

Early Mercer County Settlement

Indian Settlement

Mercer County was virgin forest inhabited by Indians. The Erie, or the Cat Nation (Eriehronon), controlled the area during the early and middle 1600's. In 1656, the Iroquois Confederation conquered the Erie Indians, controlled the area, and used it as a hunting reserve.

By the time the white settlers came to the area, it was controlled by the Seneca Indians, also called Cornplanters. They lived by hunting and fishing. Rather than establishing permanent towns, they constructed semi-permanent hunting and seasonal farming camps.

The Seneca waged war with other Indians to maintain their tribal structure and control of their lands. Although they annihilated tribes that refused to submit to their rule, they often allowed defeated tribes to remain in the conquered territory. Four tribal groups - the Iroquois, the Delawares (who called themselves the Leni-Lenape), the Shawnee, and the Wyandot - lived in the Mercer County area under the control of the Seneca. Many of the Leni-Lenape had fought with the British colonists with the Ottawa leader Pontiac in 1763, on the French side in the French and Indian War (1754–1763), and on the British side in the Revolutionary War.

The Lenape established permanent towns. There were three large Indian settlements in the area. A large settlement of seventy lodges was located near Mercer, another at "the big bend", and another at Pine Swamp in Jackson Township. These Indian settlements were all communities of less than 100 families each. East of Mercer at the source of Neshannock Creek there were at least a dozen settlements.

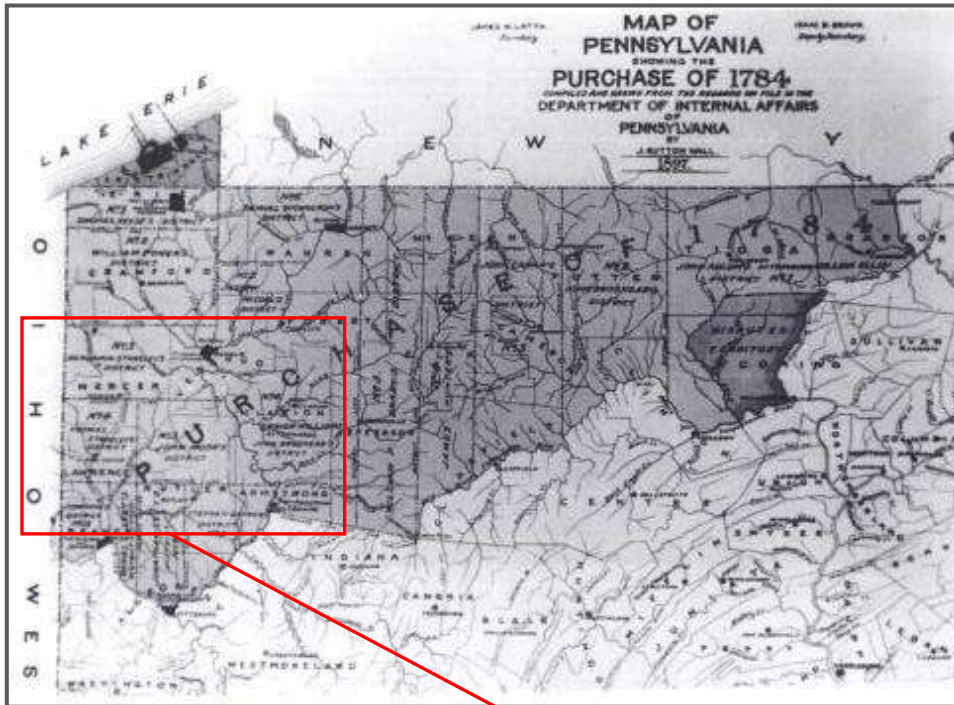
Indian attacks were common until General Anthony Wayne defeated the Indians.

The Treaty of Fort Stanwix

Most of western Pennsylvania, including Mercer County, was involved in the Treaty of Fort Stanwix. In this treaty, the United States government entered into a treaty with the Six Nations of the Iroquois (the Western Confederacy). The Six Nations included the Tuscaroras, the Mohawks, the Onondagas, the Oneidas, the Senecas, and the Cayugas. All of these nations claimed land in the Ohio and western Pennsylvania area, although not all lived in the area. In the treaty, the Iroquois agreed to give up any land claims in the area. This treaty, known in Pennsylvania as the Last Purchase, was signed in October 1784.

