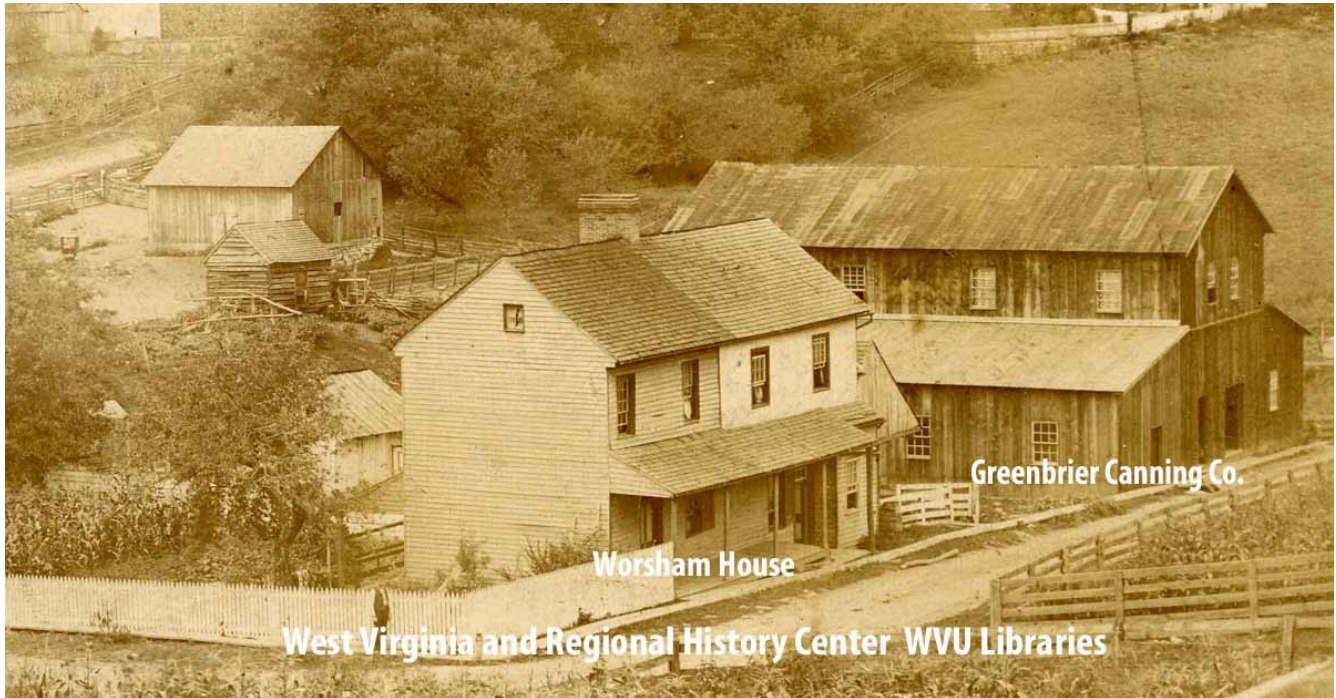


Greenbrier Canning Company 1888 – 1898



During the 19th and early 20th centuries, agriculture was a key part of the Greenbrier County economy. As a source of cash to buy other necessities, many small farms produced fruit, wheat, milk, and a variety of vegetables for the commercial market. Several agriculture businesses were established in the hollow that is now the home of Montwell Commons. Many local farmers raised peas, corn, and tomatoes as well as cherries, blackberries, and plums to sell to the Greenbrier Canning Company which was established in 1888. The canned vegetables were then sold throughout the region.

The Greenbrier Canning Company was located at the end of Lafayette Street. This was the first section of the Old Tanyard property that James Withrow, Jr. sold (the tannery had been established in 1796). The lot was 110' square and the site is now used for the Montwell Commons Lafayette St. parking area.

A great deal of information has been gathered from deeds, the *Greenbrier Independent* weekly newspaper archives, and other referenced sources. Excerpts of these deeds, articles, and announcements are presented in the following pages. They give an indication of the variety of fruits and vegetables that were grown in the Greenbrier Valley and the role that the Canning Company played in the town and the Greenbrier Valley in the late 19th century.

December 1888

Incorporation papers for The Greenbrier Canning company are filed:

“ . . . The undersigned agree to become a corporation by the name of the Greenbrier Canning Company, for the purpose of preserving and canning corn, vegetables, and fruit. . . .

