

**The Mifflinburg Telegraph,
From the Civil War to the Great Depression
(Part 1)¹
by
Sidney Dreese**

Introduction

One newspaper is widely known around the world, the *New York Times* which began in 1851, but by the name *New-York Daily Times*. In 1857 its title was trimmed to *New York Times*. Eleven years after the founding of the *New York Times*, the *Mifflinburg Telegraph* began publication. As a newspaper the Telegraph had a long life of 152 years; quite remarkable in comparison to other newspapers published in Mifflinburg. The Mifflinburg Telegraph has had quite a long history. The present article covers the Telegraph from its founding in 1862 through 1931. A second piece covering the Telegraph's history until it ceased publication as a newspaper in 2014 will be written at a later date.

This article reviews the Telegraph's first seven decades, divided into the four eras of its successive owners/editors. Their principles, morals and political views were reflected in what was printed. Yet, too, they deeply cared about the community. They took pride in the town and told about school events, a resident cleaning up around the home, a business expanding, and the history of a long-established store.

**The Beginning: Charles E. Haus and Joseph John Ray Orwig
(1862-1866)**

¹ The core information for this article comes from examining each issue, from the earliest in the 1860s forward. In this instance I have found that the issues after 1931 are temporarily inaccessible. I expect to obtain the issues after 1931 and to be able to finish the entire sequence of The Telegraph to its last issue in Part 2 in a forthcoming issue.

On the masthead appeared this text: Tuesday, June 10, 1862 – C. E. Haus & J. J. R. Orwig, Editors – Published every Tuesday evening. Office in Hassenplug’s Building. The opening of the Salutory gave the mission for the new Mifflinburg newspaper as noted in the following paragraph:

In presenting a new newspaper to the citizens of Union county, duty enjoins us to lay down some general plan or principles upon which it shall be conducted. We have long since felt the need of a paper that would properly represent the citizens of Mifflinburg and its vicinity abroad; to supply this want, and do it well—to do good, and if possible to interest, ennoble, and benefit the community shall be our highest aim....We aim to publish a cheap and good county newspaper, one to which every citizen may refer with pleasure and profit. We seek your generous co-operation, and shall labor to deserve the public favor.

It was a difficult time for the nation as it had been split in two and “now we are engaged in a great civil war” as President Lincoln had said in the “Gettysburg Address.” War broke out when Union troops and Fort Sumter were fired upon on April 12, 1861. Editors Charles E. Haus, senior editor, and Joseph John Ray Orwig, junior editor, were in support of the government. They wrote, “we deem it not the time for partisan controversy and bitter crimination We are unconditionally for the Union” and certain the government will do what is “necessary to crush the loathsome spirit of rebellion and to preserve and perpetuate the liberty bequeathed to us by our fathers.” It was also their intent to publish war news and to report the deeds of “our brave soldiers” who wanted to preserve the government and free institutions.

It is no surprise that education was a prime focus for the editors as both were school teachers (Charles’ sister, Mary Ann, was also a teacher) in Mifflinburg. “The great cause of Education, upon which depends the safety of a free government, shall receive our careful attention.” Education was critical and every issue had either reports from the county superintendent, accounts of the proceedings of the Union County Teachers’ Institutes, or essays about the importance and value of various subjects to be taught, or methods on how to be a better teacher.

Other main themes Haus and Orwig championed were: religion, agriculture, the value of women and girls during the war effort, support of President Lincoln and the government, and business and industry.

Those who received religious education by attending worship services and Sabbath school, they asserted, also acted more ethically and morally. Ministers also stressed that the people have a contrite spirit and turn to God. Mifflinburg was in a heavily agrarian area, so much value was placed on farming. The Telegraph was a guide for local farmers and printed methods for farmers to be successful by using practical and scientific methods.

Typically, women received little press in newspapers, but when women and girls helped the soldiers, their benevolent work received the attention of the press. Food, clothing, blankets and other items were sent to the front to bring comfort to the men. The Telegraph reported on the activities of the females and so then they felt their service was recognized.

