Valleys of the Susquehanna

# POST OFFICE ART

## Road Trip

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## Road Trip

Here in the Valleys of the Susquehanna, we are fortunate to have so many picturesque and stately small towns. One of the many pleasures of visiting these communities is walking around our traditional town centers. Each has its own assortment of commercial and residential buildings, but the one feature we all have in common is the post office, which was intended to be a "federal presence" in the heart of a community.

While strolling through our towns in central Pennsylvania, enjoy the variety of architectural styles and details of these buildings. Venture inside, where you may be surprised to find beautiful and significant works of art usually found in galleries and museums.

Such works of art were created during the New Deal Era when the federal government commissioned artists to create murals and sculpture inspired by the community in which they were displayed. These visiting artists would live in the community for weeks at a time, actively engaging citizens and resident historians in dialogue to discover the history, traditions and stories that helped shape their community. Each masterpiece of post office art is more than paint or plaster, bronze or marble. It is the visual representation of the story that makes each town unique and memorable. Travel back in time and enjoy the beautifully rendered scenes of our agricultural and industrial heritage.

The following roadtrip features eleven post offices. Eight of these feature artworks from the New Deal Era (Bloomsburg, Danville, Mifflinburg, Milton, Muncy, Northumberland, Renovo, and Selinsgrove). The other three (Bellefonte, Lewisburg, and Williamsport) are wonderful examples of federal architecture.

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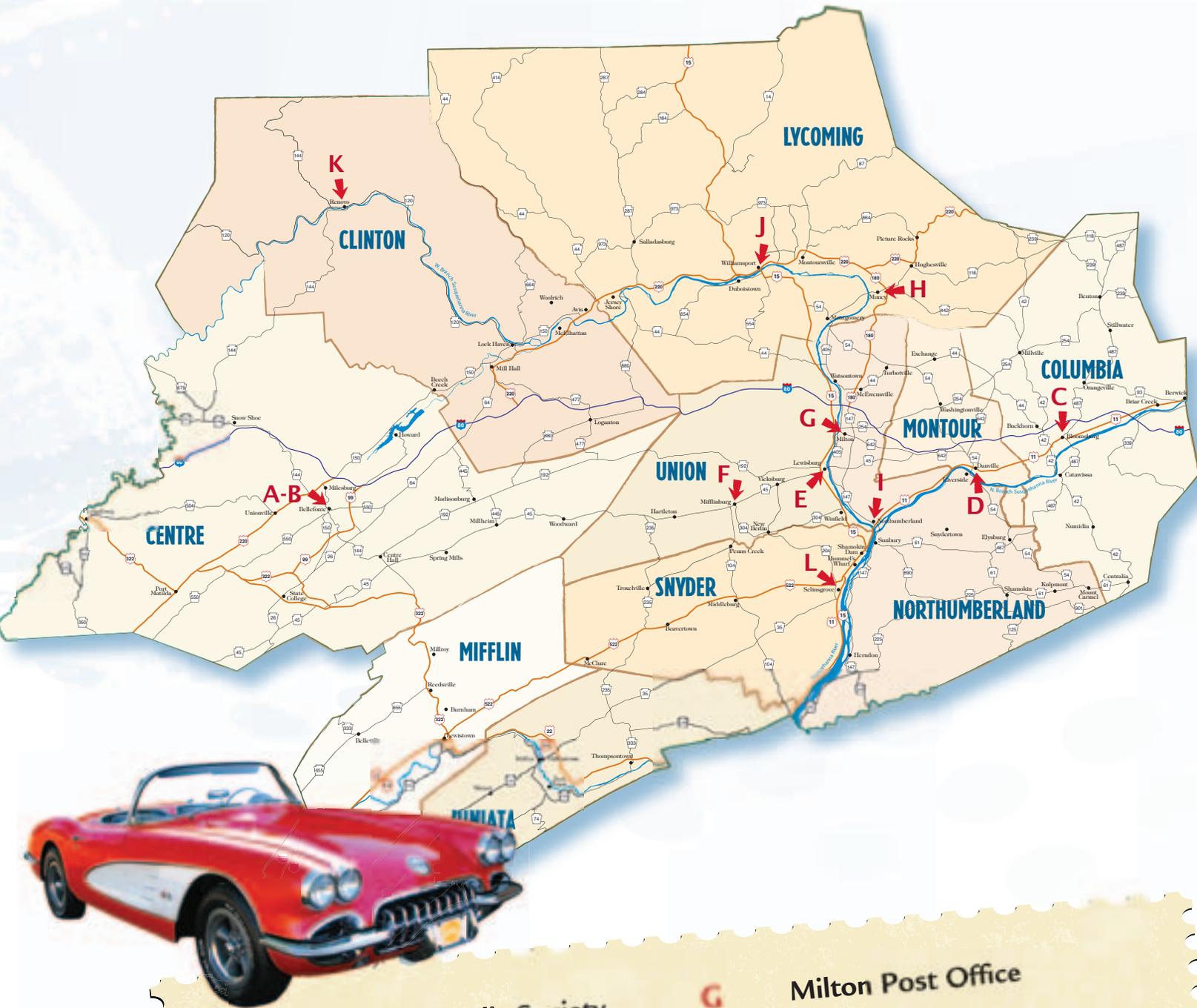
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# American Philatelic Society

