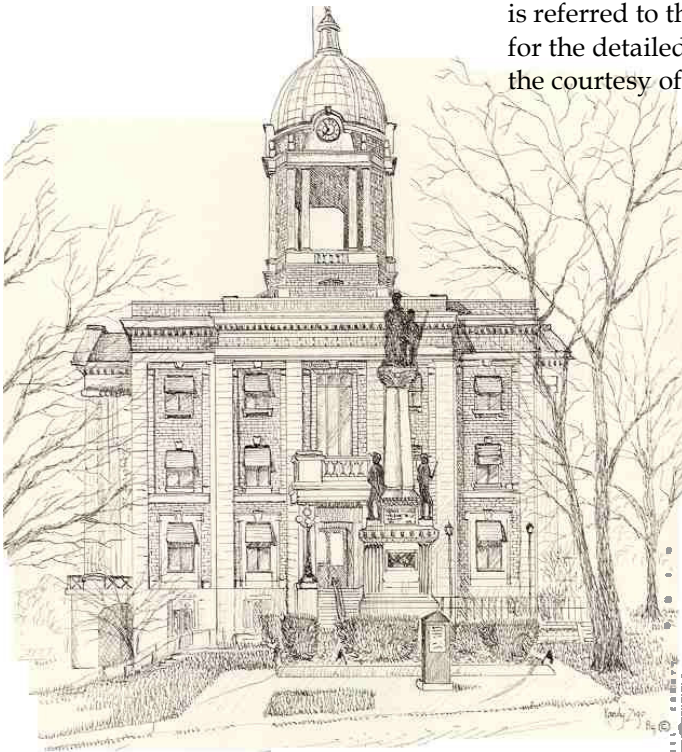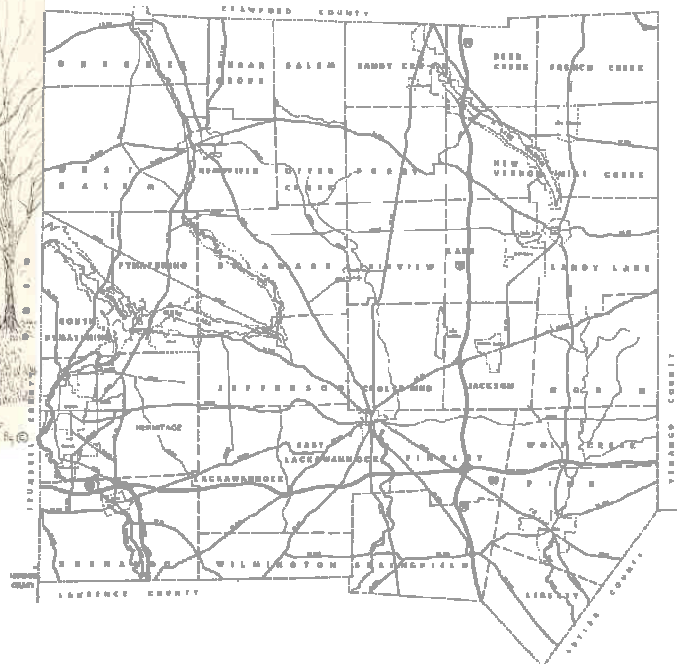# *Introduction to Mercer County, Pennsylvania*

Mercer County is located in northwestern Pennsylvania, along the Ohio Border.   Interstates 80 and 79 cross almost midway between Mercer Borough and Grove City, providing excellent access to the area. The county is also strategically placed between the ports of Erie and Pittsburgh. This has played a large role in the development of Mercer County throughout its history. The wealth of natural resources found in the county has also been instrumental in shaping the diversity of communities within its borders. Agriculture, mining, and the network of rivers and streams continue to play a role in the economic and cultural fabric of Mercer County.

The following is an introduction to Mercer County, Pennsylvania. An abbreviated time line outlines a number of milestones, beginning with the earliest settlers to 1990. It sets the stage for a discussion of Mercer County's current regional setting. The reader is referred to the Greenville Area Website (www.greenville-pa.com) for the detailed timeline that this summary is based upon, through the courtesy of the Mercer County Historic Society.