Politically the newspaper embraced Republican ideals and expressed a sense of nationalism strongly. They felt by adhering to these principles in support of Lincoln and his administration the country and the government would be preserved and reunited. Businessmen, professionals, farmers, and laborers offered goods and services and all contributed to the economy.

During the Haus and Orwig administration of the newspaper, their office was located in Hassenplug's building. According to *The History of Mifflinburg, 1792-1927* by Charles M. Steese and published in 1929, Johan Heinrich Hassenplug settled in Mifflinburg around 1800 and "operated a brewery, on the site now occupied by the Lutheran church" (p. 4). Steese continues, "It was in 1857 that the trustees of the Lutheran church purchased from Samuel Hassenplug a property on the North side of Market Street." Then a two-story brick church building was erected. In 1900 a new church was completed and formally dedicated (p. 15).

Both men were soldiers during the war and served several times, and oddly neither was away from Mifflinburg at the same time. One was

always in the office managing the newspaper. Of note is Orwig who was a 1st Lieutenant, Company A of the 131st Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry. After the war he wrote a history of the regiment. The book was titled, *History of the 131st Penna. Volunteers, War of 1861-5*.

Charles E. Haus was born September 17, 1836, the son of Benjamin and Mary Haus. After the war, he became a postmaster in Hartley Township, and he also was an assistant assessor for the county. In 1868, he was appointed inspector of tobacco, snuff and cigars for the 14th district of Pennsylvania. His death occurred on June 22, 1894, and he was buried with his wife, Mary Ellen, in the Mifflinburg cemetery.

The parents of Joseph J. R. Orwig were Samuel and Mary Orwig. Joseph was born on June 30, 1838. After the war Joseph became the assistant state librarian in Harrisburg and held the position during the 1870s through the 1890s, after which the family moved to the Midwest. Being a newspaperman, while in Missouri he worked for *The Reveille* of Linn Creek, MO. He died on June 4, 1913 in Des Moines, IA and was buried there along with his wife, Jane, in the Woodland cemetery.

Charles Haus and Joseph Orwig brought to Mifflinburg a new newspaper because they firmly believed in freedom of the press and freedom of speech. In its first four years the two men used the Telegraph to educate the citizens about the importance of going to school. Education was a safeguard against ignorance. They too stood strongly behind the national government and felt it was imperative to perpetuate the government.

The reader may be interested in a previous article about Mifflinburg's *Union County Press*, by Sidney Dreese in *ACCOUNTS of Union County History*, Vol. 6, No. 2. This newspaper was short-lived, running from 1858 until 1863. It was operated by Frederick Smith and Jacob Kuhney.

The Telegraph Changes Hands: James Edwin Herr and William Henry Harrison Haus (1866-1873)

“Be Just and Fear Not, Let All the Ends Thou Aimest at be Thy Country’s, Thy God’s, and Truth’s” – This quotation, attributed to Shakespeare from the play, “King Henry the Eighth”, appeared on the masthead of the new editors of the Mifflinburg Telegraph. After four years two new men took over the newspaper and the first issue, August 16, 1866, came off the press for James Herr and William Haus. Their office was located on the second floor of the Herr & Hayes building, a dry goods store, and was located at 308-310 Chestnut Street.

Joseph Orwig gave his farewell, followed by the introduction and salutatory by J. Edwin Herr and Wm. H. H. Haus. Orwig stated, “The best good of Mifflinburg and the community and an honest livelihood were our purposes.”

Herr and Haus continued with their salutatory,

“We accept the position as editors of the MIFFLINBURG TELEGRAPH with a lively sense of duties and obligations that will rest upon us We shall endeavor to advance the interests of Mifflinburg and vicinity, and do all we can to supply the public with a good and reliable newspaper.”

