



Who will be York's new leaders?

The passing of industrial titans leaves leadership void

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Jan 13, 2008 — Several weeks ago, a delegation visiting the York Daily Record/Sunday News editorial board proposed the need for vigorous community change.

At one point, conversation turned to getting things done in York County - now and in the future.

The dialogue covered the usual quandary: The county has so many units of government that it's hard for one public body to cause change.

That's not the case elsewhere in the United States, one of the visitors rightly observed.

But in York County, the way to get things done has rested with the private sector - the business and industrial community.

In other words, the private sector - particularly

those who captained large businesses - typically fueled change.

Some believe that's for the better. Others, for the worse, depending on the issue - or political candidate - these businessmen back.

The private sector has prevailed in getting things done in recent decades, but the business community hasn't always had such might.

The public side held sway in the county's earliest years, and its renewed influence would be welcomed today.

Indeed, the county was founded in 1749, in part, to gain the arrest power of the sheriff and his deputies.

James Smith, Thomas Hartley and other lawyers who could help others navigate the young government of the 1700s held substantial power.

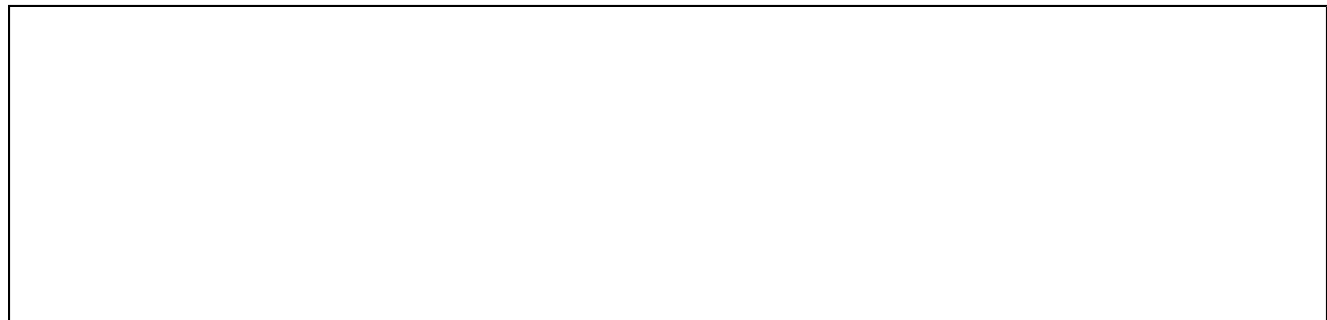
And as the Declaration of Independence distanced America from its mother country, it also cut asunder British control of lower levels of government.

So county government had to make things up as it went along.

For example, no one was better at that than Archibald McClean, a former member of the Mason-Dixon surveying team.

At one time or another, a weary McClean served

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as York County prothonotary, register of wills, recorder of deeds, justice of the peace and other positions as the county staggered to its feet under a new Pennsylvania Constitution.

McClean later withdrew from public life after overwork led to a nervous breakdown.

Local government's power ebbed in the 1800s, as governmental units continued to multiply. If some folks had too far to travel to vote, they petitioned for a new township.

And boroughs, with their clustering of residences and businesses, were carved from both older and newly birthed townships.

At the same time, York County's agricultural edge softened and, by late in the century, industries gained first place in the leadership arena.

The venerable Small family illustrates the change emerging with the passing of generations.

The Smalls arrived in America in 1743 and evolved from immigrant farmer, to carpenters and millers, to iron masters in just four generations.

I have written many times that the symbolic moment that the county's agriculture roots were supplanted by industrial muscle came in

1887.

That summer, demolition teams pulled down the outdoor market sheds in York's Centre Square in the middle of the night.

York went to bed an agrarian community with tottering but still-busy sheds that gave farmers a venue to sell their corn and potatoes.

When the county awoke, rubble filled the square. But after it was cleared, trolleys, carrying factory workers, could now clang their way through York County's center. And factories could push goods through that crossroads to the Northern Central Railroad and turnpikes fanning from the square.