Mercer's Existing Courthouse

Mercer County Timeline

Courtesy of the Mercer County Historical Society and Available online at www.greenville-pa.com

1795	1800	1801	1802	1805	1811	1814	1818	1822	1825	1827	1832-35
Pioneer Settlers begin to establish settlements in the forks of the Mahoning, Shenango and Neshannock Creeks	March 12 Mercer County is created from Allegheny County; Population 3,228	First four townships are formed: Neshannock, Salem, Sandy Lake, and Cool Spring	Wolf Creek and Pymatuning Townships; Sandy Lake dropped, Sandy Creek introduced	West Salem, French Creek, Delaware, Sandy lake, Shenango, Lackawannock, Mahoning, Springfield, and Slippery Rock Townships created	First school in the county is established by the State Legislature	Mercer incorporates as a Borough	Semi-weekly postal routes begin between Pittsburgh and Erie via Mercer; The Pittsburgh and Erie Turnpike opens for travel	Georgetown (now Sheakleyville) is christened	Escaped slaves use the "underground railroad' to reach Sandy Lake and started a settlement known as Liberia (now Stoneboro)	Ground breaking for the "French Creek Feeder" to the Beaver and Erie Canal, which will eventually connect the Ohio River and Lake Erie via the Beaver and Shenango Rivers	Hickory Township is founded and the Village of Jamestown laid out; Coal is discovered in a hillside west of Sharon on land owned by Gen. Joel B. Curtis

1838-44	1845-46	1849	1850	1851	1853	1854-59	1863	1864-66	1871	1872	1874-76
Greenville Borough (inc. 1838), Deer Creek Post Office (est. 1839, Sharon Borough (inc. 1841), Green Township (created 1844); first boats travel the Beaver and Erie Canal	Clay Furnace is put into generation (1845), six more blast furnaces started to make pig iron (1846); first rolling mill opens in the Shenango Valley area (1846)	First canal boat from Greenville loaded with coal arrives in Erie; Findley, Worth, and Mill Creek Townships are formed; Mahoning, Neshannock and Slippery Rock Townships given to Lawrence County	First nail mill opens in Sharon; Fairview, Lake and Jackson Townships formed	Liberty, Pine, Deer Creek, New Vernon, and Perry Townships are created; Georgetown is incorporated as Sheakleyville	Ground is broken for the Erie Railroad	Jamestown Borough (inc 1854),Hempfield and Sugar Grove Townships (1856), Sandy Lake (inc. 1859)	First freight train arrives in Sharon	West Middlesex is incorporated (1864), The first train leaves from Mercer Iron & Coal Company mine (near Stoneboro) (1865), Stoneboro and New Lebanon are incorporated (1866)	Erie Canal Extension closes (abandoned after the Elk Creek aqueduct collapsed)	The cornerstone for "Greenville Hall" is erected (the first Thiel College building);) Wheatland is created; railroad reaches Pine Grove (now Grove City); Bethel is incorporated	Sharpsville is incorporated (1874), Isacc Ketler opens "select school" in Pine Grove (now Grove City College)

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1880- 81	1883	1887	1888-90	1891-93	1896	1899	1900	1904	1905	1910	1912
1880 Population is 56,161; Wheatland Bessemer Steel incorporates (1881)	Greenville Water Company and the Sharon Water Works are incorporated; the Mercer Heat, Light & Power Company is chartered; Grove City is incorporated from Pine Grove	Wheatland Iron incorporates; the Shenango Hook & Ladder Company reorganizes as the Sharon Fire Department; the Sharon Steel Casting Company make its first steel	The first passenger train from the new station on Main Street leaves Greenville (1888); the Shenango Valley Electric Light Company (now Penn Power) begins operating (1890)	An ordinance for construction of a plant to furnish electricity to Greenville is approved (1891), Construction of sewers connect two lines in Greenville and in Sharon (1893)	The doors of the Christian H. Buhl Hospital open to the sick of Shenango Valley	An ordinance passes to curb and pave streets in Sharon from Sharon Rail Way on the east to Irvine Avenue on the west	The Sharon Steel Hoop Company is incorporated	The first countywide individual mail routes begin (67 routes are laid out)	First medical hospital opens in Grove City	The county's population is 77,699	South Sharon becomes Farrell

1914	1919	1920	1930-32	1933	1934	1936	1940	1942	1944	1945	1950
South Pymatuning Township is created	The steel strike suspends five blast furnaces, and other plants in the Valley become idle or part time	The county's population is 93,788 in 1920; Westinghouse Electric & Manufacturing acquires Savage Arms Corp	The county's population is 99,246 in 1930; ground is broken near Jamestown for the Pymatuning Dam (1931); Wendell August moves his aluminum forge to Grove City (1932)	The first no-direct-contact continuous process is placed into operation at the Sharon Steel Hoop Corporation (1933)	The Pymatuning Reservoir is dedicated	The Sharon Steel Hoop Corporation changes its name to Sharon Steel	The county's population is 101,039; the Sawhill Manufacturing Company announces it will establish a plant in Wheatland	US engineers survey Pymatuning Township to build an army base	Camp Reynolds Prisoner Of War (POW) Camp is established; POWs are working at Meadville Iron Works and National Radiator Company	The US War Department designates Camp Reynolds an "inactive installation"	The county's population is 111,954; Buhl Hospital changes its name to Sharon General Hospital