**100 Match Factory Place**
**Bellefonte, PA 16823-1367**
**814-933-3803**
**Tollfree: 800-782-9580**
**http://www.stamps.org/TheAPS/index.htm**

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For the past thirty-five years, the Headsvillle, West Virginia, Post Office served as an exhibition and working U.S. Post Office at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, showcasing its dual role as a country store and rural mail center. The museum is currently undergoing a major two-year renovation project and the post office was closed in late July. The American Philatelic Society proposed relocating the nineteenth-century West Virginia post office and general store — which was operated from the early 1860s until 1914 — to the American Philatelic Center in Bellefonte, Pennsylvania.

Under the relocation plan, the Headsville Post Office finds a new home just off an open-air patio in a room specially constructed to showcase the tiny building, as well as to preserve it. When visitors enter the store, they will take a step back in time to the Civil War era and rediscover the role the postal service played in our nation's growth.

Sharp-eyed stamp collectors will find the building familiar — its interior was featured on the 1972 8-cent stamp issued to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Mail Order Industry. Many of the store's original fixtures will be on display in its new location.

The Headsville Post Office not only is an attraction for visitors, it also will be used as a contract postal facility for the APS. Its loan from the National Museum of American History and its display at the APC is consistent with the educational mission of the Society and serves as the next natural step in the evolution of the American Philatelic Center located in the historic Match Factory complex in Bellefonte, Pennsylvania. The Headsville Post Office Project is the centerpiece of the next phase of the Campaign for Philately to raise $10 million over a ten-year period. Up to $350,000 will be utilized for the project for the environmentally friendly home for the Headsville Post Office which addresses light, humidity, heating issues, as well as the physical relocation of the 540-square-foot board-and-batten structure and its furnishings.

# Bellefonte Post Office

**132 North Allegheny Street**
**Bellefonte, PA 16823**
**814-355-2821**

**B**

Bellefonte is the county seat of Centre County with a magnificent courthouse in the center of town. One block away is this beautiful limestone post office. With it's monumental scale, it dominates the area yet it harmonizes with many nearby buildings which are also limestone and similar architecturally. Three limestone houses were razed on the site, and the some of the stone was used in the construction of the post office. The custom carved eagle above the entrance was originally too large to fit into the gap of the broken pediment and had to be returned to the carver to have the wings reduced.

The completion of post office was usually celebrated with a formal dedication. Bellefonte's post office was dedicated on July 4, 1933 with a cornerstone-laying ceremony and attended by over 3000 people. Two bands performed and speakers included two congressmen, a judge, chief attorney for the Post Office Department, and the local Methodist minister, who gave the invocation.