This 1897 map (from the Pennsylvania Department of Internal Affairs Annual Report of the Secretary of Internal Affairs, 1896) shows the area in Pennsylvania involved in the treaty. All of Mercer County was included in these lands. The county lines of 1897 are marked on the map.

The detail map has been digitally enhanced to outline Mercer County. The red lines show the current boundaries and the blue lines indicate the original size of the county.



In the area that is now Mercer County the Treaty of Fort Stanwix was not accepted by the Indians. Several of the area tribes, including the Shawnee Indians, the Mingo Indians, and the Delaware Indians refused to ratify or accept the treaty. As a result, the Indians were hostile to early settlers. Indian attacks were commonplace and few settlers ventured into the area. In the end, the United States and the Six Nations fought over control of the land.

A National Humiliation

After the Revolutionary War and the formation of the United States federal government (1782), Congress began to address the Indian hostility in Western Pennsylvania and Ohio. Brigadier General Josiah Harmar was sent to the area to subdue the Indian Western Confederacy. On Oct. 22, 1790, Indians led by Chief Little Turtle ambushed Harmar's army and defeated it. This defeat was a humiliation to the United States and President Washington. Again, in November 1791 the army commanded by General Arthur St. Clair was attacked by Indians led by Little Turtle near Fort Recovery, Ohio, killing more than 700 Americans. The situation became a crisis for the newly established nation. Questions arose about the nation's ability to control its territory and govern.

President Washington recalled Revolutionary War General, General Anthony Wayne, to active military service to establish a standing army, known as the Legion of the United States. Wayne was a Pennsylvanian and Revolutionary War hero known for his bravery. Because of his bravery, he was nicknamed "Mad" Anthony Wayne.



Near Ambridge, Wayne established and carefully trained an Army of 2000 regulars and 1500 volunteers, including light and heavy infantry, cavalry, and artillery.

In the summer of 1793, Wayne moved his army to Cincinnati, Ohio, in preparation of confronting the Indians. In the fall of 1793 Washington's peace negotiations failed and on September 11, 1793, Wayne received orders to attack.

In July 1794, Wayne's Army slowly began to move north. On August 20, they encountered the Indian Western Confederacy in an area near Toledo known as "fallen timbers." The Indian Confederacy Army included in excess of 1,000 men from the Delaware, Shawnee, Mingo, Wyandot, Miami, Ottawa, Chippewa, and Pottawatomie warriors under the leadership of Shawnee Chief, Blue Jacket.

Although the Indians hoped to surprise Wayne's army in the fallen timbers, they were unsuccessful. Upon confronting the Indians Wayne immediately ordered a bayonet charge to flush the Indians out of hiding. The Indians broke and fought a retreat for two miles until they encountered Wayne's Cavalry who Wayne had moved in behind the Indians. In less than one hour, Wayne defeated the Indians decisively. It is estimated that the battle resulted in 200 Indians killed and 400-500 wounded. Wayne's losses were estimated at less than forty killed and 100 wounded.

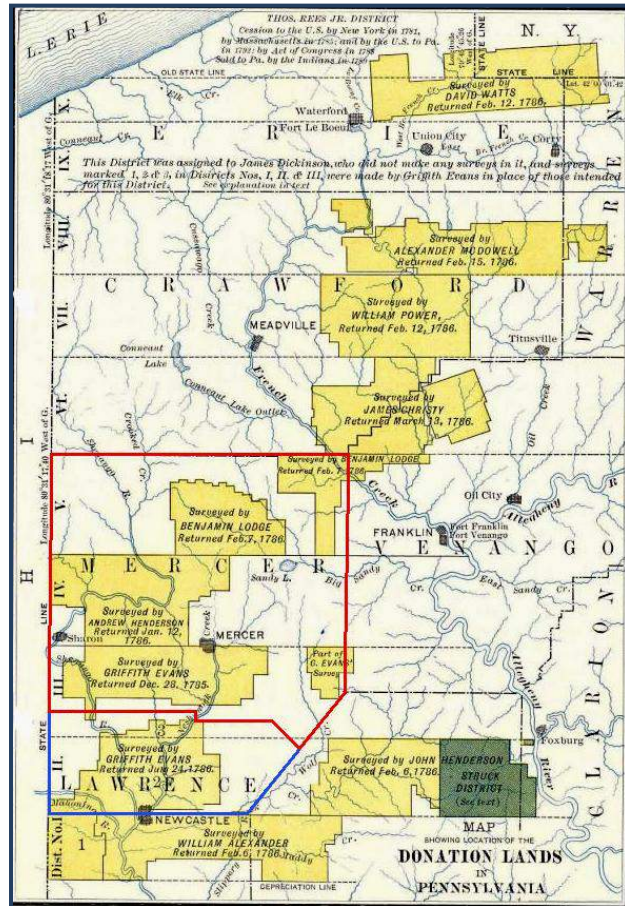
On August 3 1795, Wayne's signed a peace treaty with eleven Indian tribes, known as the Treaty of Greenville (at Greenville, Ohio). The defeat of the Western Confederation and the signing of the Treaty of Greenville led to the settlement of the Mercer County.