Mercer County Timeline

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1952	1955	1960	1965	1967	1968	1970-71	1976-78	1981	1982	1985-87	1990
The last steam powered passenger train leaves Fredonia (86 years of regular service)	A production strike at Westinghouse idles 5,550 workers locally and at 29 plants nationwide	The county's population is 127,519; statistics released by the Pittsburgh office of Dun & Bradstreet, Inc., reflect 132 businesses exist in the county	The flood control dam in Sharpsville is dedicated; the Penn State University's board of directors approve opening the Penn State Shenango Campus	Lake Latonka is started as a residential development; Interstate 80 opens	The new, relocated Clarksville is officially renamed Clark (relocated in the early 1960s due to the creation of the Shenango Reservoir)	The county's population is 127,175; the Erie Lackawanna Railroad discontinues its passenger service in the county (1970); Lake Wilhelm is formed (1971)	Hickory Township becomes the Municipality of Hermitage (1976); State Regional Correctional Facility opens in Findley Township (1978)	The Columbia Theater in Sharon is closed following a fire; Conrail abandons most of its trackage in the county	Midland Ross Corporation abandons its National Castings foundry in Sharon; the Chicago Bridge & Iron and Greenville Steel Car (predecessor to Trinity) close in Greenville	Operations cease at Westinghouse's Transformer Plant in Sharon; a tornado destroys Wheatland (1985); Sharon Steel files Chapter 11 bankruptcy (1987)	The county's population is 121,003; the creation of a new healthcare concept, Sharon Regional Health System, is announced

Mercer County's Recent Past
The 1990s and the Early 21st Century

The impact of the major industrial closures during the 1980s cannot be understated, as these companies employed thousands of Mercer County residents. The 1990s began a period of major transition in Mercer County that continues to this day. Once prominent economic centers – the Shenango Valley, Greenville, and Grove City – continue to re-establish an identity and fill the void left by Westinghouse, Sharon Steel, and others. The trickle down effect has influenced all aspects of life in Mercer County, including housing and infrastructure, not to mention the number of residents, particularly young residents, who have left the County in search of employment.

Yet the future is promising. Initiatives that took shape during the 1990s are beginning to have an impact. The Prime Outlets at Grove City, the purchase and refurbishing of Sharon Steel by Caparo, Inc., and other investments have been very successful. Thiel College and Grove City College both have the potential to become partners in creating a new niche for Mercer County in the global economy. Traditional natural resource based industries – agriculture, forestry, and mining – will continue to play important roles, with new opportunities in the form of both passive and active outdoor recreation. The county's rich history presents yet another opportunity, given the increased popularity of heritage-based tourism.

The 1996 Mercer County Comprehensive Plan established a framework to help guide the county into the 21st Century. This Plan will build upon that work by updating the statistical data, as well as the growth and development policies. It will also present some new ideas to continue the county's transition into the new economy.

Facts about Mercer County

Location: Northwest Pennsylvania, USA

Date of Establishment: March 12, 1800

Namesake: Revolutionary War General Hugh Mercer (1726-1777)

Number of Municipalities: 48

County Seat: Mercer Borough

Form of Government: 5th Class County; elected 3-member Board of Commissioners

World Wide Web: www.mcc.co.mercer.pa.us

Size: 671.5 square miles

Population (2000): 120,293 (Estimated 2004: 119,797)

Population Change (1990-2000): - 0.6%

Population per Square Mile (2000): 179.1 persons

Median Age: 39.6

Community / Economic Profile:

Leading Industries (by employment)
> Health Care
> Education
> Social and government services

Employment Centers
> Greenville Area
> Grove City Area
> Mercer Area
> Sandy Lake/Stoneboro
> Shenango Valley

Hospitals
> Horizon Hospital System
> Sharon Regional Health System
> United Community Hospital

Schools
> 12 public districts
> 7 private/parochial institutions

Public Libraries: 7

More Facts about Mercer County

Largest Municipality by population (2000)
City of Sharon: 16,328 persons

Smallest Municipality by population (2000)
Sheakleyville Borough: 164 persons

Natural Setting:
Major waterways/watersheds:
Shenango River
French Creek
Wolf Creek
Sandy Creek
Neshannock Creek

Forest cover: 162,000 acres (37% of County)
Mineral resources: coal, gravel, sand,

Public Lands:
Federal Recreation Site: Shenango Lake Reservoir
Parks: Pymatuning State Park,
Maurice K. Goddard State Park
Numerous municipal parks
State Game Lands:
#130 – East of Stoneboro in Sandy Lake and Worth
#270 – North and east of Sheakleyville
#284 – South of Springfield Falls in Springfield Township

Historical Sites:
Wendell August Forge
Bridge in French Creek Township
Frank H. Buhl Mansion
Mercer County Courthouse
Gibson House
Johnston's Tavern
Christiana Lindsay House
Jonas J. Piece House
The Quaker Bridge
First Universalist Church of Sharpsville