

'Dick's Dispatch'

Columns 76 through 100

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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#76: A LOOK AT OUR POSTAL PAST

We have told some of the ways that our Town Hall has served Ridgefield, and they were many. One of its unusual uses was as a bank.

The Ridgefield Savings Bank carried on its business there from 1900 until 1922. When the Scott Block was completed across the street in 1922, the bank moved to where The Ridgefield News Store, Squash's, is now.

The bank was organized in 1871 and first operated in the Old Hundred where the Aldrich Museum is at this time. This is also the site of the first federal post office, and its owner was Lt. Joshua King, Ridgefield's first postmaster.

Because of the great popularity that the Keeler Tavern so richly deserves and because of the physical evidence in its front room that a post office did actually operate there, many people are of the opinion that it was the first post office. This also led some to believe that the proprietor, Timothy Keeler, was the first postmaster.

About 20 years ago, I wrote to the National Archives in Washington and requested a listing of all postmasters of Ridgefield and the dates of their appointments. In due time the listing was furnished, and it is very interesting.

As of this date, 25 postmasters were appointed, most of them by the President of the United States, with the advice and consent of the Senate. I happen to have been the 24th in the almost 200 years of the federal post office's existence.

Some of the early postmasters were appointed by the postmaster general, as was our present postmaster, George Fisher. Some of those appointed by the PMG were postmasters of districts, such as Limestone, Scotts Ridge (now Scotland) and Titicus, where John D. Nash, grandfather of the publisher of the Press, was postmaster for many years.

The first postmaster, Lt. Joshua King, was appointed by postmaster general, Timothy Pickering, on March 20, 1793. He served in that capacity for only a little more than nine months.

Since he was engaged in the operation of Old Hundred as a general store, it is felt that his postal affairs were conducted along with his other duties. The population of Ridgefield at the time was just over 1,900. When one considers that the town was only 85 years old at the time, the growth must have been quite rapid.

During our nation's recent Bicentennial celebration, we were fortunate enough to win the coveted Freedom Plaque from the Postal Service for a story we did on the Battle of Ridgefield. It is our intention to give this plaque to the town for display in the Town Hall.

During the celebration there was considerable sentiment expressed that our first postmaster had been Col. Philip Burr Bradley. No doubt this feeling was sparked to some extent by the fact that Col. Bradley was appointed by the General Assembly as commander of the Fifth Connecticut Regiment in the Continental Army. The regiment had been reactivated and took a prominent part in the Bicentennial activities and more recently in the celebration of Ridgefield's 275th Birthday.

At any rate, since the question was posed, I again wrote the National Archives. The good people at the Archives were made aware of the controversy over who was actually the first postmaster of Ridgefield. Their findings remained the same, that it was Lt. King.

Col. Bradley was the second Ridgefield postmaster and was appointed on Jan. 1, 1794, by Postmaster General Gideon Granger. It is worthy of note that Connecticut has produced two of our postmaster generals, Granger and our present PMG William F. Bolger.

What is now Ballard Park is where Col. Bradley lived, in the beautiful home that was torn down, under the will of the late Mrs. Edward L. Ballard when she gave the property to the town. It is fairly well documented that George Washington made at least one visit to the Bradley home during the War of Independence.

Jeremiah Dauchy was the third postmaster and received his appointment on Oct. 1, 1801. Then came Timothy Keeler on May 3, 1805, as the fourth. He died while in office and was succeeded by his son William, on Feb. 17, 1815.

Some postmasters played musical chairs as they went in and out of office as the administrations changed in Washington. Harvey E. Smith, Hiram K. Scott, D. Smith Sholes, and George L. Rockwell were all postmasters on more than one occasion. That practice was discontinued when Franklin D. Roosevelt changed the method and made the appointments permanent.

We have been talking about the many uses to which our Town Hall has been put and somehow we got sidetracked into the post office. We'll get back to the Town Hall, but since the post office is so much in the news today, we might as well finish out this column with some more data on this very important part of our everyday life.