Since the war had ended, so did the war news—accounts of battles and news about local boys being wounded, being captured and taken prisoner, or their death on the battlefield or in the hospital. Now the nation moved onto the Reconstruction period.

Reminiscent of when Abraham Lincoln was running for president, there were mass meetings held in Union County with torch light parades followed by speeches. “The Boys in Blue” wanted Major General John W. Geary for the next governor of Pennsylvania. The new editors expressed anti-Andrew Johnson sentiments. They also reported on the capture and trial of Mary Surratt’s son, John. The two of them were co-conspirators along with John Wilkes Booth and several others in the assassination plot against President Abraham Lincoln.

There was less emphasis on the value of education, and there were occasional announcements of Union County Teachers' institutes. Also, there was less religious news, but there were listings of times for worship services, announcements for prayer meetings and festivals at various churches, and reports of the Sabbath School Convention. There was a short piece on a camp meeting of the M.E. church, and picnics of the Sabbath schools.

A hot topic of discussion was the railroad and bringing it farther into Union County. Extending the railroad farther westward would be advantageous for passengers traveling, and also for the transportation of goods in either direction. Several meetings were held in various towns. Part of the discussion was the construction of the "Lewisburg Railroad and Wagon Bridge."

On December 5, 1867, the citizens of Mifflinburg gave a petition to the Town Council to change the names of the streets." Why? "The meaningless names of the streets and the fact that some of them have no names." The petitioners also suggested new street names. Then on February 4, 1868, Town Council approved the new names of the streets, most of which still remain.

In January 1868 the editors announced they were ready and equipped to do job printing, such as "posters, labels, orders or blanks of any kind."

William Haus bade goodbye to the paper in the issue of April 9, 1868. In his final message to the readers he tipped his hat and "bid adieu to the old editorial chair." He hoped the Telegraph would continue to prosper and to be useful. William Henry Harrison Haus was the younger brother of the above Charles Haus. James Edwin Herr, then continued the paper on his own until 1873.

David Joel Herr and his wife, Jane, were the parents of James Edwin Herr who was born on June 22, 1836 in Mifflinburg. His father operated a foundry in the 300 block of Chestnut Street. James' death occurred on July 31, 1920 in Bennington, Kansas and he is buried in the

Bennington cemetery, while his wife, Annetta, who died on March 9, 1920, is buried in the Mifflinburg cemetery. Mifflinburg's public library, the Herr Memorial Library is named for her and daughter, Jane. They had willed their home at 500 Market Street for use as a library, and the library, now expanded, continues at the same address.

Past histories of Mifflinburg have neglected to tell about James Herr and William Haus, yet they played a vital role with the Mifflinburg Telegraph. While they wrote about the town and Union County, they also advanced the newspaper as a business enterprise. In addition to printing the newspaper, they also became print jobbers by printing order blanks, labels, handbills and posters. Print jobs would also have supplemented their income.

George W. Schoch, Editor and Proprietor, 1873-1918

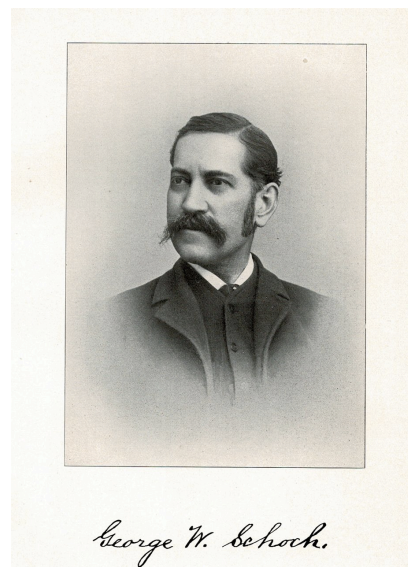
George Schoch, taking over the newspaper as both editor and proprietor addressed the readers in his salutatory message, "Kind friends in Mifflinburg How-do-you-do?—hope you're well, contented, and the like The risk seems to have already been made, in that the paper has survived one decade." (January 2, 1873) Schoch continued to use the same Shakespeare quote across the top of the front page. Later though he made a change and placed the following across the top of the front page, "A REPUBLICAN FAMILY NEWSPAPER. CHIEFLY DEVOTED TO THE DISSEMINATION OF THE LOCAL NEWS OF UNION COUNTY."

