

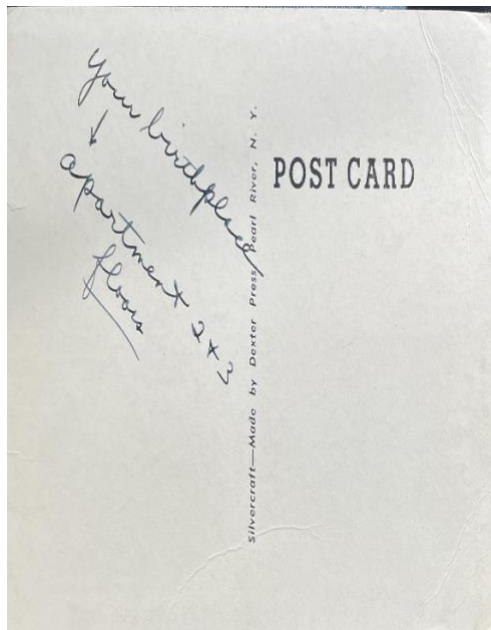
## Robert Maybury's birth home gone but not forgotten

In July, I traveled to Lehighton to see my father's birthplace for the first time. I had little information to go on except that he was born in this small Pennsylvania town on January 29, 1923, and his father served as the pastor of the Nazarene church and his mother was the church organist. The Reverend Byron Harris Maybury was active in establishing and pastoring Nazarene churches in several Eastern states and may have stayed in Lehighton just a few years.

Located in the picturesque Lehigh Valley, Lehighton draws fewer visitors than the nearby town of Jim Thorpe with its scenic railway rides and historic district. In contrast, Lehighton has a sleepy downtown, the heart of which is the intersection of First Street and Colonel Jacob Weiss Park. This was where I began my walking tour in search for clues about our family's ties to the town. Before this trip, I had searched the family photo collection and found a black-and-white postcard from the 1920s showing a Lehighton street and buildings. Printed on the front of the postcard were the words "Main St. looking north Lehighton, PA." Grandmother Mildred Maybury drew a small arrow above one of the buildings and wrote on the back of the postcard, "Your birthplace. Apartment 2 + 3 floors."



*Postcard showing arrow above birth home.*



*Grandma Maybury's handwriting identifying the apartment where "Bobby" was born.*

As I stood on the corner of First (formerly Main) and South streets, I used the postcard to capture the same angle for a photo of the street and buildings as they look now. I am about to see my father's birth home, I thought to myself. As I walked north on First Street, I noticed that the building facades on the right side of the street corresponded to the facades on the postcard. Halfway up the block, the continuous row of buildings abruptly stopped. There was a gaping hole in the block and a seven-foot-high wooden fence along the sidewalk. My first thought was that the building – my father's birthplace – had been demolished. Various scenarios raced through my head. Had there been a fire? Had it become decrepit?



*First Street (Main Street) as it looks today.*



As I pondered the possibilities, it occurred to me that I might be wrong about the building's precise location, so I took photos of the adjacent buildings. These buildings had "scars" left from the building that had been torn down -- the outline of room walls. The building just north of the demolished apartment building houses the First National Pharmacy at 143 N. 1<sup>st</sup> Street. I learned later that the pharmacy has been owned and operated by three generations of the same family and was in existence at that location in 1923.



*Site of the demolished apartment building next to the First National Pharmacy.*

Later that morning, while browsing through old books and artifacts in Claypoole's General Store a few doors down from the demolished building, I asked an elderly woman behind the counter what she knew about the demolition. She told me to take a business card and call her husband, Glenn Claypoole, since he was better versed in the town's history and current affairs. I put the card away and waited two weeks before calling him. To my surprise, Claypoole was eager to tell me about the fate of the building, adding that if I wanted to know more about it or anything else about Lehigh, he would be glad to meet me in person the next time I am in town.

What I feared turned out to be true. The building was indeed demolished -- three months before my visit. Claypoole told me that the “city fathers” determined that the building’s condition had deteriorated to the point that restoration was no longer possible. In his view, it was a hasty decision, made possible by a grant related to some “Chinese money.” He was part of a failed effort by some residents and businesses to save the structure. The local paper, *The Times News*, and other media covered the demolition story, focusing on scores of feral cats and animal rights activists who wanted their humane removal. You can watch TV coverage of the demolition here: <https://www.wnep.com/article/news/local/carbon-county/demolition-underway-on-blighted-building-after-volunteers-coral-cats-feral-trapping-condemned-building-spay-neuter/523-2a98dde8-45e0-4ee9-b87e-11ba0ca6c478>



*Rear view of the site where the apartment building stood.*

Claypoole shared fond memories of the building that was part of his newspaper delivery route as a teenager. He remembers the tenants, the staircases, and the hallways. That would have been in the 1940s, a good 15 to 20 years after the Maybury family had moved out. He was keen to send me his most recent photo of the building (below). The brownstone where “Bobby” was born is gone but not forgotten.





*The three-story brownstone before local authorities had it demolished. The Maybury family lived in apartments on the second and third floors. (Photo courtesy of Glenn Claypoole.)*

**Story and photos by Joel Maybury  
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