Postmaster General Bolger has submitted his request for an increase in first class postage rates from 20 to 23 cents, and postcards from 13 to 15 cents. Actually we had nothing to do with this proposal. However, several years ago we gave PMG Bolger, whom we know personally, a copy of the postal rates that were in effect in 1820.

We found them on the back of a very old clock that we were having repaired. Pasted on the back of the clock on one side was the populations of the United States in 1820. They were listed by states, 24 of them, and totaled just over nine million. The New England states have not increased in population as much as some of the other states. Connecticut had almost 300,000, whereas Michigan had only 8,000.

On the other side of the clock were the postal rates. For less than 30 miles, it was 6 cents; not exceeding 80 miles, 10 cents; not exceeding 150 miles, 12½ cents; not exceeding 400 miles, 18½ cents; and over 400 miles 25 cents.

The rates applied only to a single sheet of paper. For two sheets you had to double the rates and for three sheets, you tripled them.

Newspapers that were not going over 100 miles were 1 cent and over 100 miles it was 1½ cents.

Incidentally the clock was made by Mark Leavenworth & Sons, in Waterbury in 1820. It is a beauty and, even after 163 years, still keeps very good time.

[When this column was written, the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art was housed in the building that's now administrative offices, close to Main Street. Its top floor was the former Old Hundred store that housed the first post office. Back in 1793, it was a one-story building; Old Hundred was raised and a new ground floor built beneath it.]

#77: THE HARD-WORKING TODDS AND THEIR OLDS AND PHONE

We have been extolling the virtues of our Town Hall, and the many uses to which it has been put. About the only thing the old hall could not furnish was ice for skating. Other than that, it did everything that Madison Square Garden could do, and more.

During the fall season, for many years it served as the polling place where the good citizens of Ridgefield could cast their votes. More than a half century ago, Ridgefield was one of the first towns to install voting machines that replaced the time-honored ballot box.

Procedure was much the same as it is today, except that the voters need not acquire a dog tag to gain access to the voting booth. Voters entered by the front door, were recognized, checked off and proceeded directly to the machine. After the vote was recorded, the voter left by a side door.

The departure was not immediate as there were lots of seats and election day presented the opportunity to meet people that the voter seldom saw, except at the polls.

As the town grew it became necessary to acquire more voting machines to add to the two the town started with. Since the Town Hall was the only polling place, the additional machines, plus the voters who tarried for the purpose of renewing old acquaintances, caused considerable congestion. This caused the moderator to enforce the regulations and people had to leave the auditorium in a reasonable time after voting.

It seems that years ago, people placed a greater emphasis on the great privilege of casting their ballots. Some came a considerable distance, like those in the Ridgebury area and they made a real day at it when election day came around. Actually it was a day of real significance for some of the farmers.

The Todds — Mary, Rufus and Charley — were an example. They had their very necessary everyday chores to do before they could leave the farm which was where the Ridgebury School is today. The chores included feeding and caring for livestock, cows, horses, pigs, and chickens. The 25 cows had to be milked (by hand) and the milk transported in 40 quart cans to where the milk trucks from Norwalk would come to pick it up. Only after all these things were completed could they turn their attention to making themselves ready for the long trip into town. Their day normally started at 4:30 a.m., probably an hour earlier on election day.

Until 1930 the Todds always traveled by a horse-drawn wagon that was called a Democrat, though I am sure they never voted that way. The ratio between the two political parties has changed greatly in the past few years, but at the time it was about 5 to 1 G.O.P.

It was not a 10-minute ride to town for these people as it is today. Even after the automobile was put to use it would be a long day. We remember how the Todds finally bought a brand new black, 1930 Oldsmobile and when they passed on some eight years later, the car had less than a thousand miles on it. We helped push the fine car out of its garage and the four original tires all blew out.

The Todds were so concerned that someone might scratch that classy car that they drove it only as far as the Titicus watering trough, at the intersection of North Salem Road and Saw Mill Hill. They walked the final mile. After voting, their civic duty performed, they visited with other voters, did their shopping, walked back to Titicus, and then drove home. At home it was

necessary to repeat all the chores that had started before daybreak that morning. The “Good Old Days”??

