



John Wayne Aungst, Jr.
1921 - 1988

A familiar face no longer greeted visitors to the Lancaster County Historical Society after December 1985. The cheery and always helpful greeting of John Aungst smoothed the way for students, amateur researchers, and other visitors to the Society since 1973 when, under the presidency of the late Smauel E. Dyke, the office of administrator was created. Recognized for his skill in appraising rare books and manuscripts, John's interest in local history found expression in many pursuits. He was a careful, deliberate researcher. Although he was not a prolific writer, his work always was factually reliable. Among his many talents was the ability to see possibilities in historical matters other less discerning minds would overlook or dismiss as irrelevant. From this quality have come many projects by persons that needed John's confidence and persuasion.

Probably the one quality that marked John as an extremely special person was his dedication to service. Nothing was too much of an imposition on his time and efforts. John lived to serve, and did it with rare ability and first-rate class. As Postmaster in Landisville, he frequently made deliveries beyond the call of duty and postal regulations in order to serve his patrons in emergencies or when such services would make a person or family enjoy a holiday a bit more. As administrator of the Society, John spent many hours helping persons that were not shown on his salary time record. His was a rare quality that is becoming almost extinct in this increasingly impersonal world. He was a facilitator of the highest order.

John and your editor became close friends in the early 1950s when both were officers of the newly-organized Young Republican Committee of Lancaster County. In those halcyon days the YRC, working with the late GOP chairman, G. Graybill Diehm, had considerable influence in local politics. With sleeves rolled up, John helped win the big election for Ike in 1952. In 1956 John was appointed acting postmaster of Landisville, a post that was made permanent in 1958. During his tenure the post office was raised to a first class facility. He retired in 1973.

From 1961 until 1973 John served as treasurer of the historical society. In 1973 he was appointed staff administrator, a title that later was changed to director to reflect more accurately the responsibilities of that office. In 1966 John was a founder and first president of the Historic Preservation Trust of Lancaster County.

When the Edward Hand Medical Heritage Foundation was organized to preserve and display artifacts of the healing arts, and particularly the preservation of the old Lancaster County hospital, the second oldest such structure in the nation, John Aungst was elected to its board where he served until his terminal illness. Even when confined to his home and tethered to an oxygen cylinder, John managed to help organize the Landisville Old Main Street and Historical Association. A week before his death John served on the Society's nominating committee, providing his usual sensible counsel.

He was a graduate of Dickinson College and Dickinson Law School. He also was a veteran of World War II. John was a member of the Landisville Church of God. He is survived by his wife, Margaret C. Wagner Aungst, and a daughter, Dora Jo.

John died 15 April 1988. His memorial service was held at the Landisville Church of God, and during that service his long-time friend, Dr. Whitfield Bell, presented a eulogy we thought ought to be published. We lost a true and valiant friend, one who always was there when needed, and never hesitated to render cheerful service well beyond the ordinary. His presence itself was a comfort.