At this moment, A.B. Farquhar was in his prime.

As a young industrialist, he catalyzed the town's surrender to the invading Confederates in 1863. But that act did not tarnish his ability to grow his agricultural implement company into one serving international markets.

He bridged the agricultural-industrial chasm by running a heavy manufacturing operation that made machinery for farmers.

He became a man of considerable local and national repute, his adult life essentially overlaying the Industrial Revolution.

His death in 1925 preceded World War II, the high point of York County's industrial might.

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For several decades, the next generation deftly followed him - men like William J. Fisher, Farquhar's successor, William S. Shipley, York Ice Machinery; and Forry Laucks from York Safe and Lock.

In the 1950s, York's industrial fabric began to fray - or at least local control of these great factories weakened.

York Ice Machinery Corporation or York Corporation, for example, sold out to the conglomerate Borg-Warner.

And Farquhar's industrial heirs sold to Oliver Corp. By the late 1960s, the deserted Farquhar shops along North George Street had become an eyesore.

Still, in the last half of the 20th century, enough benevolent companies with outside ownership and particularly a handful of holdout county-based industries kept the community chest from emptying out. But with the new millennium, community social service and civic organizations are becoming increasingly concerned.

For years - decades - owners and officers of Susquehanna Pfaltzgraff, the Wolf Organization, Glatfelter Insurance and a few other private-sector proprietors have contributed greatly to what many viewed as positive change in the York area.

Institutions in town looking to raise funds to build or renovate, for example, sampled those

contributors first to get an idea about the potential size or scope of a project - or perhaps even if there would be a project.

Ask many leaders in town, and they'll quietly express concern about whether this well-traveled way of getting things done - via the generosity of a relatively small group of senior philanthropists - will continue with transition in their own long-held companies.

So, where will the ability to get things done for the community good come from in the future?

One answer could come through the recognition by the increasingly professional public sector that they need to form coalitions with their neighbors instead of reinforcing their borders. Thus, we find municipal police chiefs ringing York willing to explore ideas of a regional police force.

This brings us to the best-positioned catalyst for such coalition building - Metro-York.

If Metro-York and its parent, YorkCounts, did not exist, it would be hard to figure who would lead in 2008 and further into the 21st century.

An impressive part of the YorkCounts/Metro-York effort is that it has brought together scores of effective people and smaller private and public organizations.

While it's daunting to replace the community resources offered by the well-heeled donors of the present and recent past,

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accomplished, unsung players now have been assigned the center court.

Metro-York has showcased people of great achievement who must lead into the future - Eric Menzer, Bill Simpson, David Meckley and Larry Miller, among others.

So when the delegation visiting the newspaper's editorial board asserted that the private sector remains the best way to get things done, they're right.

The private sector is made up of hundreds of smaller sectors that must replace the big pieces that have moved the York-area along for years. It's messier and takes more work. But more people have an opportunity to make a difference.

Add in enlightened government officials who now realize an 18th-century system of governmental fiefdoms won't work today, and that coalition must bring about change necessary to move York ahead.

James McClure is editor of the York Daily Record/Sunday News. He has written five books on York County history and blogs daily on local history matters at <http://www.yorktownsquare.com>.

In two worlds

An interesting irony of the farm vs. factory conflict that has marked York County for decades surrounds A.B. Farquhar. His heavy manufacturing factory made agricultural

implements, thus bridging these two worlds. Farquhar's life was shortened after he was struck by a machine - a vehicle - while out for a walk.

top

Untapped leadership pool

Here's an idea to refill the leadership pool in York and Adams counties.

The opportunity to retire early has freed up a large class of school administrators and former teachers from York and Adams counties who know how to get things done.

These men and women have just led hundreds of employees and are skilled at community mobilization. And they're often only in their late 50s or early 60s.

Any organization that can gather these gifted educators into a coalition to work on community problems - even outside the educational realm - would be rewarded with results.

top

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