

# AMBLER POSTOFFICE GETS ITS OWN BUILDING IN 1898

by Newton M. Howard

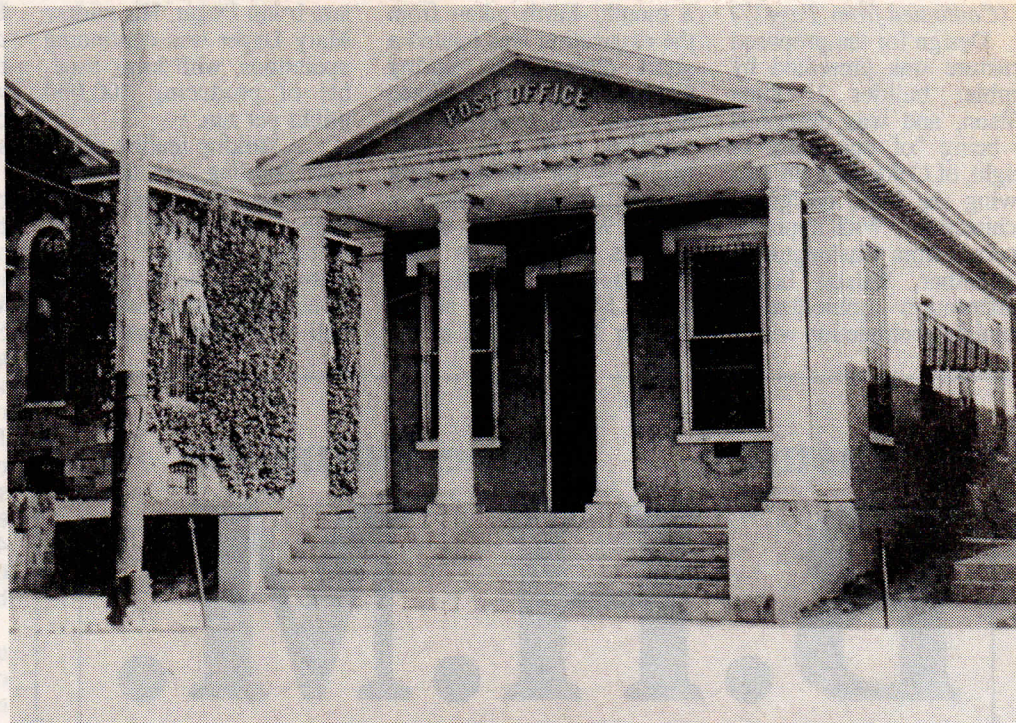
Just a hundred years ago something special was happening in Ambler that involved the Post office. For the first time ever, plans were afoot to erect a building for their exclusive use. Prior to this, space was always shared with another business, usually the general store or the postmaster's place of business.

As early as 1826 the Upper Dublin post office was located in Isaac Thomas' General Store on the Bethlehem Pike. This was the predecessor of the Ambler office, and was moved to Joseph Wilson's General Store at Main & Butler in 1861.

In May of 1898 President McKinley appointed John S. Buchanan to succeed Abram Stillwagon as Ambler's Postmaster, effective July 1st. This was known as early as 1897, with the result that Buchanan was approached by Dr. Richard V. Mattison, who for some time had tried to have the office located in one of the stores in his Opera House building.

This move to the west side of the railroad was being resisted by many townspeople, especially Joseph M. Haywood, through editorials in his Ambler Gazette. Most of Ambler's homes were on the eastern side of the tracks, as were its schools and churches. One exception was Trinity Mission, meeting in a room in the Opera House building. They would eventually move into their new Trinity Memorial Episcopal Church, being erected by the Mattisons in memory of their deceased daughter Esther Victoria.

Buchanan and Mattison made numerous trips to Washington, meeting with the Postmaster General's office, in an attempt to have the Ambler office moved to Mattison's structure. Because so many lives had been lost at the dangerous



Building erected in 1898 for use by the Ambler Postoffice. At the left is the First National Bank of Ambler, built in 1884, and moved to rear of the property about 1923, in order that the present building (vacated by Mellon PSFS in 1996) could be erected. Original Postoffice building is itisible today as a two-story commercial structure next to the former Mellon PSFS

*Photograph from Henry Scholz Collection*

crossing, there was much opposition to moving the facility across the tracks.

The next thought was to interest a group of investors in erecting a structure on the east side for exclusive use of the post office. Three promi-

nent individuals met, agreeing to construct a building next to the First National Bank on property owned by George K. Knight, whose son Alexander was one of the three investors; Joseph Haywood and John J.

Houghton were the other two. The group met with the Postal Department in Washington, getting their commitment to lease the planned building for a ten-year period.

*(Continued on Page18)*

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Design for the proposed structure was presented by Ambler builder J. Sims Wilson, and was described as being "of one story in height, of Colonial style, following the Ionic design in architecture". With approval received from Washington in September, Wilson began construction immediately, promising completion within

a month, Earth taken from the excavation was hauled a short distance to Spring Garden Street, being utilized to raise the level of the roadbed over the creek. Millwork for the new post office came from a plant in North Wales, while bricks used in the structure were manufactured locally on South Main Street, at the Ambler Brick Works of the

late Irwin Dager. His widow Mary Dager was continuing operations, with kilns capable of producing 100,000 bricks per run.

A striking feature of the new building was the front elevation, dominated by its four galvanized iron columns. Ambler painter Ellsworth Niblock completed his work inside and out by Fall, enabling Postmaster

Buchanan to conduct business before the year's end in the new post office, which was considered by many one of Ambler's handsomest structures.

John Buchanan was to be remembered for implementing home delivery of mail in 1902, the first two letter carriers being William W. Stutter and Clarence Streeper. John was postmaster from 1898 until 1904 when illness forced him to resign, with his brother Joseph A. Buchanan succeeding him. The illness was so severe that John died early the following year at 43 years of age, the death occurring on the birthday of his brother Joseph.

With original roof lines unchanged, the old post office is visible today as the renovated two-story building next to the former Mellon PSFS Bank building on Butler Avenue. It has been joined to the building originally known as the Knight Building.

(Accounts of the post office history in recent years have shown that it at one time occupied one of the stores in the Ambler Opera House Building. Personal research fails to verify that information. Don't miss next month's account of the disastrous Forest Avenue School Fire of 1926 accompanied by a rare photograph taken by teacher Florence Whiteside Astler)

### Love Letters

The Old Academy Players, Inc at 3544 Indian Queen Lane in East Falls will continue their presentation of Love Letters by A.R. Gurney on January 16 and 17 as well as January 24 and 25 at 8 pm. Their will also be a matinee presentation on Sunday January 18 at 2 pm.

The performance will be directed by Nancy Dryden and tickets are available at \$9 by calling 215-843-4324.

For more information call 215-843-1109. Parking and refreshments are free.

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