

PHILOMONT GENERAL

Semi-Quincentennial Social Media Series

Part II of III – Growth, Challenge, and Perseverance – Mid-19th Century Through the Late 20th Century (July 3rd 2026 via Facebook & Instagram)

Yesterday, we shared the origin story of Philomont – and Philomont General. A crossroads formed by commerce, a young Republic pushing westward, and a family who arrived in a colony and built a business in a nation. If you missed it, we encourage you to start there.

The story, like the nation itself, was only just beginning.

In 1843, Henry Milhollen assumed operation of the store – then housed in a two-story brick structure directly opposite its current location. The great debate over the character of the American Republic – who it would include, and at what cost – was building toward an inevitable reckoning.

As the United States descended into Civil War, Philomont found itself at the crossroads of contested territory – in every sense. Union and Confederate forces moved regularly along Snickersville Turnpike. In the wake of Antietam – on 1 November 1862 – cavalry exchanged fire at the ford crossing of Beaverdam Creek (see image of New York Herald newspaper; 4 November 1862) in what was first reported as the ‘Battle of Philomont,’ expanding the following day into what is better known as the ‘Battle of Unison.’ By 1864, Union forces had burned nearly every barn in the region to disrupt Colonel John S. Mosby. One documented surviving barn stands just north of the crossroads today – a quiet witness to a nation tearing itself apart, and a community which endured it.

The post-war era brought renewed growth, and Philomont knit itself together. Then, in 1908, lightning struck the store building, causing a fire which burned it to the ground (see image of Fairfax Herald newspaper; 31 July 1908). A vacant storefront less than 200 yards away allowed the Milhollen Brothers to move in immediately and continue operation. By 1913, the Milhollen and Pearson families had partnered and built the current store building at the northeast corner of the crossroads. Charred stone from the original building remains visible in its foundation (see photo of interior foundation wall).

The years which followed tested the nation at every turn. America entered the First World War in 1917. The Spanish Flu swept the country in 1918. The Great Depression remade American life with a severity which touched every community. Neighbors lived through and discussed these events in the same space the store operates from today. People leaned harder on one another – and on the places which endured. When America entered the Second World War in 1941, rationing shaped the general store’s shelves – and upstairs, in

the same hall which had hosted community dances, the local Philomont Red Cross chapter gathered to prepare bandages for the war effort.

When the Milhollen brothers passed, West Pearson Sr. assumed responsibility – later passing the store to his sons, West Pearson Jr. and Albert “Pomp” Pearson. Laura Pearson, wife of West Jr., began her tenure as Philomont’s Postmaster of 50 years – tending not only to the mail, but to the steady rhythm of a community which measured its days by who came through the front door.

By the mid-1960s, the Pearsons leased the business to Jean Bell and Garnett Ryan, who operated the store for many years. A brief transition followed, with a member of the Walsh family also involved. The faces behind the counter changed, but the commitment to the community did not.

In 1978, a partnership was formed which would define Philomont General for the next quarter century. Dr. Stephen Granger purchased the property, with Stanley Lickey Sr. – Fire Chief of Philomont Volunteer Fire Company for 32 years – operating the business. Both men understood Philomont General as something more than a commercial enterprise – it was a community institution worth protecting. That partnership endured for twenty-five years. Amid the Cold War, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the turn of a millennium, and September 11th – the store kept its hours, kept its shelves, and kept its place at the center of Philomont life.

Through war, fire, economic disruption, and the relentless passage of time – Philomont General remains a working, living part of western Loudoun.

Tomorrow – on the 250th Anniversary of the founding of the United States of America, and the cusp of Philomont General’s 200th year of continuous operation – we will share the latest chapter of this story. It is one which belongs, as it always has, to this community. We hope you will join us.

Philomont, Virginia | #PhilomontGeneral | #Philomont | #LoudounCounty | #SnickersvilleTpke | #America250



