

'Dick's Dispatch'

Columns 51 through 75

Richard E. "Dick" Venus, a native son and Ridgefield's first town historian, wrote 366 "Dick's Dispatch" columns for The Ridgefield Press between March 13, 1982, and Nov. 16, 1989. They focus mostly on the people of the first half of the 20th Century and the events and places that were part of their lives.

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#51: THE POPULAR OLD MARKET OF BRUNETTI AND GASPERINI

It was in 1908 that the Carboni grocery store moved from the top of Bailey Avenue to larger quarters on the corner of Bailey and Prospect Streets. The Carboni family lived over the store and continued the business as a family venture.

It is an axiom that when a business moves and another business of the same type takes over, some of the customers will continue to patronize the business at the location they were accustomed to. It happened on this occasion, to some extent. The new store owner at the top of the hill was named Bertotti (not the father of Domenica, Corrine or Santana). Giuseppe Tonetti continued his Italian bakery in the rear of the Bertotti store and this drew many customers to the store.

Mr. Bertotti had an additional gimmick in which he adopted the role of a banker for his customers. He encouraged his customers to deposit money with him in advance of their purchases. He would then pay them some interest on the balance that was left after they made their purchases. This system had a certain appeal especially to those unfamiliar with banking practices. The method attracted a number of customers to the Bertotti store.

After six years of intense competition, Benvenuto Carboni decided to sell his business and move to the new home that he had built for his family at 24 Danbury Road.

It was about this time that a young man who was working as a busboy at the famous Port of Missing Men, decided it was time for him to enter the business world. His name was Ernest Brunetti and he had a friend named Nazzareno (Nanny) Gasperini.

Nanny held a responsible position in the operation of the Port of Missing Men (many of us referred to it as The Tea House). Ernest did not have sufficient funds with which to purchase the Carboni store at the time. However, his friend Nanny had been here long enough to accumulate enough money to close the deal. So a partnership that lasted more than a quarter of a century, under the name Brunetti and Gasperini, was born.

Mrs. Gasperini was the chef at the Port of Missing Men so Ernest paid off his debt to Nanny by furnishing the foodstuffs for that establishment. The arrangement worked out very well for all concerned and the store prospered.

Some time later Mr. Bertotti packed his bags, in which he found room for money that had been deposited with him, and went back to the old country. This event provided a real shot in the arm to the new partnership down the street and business at Brunetti and Gasperini skyrocketed.

The Port of Missing Men enjoyed a fine international reputation and attracted visitors from far and wide. However, it eventually closed and Nanny joined Ernest in the operation of their store. A meat section was added to the establishment and a delivery service was inaugurated and the store continued to thrive.

The first deliveries were made with horse and wagon but eventually they were motorized. At first Nanny delivered with a Model T Ford but soon needed a very large vehicle as delivery was extended to North Salem, Brewster, Carmel and finally, all the way to Lake Mahopac.

Other Italian stores were opened, but none enjoyed the volume of business that Ernest and Nanny handled with the help of their families. Nanny's daughters, now Mrs. Primo Paterniani and Mrs. Vincent Mazzi, worked in the store, as did the three Brunetti children: Leah is now Mrs. Francis Rowland and lives in Florida. Dante Brunetti is a very successful Realtor and insurance man. He and Jack Baldaserini are partners in the operation of Homestead Realtors. Joe still operates the very popular Brunetti's Market on Main Street.

It is worthy of note that of all the Carboni, Brunetti and Gasperini children, only Leah moved away from this area. Joe did move a short distance to Danbury, but since we have always considered Danbury to be a suburb of Ridgefield, he is still one of us.

In later years it became necessary for the majority of young people to move to other localities to pursue their livelihood. With the influx of new business firms to this area, it appears that this trend is changing and the roots of our youths may spread a little wider and deeper.

Joe and Dante Brunetti were both very sports minded and, like the Carbonis, played on many of our high school teams. Both boys were noted for their even dispositions, especially Joe, who never, never loses his temper, no matter what.

When Ernest passed away in 1940, Joe took over his duties in the store until World War II interfered and he went into service with the US. Army. Later still, the store was sold to the Zandri family and Primo Zandri kept it going for several years.

History was repeated when the youngest of the Carboni family, Reno, purchased the store that his father had started so many years before. He noted the need for a lunch room in town and after operating the store for a few years, converted it into the Carboni restaurant. Finally Reno sold his business and it was again converted, this time into a pizza parlor until the building was torn down to make way for the new stores that extend from the intersection of Bailey and Prospect up to Main Street.

Following the repeal of Prohibition, one of the first beer parlors to open had been on the easterly side of the old building. It was operated for many years by the late Attilio Pongetti. Like so many businesses of the kind, there are many stories about things that happened at this little oasis.

One that comes quickly to mind is about Tony Causa, who lived out near the Ridgebury School. Tony lived alone in the house that the late Dr. Sara Bonnett later rebuilt and enlarged into a very attractive residence. He had a bay horse that could have raced at Yonkers Raceway. Tony took good care of his horse and kept the harness in good shape. After hitching the horse to his buckboard, he would adorn the horse's bridle with a very large red tassel. We always felt that the tassel was superfluous as the horse was such a beautiful animal. It was like "gilding the lily."

At any rate, Tony, like so many others, did his weekly shopping on Saturday evening. His last stop was at Tilio's tavern where he would fortify himself for the long trip back to Ridgebury; while his noble steed waited patiently on the corner.

The sideboards on a wagon such as a buckboard were only a few inches high and Tony's weekly supplies were considerably higher. One night two of the "boys" jacked up the wagon, removed the front left wheel, which was about three feet high, and exchanged it with the right rear wheel which was about four feet high. The net result was a very imbalanced vehicle."

At long last, his thirst satiated, Tony climbed into the wagon, in front of a considerable audience that had been apprised of the tricksters' activities.

That great horse needed no urging and went right off at a rapid pace. Groceries and other commodities were strewn over Depot Hill from the corner of Bailey Avenue to where the Village Bank [The Prospector] is now.

To give the devils their due, after a good laugh, the "boys" helped poor Tony retrieve his supplies.

#52: POP, A BRIDGE, AND THE DODGERS DOWN IN NEW YORK CITY

We will take a brief respite from our tour of Bailey Avenue and tell of a couple of things that are quite a few miles from Ridgefield. One will be much in the news in the next three years and the other is much in the news this week. Both are newsworthy because of their 100th birthdays. They are subjects of two stories that were told to me by my father.

One had to do with the Statue of Liberty. As everyone knows, this famous structure will be celebrating its 100th birthday in 1986. In school we learned of how the French people in a tremendous display of affection, raised the funds, by popular subscription, to pay the French sculptor, Frederic Bartholdi, to fashion this gigantic figure. How nice it would be if nations would show their feelings in such a manner today.

Bartholdi started his work in copper and iron, in 1874 in Paris. The statue was made in sections and shipped to this country on battleships. When it was unveiled 12 years later, it was called. "Liberty Enlightening the World" and later became the more popular "Statue of Liberty." A second change was made when the name of the island on which the statue stands became Liberty Island after having been called Bedloe's Island for many years. Other changes may be in the offing as New Jersey has been claiming ownership of the island that we have always felt rests in New York Harbor.

One thing is sure, during all these years it has greeted millions of immigrants who came seeking a new life in the wondrous U.S.A.

The French have been noted as freedom-loving people so Miss Liberty holds in one hand the torch of freedom and in the other a book that carries the inscription July 4, 1776, in commemoration of our nation's birthday.

The statue must have generated a great feeling of hope for the new arrivals as they steamed up the greatest harbor in the world. Many people in Ridgefield must have experienced that thrill when seeing it for the first time.

The Frenchman who conceived this splendid idea is unknown to me. However, the spirit that he generated must have floated across the sea to someone on these shores. Soon the American people were donating the funds that would build the pedestal and pay for the erection of this grand colossus.

The figure itself is 151 feet and one inch in height and from the bottom of the pedestal to the tip of the torch it rises more than 300 feet. The imposing structure is recognized as one of the tallest statues in the world.

The American writer Emma Lazarus composed the inscription on the pedestal at the main entrance. It reads "Give me your tired, Your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe

free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore, Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door.”

It is possible to fit 40 people in the head of the statue and stairways go up into the arm and hand. It was considered too dangerous to allow anyone to climb up into the torch. Therefore, when one evening at dinner (we used to call it supper), my father told me how he had climbed up into the torch on many occasions, I looked at him in disbelief. I knew better than to take issue with him. If he said that he did it, then he must have done so. My dear mother then laughed and explained that when he climbed up into the torch, it was stock-piled with other pieces of the statue on the ground in Prospect Park in Brooklyn. Pop was about 10 years old at the time.

On Tuesday of this very week, a second momentous occasion was celebrated. It was the 100th anniversary of the dedication of the Brooklyn Bridge. The famous bridge ranks with London Bridge as one of the best-known bridges in the world. It is truly a marvelous exhibition of American engineering. It was the first, and for many years the only bridge across the East River. The dedication ceremonies were on Thursday, May 24, 1883.

On the Sunday before the dedication, Pop, who was an adventurous type, decided to cross the bridge. He told me how he carefully bypassed the numerous barricades and started his walk. He was 13 at the time and when he had traversed about half the length of the great structure, he met another boy coming from the Manhattan side of the bridge.

The two boys stopped to talk and the other boy told Pop that his name was Al. He turned out to be the future great governor of New York and a presidential candidate, Alfred E. Smith, and was 10 years old at the time. This story was confirmed by the great man himself, when Pop and my brother Joe met him in New York City many years later.

We feel it is worthy of note that two brothers engaged in the plumbing business did the piping and installed the miles of conduits on the bridge. They were Ed and Steve McKeever. Later on they purchased a 49% interest in the Trolley Dodgers, later to become known as the lovable Brooklyn Dodgers. Perhaps some of their profits from the bridge work was used for this purpose.

After Ed McKeever died Steve tried for many years to gain a controlling interest in the ball club. Charley Ebbets, after whom Ebbets Field was named, was divesting himself of his share of the stock in the club. However, he and McKeever had been feuding for years so Charley sold his stock to a Brooklyn bank, thereby thwarting Steve's life-long ambition of becoming the sole owner of the club.

One cannot help but wonder if the Dodgers would have moved to Los Angeles if Steve had been successful in acquiring the stock.

McKeever had a niece who lived on Peaceable Street in Ridgefield. Stella Lynch attended local schools and graduated from Ridgefield High. In the 20's Stella married my brother Gus and there was an immediate increase in the number of Dodger fans in Ridgefield. In just a few years Ebbets Field was no longer large enough to handle them all.

McKeever had a daughter called Dearie who married Jim Mulvey. The Mulveys had a daughter who married Ralph Branca. When Gus and Stella's daughter married Jim Lowney here in Ridgefield, the reception was at the famous Outpost Inn. During the festivities, Branca and I sang a duet with Mrs. McKeever at the piano. We often wondered if the effect of our singing may have caused him to serve up that home run ball to Bobby Thompson.

#53: RIDGEFIELD'S 275th BIRTHDAY AND BAILEY AVE. BALLPLAYERS

So, we have enjoyed the excitement of the 100th birthday of the great Brooklyn Bridge, and in three years we will be celebrating the 100th birthday of the Statue of Liberty. These monumental structures are both very deserving of their many accolades.

In fact, within the next four months, we in Ridgefield will be paying tribute to something a whole lot bigger than and almost three times the age of either the bridge or the statue. Of course, I am referring to the 275th birthday of our beloved community.

A committee of dedicated citizens meets in the town hall this evening to plan an appropriate recognition of this historic occasion. Why not join us? The funds to bring the affair to a happy and successful conclusion are somewhat limited. Therefore, the events associated with the celebration will be limited.

As is usually the case, the brunt of supplying funds will fall on the business people of Ridgefield. Fortunately, the great majority of these fine people are very civic-minded.

Despite the fact that it is constantly besieged with requests for contributions to this or that worthy cause, Ridgefield's business community is responding once again in the affirmative. These good people are justly deserving of our heartfelt thanks and more importantly, they deserve every bit of patronage that we can bring them.

This is an opportunity for the people of Ridgefield to show their appreciation to a town that has been good to them. We are betting they will do just that.

When we say that Ridgefield is a friendly town, we are not only referring to its friendly people (which we have in abundance), we also take into account the warmth of the town's appearance and its rolling and friendly landscape. Ridgefield has its graceful Main Street and the rich soil that supports the varieties of its splendid trees.

The homes in Ridgefield seem to exude a warmth and friendliness not found in other communities. Many are those who have experienced the friendly feeling upon their return from a trip, or perhaps on their visit to our community. This birthday party should be a friendly one, a chance to express our feelings in a happy and neighborly fashion and certainly it should be fun.

Gordon and Karen Caaagrande are working hard on a stage presentation for Friday, Sept. 30, and Steffi Jones and the Ridgefield Guild of Artists are planning to open their art exhibit that evening to kick off what we hope will be a fine weekend. It was on Sept. 30, 1708 that Ridgefield was purchased from Chief Catoonah and his Ramapoo Indians.

The stirring Continental Fifth will be giving an exhibition on Saturday morning, Oct. 1, and a parade on Main Street will start at 1 p.m. An affair for the evening is also being planned.

Churches will be having an ecumenical service on Sunday afternoon and a special event is being planned for closing out the weekend.

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We left off in our wanderings on Bailey Avenue and Prospect Street some time back and now that we have told of coming events, it will be back to where we left off.

Bailey Avenue is a rather short street and much of it has been used through the years for business purposes and even schooling. Despite that fact, there was still room for many nice families to call it home. Some of these were the Joseph Santinis, the Rossinis, the Orazio Santinis, the Montis, the Zandris, the Christofaros, the Lents, and VanWagners on the one side and the Matt Holmeses and Dodsons, the Travaglinis (Squash), the Frullas, the Bellagambas (Dino), the Fred Romeos and Carbonis on the other. There were others but these come quickly to mind and some of them are still there.

The children of these families were involved in sports at an early age. Baseball was the most popular of all games and it was played with great zest by these kids. Unfortunately, they did

not have the fine athletic fields that we have today. Many times it was difficult to get permission to use a cow pasture or other open field on which to play. On many occasions a stone would be the substitute for the padded base of today.

Not every player would have a baseball glove and a new baseball was a rarity. More often, the ball was one that had been repaired many times. Sometimes the repairs to the ball were hidden under a cover of black friction tape. The kids learned to make do with what little they had.

Despite their lack of sophisticated equipment, some very fine ball players emerged from the ranks of these young people.

For example, Squash (Ridgefield News Store) turned out to be a fine catcher on the high school team. He also played a good game at center on the basketball team.

Bill Van Wagner was one of the better pitchers on the school teams. He was wiry and threw a very fast ball. Bill was also a real good hitter.

Levio Zandri, later to become a teacher at Ridgefield High, starred in baseball and later became one of our town's top bowlers.

Julius Santini became a fine ball player as did his brother Frank who is now our assistant fire chief. Another brother, Aldo was one of the finest left-handed pitchers.

The most noted of the Santini brothers was Alex (Town Spirit Shop), but we will have to wait for another column on him as there is not enough room.

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In Dispatch #50 we told of how Pete Carboni made a hole in one on the Vail golf course. Gene Casagrande quickly brought to our attention that Pete actually made three holes in one, all in the same year. The other two were at Newtown and Waccabuc. It cost him so much, he quit making them. Everyone got a free drink and the fact that he ran a liquor store did not help. Because of Pete, we now have an insurance policy to protect against such consequences.

#54: THE BIG SCHOOL AND LICK SANTINI

In April 1914 ground was broken for a new school on East Ridge. For many years it was the largest structure in Ridgefield and became known as the Benjamin Franklin Grammar School.

The project was a very big undertaking for our little old town, but overcrowded schools were scattered all over Ridgefield's 35 square miles. The town was going through one of its periodic spurts in population growth. In fact, in the 10-year period, 1900 to 1910, it grew from 2,626 to 3,118.