# Bloomsburg Post Office

© C

## SCULPTURE

*Title: Pennsylvania Farming*
*Artist: Roy King*
*Date: 1937*
*Medium: Wood relief (walnut)*

In *Pennsylvania Farming*, sculptor Roy King (1906–?) depicts a local farmer and his livestock. The flat relief and subject matter are reminiscent of the farm scenes and *Peaceable Kingdoms* of the Pennsylvania folk painter, Edward Hicks. King's sculpture combines rural idyll with the promise of an abundant dinner table.

The following letter from King to Edward Rowan in the Treasury Department provides an interesting account of the artist's research and proposal for subject matter:

*Dear Mr. Rowan:*

*A sketch in plaster with a layout of the proposed panel for the Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania post office is being sent for your approval.*

*A few weeks ago I visited the post office at Bloomsburg. After discussions with the editor of the local newspaper, the postmaster, chief librarian and other old residents who are all proud of the agricultural background of the town I came to the conclusion that this is the kind of subject they would like portrayed in the post office.*

*Bloomsburg seems to be one of the few Pennsylvania towns in that section that is not supported by the mining industry. That the people take a great pride in the looks of the town is evidenced by the unusual number of freshly painted buildings ...Old Senator Beulow who founded the township and wrote the constitution of the state was born there, but they don't want him immortalized in their post office, chiefly on account of the difficulties caused by his plan of town government.*

About the post office: Bloomsburg's Colonial-revival style post office is a handsome addition to the streetscape. The red brick and white trim harmonize with nearby buildings. The triangular pediment and fan light echo the pediment and arched windows of the public library the across the street. Like Roy King's sculpture for the Bloomsburg post office, Edward Hicks depicts a frieze-like procession of livestock. Although the figures in the background appear to be wealthy gentleman farmers as opposed to the working farm family in King's sculpture. Edward Hicks was a devout Quaker and sign painter who lived in Bucks County.

# Danville Post Office

**200 Mill Street**
**Danville, PA 17821**
**Phone: 570-275-2661**

**LOBBY HOURS:**
**M-F 5:30am–5:30pm**
**Sa 5:30am-3:00pm**
**Closed Sunday**
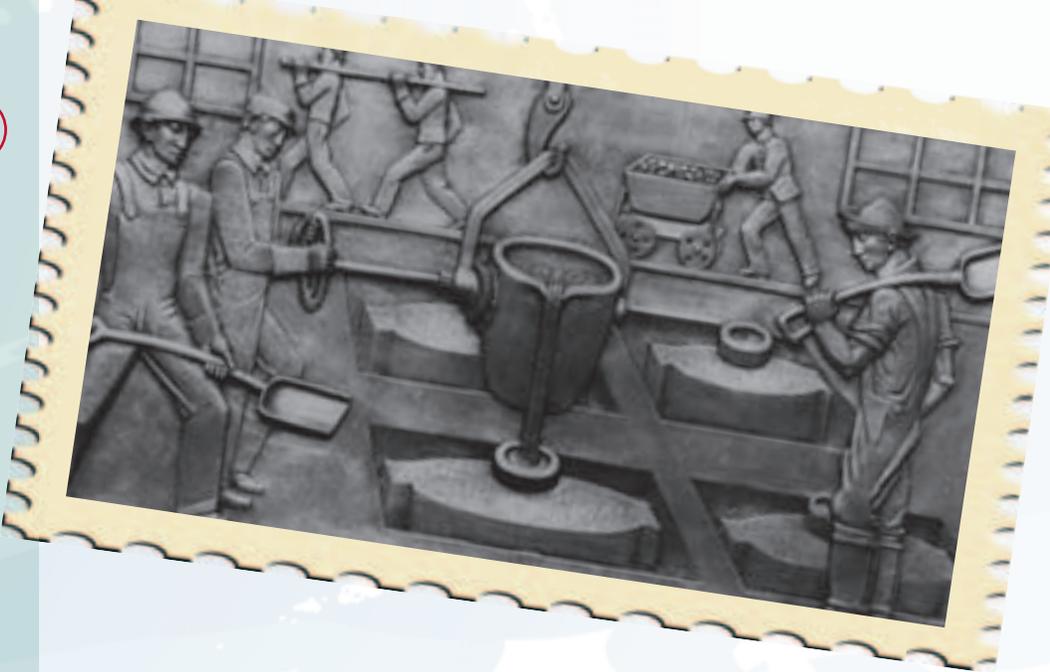
SCULPTURE
*Title: Iron Pouring*
*Artist: Jean deMarco*
*Date: 1940*
*Medium: Cast aluminum*