Mac McElwee, who lived on the corner of North Salem Road and Tackora Trail, bought the Oldsmobile. He had the car outfitted with four new tires and enjoyed its performance for many years.

If somehow the impression has been created that the Todds lived a rather frugal existence, I would have to say that it is correct. The men wasted no time in conversation, they just worked. Though they were small of stature, their productivity was immeasurable.

Their idea of recreation was to go out after the evening meal and mow, by hand with a scythe, the large swamp across from the entrance of Knollwood Drive. You can bet that their farm was always well kept. They worked so hard that they had little time to spend their hard earned money. Therefore they acquired considerable wealth and about the same time that they purchased the car, they also had a telephone installed in their home, which is where Jack Pollock lives now.

This made a big hit with Mary who, unlike her brothers, enjoyed extensive conversations. Apparently through all the years, Mary Todd had built up a verbiage that once unleashed could just go on forever. She used to call up Marie’s aunt, Johanna Regan (after whose family Regan Road is named) and talk incessantly. It got to a point where Aunt Jo would put down the phone and go on with her housework. It might be an hour before she got back to the phone, but invariably Mary would still be going strong.

Everyone thought well of Mary and were happy that she finally had acquired something which she could truly enjoy.

The fact that the Todd boys could make a living from that farm was a very real tribute to their tenacity. Some of their fields had only a few inches of soil covering great ledges of rock. The town found that out the hard way when the building committee insisted on placing the Ridgebury School directly on top of one of those ledges. The difficulties encountered and the excessive blasting that resulted added greatly to the cost of construction of this school.

As opposed to his brother, Rufus Todd was really quite a sport. He used to take one day off each year and travel by horse and wagon to the Danbury Fair. Of course, before he went it was necessary for him to perform all the chores previously mentioned.

Cigar makers had booths set up at the Fair and sold the hand-made cigars that they made right there out of Connecticut tobacco. Rufus must have purchased a good supply of cigars, which he kept carefully hidden from his brother. It was said that Rufus would celebrate each Sunday morning by smoking one of the cigars while taking the milk by wagon down to the milk station. He was always careful to dispose of the evidence as he neared the farm on his way home.

Incidentally, since there was no way of refrigerating the milk after the night’s milking, it was stored in the cool waters of a spring house, and then combined with the morning’s milk before being transported to the milk station. It was said that the Todds always shipped five cans of milk each morning whether or not they had 15 cows milking or 25 cows milking.

#78 INTIMIDATING VOTING MACHINES AND SOME VOTERS WHO USED THEM

The recent town elections raised some questions about the mechanics of voting. Some voters expressed concern that they would be unable to vote for their choice of candidates, when the names of those candidates appeared one above the other, and the voter wanted to vote for both candidates.

The Press explained in some detail as to how this could be done. However, to some, the proper way of accomplishing this is still a considerable mystery.

We have seen voters approach a voting machine as if it were some kind monster. After overcoming their fear, they would enter the booth with one thought in mind: To get out of there as fast as possible. They seemed to feel that if they spent more than five seconds in the booth, everyone in the polling place would be wondering what the voter was attempting to do. This is especially true of the party regulars, who were expected to vote the straight ticket. A straight ticket vote, of course, can be registered in about three seconds and a longer stay in the booth would open their motives to question.

This is a very good argument for doing away with the party lever and allowing the voter to select each candidate for each office.

Through the years, voters have been embarrassed by having a voting machine jam as they attempted to cast a split vote. This, for some, can be a most unnerving experience as help must be obtained to get the person safely out of the voting booth. If the list of candidates for the regular offices is augmented by a series of questions, dealing with constitutional amendments, changes in governmental structures, and so on, voters are apt to become panicky and in instances may leave the booth without completing their vote.

People tend to forget that the great privilege of voting carries with it the right to be selective and affords the time to do so. It would be good if the voters understood that the voting machines are actually their property and are there for the purpose of making it easy to express their wishes.