There were more than several elementary schools, but no high school at the time. There was a kindergarten that moved from place to place, without a permanent home. Ridgefield was one of the towns that pioneered in the establishment of kindergartens.

Most of the schools were little one-room affairs, except for Center School on Bailey Avenue and Titicus School. Schools were named for their districts, such as Scotland, Limestone, Titicus, West Mountain, Center, Whipstick, West Lane, Flat Rock, Branchville, Florida, Farmingville, Bennett's Farm. Ridgebury had North and South Schools. Some of these little schools closed after the Big School, as we called it, was opened.

The history of the Big School, which is now Boehringer-Ingelheim, is too much for a single column. However, it may be of some interest and we will try to get back to it.

My introduction to the Big School came in 1919, as a kindergarten had been established in a first floor room in the south end of the building. Miss Mabel Cleves and her able assistant

Miss Mable Nickerson had kindly attitudes that were ideally suited for the task of inducting little kids into the school system.

We have often wondered about the name Mabel. It is not heard so much any more, spelled either way. Yet there were several more Mabels or Mables in the teaching staff of our school system. Somewhere along the line it must have lost its popularity.

It was a real experience for the little kids to be attending such a large school and be mixed in with the older boys and girls in the eight elementary grades. However, friendships were formed and some of these youngsters went through kindergarten and all 12 grades together. Some of those who accompanied me were Ken Northrop, Del Giardini, Elma Northrop, Keeler Sargent, Elizabeth Thomas, and Lawrence Leary, all of whom graduated in the class of 1932.

Some of the kids in that 1919 kindergarten class established a name for themselves and are still well-known today. This brings us back to our last Dispatch, in which we promised some more about Alex Santini.

Alex is the oldest of six children in the Orazio Santini family. There were also Aldo, Rose, Frank, Julius and Elsie. They lived on Bailey Avenue in a house that somehow has resisted all the dramatic, commercial changes that have recently been made in the area.

Alex and I became acquainted in a rather unorthodox fashion. For some reason we developed a decided difference of opinion. I suppose threatening looks changed to threatening words that no doubt advanced to a push and a shove. At any rate, before negotiations could get started or a peacekeeping force could be established, my little nose found his tight little right fist. The impact must have proven to be successful and we have been friends ever since.

Alex, or Lick, as some people call him, was one of the most natural athletes that Ridgefield ever produced. I'm not sure that he made full use of that gift of natural athletic ability which made it comparatively easy for him to compete in any sport. It is doubtful that it was ever necessary for him to do much practice or training.

Alex excelled in baseball, basketball, and tennis and he was a whiz at golf. He probably would not have been big enough or heavy enough for football but I'm sure he would have given a good account of himself. He could beat just about anyone at ping pong, marbles, mumblety-peg and as a little kid he always won all the marbles.

While the other boys played marbles or shooters, Alex would watch them until one boy had picked the others clean. He would then engage the big winner and proceed to win all the marbles and shooters from him. In the wintertime they even played the game in the snow. When the marbles were covered by the snow, a boy would be assigned to listen for the sharp click as the marbles struck one another under the white blanket.

A penny would buy five marbles while the large colorful shooters cost a penny each. When Alex had won all the marbles and shooters he exhibited his business acumen by selling them back to the boys who had lost them.

Alex's vocabulary did not keep pace with his athletic prowess. In fact, to use an old cliché, he could murder the King's English. One could not really be sure whether or not his choice of words was intentional. One thing was sure: He liked to make the other students laugh and he could do it with ease. There were many of us who felt that the high point of the school year was when Alex gave an oral composition.

Junior high school opened for the first time in 1927, in the first of several additions that were to be made to the Big School. The addition was a south wing of the school and housed both junior and senior high. Ours was the first seventh grade to attend school in the new addition.

Miss Mildred Beardsley was our English teacher and she soon got a taste of Alex's ability in the use, or misuse, of words. When one day she gave him the word "tragedy" and asked him to build an oral composition around the word, he had our undivided and rapt attention as he strode to the front of the classroom. We all knew it would be a short composition and had ample reason to believe that it would be funny.

Alex told of Big Bill Tilden, who was the reigning king of tennis at the time. He told of Tilden's great height, his exceptionally strong arms, his terrific backhand that could send the ball with such great speed. Alex said that all of these assets did not make him great. No, it was because he used "tragedy."

That was the clincher and even Miss Beardsley was forced to join us in a good laugh, as Alex, with a big grin, returned to his seat.

#55: ALEX SANTINI AS TOP CHEF AND GOLFER WITH A PUTTER

We have told of Alex Santini's great natural athletic ability and his penchant for changing both the spelling and pronunciation of certain words to suit his purpose. Alex seemed to be always coming up with some new skill that could offer him a lucrative career in any one of several different fields.

While still a young man, he discovered, to no one's surprise, that he possessed the ability to excel in the preparation of food. Most women would be very happy to find a mate with this kind of talent. However, since Vivian was well versed herself in how to get around in the kitchen, it must have been one of his other attributes that caused her to say "yes."

Why Alex actually decided to pursue a career in the culinary arts is not known to me. However, we do know that along the way, he experimented with many exotic dishes and in so doing developed a clam bisque that could not be surpassed by even the finest of restaurants.

It was not long before Alex became involved in the catering business. He found that he could satisfy hordes of people at clambakes or barbecues. We can well remember such affairs that he headed for the Italian-American Club and the Knights of Columbus and the Ridgefield Fire Department.

The annual clambakes that he put on for the Knights at Bedini's Grove drew people for miles around. With the standard fare that was expected at such outings, Alex also served "porkette." This delicacy was considered a rare treat and of course his famous bisque or his she-crab soup set the tone for a great day.

Despite the efforts needed to organize these affairs, and the big job of serving the mountains of food, Alex always seemed to find time to join in one of the card games. He would also participate in the horseshoe-pitching contest and invariably come away the winner.

Alex's proficiency with cards and horseshoes was extended to the very exciting pastime that is sometimes referred to as "galloping dominoes." When the clambake ended and the day was over, he would have his pockets lined with cash that he had won in his own inimitable fashion.

The catering business grew by leaps and bounds. To keep pace, Alex obtained several enormous metal charcoal burning pits. The pits were large enough to allow him to cook hundreds of chickens at one time. He did this for the various local church fairs each year. This venture became so popular that many felt that chickens would soon be declared an endangered species. I recall one barbecue that Alex put on for the employees of one of the large industries in Danbury and it was said that more than a thousand were served.

Anyone engaged in the catering business would be well advised to have a kind of home base. This would be preferably some kind of restaurant. When Edward Schmidt decided to sell his White Spot Restaurant, Alex was right there. It was located on the corner of Main and Catoonah Streets at the time, where the Harry Neumann Associates now operate. The business was very successful but Alex, as usual, was looking for new worlds to conquer.

If you have been following closely, you may have gotten the impression, somewhere along the line, that Alex was fond of placing an occasional bet. That impression would have become solidified if you had the opportunity to observe him quickly figure the odds on any particular bet. He probably never got nearer to a racehorse than the parimutuel window, but he always seemed to know what horse to place his bet on.

Just a few years ago, Alex had a big night at Yonkers Raceway. However, he made the mistake of going to the track alone. As he left to get his car, with pockets bulging, two muggers followed him. As he reached his car, he was relieved of all he had. It was one of the few times Alex went home a loser.

We recently watched Alex in a golf tournament and he did not play well at all. We recalled a time when he was such an excellent golfer. Somehow, as we watched him missing easy putts, we got the feeling that he would have played much better if those he was playing with had bet against him. For some reason, he always needed that little incentive.

On a bet, Alex could do just about anything. Two very prominent attorneys, both of whom have served as local judges, made the mistake of challenging him to a golf match. Besides a very considerable cash bet, the winner would be wined and dined with a steak dinner and all the fixings.

Both Reed [Shields] and Ed [Dowling] are very good golfers but they also had something else going for them. Whereas they could use their full set of golf clubs, Alex would be limited to just one club, his famous putter. We say famous because that putter was probably the best known golf club ever, with the possible exception of the one that the great Bobby Jones had nicknamed "Calamity Jane."

The putter had been a gift to Alex from the late Wadsworth R. Lewis many years before. It was an exceptionally large putter and weighed considerably more than the ordinary club. Compensating somehow for the flat face of the putter, Alex was able to tee off and send the ball great distances. It was extremely difficult to put the ball back in play if it had landed in the rough, but he was able to do it.

As you probably have already guessed, Alex won the match. The judges were still not convinced and the match was held again the following year. The results were the same. It then became an annual event and was probably the most exciting of any contest at Silver Spring Country Club.

Alas, the great putter disappeared. One day while visiting in another town, Alex made the unfortunate mistake of leaving it in an unlocked car. When he returned to the car, the putter was missing. We often have wondered if the thief had any idea of the value of that fine old club. Its value was probably restricted to when it was in Alex's capable hands as it would be doubtful if anyone else could make it perform with such elegance.

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Last week we incorrectly named Alex's younger sister Elsie. She is, of course, Louise and is today is Mrs. Richard T. McGlynn, wife of our fire chief. Also in Dispatch No. 51 we listed Mrs. Gasperini as chef at The Port of Missing Men, whereas actually the chef was Attilio

Pongetti. We knew better and for two such lapses, we get a slap on each wrist and a chance to stand in the corner for a while.

#56: COULD ALEX SANTINI BOWL 200 STRAIGHT GAMES?

Although Alex Santini made a name for himself in just about every sport, he probably will be best remembered for the legendary bowling feat, which he performed 43 years ago.

As usual, the whole affair started with a bet. Someone very foolishly wagered that Alex could not bowl 200 consecutive games. Again, as usual, a careful analysis of the odds was made and then Alex accepted the challenge. We do not remember the size of the bet, but do recall that it was considered a sizable sum, for that particular time.

Several sites were considered for the one man contest to take place, as of necessity, it had to be expected that the alleys would be tied up for a long time. Finally, at nine o'clock, on Tuesday morning, April 2, 1940, at the Brewster, N.Y. Alleys, before a crowd of Alex's supporters, Alex threw the first ball and of course, it was a strike.

There would be many many more before the contest was over.

By three o'clock that afternoon, Alex had bowled 100 games. That was considered very fast bowling and it slowed down rapidly from there on. The remarkable thing was that during this span, he was able to maintain a 170 average. Lots of people would be happy to maintain such an average for only three games.

Alex used two alleys in his gigantic effort. The automatic pinsetters had not yet been installed and the pin boys had a terrible time keeping up with the rapid pace of those first 100 games. The torrid pace would slow dramatically, as by noon Alex's thumb became sore and by mid-afternoon a blister developed. It was a graphic case of the mind being willing and the flesh being weak.

When the blister broke, one can only imagine the pain which Alex must have endured. He told me years later that he could still see that battered thumb and feel its throbbing hurt.

You would never get rich betting against Alex, on anything. With each ball that he threw, the pain increased and as expected, had a decided effect on the accuracy that Alex had displayed in the first 100 games. As the accuracy declined, the strikes became less frequent. The net result of that fact was that he must now throw two balls in each box instead of one.

Pure logic dictated that he must concentrate on getting more strikes and that is just what Alex did. Somehow, he remembered a particular ball at another bowling alley that had an extra large thumb hole. Someone was dispatched to get the ball and bring it to Brewster.

The new ball provided some relief to the tortured thumb and Alex showed his appreciation by bowling a 243 game. The pain had been so intense that he had previously floundered down to a game in which he bowled only 98 and his spirit seemed to be affected by the shrinking scores.

The 243-game provided a new breath of life to a very, very tired young man. His average at the time had sunk to around 140. With new vigor, he was able to raise his average back up to around 160. However, that 243 score was to be his last real big game.

After every four hours or so, Alex was allowed a few minutes to rest. During the rest period he received rub downs from his supporters and listened to their pep talks, as they urged him to continue on to his goal.

It was great to have the support of his friends, but Alex was beginning to get rather groggy from his strenuous ordeal. It was after 11 o'clock that night when Alex bowled his 192nd game. By this time, even some of his most ardent fans were beginning to doubt that he had

maintained sufficient energy to complete those last necessary eight games. He had put forth such tremendous exertion that there was fear that he would collapse.

Somehow, Alex found and summoned up his last remaining energy and continued. It was really something to see. He was more than just a little groggy as he floundered through the 199th game.

As he made ready to start his 200th game, someone nearby heard Alex mumble something to himself. When he was asked what it was that he had said, it was repeated and turned out to be his wish that he finish with a 200 game.

As he prepared to bowl the last box of the 200th game, he needed a strike to achieve his goal. At this point Alex called on all his remaining vitality and took careful aim. As you probably have already guessed, he got the strike and bowled 200 in the 200th game.

It was now almost one o'clock on Wednesday morning. Of course there was great jubilation and some even thought he might throw another ball. That was quickly dispelled as Alex was now in a real state of collapse.

The whole affair was a superhuman effort and a real show of strength, determination and endurance. That Alex was able to accomplish this great feat and bowl so well and finish with a 200 game, is more than just remarkable. We have never heard of anyone else every doing it, and if they did, they could never have done it as well.

It was a long time before Alex was fit to bowl again. We do remember many years later, when a team that I bowled on was finishing a match at the Holiday Lanes in Danbury. Late in the evening, Alex appeared with two friends, Frank and Reed. They had been playing golf that afternoon and had stopped for some food and drink at a restaurant at the alley.

Later on they had the urge to do a little bowling and it was decided that Reed and Frank would bowl while Alex kept the score. As our match was completed, I walked over to talk with Alex and reminisce about times when we were both better bowlers.

It was not long before the two bowlers came over and joined in the conversation. As I extolled Alex's former proficiency with a bowling ball, they could not resist making a bet that he could not throw a strike with the first ball.

He had not bowled in years, but I assured him he could do it. He needed no further encouragement. Of course, he did not even bother to select a proper ball. He just walked up to the foul line and threw the ball right into the pocket for a perfect strike.

#57: HOW ALEX WORKED BERMUDA AND BROKE THE BERT PARKS BANK

In the year 1941, World War II was raging throughout Europe. During the Battle of Britain, England had withstood a terrible pounding from the Luftwaffe. The R.A.F. had performed heroic feats and temporarily discouraged the Nazis from their hopes of winning the island by aerial bombing.

The British were looking forward to a long war and they were building a huge Naval Air Base in Bermuda.

Also in 1941, Ridgefield had a population of 3,908. In a town that small, when anyone left, it was noticeable. Seven months before Pearl Harbor, at least seven young Ridgefielders left to help build that base in Bermuda. This event was so noticeable, it was like a mass exodus.

Jim Baochiochi, John Garbin, Paul Marconi, Nano Marconi, Aldo Santini, Alex Santini and Jerry Zandri, all joined the large workforce of the F.H. McGraw Construction Company. The base was to be a part of our own defense system. Other Ridgefielders may have been so engaged — these are the ones we knew.

Alex was one of the few in this group who did not have a specialty in construction work. Most of them were experienced machine operators. Alex was expected to learn how to grease the machines that the others operated.

I suppose that the others felt sorry that Alex had not learned to operate a machine. They could have saved their feelings in this connection.

The first morning on the job everyone showed up except Alex. When 10 o'clock rolled around and he still had not appeared, his friends became very concerned about Alex.

Their concern quickly evaporated when, at 10:30, a very large open auto passed by the construction site. It was driven by a liveried chauffeur and in the rear seat, rode the commander of the base. Seated next to the commander was Alex, with a big grin on his face.

The Commander had learned somehow that Alex was an expert golfer and lost no time in getting him out on the course. Apparently Alex made a real hit with the commander and it was said that he was immediately relieved of any arduous duties or manual labor during the year he was in Bermuda. No doubt Alex showed the commander's chef how to make his famous lobster bisque.

The year in Bermuda turned out to be very profitable for Alex and he had the good common sense to send his money home each week. John Moore was his banker and John made sure the booty was safely stored in what is now Union Trust [Wells Fargo] but at that time was still the First National Bank and Trust Co.