The paper would keep its allegiance to the Republican Party and its principles, and would adhere to providing information for the "public good....the prime mission of a news-paper." Schoch expressed gratitude for the "hosts of Republican boys in blue" who crushed a "mighty Rebellion."

Schoch's house was at 412 Chestnut Street where he added an addition. The first floor was used as Mifflinburg's post office (he was the postmaster under both President Harrison and President McKinley) and the second floor was the location of his printing press and the Telegraph.

Milton M. Schoch, George's brother, was the foreman of the Telegraph printing office.

George Schoch was at the helm for 44 years, nearly until the end of World War I. During that time period he was an advocate of improvements to the town and requested the citizens to take pride in their properties and to tidy up. Mifflinburg needed fresh water and he pushed for the town to have a water works. In the spring of 1883 a committee was formed by the town council to locate a suitable source. However, the plant was not constructed until 1898.



“For the welfare of the old soldier he has ever manifested the utmost interest, both in the newspaper and by personal effort, especially in the securing of pensions for worthy comrades.” (*Commemorative Biographical Record of Central Pennsylvania*, p. 834). He remained active too in the posts of the Grand Army of the Republic. First he joined the Tucker post of Lewisburg, then the Forster post of Mifflinburg, being a charter member in both organizations. In the Telegraph he reported on meetings of the posts, and also of reunions of various regiments. Many of the men, if they were physically able, would travel back to various battlefields.

“War Is Now On!” was the headline in the Telegraph as the United States declared war on Spain on April 25, 1898. “Remember the Maine”

became the rallying cry after the explosion of the ship in Cuba's harbor. Spain was suspected of blowing up the ship and the incident caused patriotism to rise high. Men from Mifflinburg enlisted to fight in the Spanish-American War. Family and friends gathered at Mifflinburg's train station to see the men depart for the front. They would make good soldiers and were described as "young, hardy, enthusiastic and patriotic." As with the Civil War, letters home were printed in the newspaper. The conflict was short-lived, and by August the war was over.

George W. Schoch was born May 1, 1842 in Mifflinburg to George and Harriet Schoch. He received his education in the schools of Mifflinburg. About the age of thirteen, he "learned the art of printing" (CBR, 833) in the Mifflinburg office of the *Union County Star* [the paper later moved to Lewisburg]. In 1855 he moved with his parents to Lewisburg, continuing to learn the trade in the office of the *Lewisburg Argus*. After six months, the publisher, Franklin Ziebach, left Union County and moved to Sioux City, Iowa. Employment then was found at the *Lewisburg Chronicle*.²

He took a break from the newspaper business at the beginning of the Civil War. He ran away from home and enlisted in the army, 5th regiment of the Pennsylvania Reserve Corps. He was at several battles including Gettysburg. On June 11, 1864 he was discharged from the service.

Upon his return to Lewisburg he continued working for the *Lewisburg Chronicle*. On January 1, 1873 George Schoch took over the *Mifflinburg Telegraph*, and on May 1, 1892, he became the proprietor of the *Lewisburg Chronicle*.

His wife was Isabella Derr Kelly and they married on April 28, 1870. Both are buried in the Lewisburg cemetery and he died on May 25, 1918, followed by her in 1922. After his death, his son, G. Warley Schoch

² The many 19th Century newspapers, short- and long-lived, that were published in Lewisburg are the subject of an article, "Lewisburg's 19th Century Newspapers," by Richard Sauers, that appeared in *ACCOUNTS of Union County History*, Vol 6, No. 1 (2016) pp. 46-70.

took over the newspaper for a few more months. His last issue of the Mifflinburg Telegraph was printed on September 16, 1918.

