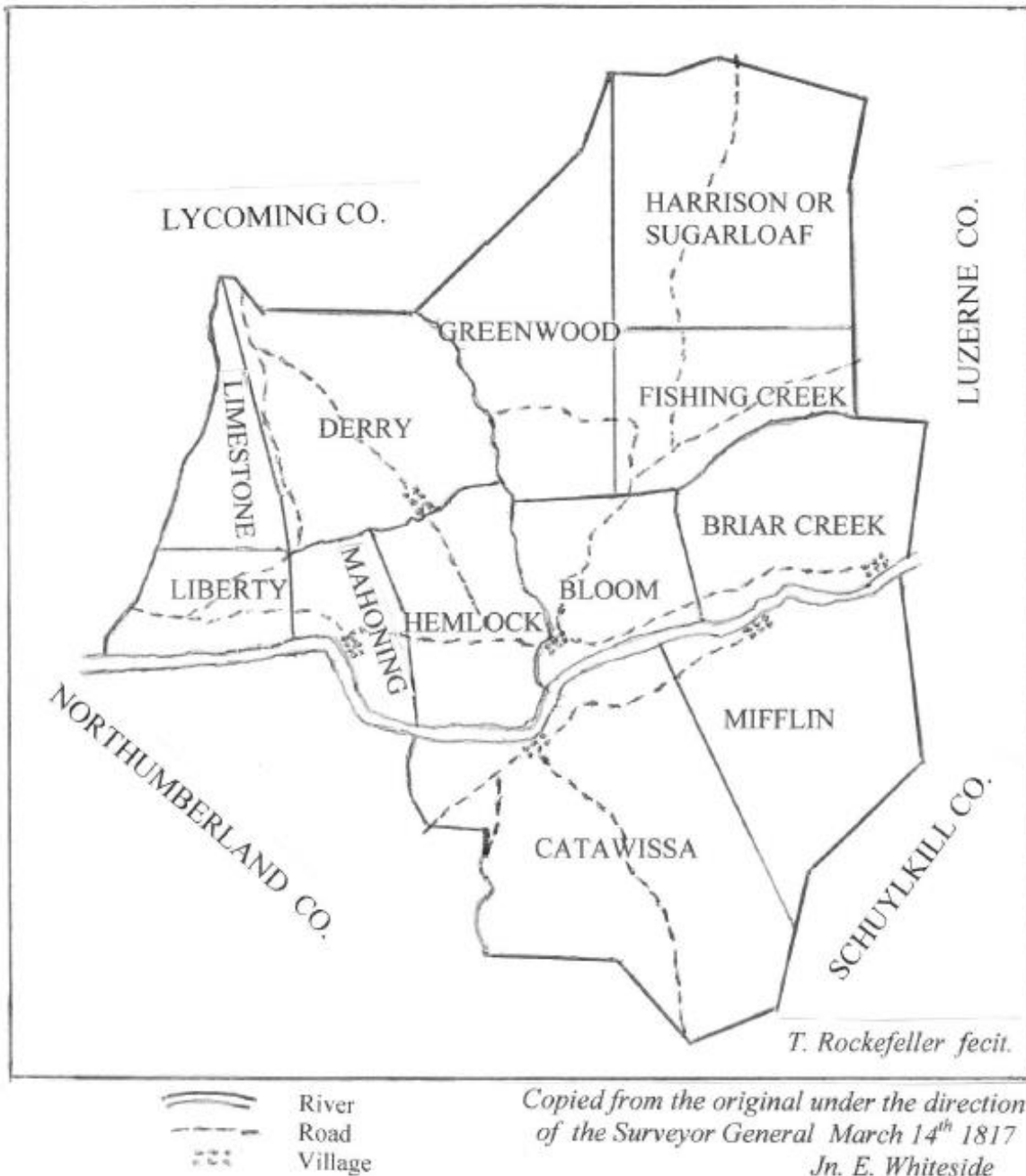


The Earliest Map of Columbia County

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In 1817, just four years after Columbia County was formed out of vast Northumberland County, the Commonwealth produced a county map based on a precise survey. The Melish-Whiteside map, now at the state archives, provides a wealth of information, such as township boundaries and local roads, which can be very helpful to anyone searching the earliest families in the county.

MELISH-WHITESIDE MAP COLUMBIA COUNTY 1817



In 1816 John Melish, a geographer and entrepreneur, convinced the state legislature to authorize the “formation of a map of each of the counties within this commonwealth”; these standard county maps were based on surveys by the appointed deputy surveyors. The maps were then copied by a clerk, usually John Whiteside, in the surveyor-general’s office before being sent to be engraved for publication. The planned atlas of county maps was never printed, probably because of Melish’s death in 1822, but hand-drawn copies of forty-four county

maps are preserved at the Pennsylvania Archives.

The Melish map of Columbia County was surveyed by J[ohn] Rockefeller and copied by Whiteside, who signed it on March 14, 1817. A redrawing of that map along with its principal details is printed opposite. The original

in color may be viewed at the Society library and on the Archives website www.phmc.state.pa.us: click on “State Archives” at the left, then in the search box at upper right enter “Maps,” then click on “County Maps and Atlases: Melish-Whiteside,” then scroll down to click on “Columbia.”

The map is noteworthy both for what it includes and for what it doesn't. At first glance, one notices that the county was then much larger; it included what is now Montour County (set off in 1850), along with a slice of modern Northumberland County on the west and a section of Schuylkill County at the south. Within the county's modern bounds, there are just seven townships: Harrison or Sugar-Loaf, Greenwood, Fishing Creek, Bloom, and part of Derry, and south of the Susquehanna River, Catawissa and Mifflin. The map shows few roads and only five villages (Jerseytown, Bloomsburg, Berwick, Catawissa and Mifflinville). Five mountains are named: Green Mountain along Green Creek; Knob Mountain [still today bearing that name], Lees Mountain north of Berwick, Catawissa Mountain, and in the far south, Mahanoy Mountain [now Little Mountain]. “Muncy Hills” also are shown bordering Lycoming County, and in the far southeastern edge of the county the map notes “Country covered with Mountains.”

While some other Melish county maps included numerous local structures such as post offices, taverns, forges, churches and academies, the map of less-developed Columbia County notes only grist mills. There are a dozen of these within the modern county bounds: in Sugar-Loaf Township: Coles [on Coles Creek] and Hess [West Creek]; in Greenwood: Tho. Bose [Eves Mill at Millville], Fulmer [Bowman's Mill], Montgomery [later Evers Grove], and Dribelbis; in Fishing Creek: Brown [at Jonestown]; in Bloom: Fields and Detrick; in Mifflin, an unnamed mill at “Mifflinburg” [Brown's at Mifflinville]; in Catawissa Township: Boon's [at the mouth of Roaring Creek] and “Clarke's Paper & Grist Mills” near Catawissa village. Five other mills are shown in modern Montour County along with [General William] “Montgomery's Factory” at Danville for spinning and weaving wool.

While the map doesn't locate individual settler families, it does help determine their life conditions: how large the township was, what roads they could take to market or to the county seat at Danville, how far they had to travel to a grist mill, etc.