Alex became wealthy while having fun in Bermuda. It was typical of him that, when it was time to come home, he sent all but \$100 (a lot of money in those days) home to John for safe keeping. The trip back to New York was made by ship. It was a slow boat and the social games were in progress all the way. We would hesitate to say how much Alex's \$100 increased en route. However, you can be sure that the figure was astronomical by docking time.

It would be difficult to resist telling one more Alex story, especially since we feel that it thoroughly illustrates how sports-minded he was. It was in the early 1950s and Alex and Vivian had gone to New York to celebrate something or other. At the time, Bert Parks presided over one of television's most popular shows, Break the Bank.

On this particular evening, Marie had gone to attend a meeting of her ladies' organization, our children were safe in bed and I was enjoying a Dodger ballgame on TV. Suddenly the telephone rang and the excited voice of Phil Masterson urged me to quickly turn to Channel 2. I was just in time to see something I will never forget.

There was Vivian wearing a large straw hat, astride a burro that was being led by Alex, who was also topped with a large straw hat. How they got on this program is another story, but this was a good show.

As previously stated they had been celebrating and it was obvious that the crowd recognized that fact. The people seemed to sense that something unusual was afoot and of course I was sure of that.

They had a chance to select a category from which the questions would be extracted. One of the choices was the American West and Vivian, who came from that part of our country, wisely chose it for the questioning.

Alex demonstrated good judgment by allowing Vivian to answer all Bert Parks' questions. She was equal to the challenge and answered each question without difficulty. As Alex danced gleefully around the stage, his grin seemed to increase with each correct answer.

As the jackpot question neared, the excitement became unbearable and I found myself moving forward on my chair. The crowd in the theater shared all emotions attendant on this dramatic presentation as it unfolded.

Bert Parks asked the jackpot question, "Who was Buffalo Bill's partner in his adventures in the Wild West shows?" Here was a question that Alex felt he should answer himself.

As, with arms extended, Alex strode to the center of the stage, I realized that I was on the very edge of my chair. When Alex answered "Wild Bill Halahan," I slipped to the floor.

Vivian was standing near Bert Parks and quickly shouted "Hickok, Hickok." Parks said "That's right — you said Hickok, didn't you?"

So they broke the bank for a considerable sum and proved that Alex can win even when he is wrong. Wild Bill Halahan had been a star left-handed pitcher for the St. Louis Cards.

The whole affair started a fine friendship with Bert Parks. Parks once said he would like to have Alex on the program every week. Alex learned that Parks had his own private golf course on his estate in Lake Mahopac and soon was giving him lessons in golf and the proper manner of maintaining a golf course.

Alex pointed out the need to top-dress the Parks golf course and then sold him several carloads of topsoil as well as other materials. So Alex again found himself in a new business, which like everything else he did, turned out to be very successful. He even got his friends to give him waste material suitable for compost and stored it in a field where Commerce Park is now located.

Despite all his successful ventures, Alex still retains his ability to stray, on occasion, from the proper pronunciation of certain well-chosen words. To Alex a Kiwanian is still a Coronian.

#58: THE OLD BAILEY AVE. ELEVATOR AND WELL-KNOWN BLACK FAMILIES

We did not run out of stories about Alex Santini, but feel that we should move on for now. The last four columns have been pretty much devoted to Alex and to Bailey Avenue, which is one of the shortest streets in town. It is also one of the oldest streets and there are many stories about it that may be of interest.

The Press recently carried a picture of the old S. D. Keeler Elevator House. At the time that picture was taken, it was a very busy place. At one time, when farming played an important role in the daily life of Ridgefield, farmers brought in their wheat, oats, rye, corn, and barley. These grains were taken up in the elevator to the top floor where they were processed and mixed.

Different ingredients were required in diets prepared for horses, cows, sheep, hogs, and chickens. The proper amount of each of the grains for the diet of each of the farm animals was mixed and placed in large bins on the top floor.

From each bin, a chute was extended to the ground floor. Through these shutes, the mixed feed would filter to be bagged and sold back to the farmers who had previously sold some of the ingredients to Mr. Keeler.

This whole operation was of great importance to Ridgefield's economy and provided employment for a number of people. Business at the Elevator House began to decline with the advent of the large grain companies such as Red Rose, Eshelman and Purina. The railroads then began carrying in mixed animal foods.

Another factor in the demise of S. D. Keeler started when Keeler began to buy feed from the large grain companies for resale to his customers. These customers now began to include the wealthy families, with their fancy horses, as they began moving into Ridgefield.

For many years the old building was used for storage after it ceased to function as a grain processor. As its use declined, so also did its physical appearance. Despite all the many changes that have been made to Bailey Avenue, the old Elevator House has stood its ground. Perhaps it should not be labeled “majestic,” but it stands in stark contrast to what passes as our modern architecture.

Recently the old building has been given a face lift and is going through some remarkable changes. Signs indicate that it is coming to life again. They say that the present occupants are Master Builders and Master Woodworker, Richard Paris and Richard Lorenzini. They will build you anything, from a birdhouse to a 30-room mansion. They will even build you a chair and if you want a cane seat, Mrs. Paris will make that for you as well. There is also Charlie Knoche’s Master Realty in the building, just to prove its diversification.

Upstairs in the south end of the building, there was an apartment or two. Originally the building super lived in one of the apartments. They are now vacant and have been for some years.

At any rate, the building is beginning to look much better and we think it is so nice that someone is reclaiming it rather than tearing it down and replacing it with one of those very plain modern structures. Wouldn’t it be nice if someone would do that to the old Railroad Station? It could be a charming asset to the town.

In the late 20’s Harry Dodson came to town to work for B.E. Sperry in his moving and storage business. He also drove a taxi for Mr. Sperry and lived in one of the apartments in the Elevator House. Later on Matthew Holmes also lived in one of the apartments, until he died a few years ago. They were both black men, at a time when there were only about four or so black people in Ridgefield.

Harry Dodson, I think, was an uncle of the popular Alfred Dodson, who also came to town to work for Sperry and then later on conducted a house painting business. Harry was very tall and very strong and was very well liked by all who knew him.

When I was a kid, the only black people I knew were Mary Steele, Major MacDonald, Louis Brown, and Nelson.

Mary Steele was said to have been born into slavery and since the records show that she was born in 1859, that could have happened. However, the records show also that she was born in Ridgefield [and slavery in Connecticut had been abolished in 1848]. The records also show that her parents came from North Salem, N.Y.

Regardless, we remember Mary as a nice little old lady that everyone thought the world of. Certainly there was never any prejudice where Mary, or any of the others, were concerned.

Mary did a lot of walking and always dressed in a black dress with a large white collar and a black straw hat with a white band. If she happened to be going by at meal time, she was always invited in to eat with the family. She was very kindly and told wonderful stories.

Major MacDonald was the coachman for George M. Olcott (Casagmo). He was very old and chose to finish out his career with his beloved horses rather than learn to drive an auto. The horses were stabled in the one remaining building of the Olcott estate. It housed several horses and carriages and had a huge tower in which water was stored. This fine building now serves as an office and recreation hall for the Casagmo complex.

Louis Brown Sr. served as a butler for several of the wealthy families and I think his last job was with Mrs. Mary Olcott (no relation to George) in the Old Indian Trading Post, after it was moved from the business district to south Main Street. Louis was well thought of and in his

white butler's jacket and his rimless glasses, he made an impressive appearance. His son, Louis Jr., was a fine athlete and starred in basketball and as a pitcher for Ridgefield High.

Nelson lived with the Brown family at the intersection of Wilton Road and Creamery Lane. I never knew whether Nelson was his first or last name. He did odd jobs and had a window cleaning business. He must have been very good at his job, as he took care of just about every store and office in town. [Ed. He may have been Nelson Richardson, a native of Maryland who was a laborer living here in the 1920s and 30s.]

Matt Holmes came to Ridgefield to work for Miss Alice C. Williams in the early 30's. Miss Williams operated a farm of sorts on Cedar Lane. She had a team of large sorrel horses named Tom and Jerry. That seemed to be a popular way of naming a team when both horses were males. I once drove a team named Rock and Rye and that was also a very popular combination. Matt was very fond of Tom and Jerry and kept them in very good condition. They had a real fancy harness, with lots of shiny brass and a large leather hood, through which the hames protruded and covered the horse's collar.

People who worked at the Cedar Lane Farm came and went quite rapidly and Matt was no exception. There was a low hanging branch on a tree next to the entrance to the farm. During the haying season, the tree limb interfered as the loads of hay passed underneath. It was very annoying for Matt to have to lift the limb each time as he rode atop the hay load.

On one occasion he did not grab the limb quick enough and it struck a resounding blow on the side of his head. Matt Holmes had a very loud and very clear voice. With just a little training of that fine bass voice, he could have been an outstanding singer. On this occasion he could have been heard from as far as Main Street.

Being a very practical man, Matt took along a saw when he returned to bring in the next load of hay. When next he encountered the offending limb, it was quickly cut far enough back to allow safe passage. As the limb fell with a great crash, Miss Williams appeared. She did not think it was a very good idea.

There was a sharp meeting of the minds, which failed, as Matt had removed the only negotiable item. Therefore, even though it was the very heart of the Depression years, that very proud man upheld his right to remove anything that interfered with the successful completion of his job. The end result was that Matt put Tom and Jerry in the stable, left the hay on the wagon and departed.

He was a very good worker and was not out of work very long.

#59: THE GOOD, KINDLY PRES ZANDRI & THE WANDERING OCTAGON OFFICE

Directly across the street from the old Elevator House on Bailey Avenue lived G.M. Zandri and his family. He was much better known as Pres. The building was actually located on a little lane that went on up to the Big Shop. It still stands there and is at this time going through some alterations.

The Zandri family consisted of Pres, Mrs. Zandri, Linda, Levio and Silvio. Levio and his wife, Mary (Bowling) Zandri, now live in Florida. He was a popular young man and a very fine athlete and later taught a commercial course at Ridgefield High. Levio was a very energetic man and was very active in local civic and fraternal organizations. He also served our local government in several capacities.

Linda, a very pretty girl, recently passed on. We can remember her as a clerk in her father's shoe store, in the north side of the building on Main Street, where Dr. Philip Martin and Dr. William Doty care for your troubled eyes.

Pres probably owned that building and hired Peter Gisnotti as the shoemaker. Later on Pres sold the business to Pete, who carried on for many years, with Linda's assistance. Those were days when people still had their shoes repaired. Now, it seems, people are more affluent and just throw away their worn shoes, and buy new ones. Perhaps the inferior quality of today's shoes renders them difficult to repair.

Silvio played a real good trumpet in Aldo Casagrande's Ridgefield Boys Band, later to become known as the Oreneca Band. Oreneca is an old Indian name and had been used previously by a Ridgefield band that was popular just before the turn of the century.

Silvio moved to New Canaan and his son, Lee, became a supervisor at the New Canaan Post Office. Lee moved to Ridgefield and when I met him for the first time, I thought it was his father. The resemblance was striking.

Old Pres was quite a man. He held down two jobs, even into his twilight years, as janitor at The First National Bank [now Wells Fargo] and at the Ridgefield Town Hall. I guess that today, the word janitor is translated to maintenance man.

I never really knew why they called him Pres. It could have been because he served so many terms as president of the Italian-American Mutual Aid Society. Then again, it might have referred to the fact that he actually possessed the capabilities to serve as president of the bank where he worked for so many years.

One thing was sure: His intellect and ability in financial matters well fitted him to be a bank president. Pres may have had some difficulty in deciphering the maze of words that make up the financial columns in The Wall Street Journal. However, he fully understood the dollar figures and was eminently qualified to play the stock market. He learned well to make his way in the financial arena and its myriad of transactions.

Pres was a good and kindly man and must have been justly proud of his contribution to the town he loved. There were so many who felt that his was an exemplary family.

Just south of the old Elevator House is a building that once served as a carpenter shop for Bacchiochi Inc., as well as a storehouse. It has large sliding doors on either side which enabled freight cars to unload on one side while trucks loaded on the other side. This building is still in very good condition and forms a part of the woodworking establishment.

Just a little farther south is a little octagon-shaped building. We think it has a rather interesting history. Its most recent service was as an office building for Bacchiochi Inc.

From 1910 to about 1938, this little building rested on the east side of Lewis's Pond. This very nice pond is just off Golf Lane on Lewis Drive. The building was originally meant to serve as a boathouse. However, the pond was not really large enough for boating. It was also intended to be a bathhouse, but we do not think that there was very much swimming there, although there was one instance where some of the boys threw Mike Short into the pond, clothes and all. Mike was a kind of hermit, living alone in the little red house on Olmstead Lane, where the Rosas now live. There will be more about Mike later on. The reason for his ducking in Lewis's Pond was his aversion to taking a bath. The boys just decided they would clean him up a bit.

So the little octagon house did not make it as a boathouse or as a bathhouse, but it sure made a delightful place to change into your skates during the winter months. The pond was just the right size for skating. Today it is rather difficult to see from the highway because of the growth of the trees and shrubbery.

In the late 30's, the beautiful Frederick E. Lewis estate was being dismantled and someone thought of a good use for the little octagon house. Over at the old Ridgefield High

School, there was a need for a place for visiting ball teams to change into their uniforms. So the little building was picked up and hauled over to the ridge and came to rest where the tennis courts are now. It served its purpose well for a few years.

An addition was in progress to the high school and soon we had our first gymnasium, complete with showers and dressing rooms.

At this time the war clouds were gathering over Europe and people were becoming conscious of the possibility of an enemy attack. A large group of spotters was organized to watch for and make reports on any airplane that might fly over this area.

The search for a place for the spotters to operate led to East Ridge and the little boathouse, bathhouse, skate house, and dressing room was soon put to work as a very integral part of Ridgefield's Civilian Defense System. At first it was manned only during daylight hours, but soon became a 24-hour effort.

Later, a platform with a long stairway leading to it was constructed right next to the little building. It gave the spotters a better view of the sky, but the building continued to be used throughout the war years.

So now the building's use as an office has lessened since Bacchiochi Inc. has gone out of business. We are sure the versatile building will find another way of serving a useful purpose.

[In 2020, the octagon building appears to be serving as the office for a painting contractor.]

#60: BIG AND LITTLE SQUASH AND HOW THEY GOT THEIR NAME(S)

Up Bailey Avenue there are Casey's oil tanks and then the only remaining house on the south side of the highway. As pointed out in an earlier column, this was the home of Nazzareno "Luchetta" Travaglini and his family. It was here that the two Squashes grew up. They were Big Squash and Little Squash. [Ed note: This house at 24 Bailey Avenue has since been razed and replaced with a small office building.]

There were several versions as to how the names came into being. One was that an older brother returned to school for the afternoon session and the teacher asked him what he had for lunch. When he answered that he had eaten squash, the name was applied and it has remained for more than 60 years.

Luchetta was also called Squash by a few hardy souls but only when they were at a safe distance. He was a big fellow and did not approve of the name.

Big Squash (Aldo, of course) has owned and operated the Ridgefield News Store for so many years that it has become an institution. Before taking over the store he had been a fixture in Bissell's Drug Store, working at the soda fountain, before and after school, when ice cream sodas were so popular.

Little Squash (Louis) was so called because he was the youngest. Even though they are about the same size today, they are still referred to as Big and Little.

Louis was a dispatcher for the state police when they were in the building on East Ridge that now houses our Ridgefield Police Department. He operated the telephone and radio systems for many years. Just a few years ago, the state police moved into their new barracks in Southbury. The one thing they could not move out of the building was Little Squash. He stayed on and continued as a dispatcher for the Ridgefield Police Department.

In the late 20's, the Ridgefield Boys Band was formed by the late Aldo Casagrande. The name was later changed to Oreneca Band after a very popular band in Ridgefield at the turn of the century. Someone was needed to carry the bass drum and Little Squash volunteered.

We recall that he had a little patch of white hair on the back of what was otherwise a head of very nice black curly hair. Since he also had another nickname, Potch, we always thought that the name was a variation of the word "patch." Not so, says Louis. It was because, as a little boy, he used to suck his thumb. So now we know the meaning of the word Potch.

