Muncie's Postal History
By: Chris Flook

Muncie's postal history goes back to the beginning of Delaware County with the establishment of the first post office in 1828. This was only a few decades after Congress initiated the United States Post Office Department in 1792 with the Postal Service Act. Signed by President Washington, the Postal Service Act was a result of clause 7, section 8, article 1 of the U.S. Constitution, which grants Congress the power to "establish post offices and post roads."

Muncie's first post office existed in a room at the office of the Delaware County Clerk - William VanMatre. VanMatre also served as Muncietown's first postmaster. In these early years, the postmasters had some difficulty in determining a correct spelling for Muncietown (as it was first known). The local government spelled the city *Muncietown*, while the post office was established as *Munseytown*. The early settlers, the literate ones anyways, spelled the community *Munsee Town*. It wasn't officially resolved until 1838 as *Muncietown* by then postmaster Edward Keasby. In 1845, Keasby shortened the name to *Muncie*, reflecting legislation passed in the General Assembly, which truncated the name of Muncietown to Muncie.

The post "office" seemed to move around a bit in the decades before the Gas Boom, often to best serve the needs of the early postmasters. It was thought that when a new postmaster took office, he would often just move postal operations to the location of his existing commercial enterprise. This of course was a convenience for the postmaster in terms of operational logistics, but had the added benefit of bringing in customers to his non-postal business. If you had something to mail, why not buy a beer to go with it? For instance, the fifth Muncietown postmaster, Amariah Cubberly, was a tavern owner and moved the post office into his bar on Main street. This practice continued for many years with the post office residing in a doctor's office in 1829 (Dickison Burt - second postmaster), Charles Willard's storefront in 1835 (Willard was the third postmaster), a hat store at the corner of Main and Mulberry streets in 1837 (Edward Keasby - sixth postmaster), and a harness shop in 1847 (John Brady - eighth postmaster). Naturally, being postmaster became a coveted position.

By 1872, the post office had moved into a room at the *Times* building on the corner of Walnut and Main streets. In 1888, the city was growing rapidly and the office was moved to the Anthony Block briefly, before moving to 415 South Walnut street.

The postmasters during Muncie's first hundred years were a veritable who's-who of local politics including: William VanMatre (1828-1829); Dickison Burt (1829-1835); Charles Willard (1835-1837); Samuel Harlin (1837); Amariah Cubberly (1837); Edward Keasby (1837-1847); John Ethel (1847); John Brady (1847-1861); Robert Richey (1861-1865); Samuel Watson

(1865-1866); Henry Marsh (1866-1875); John Eiler (1875-1883); Robert Patterson (1883-1887); John Banta (1887-1891); Frank Ellis (1891-1895); Edward Tuhey (1895-1899); David Cammack (1899-1903); David Lambert (1903-1907); Robert White (1907-1911); Robert Williamson (1911-1915); Frank Haimbaugh (1915-1923); W.H. Williams (1923-1931); and Ira Wilson (1931-1937).

All of the other Delaware County communities established post offices as well including: Albany in 1854, Anthony in 1850, Bell Creek in 1856, Blaineton in 1880, Brandywine in 1820, Cammack in 1882, Cologne in 1870, Corinth in 1879, Cowan in 1869, Cranberry in 1834, Crossroads in 1879, Daleville in 1857, De Soto in 1881, Eaton in 1856, Etna in 1902, New Corner/Gaston in 1852, Gates in 1898, Gibson in 1854, Granville in 1840, Harrison in 1852, Hasel in 1896, Hupften in 1852, Macedonia in 1878, New Burlington in 1838, Niles in 1852, Oakville in 1876, Phillips in 1903, Pleasant Woods in 1849, Progress in 1900, Reed (Station) in 1876, Rich Woods in 1843, Rival in 1900, Royerton in 1869, Selma in 1853, Sharon in 1853, Shideler in 1871, Smithfield in 1830, Stockport in 1892, Stout in 1886, Tabor in 1880, West Muncie in 1893, Wheeling in 1838, and Yorktown in 1836. A rural office was established near Cowan in 1937 and lasted until 1969. Most of these post offices, like the small communities they were placed in, have disappeared.

For rural farmers that lived outside of platted communities, the Post Office Department created the Rural Free Delivery (RFD) program in 1899. The RFD was developed nationally by Perry Heath, the first assistant postmaster general for the USPOD. Heath, oddly enough, was born in Delaware County. In an 1899 report, he cites the following early RFD routes in Delaware County: the Albany Route (1897) served 500 people along 20 miles; the Daleville Route (1897) served 275 people along 16 miles; the Eaton Route (1897) served 250 people along 18.5 miles; the rural Muncie Route (1898) served 500 along 24 miles; the Muncie Extension Route (1898) served 350 people; and the Selma Route (1897) served 500 people along 16 miles. By 1908, there were at least 30 Rural Free Delivery Routes in Delaware County.

As the county and city grew, it became apparent that existing postal facilities were woefully inadequate. In 1904, the United States Post Department began construction on a Federal Building (the Old Post Office) at the corner of Charles and High streets, which is now home to the Horizon Convention Center and the Muncie and Delaware County Chamber of Commerce. Finished in 1907, the building is a fantastic example of the beaux-arts and Italian renaissance architectural styles. It was designed by the Office of Supervising Architect - a now defunct agency on the United States Treasury Department. The OSA was tasked with constructing federal buildings and post offices around the country. An addition was made in the 1930s.

Muncie's post office resided here until 1979, after the current facility was built on Memorial Drive in 1973. The Old Post Office building was purchased by the McKay family and was later sold to create the Horizon Convention Center.