Donation Land

After the signing of the Treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1784, the Pennsylvania General Assembly began to legislate land laws and procedures. Land located west of the Allegheny River and Conewango Creek was established as Depreciation and Donation lands.

Portions of Mercer County were included in the Donation Land. The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission State Archives summarize the Donation Land program:

The Donation Land program was used by the Commonwealth to induce men to stay in service during the Revolutionary War. Each Pennsylvania Line soldier and officer who served in the Continental forces until the end of the war was to receive a bounty, or donation, of a tract of land consisting of 200, 250, 350 or 500 acres, the size of the tract to be based upon his rank. The Donation Land area was located within the Purchase of 1784, immediately to the north of the Depreciation Lands and west of the Allegheny River, including parts of the counties of Butler, Clarion, Crawford, Erie, Lawrence, Mercer, Venango, and Warren. The land was divided into ten surveying districts, with 2,570 lots totaling over 550,000 acres of land eventually created by the Land Office. The tracts were distributed by a lottery system. After enough tracts were surveyed and numbered, their corresponding tract numbers were placed in one of four lottery wheels, one wheel for each tract size, and drawn periodically.



Mercer County as it exists today is outlined in red.

Settlement

Western Pennsylvania was the western frontier. It was not until General Wayne defeated the Indians and land title issues with the land development companies were settled c1805 that settlement of the area was able to proceed.

The land Law of 1792, passed by the General Assembly of Pennsylvania on April 3, provided all vacant lands in the Commonwealth would be sold to persons who would cultivate, improve, and settle them. The act permitted a settler to occupy a tract, not exceeding four hundred acres of the unsettled lands, and begin to improve the land. By continuing to live on and improve the land, having the land surveyed, and paying the legal price for it, the settler would get a deed for a homestead.

In the fall of 1795, surveying began in the "4th and 5th Districts", most of which was included in Mercer County. Benjamin Stokely was one of the surveyors. His brother Col. Thomas Stokely surveyed the land north. Stokely states:

In October 1794, and February 1795, 453 land warrants were entered in my office in Pittsburg for land, chiefly in Mercer County.

On the thirteenth day of May 1795, I made the first survey in my district. We continued our business until the 7th of June...

Stokely remained in the area and established a homestead near Cool Spring Creek. He is considered the first white settler in the county. He states:

...on the 14th of October following, I sat down as an actual settler, with my family, a wife and three children, on the very spot where I now reside, at Coolspring, three miles northeast of the borough of Mercer.

Sarah Ball Stokely was the wife of Benjamin S. Stokely.

Stokely wrote he had no neighbor nearer than twenty-five miles. Interestingly, he formed a close relationship with the estimated 200 to 300 Indians in the area near him.

John Pearson and his son George traveled through the area in 1803. Pearson only wrote of seeing three buildings, Hunter's Tavern, McMillen's house, and Stokely's house. Pearson described Stokely's house as..., "being under construction about three miles from Mercer on the Franklin road."

Early Public Houses

Public houses (taverns, ordinaries) and trading posts were established early to meet the needs of the traders and hunters. Samuel Johnston's Public House was in operation by 1795. Benjamin Stokely states that while surveying the area:

...on the 28th of November, 1795, and, after sinking our raft in crossing Chenango [sic], wetting many things, and losing some, we arrived at that place the second day of December, hungry and tired, but, on getting refreshment at a public house, the only one then in the place, kept by Samuel Johnston, we were very soon as well as ever.