At any rate both Big and Little Squash have for many years played an important part in the everyday life of Ridgefield.

Across the street from the Travaglinis lived the Lent family. Annie Lent married Irving VanWagner and Irv still lives in the only house that is left on the upper part of Bailey Avenue.

In an earlier column we told of Irv's prowess with a coal shovel and described the uninterrupted sound of coal going down the chute as he applied that great rhythm to the swing of the shovel. We failed to add that when coal gave way to oil for home heating purposes, Irv changed his line of work to the maintenance of some of the large estates. He became very proficient and continued with estate work right on up into his eighties.

Across the street from the VanWagner house is the entrance to the Donnelly Shopping Plaza. Until the 1950s there were three little houses along what is now a parking area.

These houses were all very close to the sidewalk. One had a small porch and two steps from the sidewalk. Another had one step but no porch. The third had no porch and no step. The front door opened about two feet above the sidewalk. I do not recall this door ever being used.

Tonetti's bakery was operating in the rear of the third building and was once the site of a serious fire. There was another small building in which the instruments of the old Oreneca Band were stored. This little building was completely destroyed by fire.

My brother Paul and I were examining the ruins when he noted a piece of metal protruding from beneath a charred timber. It turned out to be a cymbal and the mate to it was soon located. The handles of the cymbals were burned off but otherwise they were undamaged. The handles were easily replaced and the cymbals were used by Leno Marinelli for many years in Aldo Casagrande's new Oreneca Band.

Then there was the brick building that served as a garage and Herb Bates livery service and now houses Acorn Press. It was a one-story building and remained so for more than half a century. Just a few years ago the growth of the newspaper business caused a second story to be added. Fortunately the foundations of buildings that were constructed at the time were of sufficient strength to allow additions to be made.

Bates had several drivers and just a few who come quickly to mind are the famous Jimmie Rogers, Julius Latanzi and Diamond Jim Brady who later became our police chief.

Close to the sidewalk and midway between the Press building and the Town Hall was Coleman's Lunch Wagon. Some referred to it as a lunch cart. It was supposed to be mindful of a railroad coach and it was. Most every town had one and it must have been the forerunner of today's fast-food outlets. I guess today such places are called diners.

This one had a sliding door at its front. That was it, no side doors and no rear door. There were three or four steps on either side of a small platform that rested in front of the sliding door. The place would probably not seat more than 10 people at one time. It should have been a friendly place and it always seemed so nice and warm on a cold winter day. However, there were a few times when it was not so friendly and arguments that started verbally often were completed with bare fists out back of the lunch wagon.

There were two such fights of which we have vivid memories. One was between Jack N. and Ed M. and was the most brutal contest that I have ever witnessed. Both men were big and very powerful. They just stood toe to toe and slugged it out. I do not think there was a clear

winner, as after what seemed like a very long time to a scared little newsboy, both men were exhausted and completely destroyed.

The other fight was a little less brutal and a little more scientific. O.C. and J.Y. were engaged in the same line of work and apparently their differences had surfaced during the day on the job. When no other method was available to settle the matter, it just naturally moved out back of the lunch wagon. I seem to remember that O.C. won this one. The two combatants live on the same street today and apparently have resolved their differences.

#61: MIKE COLEMAN'S TEN-CENT BURGERS, JIMMY ROGERS' MODEL T

Back in the 20s, the bill of fare at Mike Coleman's Lunch Wagon included such goodies as beans and franks, 25 cents; four strips of bacon and two eggs, 25 cents; corned beef hash with poached egg, 25 cents; western omelet, 20 cents. Hamburgers were 10 cents, as were large pieces of pie, and coffee was a nickel.

My brother Gus worked for Mike as a counterman. One very cold winter's afternoon, while delivering my newspapers, I felt the urge to have a taste of one of those delicious hamburgers. My problem was that I had only a nickel to spare. I approached the counter and asked Gus the price of a hamburger, knowing full well that his reply would be that they cost a dime.

My next approach was to inquire if there was any such thing as a "five cent teenie weenie sandwich." Edgar Masten and a couple of other men were seated at the counter. On hearing my question, Ed laughed so hard he almost fell off the stool. He quickly produced another nickel and I thoroughly enjoyed a full-sized hamburger, and nothing ever tasted so good.

Ed never let me forget the incident, and for more than 50 years, until he passed on a few years ago, always laughed whenever we met and asked "How about a five cent teenie weenie sandwich?"

The little lunch wagon was the scene of so many happy and pleasant memories that it is sad to report that it was here that I witnessed the only act of racial prejudice that I have ever encountered in Ridgefield. A white man, from a well-known Ridgefield family, had apparently imbibed too much alcohol and refused to sit at the counter with a black man who was passing through town.

The white man was both verbally and physically abusive. The whole affair was quite sickening. Finally the State Police were called and he was placed under arrest. It made an impression that I will never forget.

Other than that unfortunate incident, Coleman's Lunch was a place where some very funny things happened and my very funny friend, Jimmy Rogers, was generally involved, somewhere. As mentioned in an early column, Jimmy was a real favorite, and always good for a good healthy laugh. He could put a smile on the face of a sphinx; even those devoid of mirth would be forced to grin at his capers. During the Depression days, Jimmy was one of our most valuable assets.

The Model T Ford had three floor pedals that either put the little car in motion or brought it to a stop. The pedal on the right was the foot brake. The middle pedal was pressed when you wanted to move in reverse. The left pedal put the car in forward motion.

The pedal on the left actually served two purposes. When pressed all the way down, it put the car in a lower forward speed. When sufficient speed was attained, the pedal was released and it snapped back, putting the car in high speed.

Some cars also had a small button on the floor, called a cut-out. The cut-out was a gadget that opened the exhaust pipe before it entered the muffler. The result was that the sound of the engine then came through undiluted, or perhaps I should say unrestrained, making it very noisy.

Garage mechanics of the day probably never got very rich, repairing the Model T Ford. The great car was the height of simplicity and a person with even a limited mechanical ability could do his own repair work.

One very warm August noon-time, Coleman's Lunch was crowded with customers and a great roar was heard from the direction of Main Street. It sounded as though a caravan of motor vehicles was approaching from south Main. Everyone's attention was directed to the corner at Town Hall. Finally a Model T touring car, with the top down, appeared at the intersection and slowly turned into Bailey Avenue.

Seated at the wheel of the car was Jimmy Rogers, complete with a light tan duster, a fluffy light tan cap, an oversize pair of racing goggles and large gauntlets that reached all the way to his elbows. Jimmy had the car in low speed, with both the accelerator and the cut-out in wide open positions. The roar was deafening as he slowly approached the lunch wagon. Despite the terrific noise, the car in low speed probably did not exceed 10 miles per hour. The lunch customers recognized Jimmy and quickly left the counter to gaze in wonderment at the motorist in all his sartorial splendor. No one would attempt to guess, as to what his next move would be as he was entirely unpredictable.

The car came to rest, right next to a telephone pole that stood near the door of the lunch wagon. Incidentally, that pole has, no doubt, been replaced during the past 56 years. However, it is worthy of note that there is still a pole there, in the exact same spot we are talking about.

Jimmy sat there for a minute or two, with the motor running, while he basked in the rapt attention his antics never failed to produce. When he was satisfied that he was in command of the center of the stage, he opened the car door and slowly alighted from his vehicle. Jimmy slowly removed the gauntlets, then the duster and finally the goggles. They were carefully folded and placed in a neat pile on the back seat.

Jimmy's middle name could have been Neat. We never saw him in a disheveled condition. He had a very funny face that easily provoked laughter among his friends. yet his expression was always somber and very serious. He rarely smiled. He just enjoyed making others smile.

Some of the diners must have been late getting back to their work that afternoon. The one-man performance took a long time as it unfolded before the interested onlookers. One thing was sure, no one would risk spoiling the act by opening the lunch wagon door.

Finally, and at long last, Jimmy opened the rear door of the car and pulled out a chain that was large enough to moor the Queen Elizabeth. He then ran the chain through the wooden spoked rear wheels of the car. The chain was then wrapped around the telephone pole and a very large lock was snapped into place.

Once the car was secured Jimmy made a grand entrance through the lunch wagon door and ordered a cup of coffee, to the delight of the hysterical group that had just witnessed Jimmy's latest escapade.

#62: OLD BAILEY BUSINESSES INCLUDING POP CROUCHLEY'S

Right across from Coleman's Lunch Wagon on Bailey Avenue stood an old one story, wooden building. It had a porch that extended the length of the front of the building. There was

a pipe railing along the porch and that seemed quite fitting, as the building housed Charles D. Crouchley's plumbing shop.

"Pop," as we used to call Mr. Crouchley, later moved to the Scott Block when Ernest Scott built that large brick building in the early 20's. When the Crouchley store was on Main Street, it had probably the last gas pump on the street. Uncle Frank Moylan used to turn the handle on the pump as it dispensed "Good" Gulf gasoline. He was also the bookkeeper for the firm. The spot when the pump was located is still visible, on the sidewalk, about 30 feet north of Squash's.

Pop Crouchley was a member of the old Ridgefield family. His father, Benjamin F. Crouchley, was elected first selectman 75 years ago and served several terms in that office. Ben must have been a very good selectman as in those days a Democrat stood little chance of election in Ridgefield.

Pop was one of the early chiefs on the Ridgefield Volunteer Fire Department. He was also a very good baseball player and played several positions, including first base and catcher. He also served for many years as president of the Ridgefield Savings Bank. That was at a time when mortgages were not as easy to come by as they are today. Bankers were extremely cautious and a person had to prove to be a good risk before a mortgage was granted.

The Crouchley family lived for many years in the house on East Ridge where Lou Fossi and his family now make their home. Pop drove only one auto that I can remember. It was a very large, green La Salle that he acquired in the 20's and was still driving in the 50's.

The plumbing shop was manned by Uncle Bill Sullivan and Horace Walker. Ernie P. decided that he would like to learn the plumbing trade and he was assigned to Bill and Horace for training. One day they had need for a nine-foot length of pipe. Ernie was handed a yardstick and sent to the basement to measure and then cut the pipe. When a half hour had elapsed and Ernie had not returned, Bill called down and asked what was taking so long. Ernie's reply was that he did not know how he was expected to measure a pipe that was nine feet long when the ruler only measured three feet.

Pop Crouchley's two sons were both very prominent in town affairs. Ralph served on several committees and commissions in town government, including the tax assessors office and the sewer commission. Of course, he is best remembered as the long-time director of the Ridgefield Boys' Club.

The 11 very civic-minded ladies who started the Boys' Club credited Ralph with "aiding and assisting youth in its preparation for a fuller and complete life, and in the rehabilitation of youth, both morally and physically." He would certainly be very sad today if he could see the present plight of that excellent club that has meant so much to Ridgefield's youth.

In a like manner, Ralph's brother, Charles D. Jr., gave much of himself to the youths of Ridgefield. "Chad," as we used to call him, gave countless hours to the Boy Scouts for many years. He was recognized as an expert on Indian lore and was always happy while passing on his knowledge to the troops that he took on hikes and camping expeditions.

Chad taught in junior high school for many years while also serving as principal of Ridgefield Junior High. At that time it was not unusual for a principal to perform this double duty. Chad was sorely missed when he moved to Maine.

Next door to the plumbing shop on Bailey Avenue was an electrical business owned and operated by Charles Reidinger. Charlie was an excellent electrician and young fellows like Frank Bailey, Bill Dougherty, and Lyman Anderson benefited from his experience in this field.

Charlie was slightly handicapped as the back of his left hand had once come in contact with a high tension wire. The hand was badly burned but he did regain some use of it. He was known as a fixer and would not hesitate to tackle any job that was offered, whether it had to do with electricity or not.

Charlie's recognized abilities in many fields were made known to Irving B. Conklin Sr. when he became superintendent on the Dr. George G. Shelton estate in the early 20's. Irving was new in town at the time and wanted to know who the local tradesmen were that he should call for any work that became necessary to do. The doctor told him, "There is a man named Charles Reidinger who does our electrical work. However, Charlie will do anything from fixing your watch to taking out your appendix. I think it best to confine him to his regular type of work, as Ridgefield has some excellent carpenters, masons, plumbers, and painters."

Charlie wore gold-rimmed glasses, a soft black hat and a well-trimmed mustache and was never seen without his cigar. For some reason, the cigar was never full length. Where he secured so many cigar butts is not known but it was always a two or three inch butt that he took from his pocket.

Incidentally, when Harry Goodwin came to Ridgefield, he became Reidinger's bookkeeper.

The Reidingers lived on Prospect Street for many years and then built the cute little stucco house at 114 Barry Avenue.

Next there was another old wooden building on Bailey Avenue, right across from The Press. When Raymond Keeler had a contracting business, he used to keep his trucks and other equipment in this building.

Ray came from one of the real old Ridgefield families and the Keeler name is found among the original settlers. Mortimer C. Keeler was Ray's father and was one of the very prominent Ridgefield farmers. His large farm was taken over by Ray's brother Irving, and is now one of Ridgefield's finest developments and is known as Twin Ridge.

Ray was probably the biggest practical joker that ever came down the pike. He was different from Jimmy Rogers who made people laugh but never laughed himself. Ray made people laugh with his tricks and laughed right along with them. It would be a rare occasion when Ray was serious, and when you were in his company, something funny was bound to happen.

#63: THE MISCHIEVOUS RAY KEELER

Ridgefield once had a policeman who was very ticklish. I guess it could be said that he was extremely ticklish. He was considered quite handsome and in his natty uniform, and with his neatly trimmed mustache, cut an elegant figure as a limb of the law. In addition, he was a very nice man. However, he did have this affliction and some used the name of the fowl next larger than the duck, in referring to it.

G. was a friend of Ray Keeler's so Ray was well aware of G.'s aversion to being touched, let alone tickled. One day the two were in conversation in front of Bissell's Drug Store, when Ray suddenly reached out with what appeared to be the intention of tickling G. He jumped back and when Ray continued to advance, G. walked briskly away. He then started to trot and then to run, with Ray running some 10 feet behind him.

As the two runners neared the Town Hall, the pace increased and when G. turned the corner and raced down Bailey Avenue, he was in full flight. I guess the only thing that could compare with this rather unusual scene would be a man biting a dog or a mouse chasing a cat.

When G. reached Bate's Taxi Garage (where the Press was), he had a sudden idea. He raced across the street and through the door of the old building where Ray kept his trucks. G. scrambled into the cab of one of the trucks and locked the doors. Temporarily he was safe from his tormentor.

The hard part of all this, for the policeman, was that he was well aware that when Ray started one of his tricks, he would keep it going until it was completed to his satisfaction. So the town was left unprotected for the remainder of the afternoon while its lone representative of law and order was confined to the small area of a truck's cab. No major disasters occurred that afternoon, but many questions were raised as to why G. was not walking through the business section as usual. Some felt that such an incident could happen only in Ridgefield.

Ray was a professional teaser and once he found your weak spot, you would be victimized, whenever the spirit moved him. For example, Ray knew that Eddie Schmitt, who ran the White Spot Restaurant, would let no one else handle the cash register in his place of business.

Eddie and his wife, Annie, had taken over the restaurant from the Christianson family, who had operated it for many years. At the time, the restaurant was in the little building next to Bedient's that until recently, leaned several degrees to the south. It once housed the Carnival Shop but finally was abandoned and leaned so far south that one got the feeling that if one cleared one's throat while passing, it would come crashing down.

I am happy to report that this little old building is another example of how nice it is to reclaim, rather than tear down. It now serves as an extension of Trendsetters, after being straightened and after receiving a nice new brick face lift. [Editor's note: The building has since been razed and is now the location of Tazza Cafe.]

Eddie Schmitt worked the counter at the White Spot and his very efficient wife managed the kitchen end of the business. At times, Eddie would have help at the counter. The help was allowed to take your order, or clear the counter. However, when it was time to ring up the payment, Eddie manned the cash register, like a hen hovering over her chicks.

