

The Town Clock of Mercersburg

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As we pass what in earlier times was called Town Hall, now the General Hugh Mercer Borough Hall, we take for granted that the clock in the tower on the top, an icon of our town, has always been there and will always be there. In 2009 the clock reached its centenary as in 1909 it was a gift to the town from W. D. Byron of Williamsport, Maryland, of W. D. Byron and Sons, Inc., owners and operators of tanneries in both Williamsport and Mercersburg.

The September 18, 1908, issue of the *Mercersburg Journal* reported that at a special meeting held that week of the Town Council the son of W. D. Byron, Harry Byron, who was in charge of the tannery in Mercersburg, read the following letter from his father to the council:

To the Burgess and Commissioners of the town of
Mercersburg:

Mercersburg, Pa.

Gentlemen-

Realizing the many friends I have in Mercersburg and the benefits I have received from the town in the past, I desire to associate my name permanently with the town by means of some gift to you, and I take great pleasure in making you a proposition to present you with a town clock with the following conditions:-

That you shall provide a suitable location for it; keep it fully insured, and in case of loss by fire, replace it, and it shall remain the property of the town forever.

Yours Very Truly,

W. D. Byron

The *Journal* further said that the subject of the proposed gift had been brought to the attention of the council earlier that month by W. D. McKinstry who had learned from Mr. Byron that the latter would be pleased to give a clock to the town and that the council had discussed the matter and consequently appointed a committee.

After the council on September 18 had heard the reading of the letter, the members voted unanimously to accept the gift and then in discussion of the location of the clock decided to place the clock on Town Hall as "It should be on town property and the Town Hall is very suitably located."

The council further determined that a tower 15 or 20 feet in height and costing between three and four hundred dollars should be built to house the clock that would cost \$800.

The *Mercersburg Journal* on July 9, 1909, reported that the clock to be given by Mr. Byron had arrived and been taken to Town Hall. The newspaper also noted that Town Council had appointed A. A. Myers and Dr. J. M. Kuhn, members of Council, and J. H. Miller, the local jeweler, to "superintend the building of the tower and the putting up of the clock." The *Journal* said that the clock and the bell weigh almost a ton with the bell weighing 500 pounds, that it is "a beautiful piece of bronze," and that it had been cast at the McShane Foundry in Baltimore, Maryland.

In addition, according to this article, "There will be four one-piece glass dials, five feet in diameter which will be illuminated at night. The dials will be eight feet above the highest point of the roof and the tower will be placed in the center of the building. The clock works are from the famous Seth Thomas Clock Co. of Thomaston, Conn., U.S.A. and are of the very best. The work of constructing the tower and putting in the clock will be gone ahead with as rapidly as possible. This will be another addition to the town property of Mercersburg of which the people may well be proud and it will keep the lasting memory of the donor, W.D. Byron."

The next week the July 16 *Journal* reported that at that week's meeting of Town Council the following letter to be sent to Mr. Byron had been drafted:

Mercersburg, Pa., July 10, '09

To. W.D. Byron, Esq.
Williamsport, Md.

Dear Sir:- We the undersigned, Burgess and members of Town Council, of the Borough of Mercersburg, Pa., desire hereby in the name of the people of Mercersburg to express to you our thanks for the splendid Town Clock which you so kindly presented to us.....

When the clock is erected and tested, we will be pleased to extend to you an invitation to come to Mercersburg and start it.

Yours Very Respectfully,

J.A.Philips, Burgess

J. M. Kuhn	A.A. Myers, Pres. of Council
M. C. Shaffer	M. Howard Angle
D. M. Keller	J. K. Shatzer
	C. I. Selser

This issue of the *Journal* noted that the clock committee had met to receive bids for the construction of the tower in which the clock would be placed, had considered two bids, one from H. B. Atkinson for \$450 and one from G. W. Seylar for \$375, and had accepted Mr. Seylar's bid. The newspaper added that the tower would be 10x10 feet square, would extend about 35 feet above the roof of the building, and would consist of three departments: the clock room, the dial room, and the belfry. The article added that the clock room would be about 14 feet in height, that the dial room would be about 12 feet in height and would be dust proof, and that the belfry on top would be open. A final statement indicated that the bell would not swing, that the clapper would be arranged so that it would strike the hours on the inside of the bell, and that the clock should be wound once a week.

The *Journal* in the Personals Column in a brief paragraph mentioned

that four Georgia “yellow pine sticks 6x8 inches square and 35 feet in length” had been delivered for use in constructing the tower. In a later Personals Column, that of August 6, the newspaper noted: “The tower for the Town Clock is about complete” and in the same column on August 13 reported that “The Mercersburg Town Clock will be illuminated.” On August 20 the *Journal* reflected that “The new town clock has been going all right this week and strikes the hours correctly.”

On September 7, 1909, W. D. Byron wrote the following letter to his son, Harry:

Williamsport, Md.

Sept. 7/09

Dear Harry,

I send enclosed check for clock for Mercersburg. I am glad that the people are pleased with the idea of the clock. We are told that a period will come when time will be no more--When that time comes I hope this clock or its successor will be found on duty and if it is not too much to hope for that some Mercersburg man may be on hand to record the day and date hour and minute when the change takes place.

W. D. Byron

Since the autumn of 1909 Mr. Byron's clock has recorded time faithfully as it watches over our comings and goings. It has seen many of us leave this earthly life and many of us enter this world. It has recorded the minutes and struck the hours through many local, national, and international events. If the clock could speak, it could tell us a lot about our world. Although it cannot speak, it marks the rhythm of our days. As the clock begins its second hundred years of service, we trust that it will keep time until, as Mr. Byron wrote, “time will be no more.”