*Iron Pouring* depicts Danville's most important industry from the 19th century. The sculpture was originally to be cast in stone but the artist, Jean de Marco, persuaded the Treasury Department to allow him to cast it in more expensive aluminum, to better suggest the molten iron.

In the 19th century, Danville was a major center of iron manufacturing. The advance of the iron era led to Danville's greatest contribution to America's expansion, the manufacturing of T-rails for railroad track. With the help of English experts, Danville produced the nations first T-rail. The manufacturing of the T-rail created great demand and contributed to the growth of the railroads, while providing employment for more than 1,100 people in the community.

About the artist: Jean Antoine de Marco (1898–1990) was born and educated in Paris and enjoyed a long and productive career as an artist. His other commissions for the Treasury Department include plaster sculptures for the Weldon, North Carolina post office and the State Department Building in Washington, DC.

About the post office: Unlike many other small towns in the region, Danville was eager to modernize the 19th century storefronts. Many shops on Mill Street were updated with streamlined facades in the 1920s and 30s. In order to harmonize with this modernized streetscape, the Treasury Department chooses a more contemporary, streamlined design from its stock plans.

# Lewisburg Post Office and Courthouse

(E)

Sometimes the Treasury Department constructed a building to house both a post office and a courthouse. This configuration is more prevalent in larger urban centers like Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, but can sometimes be found in smaller towns like Lewisburg.

In this case, the building must express the dignity and solemnity of the judicial system. The four-story neoclassical building, the tallest on Market Street, dominates the heart of the business district. The Post Office/Courthouse distinguishes itself from its commercial neighbors by the 10-step elevated entrance, massive Doric columns, and brass doors. And yet, while clearly expressing its importance, the building harmonizes with the nearby Omega and Sovereign banks which also employ neoclassical columns and detailing.

The Lewisburg Post Office/Courthouse and nearby banks form an impressive grouping of neoclassical buildings in the center of town. It is larger and taller than the surrounding buildings, expressing its importance as a center of federal activities. Details, such as the massive Doric columns of the Sovereign Bank and the decorative balustrade at the roofline of the Omega Bank, are echoed in the Lewisburg Post Office/Courthouse.

# Mifflinburg Post Office Ⓕ

SCULPTURE

*Title: Pioneers of the Community*
*Artist: (Marguerite) Bennett Kassler*
*Date: 1941*
*Medium: Plaster reliefs*

In this series of panels, the women are carding, spinning, weaving yarn and preparing food, and the men are hunting, plowing and laying brick. The installation of this work is unusual in that it was designed to be placed above the long wall above the clerks' windows instead of on the short wall above the postmaster's door. Composed of four plaster panels — two squarish center panels, flanked by two narrower rectangular ones — it spreads across the wall above the window clerks. Men, shown hunting and building, are on the left, while the women cook and serve, and weave and spin on the two right panels. The outermost flanking panels are painted in nearly monochromatic earth tones, focusing attention to the center by the directional gaze of the subjects. The center panels include brighter colors and are formally united by a blue semi-circle in the background. This work is much more stylized than the other sculpture in the area. The planes of the surfaces tilt and overlap. The figures are shown in profile or frontally, with simplified contours, like stained glass windows, and like Henry Chapman Mercer's tile mosaic floor in the Harrisburg State Capitol.