Ray Keeler had developed the habit of carrying a yard stick. It probably came in handy for him, in his contracting business. It also came in very handy for tickling a certain policeman from a safe distance. It should be pointed out that G., when tickled, used to strike out at anything that was before him. Therefore, it was considered much safer to approach the frustrated cop from the rear. The yard stick further simplified making contact. It also would now serve as an excellent prop in teasing Eddie Schmitt.

One day, Ray entered the White Spot, sat at the counter and gave Eddie his order. At the far end of the counter was the kitchen door which had a little window through which the orders were relayed to Annie. As Eddie retreated to call the order in, Ray quickly reached across the counter and deftly depressed a key on the cash register with his yard stick. The register's bell rang, the cash drawer flew open, and Eddie spun around and raced back up the counter to find out who would have the nerve to touch the register.

The trick was repeated several times, much to the annoyance of Eddie, who never failed to give a repeat performance on each occasion. This of course delighted Ray and any other customer that happened to be present.

Eddie changed his style somewhat and whenever he observed Ray at the counter, he would stand guard at the register and call in the order by yelling as loudly as he could. The patrons enjoyed this no end.

So Ray adapted to Eddie's new mode of operation. He would wait outside the restaurant, out of Eddie's view, and slip in when Eddie's attention was diverted to the lower end of the counter. At the sound of the register ringing, Eddie would be a picture of pure frustration.

The problem was finally solved when the cash register was moved to a point near the kitchen door that could not be reached with the yardstick. Several years later, the Schmitts moved the White Spot across to the corner of Main and Catoonah Streets. Harry Neumann Associates are now in this store.

It was noted that when the move to the new quarters was completed, the cash register was placed in a strategic location that was safe from Ray and his yard stick.

Perhaps there was something about a restaurant that brought out the very best (or worst) in Ray. Long before the White Spot, there was another restaurant called the Fairfield Lunch. It was in the same quarters where Velma Torcellini now has her Question Mart [452 Main Street, i 2021 Touch of Sedona],

This place would be full of men early each morning. There were no tables, just a counter with about 15 stools. The stools left the rear of each patron a target for a joker. We have seen Ray on more than one occasion work carefully to fish out the handkerchief of an unsuspecting individual. When four or five inches of the handkerchief were exposed, the person would have a sudden feeling of warmth from a little blaze that Ray had started.

#64: THE OLD BAKERY ON BAILEY AND THE SCHOOL THAT'S GONE

So Crouchley's Plumbing Shop and Riedinger's Electric Store have long since disappeared from Bailey Avenue. In their place, we now have Bedient's Home and Garden Center in a more substantial, cement block building.

For many years after the new building was constructed, it was the home of Contessa Yarns. Matty Contessa, ably assisted by his nephew Joe, conducted a very lucrative business from this store.

The firm shipped yarn and cloth material all over the United States and Canada. The store was never crowded with customers, which made it a little difficult to understand the need for the several employees who worked there. There just did not appear to be sales of such volume as to warrant the employment of these people.

However, orders were received from a great many customers and shipments were made to faraway places. As it turned out, this quiet little business was actually one of the very biggest customers of our local post office.

Matty was a lively little fellow and was very active in St. Stephen's Church and in civic affairs. He belonged to the Lions Club and was a past president of that organization.

We recently showed the movie film, taken in 1958 of Ridgefield's 250th birthday, to the Ridgefield Lions Club. The members present really enjoyed seeing Matty Contessa and Bill Bolling, dressed in Indian costumes, and paddling a "bottomless" canoe in the parade on Main Street.

Because of his many activities, Matty became very well-known and very well-liked. When he moved upstate to Lebanon about 20 years ago, he was sorely missed by his numerous friends.

The old wooden building where Ray Keeler stored his trucks has also disappeared and in its place is a newer building with many various enterprises. There is Needles, The Ridgefield Opticians, The Stitching Bench, The Christian Science Reading Room, Sweets, Show of Hands, Electrolux, and The Ridgefield Coffee Shop.

These operations are all concentrated in a rather small area. Previous occupants through the years included Ellen Roberts Dress Store, Rodier Flowers, Joe Sheehy's Office Equipment and Supplies, George L. Rockwell Jr.'s Electrical Store, Gerald Gaffney's Plumbing Shop, and Travostino's Italian Bakery. Of all these business establishments, only Rodier's is still operating and it moved to Main Street about 25 years ago.

Antonio Travostino operated his bakery in the little concrete-sided building where the Coffee Shop is now [today, Bailey's Backyard]. After a time, he moved the bakery two doors up the street and the old bakery became Gaffney's Plumbing Shop.

Years later, the little building became a place for John McCrystal to do his tailoring, and I am told that the little Coffee Shop now serves tailor-made sandwiches, along with an extra large thimbleful of fine coffee.

The Italian Bakery seemed to present a deceiving appearance. Antonio ("Bake") could be seen, most of the time, just standing in the doorway of the bakery, which incidentally was also his grocery store. We recall that he always wore a white apron, had a crew cut, as well as an ever-present Italian cigar.

The place never was the scene of bustling activity and one got the impression that it did not do a thriving business. However, Bake must have done very well for he put his two sons, Albert and Peter, through college during some pretty tough years. In those days not everyone went to college. The Travostino family lived in a very nice house on New Street.

Both of the boys were nicknamed Bake, of course. Both helped their father in the store, which had a large delivery operation. It probably was the many deliveries that gave the store the appearance of not having so many customers. Peter, unfortunately, has passed on, but Albert and his very nice family live in Missouri.

Next to the little Coffee Shop is our municipal parking lot and it will just about complete our tour of Bailey Avenue. As most everyone knows, a school stood on the parking lot until it was torn down about 30 years ago. In 1882 Governor Phineas C. Lounsbury had kindly given this land to the town and at the same time gave the necessary funds to build the school.

This building served the town very well during its 70 years of existence. However, because its construction was entirely of wood, it was considered a fire trap and when Veterans Park School was completed in 1952, it became excess. The need for a parking lot was evident even at that time as Ridgefield was already beginning to suffer with severe growing pains.

For some reason, the old school carried more labels than any other school that we know of. At times it was called The Garden School, Town, Center, Bailey Avenue, Kindergarten, as well as Alexander Hamilton High School.

The building served as an elementary school until 1915, at which time the Benjamin Franklin Elementary School (now Boehringer Ingelheim [Venus Municipal Building/old high school]) was completed. It then became Ridgefield's first high school (Hamilton). In 1927, an addition was added to the south side of the elementary school on East Ridge to accommodate not only the high school but the new idea of a junior high school, I happened to be a member of the first seventh grade to move into the new addition. At that time the old school on Bailey Avenue reverted to kindergarten classes.

In the very early 1920's, a very fine man came to Ridgefield to become principal of Hamilton High School. His name was Clifford A. Holleran and this gentleman was to make his mark and leave a lasting impression on every student that he came in contact with. He was always Mr. Holleran to me, though there were many who referred to him as Kip.

He was a graduate of Bucknell where he had been a star athlete. He quickly became more than just a principal. His other duties included teaching chemistry and coaching the baseball and basketball teams. That he was eminently successful is a fact that can be found in the records of the fine teams that he molded together through the years.

Mr. Holleran loved sports and particularly basketball at which he excelled. We remember that he was quickly recruited to play on the town team and could put the ball through the basket across the length of the court in the old town hall.

More on Kip Holleran next week.

#65: WHEN TOWN HALL WAS A BASKETBALL ARENA

When Clifford A. Holleran arrived to take over as principal, chemistry teacher and athletic coach at Hamilton High in the very early 1920's, he had to start from scratch. The little school yard on Bailey Avenue had no room for a baseball field. There was no gymnasium, where basketball could be played, and there were no buses, with which teams could be transported to compete with schools in the surrounding areas.

Mr. Holleran set to work with vim and vigor. Soon an organized athletic program was started. The field on East Ridge was used for baseball, but it was a far different field from the one we enjoy today. The eastern part of the field had such a steep slope that it was impossible to see the left fielder from the infield. There were many arguments as to whether or not the left fielder caught a ball hit in his direction. It was finally necessary to station an umpire out there. This helped, but did not stop the arguments entirely, as the umpire's judgment was continually challenged.

The auditorium in the Town Hall was pressed into service as a basketball court. The playing room on this court was very limited and its size depended to a great extent on the size of the crowd of onlookers. If you came early to the game, seats on the stage would be available or you might choose to sit in the balcony located on the western side of the building.

The balcony was the favorite place for some of the old timers who did not like the crush that usually developed along the sidelines of the court. There were two side doors and stairways on both sides of the building that led to the balcony. The problem with the balcony was that only the first three rows would afford a decent view of the game. From the fourth row only half the court was visible and the further back you sat, the less you saw.

The balcony probably held about 125 people when full. A portion of the seating was lost to a projection booth from which silent movies were shown each Saturday night. The booth was located midway between two rooms at the very back of the balcony and may have, due to its size, eliminated 25 seats. Jack Cranston operated the movie projector. He was in charge of the local electric light operations and no doubt was chosen because of his knowledge of electricity, which was still somewhat of a mystery to most people.

The rooms at either side of the balcony were used as dressing rooms. The room on the right was used by the local team and on occasion served as a courtroom. At one time it was illuminated by a single gas fixture. The little fixture remained on the wall for many years after they stopped using gas. In its place a single open electric fixture provided light for the players, providing someone remembered to bring an electric bulb. Bulbs had a habit of disappearing if left in the socket.

During the extensive renovations of the old Town Hall, the room became an office and is now used by our first selectman. The room on the left also had several uses such as an office for the assessors as well as a dressing room for the visiting team. It had all the luxuries of the local

team's dressing room, plus the advantage of considerable illumination from the street lights in the event that no electric bulb was available.

The one lavatory was located at the bottom of the south balcony stairway and it served both teams as well as the paying customers. Of course, showers for the players were out of the question. They felt lucky to have a place to change to uniforms, which at that time they had to purchase themselves.

Orange and black were the school colors and the basketball uniforms were orange with black trim. A player who won a letter would have a large orange colored H sewn on his black sweater.

The edges of the basketball court were lined with wooden folding seats in sets of three. They provided benches for the local team on one side of the court and the visiting team on the other as well as seating for some of the more daring spectators.

When these seats were filled, as well as the stage and balcony, these wooden seats were moved forward and latecomers were allowed to stand behind them. This cut down on the size of the playing area and when a large crowd was in attendance it would shrink quite rapidly.

This procedure had a very definite effect on the size of the court and the way the game was played. As the crowd forced the seats to move forward, the diminishing playing surface caused the players to have as much trouble with the spectators as they did with the opposing team.

The crowded conditions cut down sharply on the amount of dribbling and passing. This caused an increase in the amount of long shots that were taken and Ridgefield players became proficient in shooting from either end of the hall. The auditorium had a very high ceiling so there was plenty of room for the long shots to arch gracefully from the end of the court to the basket. Of course, when Ridgefield teams visited the other area towns where the courts were larger and ceilings were lower, they had to make a severe adjustment in the type of game they played.

Mr. Holleran was an excellent coach, as his record of championship teams indicates, and he could change his game plans to accommodate most any kind of conditions as he shifted from one gear to another.

Basketball is, of course, a contact sport. In the crowded conditions that often existed at the Town Hall the contact was almost continuous. Naturally this resulted in rising temperatures as well as rising tempers.

It was not unusual for those sitting on the fringe of the court to have a player bumped right into their laps. A scramble for a loose ball could send players and spectators crashing to the floor together. There were times where in the heat of battle, spectators could be observed taking an active part in the proceedings.

There were several contests that degenerated into full-scale battles. Perhaps we should call them mini-riots. Some of the teams that visited Ridgefield seemed to have the ability to increase the competitive spirit of our players.

Two of the teams that were particularly adept at "revving up" the Ridgefield teams were Danbury and New Canaan. Perhaps this was because at the time both schools were larger than Ridgefield and did not relish the prospect of losing to a smaller school.

Our teams were understandingly interested in taking the measure of the larger schools, and frequently did so. Whatever the reason, when these teams met there was sure to be fireworks.

More on this next week.

#66: A HOT TIME IN THE OLD TOWN HALL

One very cold winter's night, in the early 30's, the Danbury High School basketball team arrived at the Town Hall for the purpose of engaging Ridgefield High in a "contest."

A good crowd of spectators generally accompanied the Danbury team when it came to Ridgefield. On this occasion, the Danbury fans were more numerous than usual. Our local team always had a good following and with Danbury as the opposing team, they turned out in full force.

It was the custom to have two games, with the "second" team from each school opposing each other in the first game. Then in the big game, the "first" team from each school was pitted against one another. "Junior varsity" was a term that was being used at the time, probably because of its euphonious effect. So the label "second" team gave way to Junior Varsity, from which it became "JV."

The first game went off without incident, although it was a hard fought contest, won by the Ridgefield High JV. All during the first game, fans continued to arrive and they were crowded behind the wooden chairs that lined the basketball courts. As the crowd swelled, the chairs were moved forward and the court shrank. By the time the big game started, playing conditions were intolerable.

It should be noted that when one entered the auditorium, one came in directly under the basket that was attached to the balcony on the west end of the court. With a game in progress, this could be most disconcerting to the team using that particular basket.

The proceedings were further disrupted due to the fact that the late arrivals had to step directly onto the playing surface. Play continued despite the distraction of fans crossing the court to find a place to stand on the sidelines. A late arrival could find himself in the very middle of a melee of players as they battled for the basketball.

Some kind of entertainment was generally offered between the first and second game. We will not compare it to the shows presented during half time at football games, but it did contribute a little culture to what would have otherwise been simply an evening of mayhem.

During the 20's, yours truly played his harmonica and on occasion was accompanied by Andy O'Connor. Andy was an excellent violinist, and he was also a very nice fellow.

On this particular evening the fans were treated to a fine exhibition of gymnastics by Louis Courtney. He was an interesting character that we will describe in more detail sometime in the future. Lou was a very good entertainer but his energetic rendition of the proper way to do back bends, flip flops and cartwheels did not have the desired effect of pacifying a crowd that had come to see a physical contest.

The big game started in high gear and then took off from there. It was a close game most of the way and this only increased the tension between both the players and the spectators.

The referee was John L. Sullivan, a former star baseball and basketball player at Ridgefield High a few years earlier. John later became postmaster of Ridgefield, in which position he served until he passed away after being stung by an insect at the firemen's clambake 22 years ago.

John had a reputation of having a short fuse, a low boiling point, or whatever. In this very physical game, with tempers running high, it became necessary for him to render a decision that went against the Danbury team.

To say that the Danbury coach disagreed with the decision would be a gross understatement. Not even "violently disagreed" would adequately describe his reaction. Keep in mind that the wooden seats had been moved forward to make room for the overflow crowd that

stood five deep behind them. The net result was a playing area diminished to little more than half its normal size.

In the heat of the argument over the referee's judgment call, words were used without sufficient consideration. An igniting spark was provided by the Danbury coach when he made an uncomplimentary remark about the referee's ancestors. Since they also happened to be my ancestors, I was in full accord with John Sullivan's next move, which was to leap across the wooden chairs and plant his right fist firmly on Gid's rather stubby nose.

I trust that I will be pardoned for saying that at this point "all hell broke loose." The old Town Hall had been the scene of some very bizarre happenings (the Klan once held a meeting there), but nothing ever compared with this one.

Players began fighting players, spectators were fighting spectators and everyone seemed to be involved. This was no sham, these people were serious.

Generally, those who sat in the balcony were older people who wanted to avoid the press of the crowd on the floor below. On this occasion, some of the old timers became instantly rejuvenated. We saw several of them climb over the barrier at the end of the balcony and drop to the floor, some 15 feet below. The jar of their landing was softened somewhat by the fact that the swirling masses below left not one square inch of the hard wooden floor on which to land. One who did not make the jump was a local sexton, who was observed descending by way of the stairway while dragging his opponent along by the hair of his head.