The capital so subscribed is divided into shares of fifty dollars each, which are held by the undersigned respectively, as follows, that is to say: John A. Preston, 5 shares; E.D. Withrow, 5 shares; H.T. Bell, 5 shares; O.T. Sydenstricker, 5 shares; E.L. Bell and R.T. Rittenhouse, 5 shares; B.F. Harlow, 5 shares; D.R. Thomas, 5 shares; Thos. A. Handley, 2 shares; James Humphreys, 4 shares; F.R. Hunter, 5 shares; Austin Hanley, 2 shares. . . . ” *Acts of the Legislature of West Virginia, 1889 p. 648*

February 9, 1889

The Greenbrier Canning Company, of Lewisburg, lately mentioned as to start a canning factory, will also manufacture cans and boxes. *Wheeling Register*

March 20, 1889

James and Edgar Withrow sell a 110' square lot to the Greenbrier Canning Company for \$200: ". . . all their right, title, and interest in and to a certain plot of land situated in the Town of Lewisburg W. Va. on the street known in the said town as Lafayette Street and joining the lot on which John Worsham now resides. (Now occupied by the Asylum.) The said lot of land to be 110 feet square . . ." (The Lafayette St. parking area now occupies that plot.) *Deed 41-492*

March 13, 1889

The Greenbrier Canning Company wishes to contract for the product of 40 acres planted in tomatoes. *Staunton Spectator*

September 5, 1889

Claude Turner, son of T.M. Turner, of this place, accidentally fell into one of the steam vats at the Cannery this morning and was badly scalded about the neck, arms, and legs. *Greenbrier Independent* Vol 24 no. 14

September 12, 1889

The Greenbrier Canning Company which was located in Lewisburg is reported in this issue as having a successful season. 26,000 cans having already been put up with prospects for the tomato canning going to 50,000 cans. *Greenbrier Independent* vol 24 no. 15

September 16, 1889

A horrible accident occurred in the Lewisburg Cannery on Thursday of last week. Claude Turner, a son of Prof. Turner, of Lewisburg, and an employee in the Cannery, climbed up to examine the steaming vat where the skins are taken from tomatoes and, losing his foothold, fell headlong into the hot vat. Before he could be rescued he was terribly scalded. He lingered, suffering terribly, for several hours, when death relieved him. No blame can be attached to any one for the occurrence.

Wheeling Register

October 26, 1889

The Greenbrier Canning Company have closed their canning operations for their first year. The company has done well, having put up something over 45,000 cans, all told.

Martinsburg Independent, also Wheeling Intelligencer 10/15/1889

January 9, 1890

The Greenbrier Canning company sold 556 cases of canned goods to P.H. Noyes & Co. of Charleston. The goods were shipped yesterday. The Company has about 800 cases of extra goods left, which they expect to sell soon. *Greenbrier Independent* vol 24 no. 32

February 13, 1890

The Greenbrier Canning Co. proposes canning corn, tomatoes, peas, &c. The managers would like

for those who intend to raise such things for the Cannery to inform the committee of the fact. We think it would pay our farmers, who are furnishing milk to the Creamery, to raise corn for the Cannery, as the corn will be pulled in its green state and they could make ensilage out of the fodder for their cows. *Greenbrier Independent* vol 24 no. 35

February 20, 1890

We suggest that the Greenbrier Canning Co. put up an Evaporator this year, and evaporate apples. Also machinery necessary to put up cucumber and all kinds of pickle. It will find ready sales for these goods. *Greenbrier Independent* vol 24 no. 36

April 24, 1890

The Board of Directors of Greenbrier Canning co. have decided to have their cans manufactured here in Lewisburg. Thereupon Mr. D.H. Thomas, one of the Board, went to Baltimore and purchased all the machinery necessary for this purpose. He also purchased a carload of tin and secured the services of Mr. J.V. Supplee of Baltimore to superintend the the making of the cans and canning of the fruits. Mr. Supplee will be here about the 1st of May to begin work making the cans. The Board, we think, acted wisely in this - We should keep every dollar at home that we possibly can. This move will give employment to several men. The Canning co. starts out this season with bright prospects, and, having secured between 75 and 100 acres of ground to be put in tomatoes, corn, peas, &c., we see no reason why it should not succeed. *Greenbrier Independent* vol 24 no. 47

May 12, 1890

Letter sent to Representative Alderson regarding a bill setting duties on various agriculture and other products including tin-plate:

“Office of the Greenbrier Canning Company, Lewisburg West Virginia, May 12, 1890

Dear Sir: We wish to say through you that we earnestly protest against any additional duty on tin-plate, and would be gratified to have the present duty removed, and if a higher duty is put on it we feel confident it will greatly damage, if not entirely destroy, the canning industry of our country.