About the post office: The Mifflinburg post office is a charming Colonial-revival style building. Unlike many other post offices from this era, the lobby is largely intact and remarkably well preserved. A few years ago a group of residents formed to landscape the property. They also successfully lobbied to have the building restored. The roof, copula, entrance doorway, and windows were replaced with materials similar to the originals.

# Milton Post Office

**G**

29 North Front Street
Milton, PA 17847
570-742-7301

**LOBBY HOURS**
**Daily: 5:00am–8:00pm**

SCULPTURE
*Milton topography (bronze plaque)*
*Native Americans (2 reliefs), Mail transportation (5 reliefs)*
*Artist: Louis A. Maene*
*Date: 1936*
*Medium: Bronze and limestone*

This is the only example of exterior decoration in the region. Five bas relief panels represent the past and present modes of mail transportation and two show Native Americans. The most successful post office artworks always incorporate the architecture into their design. The Milton post office best demonstrated this principle, since the sculpture is actually part of the façade. The artwork, commissioned under the Treasury Relief Art Project, allowed the architect, Harry Sternfeld, to work with a sculptor of his choosing, rather than having to rely on an artist selected by competition. Detailed drawings of the relief sculptures in the blueprints suggest that Sternfeld may have designed them as well.

Harry Sternfeld, (1887–1976) a Philadelphia native, received his undergraduate and graduate degrees at The University of Pennsylvania. In addition to the Milton Post Office, Sternfeld designed the William Penn Annex Post Office and Courthouse (Philadelphia, 1941). It is interesting to see Sternfeld's 1934 sketches for the William Penn Annex published in the architecture magazine Pencil Points. It shows a building very much like Milton's post office: an Art Deco structure with rounded corners, a pronounced entrance façade off to the left, and decorative bas reliefs above tall windows. The Annex, as built in 1941, is in the "classical moderne" style. While it lost the more distinctive Art Deco elements, it does have four stone reliefs representing mail delivery around the country, flanking two entrances.

The Milton post office is really a smaller scale version of what might have been built in downtown Philadelphia. The Milton post office is one of a few in the region which is not based on stock Treasury department plans. This is very unusual, as most private commissions, like the William Penn Annex, were reserved for larger cities.

# Muncy Post Office

(H)

**MURAL**

*Title: Rachel Silverthorne's Ride*
*Artist: John W. Beauchamp*
*Date: 1938*
*Medium: Oil on canvas*

**LOBBY HOURS**
**Mon–Fri: 7:00am–5:00pm**
**Saturday: 8:00am–1:30pm**
**Sunday: closed**

The Muncy Post Office houses a dramatic mural that relates the story of a local heroine. In July of 1778, a combined force of British Loyalists and Indians massacred settlers in the Wyoming Valley. General Washington was unable to spare any of his troops to protect the people of the Susquehanna Valley but sent Captain John Brady home to organize a group of volunteers in the Muncy area. For days Captain Brady watched settlers from the north take boats down river to the protection offered by Fort Augusta at Sunbury. In late July help finally came when Captain Andrew Walker arrived with a squad of soldiers and orders to build Fort Muncy. As work on the fort progressed, soldiers were deployed to protect the settlers who were busily harvesting crops.

On August 8, 1778, a band of Indians attacked a group of settlers and soldiers who were working at the mouth of the Loyalsock Creek. During the attack they killed several men and mortally wounded Captain Brady's son. By that afternoon a survivor reached Fort Muncy with the news of the massacre. As a small group of settlers gathered around the Fort, Captain Brady asked for a volunteer to ride up Muncy Creek to warn the settlers who were next to be attacked. Offering his own white mare for the journey, the Captain could still not find a person to warn the settlers. From the back of the group a young woman named Rachel Silverthorne sprang forward and mounted the Captain's horse. Before anyone could react Rachel was on the trail to warn all the settlers who were in danger. Rachel returned later that night after she had alerted the settlers, who were by now slipping under darkness to the safety of the Fort. When the next day dawned, the fires of burnt cabins could be seen on the horizon. The mural depicts Rachel on Captain Brady's white horse warning settlers to return to the fort.