Our party this tour was composed of seven, viz., W. Ewing, Joseph Davidson, Noah Lewis, Jos. Brooks, John Moore, Jabez Coulson, and myself. On the 9th of May, 1796, we returned to the woods, a third tour. (This is not the Johnston's Tavern now in existence on US Rt 19 south of Mercer. See 1827)

Samuel Johnston is listed on the first Mercer County Census of 1800 as head of a household, with a male between 26 and 45 years old, and a female resident between 16 and 26 years old.

John Garvin also operated a public house called the "Blue Ball Tavern" on the north side of Mercer before the county was established. John Garvin is also listed on the first Mercer County Census of 1800 as head of a household, with a male between 26 and 45 years old, and a female resident between 16 and 26 years old. Garvin was licensed to operate a tavern in Coolspring Township in 1804.

In 1803, Joseph Hunter operated a Tavern near Mill Creek a mile east of Mercer. This building was described by John Pearson (1803) who traveled through the area in 1803 accompanied by his son George:

On August 31, 1803, John Pearson: We preceded on to one Hunter's tavern above a mile beyond (east) the site for Mercer town. Hunter lives on the Neshannock, or a branch of it. Hunter's is a tolerable good house but covered with boards which let the water through when it rained in the night of the 14th (Sept. 14. 1803) in which more rain fell by far than at any time since we left home.

Hunter was licensed to operate a tavern in Coolspring Township in 1805.

Taverns were licensed in Wolf Creek Township as early as 1804. (See 1804)

These early public houses were social centers. Travelers either had to stop for rest at the private home of a stranger who would take them in or at a public house. Care for their horses was a major concern of the travelers. Public houses would tend to their horses. At the same time, the travelers would rest and prepare for the next leg of their journey. Travelers could enjoy food, whisky, music, dancing, and companionship at these stops. They often brought news and were the settler's primary contact with the outside world.

Frequently towns were established near these early taverns.

As the judicial system was established in an area the circuit judge, and often, traveling lawyers, came to the main tavern in the county seat to conduct court.

The Establishment of Mercer County

Mercer County was officially created on March 12, 1800, as a part of Crawford County which was originally part of Allegheny County. It remained part of Crawford County until February 1804 when it was formally organized as a separate entity. The population was 3,228. Benjamin Stokely, William McMillan, and John Williamson were appointed county trustees in 1803. They were to establish a county seat and deal with land grants.

The first regular county officials for Mercer County were chosen in 1803. In October of 1803 that year, the first county election was held. Robert Bole, Andrew Denniston, and Thomas Robb were elected commissioners.

The county commissioners held their first session on November 10, 1803 at Joseph Hunter's Tavern.

Judge Moore was appointed president judge of the sixth district in 1803. In February 1804, he convened the first court at the house of Joseph Hunter. When first Court of Mercer County was held at the Hunter house, the members of the court lodged at the McMillan house, described by John Pearson (1803) as:

The best house I have seen in Mercer County is one McMillan's, not far from the place fixed on for the town; it is large, of wood with good rooms, an excellent stone chimney, that is the stone is excellent, (and I do not recollect seeing any bad), covered with oak shingles, a garden of good size paled in; upon the whole a very respectable settlement.

In October 1804, the county offices were moved to Jacob Myers' house. In May 1807, the county commissioners signed a contract with Joseph Smith and John McCurdy to erect a building specifically for the court and county business. This first courthouse in Mercer County was a log building.



The county was named for General Hugh Mercer. Mercer was born in Scotland in 1726. He arrived in Philadelphia in 1747 after serving in the British Army as a soldier and surgeon. He practiced medicine in what is now the Mercersburg area.

Mercer was a close friend of George Washington. He became a Brigadier General in the Continental Army. In 1756, he was commissioned a captain in the Pennsylvania regiment.

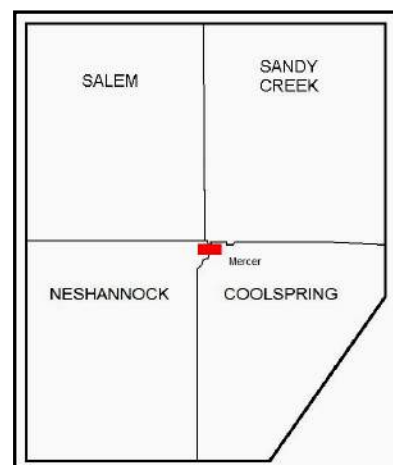
He died in combat, after being repeatedly bayoneted, during the Battle of Princeton on January 3, 1777. He died on January 12, 1777, the same day in which General George Washington's forces defeated the British at Princeton.