Yours very respectfully, etc,

Greenbrier Canning Company, Per D.R. Thomas, Treasurer

Greenbrier Creamery Company, Per H.T. Bell, Treasurer”

Representative Alderson proceeded to give a 15 minute floor speech on behalf of the company.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I personally know that the Greenbrier Canning Company and the Greenbrier Creamery are new industries, with fair prospects of success even under the existing law, which is not favorable to them, . . .

Congressional Record – House Volume 21, Part 5 1890 p.5003

May 22, 1890

The Greenbrier Canning Co. have men now busily engaged in manufacturing cans. Some 5,000 have already been finished, and the tops and bottoms ready for about 15,000 more cans.

Greenbrier Independent vol 24 no. 51

June 19, 1890

The Greenbrier Canning Co. will begin canning peas about the 25th inst. The Company has out 4 acres of peas, beside those raised by private parties. *Greenbrier Independent* vol 25 no. 3

July 16, 1890

The Greenbrier Canning Company has a force of hands busily engaged in canning peas. They have already put up 5,000 cans, and will likely close operations in this line some time this week. The corn crop will be ready to can in a few weeks, and then comes tomatoes. The Company will have 27 acres of corn and 46 acres of tomatoes to put up. *Greenbrier Independent* vol 25 no. 7, *Wheeling Register*

August 14, 1890

The Greenbrier Canning co. began canning corn last Thursday. The tomato crop will be ready for use by the first of next week. The Company will work about 40 hands for the next six weeks putting up the fruit. *Greenbrier Independent* vol 25 no. 11

September 11, 1890

The Greenbrier Canning Co. is now putting up some fine fruit. On Tuesday the company received 25 bushels of tomatoes and yesterday 200 bushels, and a prospect for 150 bushels per day during the season. It has canned to date 22,000 cans all told. Mr. Aquilla Lipps of our town, has gathered from his 3 ½ acre patch of tomatoes 200 bushels, with a prospect for 800 or 1,000 bushels more.

Greenbrier Independent vol 25 no. 15

October 9, 1890

The Greenbrier Canning co. is still busily engaged in putting up tomatoes. - This is the 9th of October, and no frost yet – something remarkable for this section. The tomatoes are still rolling in by the wagon load. *Greenbrier Independent* vol 25 no. 19

January 29, 1891

GREENBRIER CANNING COMPANY At a meeting of the stockholders of this company held in Lewisburg last Saturday, a report of the Board of Directors showed the gross assets of the Company to be \$9174.00; liabilities, \$3,646.80 – net assets, \$5527.20. There was a small loss reported in the operations of the last two years, resulting from the payment of interest on money the Board was forced to borrow in consequence of the failure of many of the stockholders in paying their assessments and from some incidental expenses which will not occur again. - The Board had no trouble in disposing of the fruit canned at good prices, and already the Cannery has made a reputation which will be of great value to it hereafter. The old Board was re-elected, except Mr. J.S. Withrow, now in business elsewhere. Mr. J.W. Wetzel was chosen in his place.

Greenbrier Independent vol 25 no. 35

March 5, 1891

Notice. We are now ready to make contracts with all parties wishing to raise vegetables,&c., for us this season, such as Sugar Corn, Peas, Beans, tomatoes, Berries, Peaches and anything else that we can buy at prices as we can afford to handle. Please report, without delay, what manner of acres you will take. Greenbrier Canning co. per D.R. Thomas, Treasurer *Greenbrier Independent* vol 25 no. 40

March 26, 1891

The Greenbrier Canning Company has already procured about 30 acres of ground to be put in

tomatoes, beans, peas, corn, etc., for their Canning establishment for this season, and parties desiring to raising vegetables for this purpose had better call on Mr. D.R. Thomas at once.

