

"R.F.D in Carroll County"

Carroll County Times Article for 10 January 1999

By Jay A. Graybeal

1999 will mark the centennial of the inauguration of county-wide Rural Free Delivery service in the United States. The selection of Carroll County for the first service was due to the efforts of Edwin Wilmer Shriver of Westminster. Shriver had proposed plan for a county-wide delivery system that was accepted by the Post Office Department in 1898. A cornerstone of his plan was a postal wagon of his own design he called "The Post Office on Wheels". The horse drawn vehicle was equipped with an open driver's seat and a central work and storage area with counter, drawers and letter boxes for Shriver. Westminster carriage makers Herr Bros., completed the mail wagon in early 1899 and Shriver made his first run on Easter Monday 1899. The March 25th issue of the Democratic Advocate newspaper carried story about the upcoming event:

"The Postoffice on Wheels, as shown in the accompanying cut, was conceived and designed by Mr. Edwin W. Shriver, of Westminster. The idea came to him last summer during some leisure moments, and he mentioned it to Mr. A. W. Machen, superintendent of the Free Delivery System of the Postoffice Department, whose summer home is in this city. Mr. Machen at once became interested in the plan and requested Mr. Shriver to work out details and submit his plans in writing to the department. Mr. Shriver did so, including a design of a mail wagon, map of proposed route and cost of operating route. The Department thought favorably of the scheme and decided to make a trial of the experiment. Mr. Shriver was directed to make out specifications for building a wagon and to obtain bids for its construction. Herr Bros., of Westminster, were the successful bidders, and an order for the wagon was given to them last December for its construction. Work was begun at once, under Mr. Shriver's personal supervision, and the wagon is completed and ready for the road. It was ready, in reality, some weeks ago, but postal affairs in Cuba and Porto Rico engaged Mr. Machen's attention and the wagon was not started. Postmaster Milton Schaeffer, of Westminster, took much interest in the new postal scheme, and has been aiding Mr. Shriver and the postoffice Department in arranging the route and getting matters in shape for a trial of the experiment. He and Mr. Shriver were both at the Postoffice Department on Wednesday.

Description of Wagon

The wagon is a handsome one. It is eight feet long, painted blue, with black trimmings. The running-gear is yellow, with red stripes. On the doors on each side, and on the back, are the words, in white letters, "U.S. Mail Postal Wagon." The inside is fitted up with counter, drawers and letter boxes, of different sizes. In the back are sixteen boxes, mostly large, and in front are forty-two boxes, all zinc lined. The wagon is a credit to the builders. It was put up according to specifications, but both the designer and builders see that a lighter wagon would do. Experience, too, will probably suggest some changes that will make the wagons more convenient and less expensive.

When the Wagon Will Start.

The wagon will be started on Monday, April 3, leaving Westminster at 8 a.m. The route will be to Warfieldsburg, to Baile, to Denning's, to Taylorsville, via Crawford's Store, arriving at Westminster about 5 o'clock p.m., in time to meet evening mails east and west. The length of the route will be thirty miles. It is designed to put up mail boxes every half mile, making sixty in all, and some, if not all, will be put up

before the wagon starts out. Persons who desire to have their mail delivered to them can have it done free of cost by simply putting up boxes along the route. The boxes should have locks on them, also. Persons putting up boxes should have their names on them, and have them up by April 3d. Mr. Shriver will be over the route several times next week, and will give information as to mails and boxes to any one desiring it.

Not much change will be made, for the present, in the mail system affecting the route where the wagon will run. Mail from Baltimore and points beyond, for Taylorsville and Winfield, instead of being sent by the Baltimore & Ohio railroad to Hood's Mill, and thence to those offices by star route carrier, will be sent to Westminster, and thence by the Postoffice-on-Wheels. By this arrangement mail will reach Taylorsville and Winfield from one to two hours earlier than by the present arrangement. Mr. E. W. Shriver will be the mail clerk, and will have as his assistant Mr. Horace G. Reese, son of the late David Reese, of Meadow Branch. Mr. Reese is now in the graduating class at Western Maryland College. He will learn the route and the handling of the mails, so as to be able to take Mr. Shriver's place whenever it may be necessary, on account of absence or sickness. On the first trip, on April 3d, Mr. Shriver will have with in the wagon, besides Mr. Reese, Mr. A. M. Machen, the Superintendent of the Free Delivery System. In other vehicles will be Mr. Milton Schaefer, postmaster of Westminster, some officials from the Postoffice Department at Washington, a porter and an artist from the Baltimore American, and others.

Will Probably Revolutionize the Rural Postal System

If the Postoffice on Wheels proves the success it is expected it will revolutionize the mail system in rural sections, for its use will be gradually extended to the whole country. By its introduction the present star-route mail carriers will be superceded and cross road and roadside postoffices will be abolished. The introduction of the Postoffice-on-Wheels will also cause a great saving to the government, and will greatly reduce the labor in the Postoffice Department at Washington. Under the present system fourth-class postoffices are very numerous and new ones are being continually established. The continual increase is adding continually to the work of the Department. Every postmaster must give a bond, which must be recorded and filed, and a separate account be kept with every office. The postmasters are allowed the proceeds of all stamps sold, up to \$100, and as fully one-half of them do not sell over the amount the government receives no return for the stamps furnished. Besides, the lack of business knowledge and business system upon the part of many fourth-class postmaster results in confusion of accounts and in reports which necessitates much correspondence, and carelessness in handling mail matter frequently results in complaints that must be investigated by the Department. Another important annoyance will be avoided, too, by the abolishment of a large number of fourth-class postoffices-that is the contention over appointments. These offices give politicians, great and small, a great deal of trouble, frequently involving congressmen, and creating discontent and turmoil in parties. The introduction of the Postoffice-on-Wheels will reduce this annoyance at least three-fourths, and for this reason alone the wagon will be welcomed by district, county and state political leaders. Dispensing party patronage is always a disagreeable matter, and rarely fails to cause trouble and weaken the party in power. The greater the patronage the greater the source of weakness.

Besides the saving to the government the design of the Postoffice-on-Wheels is to facilitate the receiving and dispatching of mails. Daily mails will be carried to the very doors, almost, of the rural population, whereas at many offices mails are received only two or three times a week, and some of the people have

to go a mile or two to get their mail. In addition, facilities for transmitting money by mail, in the shape of money orders or postal notes, will be supplied to the people, who will be able to get them from the postal clerk in the wagon.

*The cut of the wagon seems to have gone astray through transmission and was not received up to one hour of going to press. It should have been received on Thursday."

Although the illustration was lost, Shriver kept his way and completed his journey on Easter Monday. Next week's column will a period description of his historic trip.

Photo caption: Edwin W, Shriver's Post Office on Wheels" was built by Herr Bros. (later Herr & Babylon), W. Main St., Westminster. J. Leland Jordan Collection, Historical Society of Carroll County.