Voting machines are really a very simple gadget when compared with some of the complicated equipment we use in our everyday lives.

When voting machines first came on the scene, they were even more intimidating to a populace that was accustomed to marking the ballot by hand. Ridgefield, always ready to be in tune with the times, was right up front when the first machines became available.

In case you may have wondered how the party on the top line is determined, it goes to the party that holds the governor's chair at the particular time. This can cause a problem if one party controls the top spot in Hartford for a considerable time. Party regulars voting the straight ticket become so used to pulling that lever, it becomes almost automatic.

We can recall an incident that took place in the Town Hall when that was our only polling place. One of the many chauffeurs that Ridgefield sported at the time had become accustomed to pulling the top lever. On this particular election day he voted as usual and once outside the hall was questioned as to whether he had pulled the bottom lever. Tom replied that he had not. He was unaware that since he had last voted, there had been a change in Hartford. He was so incensed when he realized what he had done that he attempted to reenter the booth to rectify his error. He almost caused a riot and the police had to be called.

On another occasion a very stout woman stayed in the booth an inordinately long time. That she was splitting her ticket, there was no doubt. When she began talking to herself, the moderator politely asked if she wanted him to come in and help her. Leni was well aware of her size and knew that there was no room left in the booth for anyone else. She exclaimed in a very loud voice that all she wanted was to vote for Dick Venus. My political opponent in that election of so many years ago was standing beside me within easy earshot of the voting booth. I should have felt good about it, but actually it was kind of embarrassing.

The process of making voters has changed dramatically in the past few years. At one time it took place on Saturday at the Town Hall and the Board of Selectmen and the Town Clerk

made up the voter-making committee. It was necessary for at least two of the Board and the Town Clerk to be in attendance. Among other qualifications, it was necessary for the prospective voter to prove that he or she could read. This was done by pointing to the state statutes and asking the person to read one paragraph.

On one occasion, Ruth, Leo and I were the committee. Bill Shipley, the TV personality, had recently moved to town and came in just before noon to be made a voter. When the preliminaries were completed and he was asked to raise his right hand for the oath, it was exactly 12 o'clock. As soon as Bill raised his hand, the fire siren went off and the new fire horn blasted away. He turned and said, "I knew it would be quite an occasion when I became a voter in Ridgefield, but I really did not expect a celebration."

Committee members were, of course, not allowed to use any persuasion on the new voters to get them to join one party or the other. However, we all had hopes and tried to be as nice as possible on the chance that they would join our ranks.

On another occasion, a young man came in that I felt would join our party. This time Ruth, Paul and I were the committee. Everything went along very well until it was time for him to read the statutes. He picked up the book as though he was about to address a large gathering. However, not a word came out.

We were all very surprised as it was apparent that he could not read. Paul and I decided to work on him and took him in another room to study the simple paragraph that we had selected.

After a considerable time it seemed that he had memorized the passage and we called Ruth back again for a repeat performance. Again, nothing happened. We tried again and this time got Ruth to agree that if he could read one sentence, it would be considered sufficient. The sentence was repeated so many times, I can still remember it, but when he tried again, the result was the same.

Paul and I took him to where a voting machine was set up and showed him the name of each party. Charley got so he could remember where each one was on the machine and Ruth grudgingly agreed that she would go along if he could distinguish between the two parties.

We had at first felt that perhaps the young man was made nervous by the proceedings. When I saw his father-in-law sitting in the lobby, I asked him if he was aware that Charley could not read. He said that it was news to him as he had seen him looking at the newspaper on many occasions. He must have been looking at the pictures.

At any rate, Ruth, Paul and I escorted him to the voting machine where he proudly pointed out the two parties and Ruth agreed to swear him in. We started back to the office and had to pass a sign that indicated the Board of Assessor's Office. Charley looked up at the sign and said "I told you I could read; that says Tax Collector."

The final blow was when he proceeded to join the opposition party.

#79: THE DANK, DARK, AND SCARY JAIL IN THE BOWELS OF TOWN HALL

The basement of the town hall has almost as much history as the upper floors.