About the artist: Very little information exists about John W. Beauchamp (1906–?). He painted murals in Utah and Viginia and worked as a printmaker for the WPA Federal Art Project.

About the post office: Muncy's Colonial Revival-style post office, with its red brick and divided light sash windows complements the 19th century buildings on Main Street.

Dr. Joseph Priestley
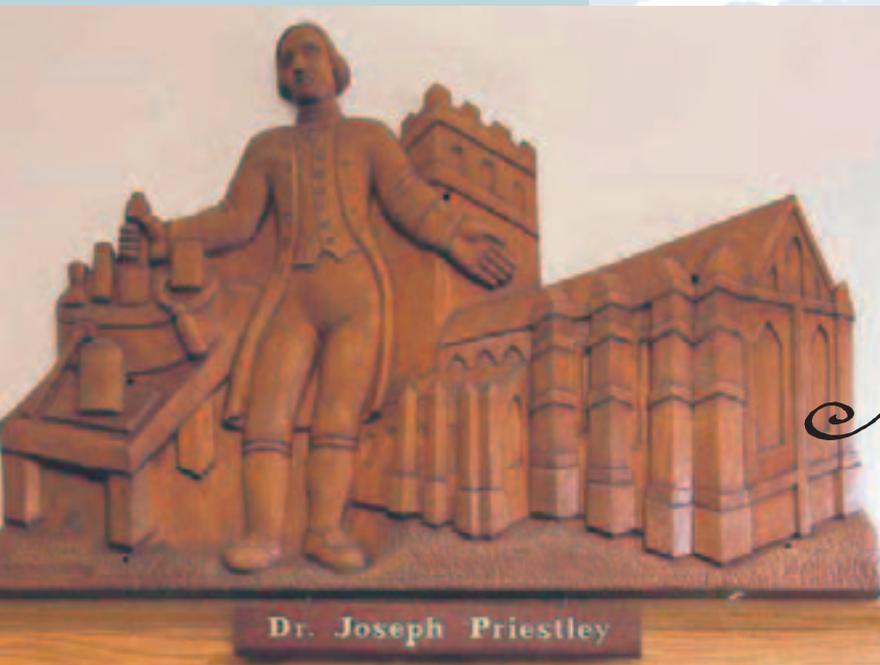
# Northumberland Post Office

**75 Queen Street**
**Northumberland, PA 17857**
**570-473-3581**

**LOBBY HOURS**
**Daily: 5:00am - 8:00pm**

SCULPTURE
*Title: Dr. Joseph Priestley*
*Artist: Dina Melicov*
*Date: 1942*
*Medium: Red mahogany relief*

This sculpture depicts the town's most famous citizen, Dr. Joseph Priestley (1733–1804). Priestley was born in England near Leeds but his political and religious views were unpopular in his native country. He was a supporter of the French and American revolutions and a liberal pastor of a small dissenting church. Priestley left for America after an angry mob burned his house, eventually settling in Northumberland in 1794. Inspired by his friend Benjamin Franklin, Priestley began scientific experiments involving electricity and chemistry. Joseph Priestley is most famous for discovering oxygen. He also isolated and described the properties of ammonia, sulphur dioxide, hydrogen sulfide, carbon dioxide, and carbon monoxide. Priestley also discovered that India gum could rub out pencil marks and thus invented the eraser.

Artist Dina Melicov depicts Joseph Priestley flanked by symbols of his life's work. On the left is the workbench Priestley used in his Pennsylvania laboratory. The portion on the right depicts Priestley's church.

Joseph Priestley's house and laboratory are maintained as a museum by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. For more information, visit: www.phmc.state.pa.us.