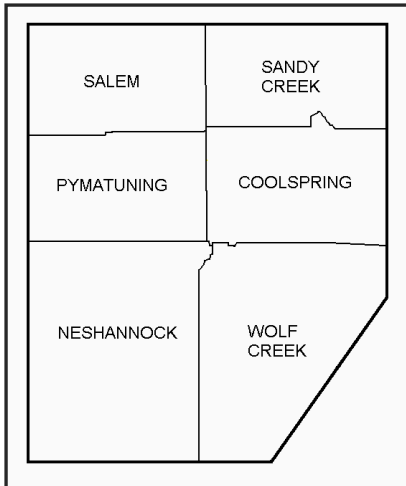
Development of Townships in Mercer County

Mercer County was formed in 1800 from Allegheny County.

After the creation of the county in 1800, c 1801, the first townships were laid out. These townships were not legal entities as townships are today. They were established for assessment purposes, each being about a quarter of the land. The dividing lines ran north, south, east, and west through Mercer. The northwest part was called Salem Township; the northeast was called Sandy Creek; the southwest was called Neshannock Township; the southeast quarter was called Cool Spring Township.

Mercer, the county seat, was in the center of the county.



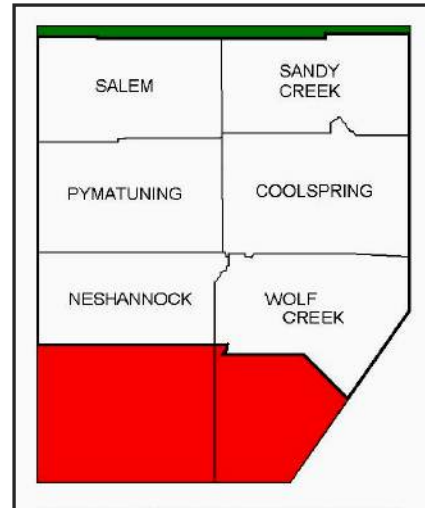


The area where the settlers in Pine Grove (Grove City) were establishing their homesteads was included in Coolspring Township

Shortly thereafter, c1802, the county was divided into six townships, Salem, Sandy Creek, Pymatuning, Coolspring, Neshannock, and Wolf Creek. Pine Grove was in Wolf Creek Township.

In 1808, a northern portion (the green area) was ceded to Crawford County, and in 1849, a southern portion (the red area) was ceded in the formation of Lawrence County. No further land changes were made after 1849.

As the county continued to become settled, it was re-divided into townships a number of times.



Development of the Communities in Mercer County

Mercer was the first community to be established in Mercer County. In 1803, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania designated Mercer as the county seat and established its location, size, and name.

The land was a hazel-brush prairie, with scattered small trees. Before Mercer was established, as the county seat pioneers were living in the area. In addition to Benjamin Stokely, David and John Garvin, James Braden, John Pew, the Findley family and James Watson were living in the area.

Two-hundred acres were donated by John Hoge for the town. Mercer was laid out in 1803 by trustees John Findley, William Mortimore, and William McMillan. The deed to the ground was given to the trustees in 1804. A public square was established on the top of the hill to accommodate the court and public offices. The first post office in the county was established on July 1, 1805.

The following table indicates the chronological development of the communities in Mercer County and the year each was incorporated. Earlier names are included for communities that were known by other names.