At one time, and until some 25 years ago, the town road equipment was garaged in the eastern end of the basement. Of course, there was not so much equipment in those days. In fact, at the time of the terrible blizzard of 1934, there was only one large truck (International), a smaller dump truck, and a grader (Fordson).

The limited equipment was no match for that savage storm, but that is another story. During those years, the number of people employed on the road crew was so small that the first selectman actually directed their activities.

As the town grew, so did the road crew, until it was necessary to have a foreman to take over the operation. One of the first was Al Rux. Then came, among others, Tom Potter, Dick O'Keefe, Curtiss Leighton, Bob Mulvaney, Sam Comstock, Fred Gay, and now our Director of Public Services Frank Serfilippi..

So with all the other uses of this fine old building, we can add the town garage. Only about half the space was used for road equipment. At the time it was felt that it was more economical to hire equipment from local contractors as it was needed.

The rest of the basement was used as storage for the voting machines and excess equipment from various town offices. Of course, there was also the great old hot air furnace and the town jail. The jail was something else.

We always compared the jail to the dungeons that we read about in our history books. It was a very dark and dingy place and very scary to a little kid when his curiosity caused him to visit while waiting to deliver The Press. He just wanted a peek at that large cave-like chamber.

There were two cells on the north side of the jail and a larger one on the south side. A very dim electric bulb hung in the center and provided what little light was available. After becoming accustomed to the semi-darkness, a blanket could be seen on the cot of each cell. They were the army-type blanket and probably had once been khaki, but were somewhat yellow with age.

Fortunately, there were no inmates at the time and as some courage returned, a closer examination revealed that all the heavy iron gates to the cells were open. It almost seemed as though someone was expecting company. It was the first example of the open door policy.

The rest of the front of each cell was made with iron bars, like the gate. The other three sides of each cell were made of brick. The jail, as the rest of this sturdy old building, gave off a feeling of permanence. You just knew it would be there tomorrow.

That first visit to the jail was of short duration and it was good to get back outside in the light and smell the fresh air. However, our innate curiosity would make for many future tours of inspection.

One time, a second and brighter bulb was installed and this provided enough light for an opportunity to discover a tiny lavatory at one side. It had no light inside but did feature the very bare necessities. Apparently, in order to use the facility, one would have to leave the door open, or be in complete darkness.

The second bulb also allowed one to see that the brickwork was of exceptional quality. Whoever did that brickwork actually used his artistic ability. Bricks were not just laid one on the other and closer examination revealed several little intricate designs that must have been intended to impress the unfortunates who might be lodged there.

Another discovery was an enormous key in the lock of each gate. There was a strong temptation to turn one of the keys in order to hear the clank it no doubt would have made. However, the feeling was suppressed and any satisfaction had to be garnered from imagining that the sound would be terrifying.

We often wondered why school children were not given a guided tour through the jail, similar to the one we used to make through the Keeler Tavern. It would, no doubt, have been a real deterrent to any youngster who may have been contemplating a life of crime.

It must have been on our fourth or fifth visit that we entered the jail with our newly acquired bravado when there was suddenly the feeling that we were not alone. Up to now there had never been anyone in the place, not a police officer or a prisoner.

This time, a slight movement in one of the cells set our heart pounding. We beat a hasty retreat to the safety of the great outdoors.

Once outside, our position was reassessed. We remembered that the cell from which the slight noise had emanated had a closed gate. It naturally followed that this gate must have been locked.

Summoning up what little nerve remained, we re-entered the jail and let our eyes adjust as we stood just inside the door. Soon it became apparent that a man was lying on the cot of that cell.

He did not make any further moves so, emboldened, we moved in a little farther. When it became obvious that the man was asleep, a closer examination was made.

His shirt was badly torn and it appeared that his face was bruised in a few places. We felt that discretion was the better part of valor and quietly left the premises.

After getting our papers from the Press for delivery, we learned from a front-page story that there had been a family disturbance and Oscar had been interned until such time as the effects of a heavy liquid diet had subsided.