About the post office: Northumberland's charming post office with its wood detailing is reminiscent of the vernacular wooden houses and railroad buildings in town.

# Old Williamsport Post Office
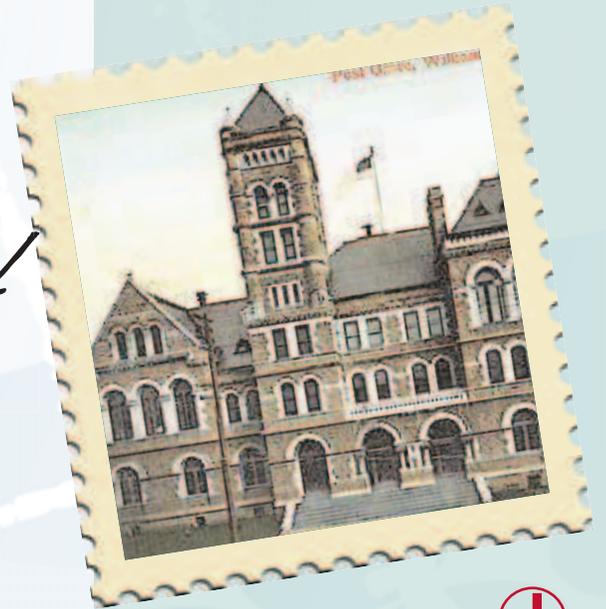
The old Williamsport Post Office, now City Hall, is the oldest post office in the tour. The building occupies an entire block on the corner of West Fourth and Hepburn Streets, an important intersection of the central business district. With it's massive scale and six-story tower, the former Williamsport post office dominates the streetscape. White trim, gargoyles, and dozens of rectangular and arched windows enliven the textured gray limestone walls. The building became a landmark since its completion in 1891. Local newspapers noted that Williamsport residents were proud that the project came in under budget. The building's style is described as "romanesque," a style made popular in the late 19th century by architect Henry Hobson Richardson (1838–86).

The Williamsport Post Office was designed by the Treasury Department's architects, as was the similar Post Office Building in Washington, DC, completed a few years later.

Valleys of the Susquehanna
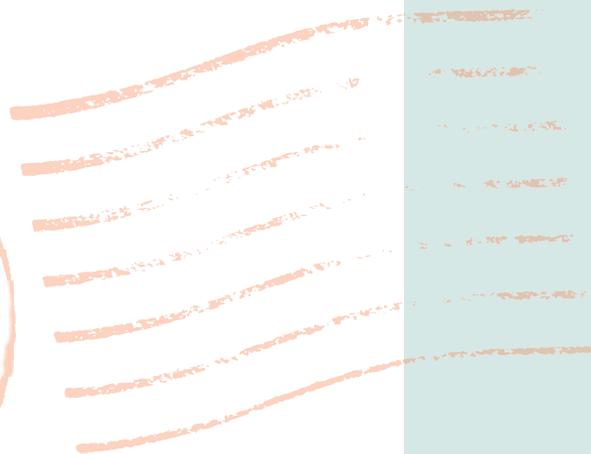
# Renovo Post Office

**365 Huron Avenue**
**Renovo, PA 17764**

**LOBBY HOURS**
**Mon–Fri: 8:00am–5:00pm**
**Saturday: 9:00am–4:00pm**
**Sunday: closed**

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MURAL
*Title: Locomotive Repair Operation*
*Artist: Harold Lehman*
*Date: 1943*
*Medium: Oil on canvas*

The artist, Harold Lehman, traveled to Renovo within a few months of his commission to photograph and sketch parts of the community. By the fall of 1941, he had ten preliminary designs completed. Soon after, however, the United States entered World War II, and Lehman decided to scrap his favorite sketches of Renovo's history in favor of a more current topic depicting war production. During his initial visit he noted that over half of Renovo's population was involved in the railroad repair shops. Lehman instinctively knew that these shops would be vital to the war effort.