Greenbrier Independent vol 25 no. 43

June 25, 1891

One day last week the Greenbrier Canning co. sold to Harvey, Hagen, & Co., of Huntington, to be delivered in the fall, 3,000 cases of tomatoes, which will be 72,000 cans. The Cannery opened out Tuesday morning, and are now putting up cherries. *Greenbrier Independent* vol 26 no. 4

July 30, 1891

Wanted - 10,000 gallons of blackberries, for which we will pay fifteen cents per gallon, each. (about \$5 today) Greenbrier Canning Co. *Greenbrier Independent* vol 26 no. 9

September 17, 1891

The Greenbrier Canning Co. has thirty hands at work night and day putting up tomatoes, corn, bean, peaches, &c. The fruit is now coming into the Cannery by the wagon loads. Let the good work continue. *Greenbrier Independent* vol 26 no. 16

October 1, 1891

For several weeks past the Cannery has been working a full force and has put up a large quantity of fruits and vegetables – corn, beans, peaches, berries, plumbs, tomatoes, &c., - canning some days between 4,000 and 5,000 cans. - Tomatoes have been coming in by the wagon load for ten days or more, and the whole force is now busy with them. *Greenbrier Independent* vol 46 no. 18

June 22, 1893

Sale of Stock Pursuant to an order of the Board of directors of the Greenbrier Canning company, made on the 4th day of February, 1893 I, as Agent for said Company, will sell at public auction, to the highest bidder, in front of the Hotel in the town of Lewisburg W. Va. on *Saturday, July 8th, 1893*, Four shares of Stock in the Greenbrier Canning Company, subscribed for by E.H. Henry, deceased, on which said Henry paid \$75. Terms of Sale - Cash I will transfer said shares of Stock to the purchasers. D.R. Thomas *Greenbrier Independent* vol 27 no. 4

February 27, 1896

A Fine Opportunity

At the recent meeting of the stockholders of the Greenbrier canning Co. an order was entered directing a committee – J.A. Preston, D.R. Thomas, and H.T. Bell- to let the Company's house with all its machinery and fixtures free of rent, for the coming season, to anyone who would agree to run the cannery this year – the renter to pay nothing but the taxes, cost of insurance, and to buy cans on hand. Here is a good chance for some enterprising man to make money. The product of the Greenbrier Cannery, whilst in operation, commanded the best market prices and there was never any trouble in disposing of it. Many believe that the unprofitable operation of this enterprise heretofore was caused by the attempt to grow tomatoes from the seed rather than from the plant, by which the maturing of the fruit was always delayed until endangered by frost. In no country known to us does the tomato reach higher perfection than here in Greenbrier, and, if we can always grow them in abundance in our gardens, where is the difficulty of growing them on a larger scale on the fertile grounds contiguous to the town? We believe it can be done and that the crop can always be matured

in time to escape frost. Surely it is worth the effort, and if one or more enterprising men will take hold of the business we think they can make money.

What is done must be done quickly, for if the committee cannot let out the property on the easy terms mentioned, then it will be sold. The close personal attention of one or two enterprising men we believe will insure the success of the enterprise and demonstrate the fact that a Cannery can be profitably operated here. *Greenbrier Independent* vol 30 no. 40

March 26, 1896

Notice. If not sold privately, before that time, we will sell, on Thursday, the 2nd day of April, 1896, the following articles, of the Greenbrier Canning Co. All sums under ten dollars, cash; over that amount, 90 days time, secured by well endorsed negotiable notes:

one forty Horse Coleman Boiler;	one *Shriver Process Kettle and six crates;
3 Box's, 14x20, Tin;	50 to 75lbs cut Tin;
1 Can Tester;	3 Wooden Tanks;
1 Crayon, complete;	1 10 gal. Gasoline Tank;
12,000 2-lb. Tin Cans;	400 2-lb. Packing Cases;
1 set Stock and Dies, ½ to 1 inch;	1 Four-wheel Truck;
1 Pump and Piping and 14 years water right;	
1 House and Lot;	About 100 delivery Cases;
About 3,000 lbs. Scrap Tin;	About 100 lbs. Rosin;
Complete Can Making Machinery and sundry other articles.	

J.M Cunningham, D.R. Thomas - Committee

*In 1874 A. K. Shriver of Baltimore invented a closed kettle or pressure cooker for processing the cans by superheating water with steam, thereby killing dangerous bacteria and reducing the processing time. *Greenbrier Independent* vol 30 no. 44

February 18, 1898

The Greenbrier Canning Co. lot was conveyed to John Preston: “. . . that certain lot of land . . . on the street known in the plan of said town as Lafayette Street adjoining the lot on which Mrs. Worsham now resides, 110 feet square. . . “ *Deed 51-461*

The *Greenbrier Independent* newspaper was researched at the Greenbrier County Historical Society archives at the North House Museum, Lewisburg, WV, where a digitized version is available.

Deeds are identified by (book no.– page no.) and are on file in the County Clerk's office at the Greenbrier County Courthouse.