Such things go practically unnoticed today and are scarcely mentioned in the newspapers. While such actions were frowned on at the time, they were of interest to the readers and provided topics for conversation. Perhaps we have been so indoctrinated by the everyday violence on the TV screens that nothing short of a real sensational murder will claim our attention.

On another occasion we found a man sleeping on a cot in one of the cells and this time the gate was wide open. He turned out to be what was known as a “Knight of the Road” — or a bum, as some referred to these people. They were men who walked from town to town. Some had a destination but others just kept going on and on.

They were not bums in the true sense of the word. In fact some were well educated. Perhaps some psychoanalyst could discover what makes these kinds of men wander constantly.

At any rate they were allowed free lodging by kindly old Frank Taylor who was our only policeman (night watchman), although we did have the State Police in town at the time.

#80: WHEN STEPPY SHOT THE POST OFFICE THIEF

Frank Taylor earned a fine reputation as the keeper of law and order in Ridgefield.

Originally he was hired by the local merchants as a night watchman. His duties were to walk around the various stores each night to make sure that both the front and rear doors to each establishment were locked.

Each of the merchants contributed toward his \$100 per month salary. Since Frank was already an elected constable of the town, he was actually on duty 24 hours of each day.

Frank was a big man and exhibited a very authoritative appearance. He was, however, a very kindly and understanding gentleman.

In making his rounds each evening, he got to know the young people who hung around the Main Street business area. Youngsters soon learned to trust old Frank and treat him with great respect. When he approached a group of the younger boys at eight o'clock and informed them that it was time to go home, it would have been a very rare occasion if a dissenting opinion was expressed. If by chance a boy chose to ignore Frank's advice, a little whack on the seat of the pants of the objector produced a quick change of mind.

Frank's nightstick was a big one and no one dared to go home and confess that he had been chastised by this very respected man.

Frank was very active in the everyday life of Ridgefield and its organizations. He was a past Noble Grand of Pilgrim Lodge No. 46, Independent Order of Odd Fellows, as well as a charter member of the Ridgefield Volunteer Fire Department.

His civic activities brought him in contact with the parents of these young people that he had to deal with each evening. With the parents solidly behind him, Frank wielded sufficient influence over the youths of Ridgefield that when he approached another older group at 9 o'clock, they too dispersed as directed.

With the next older group, at 10 o'clock, and again at 11 o'clock, it was easier, as no one wanted to be humiliated in front of their peers, by the whack on the seat that became stronger with each passing hour.

By midnight, the streets belonged to Frank Taylor and if someone was out at that hour, he had better not have any mischief in mind.

I am sure that most people liked Frank Taylor and I am sure that they respected him. I know that I did both.

There was little crime in Ridgefield, in those days.

My father once told me of how, late one Sunday afternoon, he and Hen Mead, Bill Sullivan, Con Nevins, and Jack Walker were sitting in front of the town hall. It was their regular habit to do this following the ball game on East Ridge, in the early part of this century.

Each play of the game was gone over in detail by these rabid baseball fans. Disagreements over the way the game should have been played were numerous and spirited, especially if Ridgefield had lost the game.

When the game had been completely replayed, their attention turned to the relative values of some of the spirited horses that passed by. Most agreed on Edward Payson Dutton's as being the finest, followed closely by the great horses of George G. Haven.

The occasional motor vehicle that they saw would bring forth even further, intense comparisons that generally narrowed down to the autos owned by Dr. Russell W. Lowe and Albert H. Wiggin.

On this particular Sunday, a wagon appeared from the north, drawn by a pair of bay driving horses. This vehicle did not quite reach the town hall but made a U-turn in front of the Methodist Parsonage (now known as the Hackert and Monti building).

The wagon was of the buckboard type. It carried three men and came to a stop in front of what is now Homestead Realty. It was, at that time, the United States Post Office for Ridgefield.

One man stayed in the wagon, to hold the horses, and the other two approached the post office door. One carried a large crow bar and it was evident that they were not about to mail the heavy bar.

The five at town hall had directed their attention to the activities down the street and when the sound of the front door of the post office being forced reached their ears, they all began to shout for Frank Taylor.