Soon the stairways were so crowded that the players could not get to their dressing rooms. No one had the presence of mind to call the state police and our one local policeman was no match for the flailing fists of the combatants. He may even have been enjoying the proceedings at this point.

Finally, when the pent up energy was exhausted, all doors were opened and players and spectators emptied into the freezing night air. The bitter cold was preferred to the heat of the steamy auditorium. However, the sight of the scantily clad players, running up and down Main Street was just incredible.

Miraculously, no one was seriously injured and no one froze to death, but no doubt many had the sniffles the next morning. It was some time before the Danbury players were herded into their bus, where they changed into their clothes that were brought to them. How their coach escaped was never thoroughly explained.

It was probably embarrassing to lose a game to a small town like Ridgefield and the events of this evening supplied a valid reason to cancel further competition for several years.

The intense rivalry between the two towns spilled over from the high school teams to the regular town teams. Both Danbury and Ridgefield had excellent baseball and basketball teams and drew great crowds when they played at Danbury's Seifert's Amory and Lee's Field.

#67: DICK AND ELSA REMINISCE ABOUT THE OLD SCHOOL DAYS

Our column this week is in the form of an answer to a letter that we received from Miss Elsa Hartmann. Miss Hartmann moved from Ridgefield to Bethlehem, Conn., many years ago, but still keeps track of us by way of The Ridgefield Press.

Many local men and women will fondly remember her as a long-time teacher of history and German in our junior high school. Her father was the great Josef Hartmann, whose excellent photographs grace the pages of The Press.

Dear Elsa: Your nice letter about the old Hamilton High School is greatly appreciated and very timely, as we were about to wind up our tour of Bailey Avenue.

It is hard to believe that you started as a freshman at the school, way back in 1921. I can well understand how scared you were that first day, when you had to face the faculty: the balding young man (Mr. Holleran), Miss Eleanor Burdick, Miss Ruth Wills, Miss Helen Prentice, and Mrs. Edwin Myer.

I had listed Mr. Holleran in a previous column as chemistry teacher and athletic coach. You have correctly added general science, algebra, plane geometry, and physics to the many duties and subjects that he taught. He was truly a remarkable man.

You also noted that Miss Burdick taught American History and European History as well as English. Of course, she also excelled in dramatics and always directed the class plays. We did not have any specialist in those days.

Miss Wills taught Latin and Spanish, as well as French. Miss Prentice taught a course in business and girls bent on becoming homemakers were treated to an excellent course in home economics by Mrs. Myer.

We found it interesting that students enrolled in the four-year high school in 1921 numbered only 70. There were several years running when the graduating class increased by only one from the previous year. My class in 1932 had 32 and Marie's class in 1937 had just 37 graduates. My, how we have grown.

We enjoyed learning that every morning, after attendance was taken, the student body sang songs from the old Assembly Song Book while Ella Allan (Eddie's aunt) played the piano. This would be a grand thing to do even now, except that they probably would want to do the loud jungle music of today.

I remember that you played the piano very well, so it was natural that you took over as pianist when Ella graduated. You must have had great fun playing a duet with your dear father and his violin. I guess most people remember him as the very outstanding photographer rather than as the fine violinist that he was.

I got a good laugh out of your story about "Krambambuli," the German song that the students used to sing. The words of the song were in praise of the enlivening powers of whatever "Krambambuli" was. Then one evening when you were singing the song at home, your father explained to you that the word actually stood for a truly potent mixture of cognac and arrack.

Your description of the physical characteristics of the old building is so very accurate and indicates that you still have an exceptional memory. The bell rope, as you noted, hung between the front windows, over the shelf that held Webster's International Dictionary. Mr. Holleran rang the bell 10 minutes before school began and then each hour, on the hour, during the rest of the school day. As you pointed out, he was able to carry on a conversation with the students, while leaning on the dictionary and pulling on the bell rope.

It is obvious that you admired and respected this fine man, as all of us did. You wrote of how he loved sports and how you saw him make a basket from the far end of the old Town Hall "court." I, too, witnessed that display of great accuracy.

Some of the readers of this column will enjoy your story of how in 1924, he scheduled a game with the high school team of his old home town, Watertown. A bus was hired on this occasion, from Dave Rich, to make the 40-mile trip. Dave ran a bus (we called it a jitney) back and forth to Danbury each day, making three trips. The make of the vehicle was a Larabee. It seems incredible that it took three hours to get to Watertown, and then the crowning disappointment when our teams lost the game.

You mentioned the fact that because of the long ride home and your stop after the game at Mr. Holleran's Watertown home for cider and doughnuts, you did not get back home until

three in the morning. That must have been considered scandalous at the time. Your dear old father waited at the Town Hall until the bus finally arrived, so he could walk you safely home to Ramapoo Road. Karl and I have figured that you then lived where later on the Courtney family lived and where Al and Toni Tulipani live now.

You recalled how in the early days of radio, Mr. Holleran was one of the first to purchase one because he wanted to hear Graham MacNamee broadcasting the World Series. The play-by-play description could be heard in the room next to his office and between classes, the grape vine passed along the ballscore. Then with the advent of TV, at the end of the school day, both you and he rushed home to see Mickey Mantle. You were a staunch Yankee fan, while he and Chad Crouchley were avid Red Sox rooters.

You will remember Mr. Holleran as a very kindly man. Even so, he was a strict disciplinarian and woe betide any student who got out of line. On one occasion he heard a noise in the hallway and opened his door to see what was going on. Jim Sullivan had been sent to a window at the rear of the hall to clap the chalk dust out of some blackboard erasers. Lawrence Brundage opened a door at the other end of the hallway and Jim promptly threw an eraser at him. Of course, the eraser was returned with gusto and soon the air was flying erasers. As the door between the two combatants opened, a balding head appeared and caught the full force of an airborne eraser. When Jim saw what he had done, he clambered out the window and ran as fast as his legs could carry him.

There was an old grandfather clock in the old school that stopped working. Ralph Brundage, who later became a repairer of clocks and watches, volunteered to fix the clock. He and Don Cumming proceeded to dismantle the clock and then could not get it back together. Perhaps this incident made Ralph determined to learn the art of clock repairing.

Incidentally, you were correct about the floor registers in the floor of the basketball court in the Town Hall. There were four of them, through which heat from the pipeless furnace was transmitted to the auditorium. Because of the high ceiling it was a difficult place to heat. On one cold night, Pres Zandri put extra coal in the furnace and when I landed on one of the registers, I was almost fried by the hot metal.

It was so nice to hear from you Elsa, and please write again soon.

Most sincerely,
REV

#68: SOME GOOD LAUGHS WITH KIP HOLLERAN

In naming the various stores on the north side of Bailey Avenue over the past half century, we failed to list Rose's Kiddie Shop. This little store was operated by Rose (Serfilippi) Belardinelli and was in the building that now houses the Ridgefield Coffee Shop.

The Kiddie Shop business grew quite rapidly and after a short time, Rose moved to Main Street. So the little concrete-sided building served a number of purposes, from an Italian bakery and grocery to a plumbing shop, a grocery store, a clothing store, a tailor shop, and is now a coffee shop [today, Bailey's Backyard].

We have told a number of stories about the old Hamilton High School that stood on the present municipal parking lot, next to the coffee shop. Most of the stories were about the school principal, Clifford A. Holleran, and were of a rather serious nature. There were others more humorous.

One had to do with Jack Cranston, who pitched for the high school baseball team more than 50 years ago. Jack was a big fellow and pitched lefthanded. He had a terrific fastball but

was noted for accuracy. However, Jack decided that he needed a curveball to make him even more effective. He practiced with the curveball diligently, in secret, to perfect his new pitch. When Jack was satisfied that his curveball would be difficult to hit, he decided to try it in a real game.

Jack's next start caught Coach Holleran by surprise as he witnessed a roundhouse curveball that the batter could not hit and the catcher (Gene Casagrande) could not catch. The coach thought that those first four pitches which put the batter on base were mistakes. However, when the second batter was put on base in the same manner, he became concerned.

His concern turned to amazement when the third batter was passed, loading the bases with none out.

Mr. Holleran strode to the pitching mound with a bewildered catcher at his side. Jack tried to assure them that he would get better as he went along.

However, the coach, after listening for a minute, suddenly ordered Jack to walk to home plate. So Jack walked to home plate with the coach and the catcher following.

When Jack and his entourage reached the plate, Coach Holleran said, "I just wanted to be sure that you really knew where home plate was."

Another time, as a classroom teacher, he was explaining to the class what an equation was. One boy was a little slow in understanding and he received the immediate and personal attention of the teacher.

By way of giving a graphic illustration of an equation to the student, Mr. Holleran stood before him and placed an 18-inch ruler on his index finger. When the ruler was perfectly balanced, he asked the student what he would have if a 100-pound weight was attached to each end of the ruler. Without hesitation the boy, who was supposedly "slow learning," answered: "I guess you would have a very broken finger."

It took only a few seconds for the fine teacher to join in the laughter that permeated the classroom.

One of the best stories about Mr. Holleran came from him himself. It was his first day in Ridgefield and he wanted the names of each of his pupils. He asked that each one arise and give his or her last name as they were called on. My brother Joe sat in one of the front seats and when Mr. Holleran pointed to him, Joe dutifully arose and said his name was Venus.

The new principal blinked at the rather unusual name and then called on the next student who declared his name was Romeo (probably Fred).

With that, Mr. Holleran called a halt to the proceedings as he had a feeling that he was being taken advantage of. In a loud voice he said, "Some of you think you are pretty smart but if the next one who gets up tells me his name is Juliet, there will be trouble."

When the two boys were able to prove that their names were actually Venus and Romeo, Mr. Holleran had a big laugh over it.

After many years Mr. Holleran finally married Miss Grace White. This lady was one of the toughest and yet one of the best teachers any school ever had. They made a great couple.

I was privileged to be one of the pallbearers when Mr. Holleran passed on. The ride to Watertown, where he was buried, brought back some fond memories of all that he meant to the people in Ridgefield who came in contact with him. That they were the better for knowing him, there can be no question.

Before we leave Bailey Avenue, we must refer back to Dispatch No. 48 in which we stated that Benvenuto Carboni and John Christopharo were two of the first four Italian men to come to Ridgefield in 1902. We said further that for the time being, the other two would go

unnamed. Our information had come from an interview granted by Octavius J. (Tabby) Carboni to his son Bob.

Jimmy Costanzi took issue with the statement, claiming that his grandfather, Esperanzio Sorcinelli, was actually the “first” who came and then was instrumental in bringing all the others that followed. We thought we had a modern day “Hatfield and McCoy” thing going, but it petered out.

Jimmy stands firm on his conviction that his grandfather was the first. However, he admits that Benvenuto, his wife, Assunta, and their children did constitute the first Italian family.

Most of the men who came from Italy had to leave their families over there until they had made enough money to support them and pay their passage. Jimmy’s grandfather never brought the grandmother over here. Instead on 10 occasions over a 20-year period, Esperanzio made the return trip to Italy. Each time, his glowing account of the great Town of Ridgefield encouraged others to make the trip. Also, in the year following Esperanzio’s biennial trip to his homeland, another child was born into the family. We think that Esuperanzio qualifies for the title of the first “Family Planner” as well as the first Italian to come to Ridgefield.

#69: WATER CAME TO TOWN AFTER THE GREAT FIRE

We have traversed Bailey Avenue from Prospect Street to Main Street and are now at the scene of the Great Fire of 1895. There was no happiness in Ridgefield on that cold December Sunday evening.

The fire started in the rear of what was known as the Gage Block in a store operated by D.F. Bedient and H.E. Mead. The building was located where the Bedient Block is now, on the corner of Bailey Avenue and Main Street.

Josef Hartmann, the eminent photographer, and Louis Joffee, the tailor, discovered the fire in the early evening hours of Dec. 8, 1895. The shout of “Fire!” is always frightening to hear and when these two gentlemen sounded the alarm, it must have been terrifying in a town without a water system or an organized method of fighting a fire.

Mr. Bedient hurried to the scene and tried to enter his store by the front door. The fire had made such progress that he was driven back by the smoke and flames.

John Quinlan and James Halpin (after whom Halpin Lane was named) gained entrance by a side door. They could do nothing, however, to stem the rapidly spreading fire. An attempt to utilize a bucket brigade was rendered futile. Passing a pail of water from one person to another in such a conflagration was about as effective as a pea shooter would be on a charging elephant.

The fire spread to the Town Hall and other buildings and it began to look as though the whole of the business district would be destroyed. The courageous townspeople who had gathered kept the bucket brigade going despite the tremendous odds and were successful in extinguishing some of the smaller fires as they started. How sad it must have been for these fine people to be so helpless in the face of this roaring fire.

A call for help was relayed to the Danbury Fire Department and Mayor Rundle ordered his firemen to load a thousand feet of hose and a steamer on a flat car. This equipment started by railroad for Ridgefield just before midnight. The steamer was actually a machine that pumped water for the hose but since there was very little water available and no hydrants to draw from, the steamer could not be fully effective. Rockwell’s History of Ridgefield states that the equipment from Danbury was of great assistance while Bedini’s version is that the equipment did not arrive until three o’clock in the morning, when the fire was about over. At any rate, Danbury made the effort and it must have been agonizing to wait for that train to arrive here.

Ebenezer Keeler used dynamite in a vain attempt to stop the spread of the fire. One building was actually torn down before the fire could reach it and it was there, about where the Ridgefield Savings Bank is now, that the fire stopped some six hours after it had started.

The many wooden buildings were like tinder to the fierce flames and the need for a water system was quite apparent. Shortly thereafter, a water system was devised by piping water from a series of springs on West Mountain. After only a few years, it was recognized that the system was not adequate for a citizenry that had become very conscious of the devastation a fire could cause.

Henry B. Anderson, a very enterprising man, turned his attention to the problem and decided to buy the toddling Ridgefield Water Supply. Under his careful guidance, lines were laid from Round Pond to a standpipe at the rear of the William Harrison Bradley Estate on West Mountain. From this vantage point, water flowed by gravity to an artery of pipes and to the fire hydrants in the Village District. Many of these pipes are still in use today, eighty-one years after their installation.

The standpipe proved to be a great curiosity, especially for the young people who climbed the mountain to see it close up. It was visible in almost all parts of Ridgefield, but as you got closer to it, tramping through the woods, it became more difficult to see until you suddenly found yourself standing before it.

The pipe had a metal ladder on its side that went all the way to the top, from where the very best view of Ridgefield could be had by those with enough nerve to climb up there. We say "nerve" because, though the ladder was secure, it did not start until about 30 feet from the bottom of the pipe. The reason, of course, was to prevent the adventurous from climbing up the side of the standpipe.

For those with the nerve, this obstacle was overcome by climbing up a slender tree that was growing near the pipe. It was a maneuver that required assistance and we never knew anyone who could reach the ladder on his own.

A second person would start the tree swaying back and forth until the one in the tree was able to grasp the ladder. From there on the ascent was easy and well worth the effort.

Only from an airplane could one have such a majestic view of the town. There were many initials placed at the top of the standpipe as evidence that one had made the climb successfully.

The standpipe was one of two curiosities on West Mountain that attracted many young people. The other was the famous Swinging Bridge, which we hope to tell about sometime.

The first standpipe rusted out and it became necessary to erect a second one. It was planned to put the second pipe on property now owned by the Albert Swanson family on High Ridge Avenue.

The neighbors objected to having such a thing on the beautiful street that was once known as "Publishers Row," so the second pipe was put up right next to the first one and a few years ago [1972] the older pipe burst in the middle of the night with a deafening roar.

H.B. Anderson once owned what we now know as Manor Estates on West Lane until he sold it to Frederic E. Lewis. Mr. Lewis developed this property in the early part of the century into one of our nation's greatest showplaces. More on that later as well.

Mr. Anderson had a superintendent when constructing the present water system. His name was Eldridge N. Bailey and he became manager of the water company and for a time served as Ridgefield's first selectman.