<i>Community</i>	<i>Date of Incorporation As a Borough</i>
Mercer	March 24 (28) 1814
Greenville (Formerly West Greenville)	May 29, 1837
Sharon	October 6, 1841
Clark (Formerly Clarksville)	May 5, 1848
Sheakleyville (Formerly Georgetown, Exchangeville)	March 11, 1851
Jamestown	1854
Sandy Lake (Formerly Brownsville)	August 20, 1859
West Middlesex	1864
Stoneboro (Formerly Liberia)	August 25, 1866
Wheatland (Formerly Wheatfield, Wheatland Furnace)	February 21, 1872
Sharpsville	June 9, 1874
Fredonia	August 1876
Jackson Center (Formerly Scatterfield)	June 5, 1882
Grove City (Formerly Pine Grove)	January 4, 1883
New Lebanon	August 22, 1886
Farrell (Formerly South Sharon)	November 21, 1901
Hermitage (Formerly Hickory Township)	January 1st, 1976

Black Settlement in Mercer County

Very early in the settlement of Mercer County there were black residents, both slave and freemen. Although slavery existed in Mercer County, it was not widespread. Freed slaves, known as “free-men”, and the Underground Railroad played a far greater role in the early history of the county.

William James McKnight, M. D., recorded the early history of slavery in a “A Pioneer Outline History of Northwestern Pennsylvania”, published in 1905. He wrote:

The pioneer slave in Mercer County was in Sandy Lake Township in 1801. The pioneer will recorded in Mercer County was that of John Calvin, in 1804, of Salem Township. In this will, he bequeathed a mulatto to his wife. John Sheakley migrated from Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, to Sandy Creek Township, Mercer County, in 1804, bringing with him four negro slaves.— viz., Sam, Steve, Phoebe, and Hannah. Phoebe had two children born in slavery in Mercer County,—to wit, Ben and Rose. John Sheakley died in 1816, and in his will he bequeathed a mulatto girl to his wife; all of his other slaves were then free.

John Young lived on Indian Run, in Springfield Township. He owned slaves; how many is not known. In his will of April 20, 1825, he says, "I do will that Peg ... is to be supported out of my farm, left to John and David." Peg had two children born in slavery in Mercer County,—to wit, Robert Johnson and Sallie Johnson. Robert worked at shoemaking after his freedom.

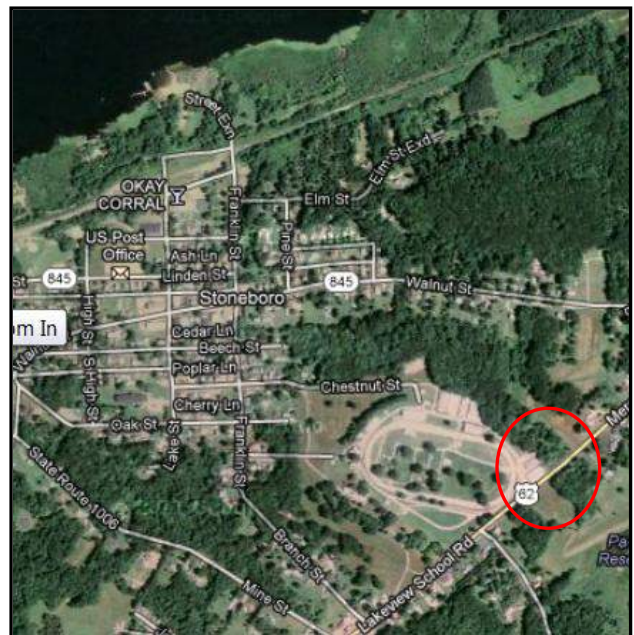
In 1811, (another source 1818) Richard Travis, Sr. (1745 to 1843), a black "free-man", purchased 150 acres along the shores of Sandy Lake from H. Baldwin for two dollars. About 1825 Travis established a fugitive slave town, Liberia, on this property. Liberia became a well-known sanctuary for fugitive slaves.

In spite of raids by slave catchers looking for escaped slaves, the community grew over the years. The 1840 Census recorded there were over two dozen non-whites as residents in the area.

In 1842, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled (*Prigg v. Pennsylvania*) that states were not required by law to help slave catchers. The effect of this ruling was that reaching Pennsylvania meant reaching freedom. However, the Fugitive Slave Act passed by the United States Congress on September 18, 1850 declared runaway slaves were to be returned to their masters. This law led directly to the abandonment of Liberia; most of the residents moved north to Canada to ensure their freedom. A few stayed in this area, including one man known for selling cigars and whiskey to his neighbors, and a woman known as "Auntie Strange." Joseph Polk (1873 to 1970) was thought to be the last known survivor who lived in Liberia. In c1853, the land was purchased by John F. Hogue and William Shields.