Over four decades George Schoch had much pride in his hometown. In addition to telling the news, he also was an encourager of the townspeople to tidy up their properties. Town improvements were very important to him and a sign of progress.

A New Era Begins for the Telegraph with C. Asher Kniss (1918-1955)

A “New Editor and Proprietor, C. Asher Kniss, Takes Charge” and was announced by this Headline, “Old Management of Telegraph Introduces Worthy Predecessor – Under Editor Kniss’ Management the Paper Will Be Devoted to Best Interest of the Community” (September 13, 1918).

Clarence Asher Kniss (more commonly known as C. Asher Kniss), his wife, Anna, and young son, Richard, moved from Herndon and settled in Mifflinburg. Asher Kniss had been the owner, publisher and editor of the *Herndon Star* in Northumberland County. In his first issue, he stated, “In moving into your midst I do so with an intense desire to be a help to the town and surrounding communities I foster no other policy except straightforward business dealings with my fellow man.”

From 1862 until 1918 the type was all set by hand. The building was then equipped with a linotype machine (The linotype machine became a standard for the printing of newspapers, magazines and posters), and it greatly increased the speed of printing.

Prior to 1918 “flat sheets were fed by hand into the press and were delivered flat to be turned over and printed on the reverse side.” After the printing was completed, the papers had to be folded by hand to go into the mail. The Telegraph was typically sixteen pages. The entire process took approximately 48 hours. With the new duplex press the run time was decreased to five hours.

In 1929, T. E. Grady of the *Montgomery Mirror* wrote this of the *Mifflinburg Telegraph* after taking a trip to Mifflinburg:

“Standing in one corner is the old Washington hand press, upon which was printed the first issue of the *Telegraph*, June 5, 1862, almost sixty-seven years ago. Publisher Kniss has given it a place of honor. It stands alone in its glory. For almost sixty-seven years, it has told the story of Mifflinburg, its tragedies, its successes and its failures, and even today it still is used to print sale bills and cards, and its work is equal to the most modern, if handled properly.”

During the closing months of World War I letters from overseas were printed, letters from men, such as, Frank Boyer, Wilbert Chambers, Grover Bierly, Robert Burns Rearick, and brothers, Ben and Donald Katherman. On Saturday, October 5, 1918, a war exhibit train came to Mifflinburg and other places in Union and Snyder counties. Part of the exhibit with three cars contained German weapons captured by Americans fighting in France, talks about war conditions were presented, and citizens were encouraged to subscribe to Liberty Bonds.

Private Raymond E. Harter was the first soldier from Mifflinburg to die. He died of pneumonia at Camp Lee, Virginia.

Peace was announced on the front page of the *Telegraph*, November 15, 1918. The citizens of Mifflinburg celebrated the signing of the Armistice. Kniss reported there was

...a full day of noise making and rejoicing, which started about four o'clock in the morning when several young men paraded the streets banging drums. Factory whistles blew, church bells rang, and the school bell rang all morning. About 3:00 in the afternoon a large parade began including soldiers, decorated baby carriages and automobiles, floats, school children and the mothers of the boys in service. The parade ended at the Hopp Hotel and then Rev. Rearick delivered a short address.

By 1929 the newspaper had outgrown its space in the borough building, and the office was then relocated to its current location at 358 Walnut Street. The building was purchased from the Mifflinburg Body Co.

The stock market crashed on October 29, 1929, and on November 21, the Telegraph printed a letter written by the president of the Bankers Industrial Services, Inc stated that the “financial disturbances will not affect prosperity.” Americans were encouraged to keep on working “to keep our ship of prosperity upon an even keel.” As Christmas came closer, Mifflinburg merchants prepared their stores for shopping. Kniss reported that “indications are that many of the wise folks have begun their Christmas buying early and there is a perceptible increase in the number of patrons in the stores every day.”