He was a very tall man and had kind of a glowering expression that scared me as a little kid. Later on, when I got to know him, he proved to be quite congenial. He was also superintendent for Mr. Anderson when the famous "Port of Missing Men" was constructed, with its ten miles of private roads, where Eight Lakes is today.

One thing is for sure, H.B. Anderson had a lot of ideas and he provided work for an awful lot of people.

#70: BOB LEE OF FARMINGVILLE AND CONNIE'S WILD RIDE

Pictures of some of our respected senior citizens appeared in a supplement to The Press, as part of Ridgefield's 275th Anniversary. On the same page there were splendid articles, written by four very astute high school students. The purpose was to further the theme of the tabloid, which was the past, the present and the future.

Ridgefield was pictured as a good place to live for the young, the middle aged and the senior citizens, as we believe that our town is well suited for all three categories.

A goodly number of Ridgefielders have lived to be more than 100. Some that we personally have known were Mrs. Van Allen Shields, Mary Steele, Phoebe Humphreys, Mrs. John Kiernan, and the oldest, Mary Clark, who lived to 106. There is no connotation attached to the fact that no gentlemen were included in this elite group. There probably were some gentlemen who reached this plateau — we just did not know them.

We did have the pleasure of knowing personally several fine gentlemen who lived well into their nineties and one is a descendant of one of the early Ridgefield families. Robert A. Lee was born 94 years ago at what is now 563 Main Street and is still doing very well. When listing fine gentlemen, you could easily start with him.

Bob, as he likes to be called, was not quite one year old when his family moved up Main Street to number 599 where his father Fred had completed the house where the Harry Bennetts now live. It should be noted that Fred C. Lee was Ridgefield's first selectman, just 90 years ago.

The name Lee has always been synonymous with the Farmingville area and after a few years, Bob's family joined four other Lee families in that very nice part of Ridgefield.

Farmingville, as the name implies, was probably the area most adapted to farming. Its fertile soil grew wheat, corn, oats, buckwheat and even flax. Bob Lee grew up on his father's farm and always retained his love for farm life. However, when he was a young man, the call of the business world was "very strong and he left to join the Maher Corporation in Greenwich. Mr. Maher had a very pretty daughter and soon she became Mrs. Robert A. Lee.

Their main residence was in Greenwich. However, Bob's great love for the Farmingville area caused him to hold onto the many acres that made up the Lee farm, where he maintained a weekend home at 269 Farmingville Road. Just a few years ago, this place was sold to Dr. Joseph Heissan.

The Robert A. Lees are parents of four girls and two boys. One of the girls, Barbara, shared her father's affection for the old farm. Barbara became Mrs. Joseph Johnson and she and Joe still live on a part of the farm, at 62 New Road. The Johnsons had two girls, Wendy and Lynn, and a son, Lee. Wendy lives in Ridgefield and is married to David Perry.

Bob Lee is an honorary member of the Ridgefield Savings Bank, after serving many years as an active director. I got to know Bob through our mutual love for horses when I was still a teenager. Another friend of mine, B. Sturges Selleck, used to take care of Bob's horses during the week while Bob was taking care of the business that he took over from his father-in-law.

Sturg, as we used to call him, had a stable of racehorses that was known as Little Brook Stables. The name came from a little stream that flowed from Peaceable Street north, through Bryon Park and past the horse barn at 23 Barry Avenue, where Mrs. Deno Carboni now lives. The barn was torn down many years ago. During the winter months, Sturg used to keep Bob's five-gaited saddle horse and a little colt with his race horses on Barry Avenue, and I used to help exercise them.

The saddle horse was named Ragman, which was really not a suitable name for such a very beautiful horse. The colt was named Connie and had a lot of Arabian blood.

Somehow I was entrusted with the training of the colt and it was a most rewarding experience. I knew that she was intended for Mrs. Lee's use and I was determined that she would perform at her very best.

A lot of time was spent getting her used to the bridle and then the saddle, then to feel a little weight in the saddle. The weight was increased each day, until the day finally arrived when I was able to sit in the saddle. Connie squirmed a little the first time but she was an exceptionally well-mannered filly and the day came when she was ready to go off with me in the saddle.

We went slowly out the driveway and up the hill to High Ridge Avenue and entered the open field where Saint Mary's School is now. Connie performed to perfection. She was kept to a walk as we traversed the circumference of the large field several times. I felt that everything was proceeding on schedule so she was allowed to trot at a slow pace.

However, when an attempt was made to slow her to a walk, the cheek strap broke right where it held the bit. The bit dropped completely from Connie's mouth and then things began to happen. We went from a leisurely trot to a canter and then to a full-fledged gallop, in much the same way that the automatic transmission on your car works, except the shift to the faster gears took place much more rapidly.

My reassuring words that everything was all right were lost in the wind as we sped across the field. There were a number of large maple trees along the south side of Barry Avenue. The large sweeping, lower limbs of these great trees, extended over the fence and into the field.

Connie headed for the north corner of the field, about where the north entrance to the parking lot is now. As there was no opening there at this time, Connie sped along the fence under the tree limbs. There was no way to guide her so my only recourse was to lie flat in the saddle as we passed under the limbs.

We made it by the first tree, but under the second, we were not so lucky. A very large limb swept over Connie's head and along her back, over my prostrate form until it reached my chin. Whereupon I was lifted unceremoniously from the saddle and deposited on my seat in the field.

Fortunately, I was able to hang onto the reins as Connie stopped and turned to stare incredulously at her friend, who was in a position she had not seen before. It was a time to be calm and I carefully arose and approached the fine little filly who took the episode very well.

A repair job was made with the help of my jackknife and the training session continued as if nothing had happened. We were very lucky.

#71: FAVORITE HORSES, A COW KILLING AND MANPOWERED FIRE ENGINES

We have been talking about Connie, a filly that we once trained for Robert A. Lee some 45 years ago. This young mare had an excellent disposition and seemed to enjoy everything she was asked to learn.

The one unpleasant incident that occurred when the cheek strap on her bridle broke had no adverse effect on her training. Her lessons continued uninterrupted and she soon forgot that it had happened.

One thing that she learned with comparative ease was to bend her left knee, to make it easier to mount her. Bob was very impressed with this.

At the time Marie Bishop was my girlfriend — and still is. Marie was not an experienced rider. However, Connie's education had progressed so well that Marie rode her a couple of times and did very well. Then on one occasion as we rode past the home of Mrs. Potter on Lounsbury Road, a bulldog came out and nipped Connie on one of her rear legs. Connie immediately shifted gears and took off at high speed.

Fortunately I was riding one of the Sturg Selleck's race horses, a pacer named Sand Pilot. He was very fast and was soon able to overtake Connie and her terrified rider. How Marie managed to stay in the saddle during that wild ride, I will never know. I think that was her very last horseback ride.

Bob was very fond of his other horse, Ragman. He used to put him over some jumps that always looked too high for him to clear. I warned Bob of the danger in jumping a horse that was no longer young, though he still had tremendous spirit. Finally he and Ragman had a fall that could have been very serious. Soon after the accident, he gave the gallant horse to me, and I enjoyed him for a number of years, until he finally died at age 33.

Ragman was a man's horse and would give you a real good ride, right up until the time he breathed his last. Jim Bacchiochi used to go riding with me. He rode a mare, Alice Brook, a race horse and part of Sturg Selleck's Little Brook Stables. She was a fast trotter, but Ragman could stay right with her.

So the many fine acres that made up the Lee farm in Farmingville served many different purposes. At one time, dairy cows grazed over the pastures, then there were beef cattle, and, of course, the horses.

One time in the late 30's, Irving Conklin pastured a dozen yearling Guernsey heifers on the farm during the summer months. One night there was a terrible storm with lots of thunder and lightning. It is a natural thing in storms of this kind for cattle to seek protection under a tree. In this case it was a tragic thing to do, for the next morning, we found all the heifers dead. The enormous tree under which they had sought refuge had been struck by lightning which then splintered off into the heifers.

The soil on the Lee farm was not the only productive thing. The giant maple trees also did their share. In the 40's Bob Lee tapped the trees, set up very sophisticated equipment in the barn and melted down the sap to maple syrup and maple sugar. As well as being the very fine gentleman that he is, Robert A. Lee was also a good businessman.

In the 275th Anniversary parade last week, the Ridgefield Fire Department exhibited an old, hand-drawn hose-cart. This fine old two-wheeled piece of apparatus was given to the department by the late governor Phineas C. Lounsbury, as a result of the Great Fire of 1895. It has been beautifully restored by a committee, directed by Lt. Jack Sullivan. They are justly proud of their work.

Seeing the old hose cart again reminded us of a story that my father, Charles A. Venus, related to the firemen at their annual dinner in 1934. He was the speaker at the dinner and the account of it appeared on the front page of The Press on Feb. 15, 1934.

He told of how in the early days of the Ridgefield Volunteer Fire Department, horses were used to draw various pieces of equipment to the fires. They had no horses of their own, but

used those of the livery stable, right across the street from the fire house, when they were available. On occasion it was necessary to commandeer a team from a farmer who might be passing by the fire house at the time.

I never saw the horses pulling the fire engines, but I did get to know several horses who, in their younger days, were used for this purpose. One was a very large black, owned by B.E. Sperry, who owned the livery stable. This beautiful animal had been part of a team and his mate had died several years earlier. My father had driven this team to a fire on several occasions. There is a postcard somewhere that shows this team in front of the stable. Probably Charlie Cole has this card in his collection.

Andy Frattini, who worked for Mr. Sperry used to drive this great horse on a coal wagon. Andy called the horse "Maggie" even though he was a male. Charlie Washington, who also worked for Sperry at the time used to laugh every time Andy referred to the horse as Maggie.

They used to let me ride Maggie when I was about eight years old. The horse was so big I could not climb up on his back, so Charlie used to pick me up and toss me up for a bareback ride. I had great fun even though my ride was confined to the small area from the blacksmith shop (where the Thrift Shop is now [was until 2017]) to Catoonah Street and back. I must have looked like a peanut on the big horse, but Maggie always heeded the commands from the little imp on his back.

Back to Charlie's story to the firemen. He told of a fire that broke out on Bailey Avenue. in 1907. At the time, he was working for Charles Crouchley at his Bailey Avenue shop. When he saw smoke and then flames from one of the buildings on the south side of the street, he ran to the firehouse and sounded the alarm. He then bypassed the little hand-drawn hose cart and got between the shafts of a wagon that was normally drawn by a single horse. The wagon carried both hose and other equipment, whereas the two-wheeled cart carried only hose.

Somehow Charlie got the fire wagon out onto Catoonah Street where others arrived and helped him pull it toward Main Street. As they reached Main and crossed into Bailey Avenue, several more men began pushing the wagon.

Charlie had expected to stop at the first hydrant but by now they were on a dead run and went right by the hydrant. They were going so fast they even passed the fire. It was all downhill now and Charlie said that he really thought he would be killed before the fire wagon could be brought to a halt.

#72: HOW THE TOWN CELEBRATED ITS 275th BIRTHDAY IN 1983

We have been writing about what Ridgefield was in the past. Since its birthday is already two weeks in the past, with your kind approval we would relate for you some of the things that went into the weekend celebration.

It all started last year with a phone call from First Selectman Leonard, asking me to chair a committee that would provide an appropriate 275th birthday party. A couple of notices appeared in The Press, asking that anyone interested in participating in the celebration, appear at our first meeting on Thursday, Nov. 4th, at the town hall.

About ten people came to that first meeting and most of them came back to each succeeding meeting on the first Thursday of each month. One fellow showed up and asked for \$1,500 right up front for his group's participation. That was his first and only meeting.

Some fine committee members represented organizations and others were very civic-minded individuals who just wanted to help. Suggestions were made as to what members

thought would be suitable things for the celebration. They were carefully sorted and the committee seemed to agree with my suggestion that the whole affair be packed into one exciting weekend, rather than try to spread it out into a year-long series of events.

The actual purchase of the town took place on Sept. 30, 1708. Since this year, Sept. 30th fell on a Friday, that weekend seemed a natural choice for the celebration.

The Board of Selectmen appointed an executive committee, consisting of myself as chairman, Hank McPike as vice-chairman, Dorothy Franks as secretary and Mary Hart as treasurer.

The selections turned out to be excellent. Frank is a very bright young man, with a pleasing personality and a willingness to work real hard. We will surely hear much more about Frank in the years to come. The two ladies supplied the charm and glamor, coupled with a keen sense of civic pride and their ability to work. Both were always available. Dorothy as secretary of the Chamber of Commerce was always ready to submit information, as well as keeping everyone on their toes.

Mary, beyond a shadow of a doubt, has proven that despite what you may have heard, tax collectors can be very popular. The effervescent Mary was always there to make deposits, keep records and make reports so that we always knew where we stood. This was important to me as chairman for my first consideration had to do with the wherewithal with which to put on a suitable program. As a member of the 1958 celebration committee, I remember how Chairman Karl Nash strove to stay within the confines of a \$7,500 budget.

Considering the rate of inflation we face today, we thought our request for a \$5,000 budget to be modest. However, it was cut to \$3,500. One man at a budget hearing would have denied us any funds, as he felt the committee just wanted to make "Whoopee." Perhaps he did not understand the need to occasionally blow the lid just a little bit higher than usual.

The committee heard me say on several occasions that the job of putting on this celebration should be fun, and not just a lot of hard work. I think the committee did work hard and still it had fun, although we did not make "Whoopee." My personal goal was to have an informative, interesting, and exciting birthday, free of admission charges. If the funds were available, this would not be a difficult assignment. However, as proposed events multiplied, it became obvious that more funds would be necessary.

In the face of mounting financial problems, there came a letter in a roundabout fashion. Elisabeth Braun had only recently moved to Ridgefield and liked what she saw. She wrote a friend, Charles West, who lives just over the line in Wilton, and expressed a desire to become involved. Charles gave the letter to his friend Dan McKeon, and Dan turned it over to me.

A call to Elisabeth revealed that she was an executive with American Express and her willingness to assist in advertising and promotional ideas. So was born the very successful supplement that appeared in the Sept. 15 issue of The Press. Letters were sent to some 200 local business establishments inviting them to purchase advertising space in the supplement. From the very beginning it was decided that there would be no arm twisting. Those who bought space did so because the spirit moved them. For this reason we strongly recommend that these advertisers receive everyone's kind consideration.

The supplement was to carry articles of historic value, along with the necessary advertising. Elisabeth felt that it should have something that would interest our school children. Her time became limited due to business pressures, and she enlisted, with our approval, the assistance of Geoffrey Kean. Geoffrey was eminently qualified for this assignment and with the tremendous help of Thomas Nash, this little group came up with a tabloid that should be a

collector's item. The entire operation proved to me that with fine young people like Tom, Mary Hart, Frank McPike and others, our town's future is in good hands.

We ran into a real problem trying to find someone to follow the Governor's Horse Guard in the parade. We had hoped to use the town's street sweeper for this purpose, but could not find a driver for the machine. Little Jimmy Fossi and Josh Timick took me off the hook. The boys with their shovels made a big hit with the huge throng as they passed the reviewing stand on Main Street.

Problems were encountered in getting the parade through Ballard Park, due to the late entry of several oversized trailers. Mike Venus came to the forefront and got Dingee electric to remove a street light and the town road crew removed a section of fence that Morganti, Inc., will replace.

By now, everyone is aware of the fine job Steffi Jones did with the art show and how Gordon and Karen Casagrande lured Charles Pope out of semi-retirement to give us that glorious "1776" Show, and how Chip and Moo Moo Landon and their friends, worked so hard to put together an Anniversary Ball like we never had before, and how Jack Herr and his assistants got that big parade off right on time, and Tom O'Mara's special events, and Frank McPike's ecumenical service that was so beautiful to witness, and Bill Allen and his Fifth Connecticut Regiment of the Continental Line and the great job that Eddie Allan and his assistant Jerry Myers did in finding places to park all those cars and buses.

