the farms and orchards in production, but new implements were unavailable so progress stood still.

After the war's end the availability of electricity, new automobiles, affordable land, and the increased number of black topped roads made living in a rural setting and attractive option for persons who were retreating from the stresses of urban and suburban life. Nor would they have to live in drafty homes

without central heating or indoor plumbing, they could live as well here as anywhere. The rush to the country began.

A more recent population change has been the influx of Amish families beginning in the 1960's. Initially these families were engaged in dairy farming, but the soil here was not nearly as productive as the farms of Lancaster County. Reliance on manpower and horsepower meant that production was not sufficient to make the farms profitable. As a result, some families moved away and some adapted their skills to other occupations. Although a few of Upper Mifflin's Amish families are still engaged in farming, more of them are now practicing the building trades.

In the early days of the township there were four one-room schools, at Bridgewater, Mount Hope, Westfield and Whiskey Run. At that time only a few persons continued their education beyond one-room schools. During the first part of the twentieth century some students did attend high schools in nearby towns. Their families had to provide transportation or they stayed with relatives who lived near the school they had chosen to attend. Other students attended the Cumberland Valley Normal School in Shippensburg.

At the turn of the century the one-room schools and the small country churches at Mount Hope, Tabor, and Guisetown were centers of social activity in the township, and families made social activities of their farm work. The threshing dinners and husking bees were as eagerly anticipated as the church picnics and spelling bees.

A very important organization in the social life of the township is the Mifflin Athletic Association. In 1919 some of the young people who met to sing, pull taffy and just socialize decided to form an athletic association. Although there wasn't any playing floor available the boys purchased a basketball and baskets and played in a wagon shed with a ground floor. The spectators sat above the dressing room protected from hits by the ball by chicken wire. In 1921 the team played outside teams, and girls' teams were organized. In 1923 the association moved to their new gymnasium above the wagon shed of J.A. Brandt. This was their home until it burned in 1940. In 1946 the group reorganized to build a new community center which still serves the area. Although there are no longer organized sports, the buildings, pavilion, and grounds are used for family reunions, meetings, and the annual fair in July.

In 1944 the township began providing bus transportation to Newville High School, and the educational level of the population climbed steadily ever since. After the Big Spring Jointure was formed in the 1950's the one-room schools closed. Now even the elementary students are bussed out of the township, and the one-room schools have been converted to houses.

Upper Mifflin Township is now largely a bedroom community whose residents work, shop, and attend social activities elsewhere. It remains an attractive rural area with houses scattered among the remaining farms and vacation homes in the mountain.