Renovo's mural depicts a jib crane operation at the Pennsylvania Railroad yards in Renovo. Locomotive wheels are being removed and stacked by the figures in the center of the mural. To the right of the mural, a man waits with an acetylene torch to heat the wheels before repair. The foreman to the left is holding a poster: "America's Answer — Production." This was a popular poster at the beginning of the war so Lehman felt it would be fitting to include it in the work. Since the Treasury Department was trying desperately to link its art program to the war effort, the poster was a touch quickly approved. The mural was installed on August 1, 1943, two months after the Section of Fine Arts had closed its operations.

Renovo's was one of the last murals to be installed in post offices across the nation. The repair yards are now closed although some of the brick buildings depicted in the mural can be seen just a block from the post office. A bit of Renovo's past and WWII history is preserved in Harold Lehman's mural.

# Selinsgrove Post Office



**MURAL**

*Title: Susquehanna Trail*
*Artist: George Rickey*
*Date: 1939*
*Medium: Tempera on canvas*

This beautiful mural depicts spring plowing and planting in central Pennsylvania, combining richly detailed subject matter with a dramatic use of the lobby space. The artist, George Rickey, decided in his early sketches to cover more wall by having his mural wrap down around the postmaster's door. This allowed his two farmers to be painted nearly life size. The planting farmer on the left is very close to the picture plane and appears to be ready to step onto the lobby floor, circle the postmaster's door, and follow the other farmer plowing into the distance. This trompe l'oiel effect incorporates the lobby; rather than being a detriment, the narrowness of the space enhances the rapidly receding horizon of the mural.

The background includes Shriner's Church, the Susquehanna River, Selinsgrove and the Mahanoy mountain. In the middle ground is a woman, infant, and child. The letter that the woman holds as well as the rural mail box behind her, symbolize the Post Office Department's duty "to bind the nation together by mail." Rickey does not depict tractors which would have been used, or at least desired, by many farmers; he presents, instead, a romanticized, nostalgic view of farming.

Rickey's mural skillfully integrates many elements which were so popular in Depression-era murals: images of working men, motherhood, fertile land, and a strong community. In the midst of the Depression, his mural presented a stable present and a promising future.

Despite the positive reception of the mural by Selinsgrove's resi-dents, the Treasury Department was un-happy with Rickey's work, and he re-ceived no further commissions from it.

**100 South Market Street**
**Selinsgrove, PA 17870**
**570-374-4821**

**LOBBY HOURS**
**Mon-Fri 5 am-5:30 pm,**
**Sat 5 am-3 pm**

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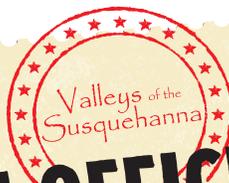
# PARTICIPATING VISITORS BUREAUS

### Central PA Convention & Visitors Bureau

Web: www.centralpacvb.org
Email: info@centralpacvb.org
Toll Free: 1-800-358-5466

### Clinton County Visitors Bureau

Web: http://www.clintoncountyinfo.com/tourism.htm
Email: tourism@kcnet.org
Toll Free: 1-888-388-6991

### Columbia - Montour Visitors Bureau

Web: www.iTourColumbiaMontour.com
Email: itour@cmvb.com
Toll Free: 1-800-847-4810

### Juniata River Valley Visitors Bureau

Web: www.juniatarivervalley.org
Email: jrvvb@juniatarivervalley.org
Phone: 1-717-248-6713

### Lycoming County Visitors Bureau

Web: www.vacationpa.com
Email: visitorinfo@williamsport.org
Toll Free: 1-800-358-9900

### Susquehanna Valley Visitors Bureau

Web: www.VisitCentralPA.org
Email: info@VisitCentralPA.org
Toll Free: 1-800-525-7320

Valleys of the Susquehanna

**210 William Street · Williamsport, PA 17701**
**1 (877) 507-3570 · www.pavalleys.com**