

"The Postoffice on Wheels"

Carroll County Times Article for 1 November 1998

By Jay A. Graybeal

The November 5, 1898 issue of the Westminster Democratic Advocate newspaper carried a story under the headline of "CARROLL COUNTY AHEAD." which detailed Edwin W. Shriver's upcoming experiment with his "Postoffice on Wheels":

"An Important Postoffice Experiment to be Made from Westminster—If Successful It Will be Adopted Throughout the Country.

A few of the intimate friends of Mr. Edwin W. Shriver, of this city, have known for some months that he was perfecting plans for a "Postoffice on Wheels," and that he had submitted the same to the Postoffice Department at Washington. On Tuesday the plan was accepted and Mr. Shriver was informed of it, and the information was given to the various newspaper correspondents in Washington. We copy the following from the Baltimore American of Wednesday:

To no department of the postoffice work is more time and attention devoted by the present administration than to the rural delivery. First Assistant Postmaster General Heath is constantly devising improvements in the service, and he is ably seconded by Superintendent of Free Delivery A. W. Machen.

Today Mr. Machen ordered the trial for experiment in free rural delivery, which, if it realizes even a part of what is claimed for it, will literally establish a postoffice on wheels for every country community contiguous to a country town of moderate size.

Mr. Machen has selected the town of Westminster as the central point of his experiment. He has closed a contract with Mr. Edwin W. Shriver, of that town, whereby Mr. Shriver, for \$1,375 per annum, binds himself to make a tour daily, except Sunday, over a circuit of more than thirty miles, collecting and delivering letters and mail of every other kind, issuing and paying out money orders, registering and delivering registered letters - in a word, performing for the farmers in the vicinity of Westminster all the functions performed by the postmaster at Westminster. Mr. Shriver is to furnish a two-horse covered wagon, the necessary assistance in the way of driver and postal clerk and is to establish a perambulatory postal service. He has designed a wagon expressly for the service not unlike the wagons employed in some of the larger cities used for collecting the mail and preparing it for forwarding en route.

MR. SHRIVER'S CIRCUIT

Mr. Shriver's wagon will leave Westminster at seven o'clock every morning except Sunday. Before the hour the last mail from Baltimore and the East has arrived. The local mails from the West and the star route mails are also in the office, and the mail for his route has been sorted out. He drives first to Frizellburg, which is four and a half miles from Westminster. Here he delivers all the mail for that office and takes up the mail intended for all the other points on his route, including Westminster. His next stopping point is Wakefield, five miles distant; then Medford, two and a half miles; then Avondale, two and a half miles; then Warfieldsburg, three miles; then Smallwood, four miles; then Reese, two miles, and thence back to Westminster, four miles, making a total circuit of thirty-one and a half miles. This is the circuit mapped out for the first or experimental route. If it succeeds similar routes will be established all over the county. Mr. Shriver's wagon has been built for him by the government, and it is

a provision of his contract that if the plan proves to be feasible the government will pay him a fixed sum for every wagon it builds for future routes.

It will require nine or ten hours for Mr. Shriver to make his route. He will return to Westminster every evening in time to catch the mail trains East and West. There are eight postoffices on his route. At every postoffice he will exchange mails. Thus, at Frizellburg he leaves the mail from Westminster for that office and for all the little offices between those two towns. He takes with him all mail from Frizellburg and the intermediate points between it and Westminster intended for other points on his route and all the railroad mail. As the service now exists, all matter for the points on the route are brought first to Westminster by the star routes and the railroads, and then sent out again. For example, a letter mailed today at Frizellburg for Smallwood goes back to Westminster, and is tomorrow delivered at its destination. Under the new system, Mr. Shriver's wagon picks up the letter at Frizellburg and carries it directly to Smallwood, delivering it a few hours after it has been mailed.

FARMERS CAN HAVE BOXES

Matter can be mailed at any point along the route where a person meets the mail wagon. Matter will be delivered at any point along the route where the person desiring his letters delivered will put up a suitable small box. Every farmer living within a mile or two of the route can put up a box with his name plainly marked on it, and Mr. Shriver will drop all mail intended for him in this box. There will also be made arrangements by which the wagon will collect all letters left in these boxes. It is intended that farmers desiring to adopt this easy method of receiving or sending mail will provide Mr. Shriver with a duplicate key to their letter box, so that he can unlock the box and take out letters to be forwarded. Villages along the route that have no postoffices can thus supply themselves with a daily postal service. Farmers living along the route thus have a quick communication with one another, which is impossible under the old system. Money orders and registered letters will be delivered by Mr. Shriver, and he will be appointed a postal clerk to authorize him to issue money orders and register letters. If the project turns out successfully, as the department believes it will, every farmer along the route will have as complete a daily postal service as the resident of any city."

Shriver's experiment was successful and led to Carroll County having the first county wide system of rural Free Delivery in December 1899. Shriver later assisted with the development of rural free delivery in other parts of Maryland and in other states.

Photo caption: Edwin W. Shriver experimented with the "Postoffice on Wheels" in November 1898 led to the development of Rural Free Delivery in 1899. Historical Society of Carroll County collection.