An official Commonwealth historic marker is located along PA St 62, near the current entrance to the fairgrounds, identifying the Liberia Cemetery. In the cemetery are the gravesites of both the slaves who had died while fleeing the South and those who had resided in Liberia. This area is marked on this Google Image of the area.

During the same time, Mercer County became known for its involvement in the Underground Railroad. Early on local prominent abolitionists and residents were actively involved in the passage of fugitive slaves through the Underground Railroad route from the New Castle and Sheakleyville stations headed north toward Canada. A local Anti-Slavery Society was established on July 4, 1835. Much of the activity centered in Mercer. The Liberia settlement had influenced public opinion throughout the area as did the anti-slavery paper, *American Freeman*, published by William F. Clark around 1852



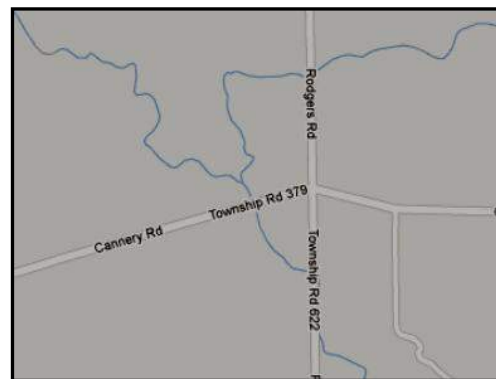
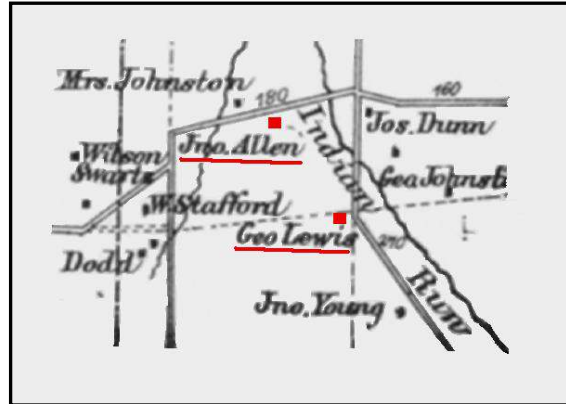
Less than ten miles away from Liberia, in East Lackawannock Township, on Indian Run, near the intersection of Cannery Road and Rodgers Road there was another black community, Pandenarium.

Pandenarium was the concept of Dr. Charles Everett, a wealthy physician of Charlottesville, Va. Everett owned a number of slaves, but firmly believed slavery was a sin. In 1837, Dr. Everett began planning to set them free.

His plan was to give each one a plot of land and \$1000 to establish themselves. Everett, with the help of his nephew, Charles D. Everett, a physician in Philadelphia, bought 50 acres of land in Indian Run for the site a settlement of freed slaves. The settlement was to be self-sustaining and include homes, a church, shops, eateries, and a stagecoach stop. In c1849, construction was begun. Everett died in 1848 before construction was finished. His nephew continued the project.

On Nov. 12, 1854, 61 (63) former Everett slaves and their families arrived at Pandenarium where 24 houses had been constructed. Each held the deed to two acres and \$1000. Original residents included John and Rosie Allen, and George Washington Lewis.

This excerpt from a map of 1873 shows Indian Run and the residences of the Allens and George Lewis. The Google image below shows the same area. The detail (below right) from a Google map of the area clearly shows the location of Indian Run through the area.



Unlike Liberia, the Stoneboro settlement, there is no historic marker identifying Pandenarium. There are no known maps of the settlement at the time of its establishment.

In 1855, Act No. 324 of Pennsylvania State Legislature recognized Pandenarium, listed the residents by name, and established their legal rights as emancipated slaves from the Evert estate.

The settlement prospered for a while but was unable to sustain itself. The freed slaves were not accustomed to dealing with winter weather. Many died of pneumonia and its complications. The Indian River flooded in the spring causing serious destruction in the settlement. Social unrest developed among the residents and outsiders took financial advantage of them. Within two years, an outbreak of tuberculosis claimed more lives. Only a few residents remained.

Most of the remaining residents began to move away from the community to Mercer, Sharon, Farrell, and New Castle to seek economic opportunities.



Reportedly, George Washington Lewis (c1836 – 1916) was one of the last to leave the settlement. Washington served in K Company K of the 127th U. S. Colored Regiment during the Civil War.

This photograph was taken c1855.