

## The Village of Muddy Creek Forks, PA

The community of Muddy Creek Forks has long been a center of activity for the rural area which surrounds it. As early as the 1750s a mill (known then as Denny's Mill) was located where the north and south branches of Muddy Creek meet. When the first election under the new constitution of the United States was held in 1789, Muddy Creek Forks was one of just three polling places in York County.

In December 1874 life in the rural village of Muddy Creek Forks was transformed by the arrival of the narrow gauge Peach Bottom Railway. Where once only subsistence farming and the milling of local grain were possible, because goods could not be transported to market, suddenly the city of York became a short, easy trip. With the completion of the Maryland Central Railroad in 1884, a good connection to Baltimore was also available. Conversion to standard gauge and unification of the line from Baltimore to York as the Maryland & Pennsylvania Railroad in 1901 brought access to national markets for rural areas of York, Harford, and Baltimore Counties.



In 1888 an enterprising young businessman named Alexander M. Grove saw the opportunity rail transportation offered, purchased the village, and set about transforming the community. He converted the old two-story mill with traditional mill stones to a three floor, up-to-date roller mill. A grain elevator was added to buy local grain and ship it out on the railroad. A huge new store was built which sold everything from food and fabric to reins and bridles. Anticipating the modern megastores by about a century, the A. M. Grove Store had available everything the community needed to buy for themselves, their families, and their farms. Muddy Creek Forks also contained a seed and fertilizer business, the fertile lowlands were farmed and livestock was raised, and coal was brought in to heat homes. Around the turn of the century A. M. Grove was one of the founders of the York Eastern Telephone Company with exchanges in Fawn Grove, Brogue, and Airville.

The impact on families in the area was remarkable. Dairy farming, which was impractical earlier, became a big business, not only for Muddy Creek Forks, but especially for Harford and Baltimore Counties in Maryland. A Baltimore dairy built a milk collection building in Muddy Creek Forks to keep the milk chilled while waiting for the train to pick it up. A cannery was built in the village to prepare vegetables for market. Grain and milled flour were shipped out by the boxcar load. Families were able to specialize their production of goods,

knowing that they would have income from sales to purchase the other necessities and some luxuries.

The railroad not only took goods to market, but it also broadened the horizons for the whole community. Before the advent of the railroad, people were limited to their local communities for most of the year. A trip to York or Baltimore was a major undertaking. But with inexpensive and relatively rapid transportation everything changed. People could go to one of the big cities for a day and return on one of the six daily passenger trains. Even such things as getting to piano lessons or attending a better school were made possible.

The quantity and quality of the things people could purchase was also improved by having access to more rapid transportation. If the store at Muddy Creek Forks did not have the item desired they sent a clerk on the train to York to purchase it for the customer. With the advent of telephone service the process was simplified further. A. M. Grove simply called York and the merchandise was shipped down on the train. This meant that the people in the community could devote their time to the business of running their farms and local businesses.

A. M. Grove and his brother James ran the businesses in the village, and they hired many employees to help. The store had four or five clerks and was open from 6 a.m. until the last customer left, which was often not until around 11 p.m. On July, 1906 A. M. Grove organized several area merchants to agree to close at 7:00 pm on Monday, Wednesday and Fridays. The miller and the warehouseman worked very long hours, especially in the months during and right after the harvest. In addition to running the grain elevator and fertilizer warehouse, the warehouseman was paid to help assemble farm machinery and other items which were ordered by customers and which arrived in boxes unassembled. He was assisted by one of the farmers. The farmers also helped unload fertilizer from the arriving boxcars and shovel coal into the coal bins from the railroad gondolas.

A. M. Grove lived to be 76 years old. After his death in 1935 his brother James and his son-in-law Kerr Warfield continued running the businesses. In 1947 the village was sold to James and Mamie Keiser, who continued to operate the fertilizer business, the grain elevator, the Post Office, and a greatly reduced general store.

In the early twentieth century, Muddy Creek Forks was prosperous, and it was served well by the Ma & Pa Railroad. However, as automobiles and trucks became more prevalent and roads better surfaced, the surrounding community developed alternative access to markets. Nonetheless, the village remained a community center until the closing of the general store in 1983. The railroad's contract to carry the mail was lost to a trucking firm in 1954. At that time passenger service on the Ma & Pa was discontinued and, in 1958, the Maryland District was abandoned. Freight continued to be carried between York and Whiteford, Maryland, and the Keiser's fertilizer business was one of the last receivers of incoming freight south of Red Lion. Traffic on the railroad gradually dwindled. In 1978 the Ma & Pa discontinued service south of Red Lion and Muddy Creek Forks languished until its purchase by the Maryland & Pennsylvania Railroad Preservation Society in 1992.

Now the Ma & Pa Railroad Heritage Village welcomes visitors, with train rides for all, restored buildings to explore, special events to enjoy, knowledgeable historical interpreters to share information about the heyday of the village (around 1915), and a museum full of antiques, railroad artifacts, and milling equipment. Muddy Creek Forks is alive with countless people coming to climb the stairs to the A. M. Grove General Store to begin their Journey in Time.