

The Maryland & Pennsylvania Railroad Heritage Village at Muddy Creek Forks, PA



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 of the difficulty and expense of transporting goods to market, suddenly the city of York became a short, easy trip. With the completion of the Maryland Central Railroad in 1884, an easy 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 160 acres at Muddy Creek Forks, 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. He built a huge new store, which sold everything from food and fabric to dynamite and farm equipment. 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. A grain elevator was added to buy wheat from local farmers and ship it out on the railroad. A. M. Grove also did a huge business in seed and fertilizer and sold coal to heat homes, schools, and churches. By the turn of the 20th century he had founded the York Eastern Telephone Company with exchanges in several nearby towns.



The impact on families in the area was remarkable. Dairy farming, which was impractical without rapid transportation, became a big business, not only for southeastern York County, but especially in Harford and Baltimore Counties in Maryland. The Baltimore City 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 modern cannery was built to prepare vegetables for market. Grain and white flour were shipped from the mill and grain elevator by the boxcar load. Local families were able to specialize the production of their farms, knowing that they would have income from sales to purchase the necessities of life 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 seldom traveled outside their local communities. A trip to York or Baltimore was a major undertaking. But with inexpensive and relatively rapid rail 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. Those in Bel Air and closer to Baltimore could commute to work, on one of 16 daily trains, and there were evening trains which made it possible to attend cultural events in the city. 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 cheaper and more rapid transportation. All kinds of goods arrived at the store in Muddy Creek Forks by train, large items like McCormick reapers or mowers and even exotic items like bananas and pineapples. Members of the Grove family or store clerks went to York by train several times a week to bring back for their customers items or sizes that were not stocked in Muddy Creek Forks. With the advent of telephone service the process was simplified further. A. M. Grove simply called a corresponding merchant in York, and the merchandise was shipped down on the train.



Today the village of Muddy Creek Forks is a rare survivor -- an early 20th century village largely intact in the 21st century. Its historic integrity and significance as a rural commercial center that developed because of the coming of the railroad is recognized by its listing as a Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places. The Ma & Pa Railroad Heritage Village exists as a museum to preserve and interpret the history of the railroad and its profound effect on the development and life of villages like Muddy Creek Forks. An 18 stop walking tour highlights the buildings and businesses of the village, the A. M. Grove store, mill, and grain elevator are open for visitors, a diorama and exhibits relate the history of the railroad and village, costumed docents engage visitors to explore early 20th century life, and motorcar trains take visitors on a five mile trip through the scenic Muddy Creek Valley.

**Come for a visit and take a Journey in Time
at the
Ma & Pa Railroad Heritage Village!**

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