Without the excellent cooperation of the committee members, the advertisers, the individual contributors, the road crew, the fire and police departments, the clergyman's organization, the Ridgefield Boys Club, the local school systems, the Parks and Recreation Commission, and The Press, we would never have been able to put on this eventful weekend celebration.

Our special thanks to the Good Lord who on Saturday held off the rain until the parade was over and again on Sunday until the conclusion of the Ecumenical Service.

#73: BAD GUYS AND GOOD GUYS ON THE TOWN HALL STAGE

It just seemed fitting that the reviewing stand for the 275th Anniversary Parade be placed in front of the town hall. For most of its almost 90 years, this fine old building has been the focal point for most of Ridgefield's important activities.

Incidentally we would take this opportunity to express our thanks for the many letters, cards, phone calls, and verbal messages of appreciation of a very eventful weekend celebration.

The town hall, besides serving as a shelter for the various town offices, has been used as a moving picture theater, a place to play basketball, a voting place at election time, as well as a place where all town meetings took place. Many high school graduating classes had their exercises on the old stage. In many instances this turned out to be a tearful parting from dear old Ridgefield High.

That stage, on the eastern end of the first floor, now serves as a meeting room. It was also the scene of so many fine plays and minstrel shows. For these affairs there were footlights that were shielded from the audience by half round pieces of tin but were blinding to those on stage.

Interesting lectures were often given by prominent speakers and even some who were not so prominent. Once, during the mid 20's, the selectmen made the mistake of renting the hall to a group that turned out to be the Ku Klux Klan. That was a very exciting evening and, though

no one was seriously injured, there were a number of discolored eyes and bent noses as the Klan was driven out of town by an organization known as the Nightriders.

During the afternoon preceding that eventful evening, two crosses had been erected, one in the cemetery and one on West Mountain. They had been doused with oil and the plan was to light them following the town hall meeting.

However, they were discovered in time to prevent this fiery exercise from taking place. One of the local men who assisted the Nightriders is still around and in good health. There was never a repeat performance.

The town hall also furnished classrooms for our growing high school in 1926 before the southerly addition was built on the old school on East Ridge.

During World War II, the auditorium served as a place to collect blood for the Red Cross. BloodBank. On many a Saturday, a rummage sale was held by various organizations. We never hear the label, rummage, any more. I guess it has been supplanted by the more euphonious Tag Sale. At any rate in those times when some of our wealthy residents were divesting themselves of expensive clothes that they no longer needed, those less fortunate were able to find some great bargains.

Dancing was, for me, the most popular use for the great high ceilinged auditorium. The junior and senior proms were always well-attended and were really something to look forward to. The girls always wore long evening gowns and the boys were in their best finery, many in tuxedos.

Then there would be the Firemen's Ball, the K. of C. Ball, the Chauffeurs' Ball, the Masons' Ball, and many others. The Spartan football team had an annual ball in the 30's and it was something you would not want to miss. They used to hire Timmy Crowe's Orchestra. They came all the way from Waterbury and were very good. Tommy's theme song was "Gimme A Little Kiss, Will Ya Huh?" It was a cute song but we did not like to hear them play it as it meant the dance was over. Wonder how many remember that one?

We played for the Firemen's Ball in 1937 and Wharton Ford played for the Chauffeurs' Ball. In 1938 the roles were reversed. At the recent Anniversary Ball, I showed the Wharton Ford Band the program from the 1938 Firemen's Ball, and one of the band, Joe Perry, remembered playing for the affair 45 years ago.

Despite the high ceiling, the acoustics at the town hall were good and microphones and other electronic equipment were not necessary. Perhaps this was due to the fine work of the decorating committees.

Great pains were taken to make the hall attractive for these affairs. There was a large metal grating in the very center of the ceiling. It could only be reached by climbing high over the stage and then crawling through a very narrow passageway over the ceiling and some 50 feet above the floor. The person doing this would carry with him a wire that he would poke through the grating. When the wire reached the floor it was fastened to a metal hoop to which had been attached several hundred colorful streamers that had been twisted, ribbon like, the other end of which had been attached to the side walls. The fellow above the ceiling then pulled the wire and the decorations to the desired height and the effect on the old auditorium was an instant and beautiful transformation. The fellow who crawled along over that ceiling could not be the squeamish type as it was a rather scary trip.

The great old stage was not overlooked by the decorators and it too became a thing of beauty with potted plants and shrubs as well as bunting.

Those doing the decorating took great pride in their work as they tried to outdo those who had decorated for the previous affair. The dance floor had very narrow, hard maple boards that were excellent for dancing, especially after a light application of corn meal. This allowed the dancers to glide over the floor to the music of the great bands. Unlike today's dancers, at that time, a person's talent on the dance floor was judged by his ability to keep both feet on the floor. The heel was raised but the toe remained in contact to move smoothly over the floor in graceful rhythm with the music.

The floor had four metal registers through which heat arose from the coal-burning furnace. The registers were about three feet square and had to be turned off after the dancing started as the floor was always crowded and the hall warmed up rapidly. The registers did not interfere with the festivities as dancers soon learned to avoid them and spiked heels had not as yet become fashionable.

Some of the other fine orchestras that played for dancing at the town hall were Frank Volk's, Charlie Sterling's, Vic Vaast's and Jack Miller's that featured Bix Santella on trumpet and our own Andy Bloomer on tenor sax.

There was always something nice to remember about these dances. One very memorable affair was Marie's junior prom in 1936 that Vic Vaast played for. We still have the invitation for that one and admission was only 75 cents. The boys wore gardenias and the girls seemed to favor camellias.

#74: WHEN WRESTLERS GRAPPLED IN OUR VERY FUNCTIONAL TOWN HALL

It seems probable that very few buildings ever served a community in as many ways as our present Town Hall. It certainly was a multiple purpose structure and a credit to those sturdy people who were responsible for its construction. The fact that the population of Ridgefield in 1895 was about one tenth of what it is today is evidence of their farsightedness.

As everyone knows our present Town Hall replaced one that was destroyed during the great fire of 1895. The hall that burned was also a sizable building and was only about 20 years old at the time of the fire.

Offers of help to build a new Town Hall came from the King brothers, Rufus and J. Howard, as well as some others who had formerly lived in Ridgefield. It is interesting to note that most people who moved from Ridgefield to other communities seemed to always retain a deep feeling for our town. Many, after living for a time beyond the friendly confines of Ridgefield, felt a real need to return and enjoy the great natural beauty of our town and the many fine things it has to offer.

John Brophy was first selectman when our present Town Hall was constructed and played a leading role in ensuring that this fine building would be completely functional as well as very practical.

We have told of how the auditorium was used for basketball games. It also housed other sporting events, such as boxing and wrestling contests. This was before the TV cameras helped to make a farce out of the "sport" of wrestling. The bouts held at Town Hall were for real.

Probably the man most responsible for these events in Town Hall was a fellow named Peter Chrisafis. Big Pete, as he was called, came here from Stamford during the mid 20's. He and his brother-in-law, John Papageorge, opened a restaurant called The Fairfield Lunch, where the Question Mart is now [in 2020 Touch of Sedona, 452 Main Street]. They may have been the first Greek families to move to town.

They were very successful in their business. John did the counter work while Pete and his two sisters, Anna and Eve, took care of the kitchen. When news of the superior quality of their fare got around, they were considered a very welcome addition to Ridgefield, and among their patrons were some very important people. I can remember as a kid, delivering newspapers, including The Press, to this restaurant.

On one occasion the place was crowded with customers and one of them approached me to buy a Press. He was a big handsome fellow and he smiled and said "I just want to learn something about your very beautiful town." His name was Gene Tunney and at the time (1927), he was the heavyweight champion of the world.

I ran into the kitchen to inform Pete of his distinguished customer. Pete quickly dropped his kitchen duties and was soon engaged in animated conversation with the great boxer. A few days after this memorable event, Pete received a nice letter from Tunney, which praised the food dispensed by The Fairfield Lunch.

Pete had the letter framed and it hung on the wall of the little restaurant for about 10 years, at which time the Papageorges and Pete moved on to Cambridge, Mass.

The Postal Sectional Center had a habit of sending letters that were undeliverable, for one reason or another — illegible writing, insufficient address, etc. — to Ridgefield for deciphering. Just 40 years after the incident at The Fairfield Lunch, a postcard was received. The address on the card was "Gene Tunney — Somewhere in Fairfield County Conn. — USA."

We remembered where he lived in lower Fairfield County and put the card in an envelope, properly addressed. A note was enclosed with the card, reminding Tunney of our chance meeting so many years before. Two days later, I received a nice thank you letter from the undefeated champion, assuring me that he remembered distinctly the meeting that I had referred to. He was especially appreciative as the card had been mailed to him from Las Vegas by Tony "Two Ton" Galento.

I would be remiss if I did not mention George Papageorge, John's son. George must have been about 10 years old when they arrived in Ridgefield and some of the kids were a little reluctant to play with him. I used to play catch with him on the empty Odd Fellows lot, where now stands the Gaeta building that houses Marshall's, Century Real Estate, Cortina's and Rodier's [The Toy Chest and PrimeBurger in 2021].

On one occasion George threw me a high hard one. In fact it was so high that I could not reach it. The ball bounced upward from the tip of my glove and found its way through the north window of Llewellyn Crossman's Jewelry Store. Mr. Crossman had just bought the store from Francis Martin and it was located where the United Cleaners is now.

At any rate George said that as he watched the ball fly toward the window, his first impulse was to see how fast he could run from the area. However, his sense of responsibility won over and we reached the front door of the jewelry store as Mr. Crossman came charging out to catch the culprits who had broken his window. After explaining that the act was not intentional we were allowed to make restitution without further penalties.

As time went on George's fine character, coupled with his athletic ability, made him not only acceptable, but a very popular young man.

What has this to do with the Town Hall, you ask? In our roundabout way we will get to it.

George's uncle Pete was a big man and had done considerable professional wrestling. He was also a weight lifter and we have a picture of him somewhere, in leotards with a large

dumbbell held high over his head. It was Pete who kindled the interest in boxing and wrestling that led to these events being held in Town Hall.

When his customers became aware of his ability in these sports. Pete was soon put to work, training those who showed some aptitude. He was a fine teacher and before long he had a number of young men learning the manly arts. One in particular, Luke Kilcoyne, became so proficient at wrestling that he was considered a prime candidate for the New England light heavyweight title.

Pete knew many boxers and wrestlers, and used his connections to bring some of them to Ridgefield for exhibitions at Town Hall. One in particular was New England champion Louis Earle. Paddy "Toy Bulldog" Mack from Bridgeport was another. As his pupils progressed they engaged in matches with these pros.

There will be more on this but for now we would take this opportunity to thank the many kind people who have indicated their pleasure with the 275th Anniversary Celebration by letter, phone or in conversation. We are very grateful.

#75: LIMPING, LEAPING AND THE TERRIBLE TURK

We have been telling about a fledgling athletic association that was getting ready to become a popular part of our town in the late 20's.

Pete Chrisafis saw the interest of the young men in learning to wrestle and he was happy to teach them the fine points of that sport. He was also a very good organizer and soon had a substantial following. Pete took great pride in his own ability and the young men turned out to be avid students.

Way back in Dispatch #4, we told of Joseph Roach and how he came home from World War I and took over his father's monument business. Many times we watched as Joe ground down a piece of marble or granite and then polished it into a thing of beauty. He was an authentic hero of World War I and we told of how he was wounded twice during his escape from a prisoner of war camp.

Joe was also a fine athlete and a very good boxer. He soon took over as boxing coach for the young fellows interested in the "manly art of self defense." Lynce Carboni, Pat O'Keeffe, Lester Winn and many others experienced rapid progress under Joe's tutelage.

Ernie Stash was a fine wrestler and assisted Pete in his training program. Ernie was also very good at gymnastics but had no equipment and no place in which to teach the boys interested in this sport.

Interest in the sports finally grew to a point where the Ridgefield Athletic Association was formed and a determined group set out to look for a place that would serve as a sultahle gymnasium. This was no easy task in our town which at the time had a population of less than 3,000.

Henry Messer operated an automobile repair business where Genoa Imports is now located on Danbury Road [then 37 Danbury Road, opposite Grove Street]. When Henry decided to move his business to Danbury the association moved quickly to rent the building. So Ridgefield had its very first public gymnasium. It became a lively place as membership grew.

The boxing and wrestling bouts that were in Town Hall were well attended and raised money for the much-needed gymnastic equipment as well as for the rent of the new quarters. Pete, Joe and Ernie were now under a full head of steam and a lot of young people benefited from their combined efforts.

During the time that Messer operated the garage, an invitation was painted on the side of the building in large bold letters: LIMP IN AND LEAP OUT. Shortly after the new gymnasium was established, the sign was changed to read LEAP IN AND LIMP OUT.

Some of the things that happened at the gym were not so funny. A large punching bag hung just inside the entrance door. It was a ritual that each night, as Joe Roach came through the door, he would hit the bag a terrific punch that sent it sailing toward the ceiling. Some smart aleck removed the contents of the bag and replaced it with sand. That evening Joe struck the bag as usual and got a badly broken hand.

In the spring of 1931, the Knights of Columbus sponsored a wrestling show at Town Hall. Pete Chrisafis was the promoter and arranged the matches. He must have known every wrestler on the eastern seaboard. Some may remember Dr. Jack Mercer. He had been a former resident and a top-notch wrestler. Dr. Jack came back to town that night to serve as referee. One of the wrestlers appearing on the program was the great Steve Passes. Steve won over Tony Spalla and Paddy Mack pinned Tony Perrone. Ridgefield's own Luke Kilcoyne won that night over Bobby Brooks.

There is a story about Luke that is worth telling, as it illustrates the camaraderie that existed between the young aspiring wrestlers and their coach.

The Danbury Fair in those days was in full swing and sported a midway that offered a variety of "entertainment." As well as the exhibit featuring the largest horse in the world, the smallest horse, the largest snake, the lady with the alligator skin, the fire and sword swallower, the motorcycle bowl, the world's biggest man and the smallest, the bearded lady, and the exotic dancers, strippers, or Hoochie Koochies as they were called, there were the wrestling contests, featuring the Terrible Turk.

The Turk was always a very large ferocious looking man with cauliflower ears that were the mark of a professional wrestler. He also generally sported a large handlebar mustache. A \$10 prize was offered to anyone who could stay two minutes with this man without being pinned.

Admission fees would soar when some local boy accepted the challenge. His friends would crowd around a small ring set up inside the tent. The ring was made small for two reasons: to make more room for the paying customers and to make less room for the local boy to run away from The Turk.

Luke and some of his friends were passing the wrestling tent. The friends kept urging Luke to accept the challenge which he finally did. In the meantime a goodly crowd had assembled to hear the barker advertise the match and the tent was soon filled to overflowing.

The Terrible Turk was quite surprised as the match started and he found that he was not just facing another local yokel but a determined young man who knew his way around the ring. Luke had all the best of it and soon had his opponent on the mat. It became obvious that Luke would actually win the match by pinning The Turk, whose shoulders were getting closer to the mat.

It was at this point that The Turk aimed a vicious and illegal kick to Luke's groin. As Luke lay writhing in pain, The Turk jumped up and declared himself the winner.

When word reached Pete Chrisafis about what had happened to his protege, plans were quickly made for a visit that night to the Danbury Fair. A large crowd of local men accompanied Pete and the Terrible Turk was again challenged by a Ridgefielder. This time, however, there would be no chance for the sideshow performer to make use of any illegal tactics. The ominous expression on his face was meant to strike fear to the heart of an opponent. Mothers could pacify the most rebellious child by merely threatening to turn it over to this terrifying person.

That expression quickly changed to one of fright as the Terrible Turk was slammed to the canvas where Pete applied a double toe hold. Some of those at ringside said they could clearly hear the bones breaking as Pete made use of his great strength.

Pete made short work of this person who had the audacity to foul his pupil. One thing is sure, the Terrible Turk spent a long time in Danbury Hospital before he returned to wherever he came from. There is also a story (still unconfirmed) that during the ensuing melee, some unknown person ran off with the cash box.