On October 29, 1929, work had begun on increasing the size of Mifflinburg’s silk mill, and by January 2, 1930 the Telegraph reported that the work had been completed. New machinery would soon be installed and ready for operation. In another article steady work was predicted for the coming year, and there was a building boom in Pennsylvania.

Kniss continued with an optimistic tone during “the current business depression.” Stock market values were increasing, and there was an upward trend in employment. In the issue of February 13, 1930 there was a special supplement on the automobile market that was expanding. There were photographs of automobiles with featured highlights. An “Automobile Show and Merchants Exhibit” would occur in Milton, February 19-22.

Smith’s Bottling Works, which bottled chocolate milk and soft drinks, moved to a new location on Walnut Street. The company was considering adding Moxie, Pepsi Cola, and pale dry ginger ale to its thirteen other flavors. A new fruit store, the Mifflinburg Fruit Co., opened on Chestnut Street. “J. D. S. Gast & Son Celebrate One Hundred Years of Successful Merchandising Service” was the headline on October 2, 1930. The store’s milestone received full-page coverage in the Telegraph. Henry Gast and John Wolfe founded the business in 1830 and the article gave their life’s story. Earlier in the year, in April, there was a big event at the store. Ladies fashions were shown including a dress from the Civil War time period.

There was little idleness in the county as industrial output had increased. Yet not all was well for everyone. The American Legion post and several Sunday Schools met in December 1930 and formed the Buffalo Valley Relief Association. Prof. Frank Boyer was elected president. The purpose was to help with the needs of various families. The main items needed were food and clothing.

The newly formed Chamber of Commerce of Mifflinburg was “primarily interested in helping home industries....and plans are underway to give this phase of the work attention in the near future” (November 5, 1931).

Another organization was formed on January 10, 1930, in the Buffalo Valley, named the “Buffalo Valley Good Roads Association.” The roads around Mifflinburg were in poor condition and needed to be improved. Guy Roush of Mifflinburg was named the chairman. Their goal was to work with road supervisors and the State Highway Department and to attain state aid for improving the roads. The work of the association was effective as the roads were improved. For example, by October, 1931, a newly improved highway between Winfield and New Berlin was completed. Readers will know this highway as Route 304. On Saturday, October 3, there was a large parade with three bands, the American Legion Drum Corps, and over 75 automobiles and floats. The event commemorated “the achievements of bringing this town (New Berlin) out of the mud.” After the parade speeches were given in the public square. “The event was broadcast over WJBU station of Bucknell University” [During the first years of the station’s existence in the early 1930s the radio station’s call letters, now WVBU, were WJBU].

To end the year, 1931, with some cheer, “Mifflinburg In Holiday Attire” appeared on the front page. “Each side of the street in the business district is festooned with strings of colored lights, presenting a colorful effect that is worth going miles to see.” Stores had elaborate window displays of Christmas merchandise.

Asher Kniss would continue as the editor until 1955, and others would follow him: Wilmer “Red” Harter, Harris Lemon, and John Stamm. Perhaps Kniss’ legacy was that he brought the Mifflinburg Telegraph into the 20th Century by streamlining and making the printing process more efficient and faster.

I conclude here with 1931 as no other paper copies of the Mifflinburg Telegraph could be obtained. However, I expect this will be a temporary matter, and in the future I expect to follow this article with Part 2, covering the years 1932 until the Telegraph ceased publication as a newspaper in 2014.

The reader is also invited to read the article following this one in the present issue, by Mary Lee Jensen, describing her experiences as editor of the Mifflinburg Telegraph in 1979-80.

Referring again to the words of T. E. Grady in 1929; these sum up much of the Telegraph’s past: “It has told the stories of three wars, numerous political battles, court trials, murders and suicides, and like Tennyson’s brook, bids fair to continue on telling the world of the coming farm sales and auctions throughout the Buffalo Valley.”

