

Diamond sparkles as a classic downtown

By John Zavinski



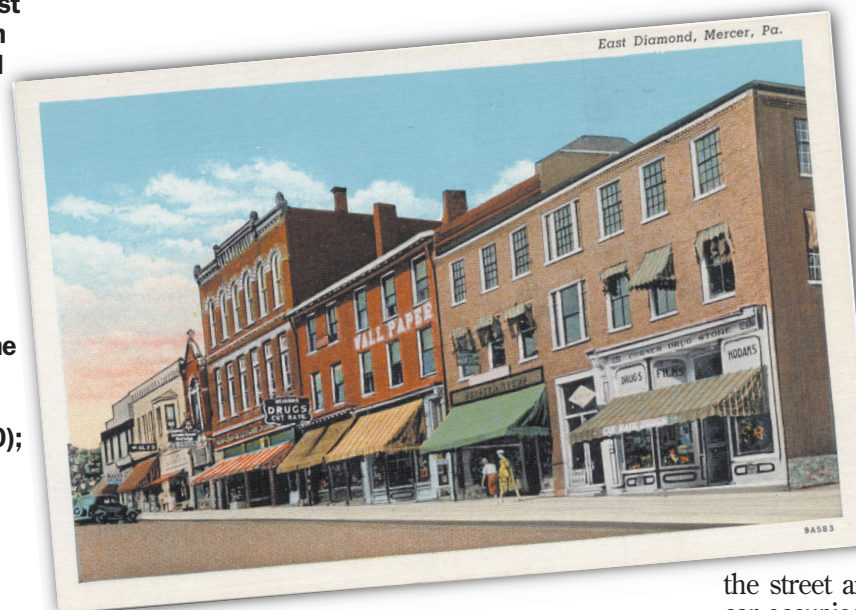
John Zavinski of Hermitage is a deltiologist – a collector of postcards – and illustrates historic local images here with modern views of the same scene. He is director of graphics and technology for *The Herald* newspaper and design director for *Life & Times* magazine. Contact him at jzavinski@sharonherald.com or 724-981-6100 ext. 235.

The northeast corner of North Pitt Street and East Market Street behind the county courthouse in Mercer has changed only slightly over the decades.

► Above, the block circa 1907-15 (possibly 1910);

► In 1939, at right;

► And a modern view, below.



John Zavinski/Life & Times

A COUNTY SEAT not only serves as a center of commerce for outlying rural communities but also as a showplace of sorts for all who have matters to address with the county courts and government.

In the borough of Mercer, the state courthouse is surrounded by a diamond, or square, of business blocks, which are substantially unchanged from when the courthouse was erected a century ago.

The east side, North Pitt Street, is particularly intact. The first view was published between 1907 and its 1915 postmark date. A banner "...week of Sept. 6 to 10" might be from 1910, when those days were a Monday through Friday.

Of particular interest is the Corner Drug Store on the corner of East Market Street at the far right of the card. Not only was it the proverbial corner drug store with a soda fountain, but the awning also advertises "76 GASOLINE 20¢" and a partially covered sign below says "gasoline supplies tires."

Perhaps this was the marketing angle that set them off from another drug store just three doors up the block.

Out front, two men in the street are seen tending to a motorcar occupied by two women, one standing, the other with a scarf-covered hat. Note also the gaslight out front.

In the middle, 1939 view, Corner Drug Store has ditched the automotive line and is focusing on film and cameras as a specialty, while the mid-block competitor added "cut rate" to its name.

The tall building in the middle of the block eventually became a G.C. Murphy variety store, a popular downtown anchor in many small towns.

Today the block holds among other things a martial arts studio, a tax-preparation service and a lawyer's office.

The cut-rate drug store space is now Mercer Mercantile and Soda Shoppe, a quaint throwback to the days of penny candy and sodas sold beneath ornate pressed-tin ceilings in a busy little downtown business district. ♦