That exemplary limb of the law had just started his evening tour and had crossed Main Street from the apartment over Bissell's Drug Store that he shared with his daughter Mabel and her husband, Mally Knapp.

Frank was in the driveway between Saint Stephen's Church Parish House and S.D. Keeler's store (now Ridgefield Auto Parts). Frank hurried to the front of the store, as best he could. He was somewhat impeded by an affliction that caused him to throw his right foot out

forward, in a rather awkward manner. This encumbered his stride and earned for Frank the nickname “Steppy.” It was, however, never said in disrespect.

Steppy had never really needed to hurry because his very commanding presence generally brought everything else under control and word of his expert marksmanship was well known to those he must keep in line.

Frank’s alert mind took in the scene being enacted on the other end of the street, and with his powerful voice, he yelled at the men to halt. Unfortunately for them, these men had not heard of Steppy’s prowess with the weapon that he carried. This huge gun was known as a “Hawg Leg” and was actually a greatly oversized revolver of 45 calibre. It was not as large as the sawed-off rifle carried by Steve McQueen in the movies, but it would remind you of it.

At any rate, the two men had entered the post office and were now returning and carrying the little safe that probably weighed about 250 pounds. Another command from Frank went unheeded and he drew his long revolver.

His first shot sounded just as the men had hoisted the safe and were about to lower it carefully into the back of the buckboard. The bullet struck one of the thieves in the leg and caused him to relinquish his hold on the safe. The other thief was unable to handle the weight of the safe and it went crashing through the floorboards of the wagon, landing in the graveled roadway.

The wounded thief was hauled up into the wagon. All thoughts of thievery had dissipated as the buckboard and its occupants took off up north Main Street.

So the thieves got away, but without their loot. The attempted robbery was never solved, but the grand old man had scored again and sleepy little Ridgefield was spared the embarrassment of having its post office safe stolen.

#81: A COMMUNITY THAT WAS KIND TO PASSING HOBOS & TRAMPS

The three cells in the basement of the old Town Hall housed two kinds of tenants. There were those who had run afoul of the law and there were those who merely sought refuge there.

Since crime as we know it today was minimal, there were not very many actual prisoners in those days. One stay in that murky, mysterious dungeon was generally enough to discourage a repeat performance by any offender, except the most incorrigible. . .

The others who made use of the facility had an entirely different opinion of this haven for their weary bones. The rock-hard cots were, to them, as soft as the fuzz on a peach. The old army bed covers were as warm as the best of today’s electric blankets. The heavy iron bars and the barred gates were actually a protection, rather than a restraint. While the light was practically non-existent, they could make their coffee on the top of the hot old furnace. In warm weather, when the furnace was not operating, these men would use their own little can of Sterno to heat the water.

Kindly old Frank Taylor made sure that the lodgings were always kept in order. He also saw to it that the residents did not become permanent. This was never a real problem as they were always anxious to get started again on the road to somewhere.

Almost always they were on their way by dawn. As a young boy delivering milk early in the morning, I used to see them taking off on their journey just before the sun came up.

Some of these people were from fine families and behaved like real gentlemen. They were called transients, wanderers, tramps, bums, nomads, hobos, and knights of the road. They did not seem to care what they were called as long as they were not badgered and could have a peaceful night’s sleep.

There was a time in the early 30's when a burglary occurred in two different stores two nights in a row. The officer in charge at the State Police Barracks suspected that it was one of the transients and caused an investigation of them all as they passed through. It should be recognized that such a crime wave, in little old Ridgefield, caused a sensation at the time.

Frank Taylor was convinced that it could not have been one of his lodgers. Frank's confidence was based in part on his years of experience with the knights of the road, his innate belief in the goodness of his fellow man and the fact that he was keenly aware of any movements around Town Hall. The investigation proved him to be correct and the real perpetrators were apprehended.

One night in the late 30's, all three cells had an occupant. It was a cold winter evening, and while each of the men would go his separate way in the morning, the three joined together to have their coffee and whatever else they had that would sustain them through the night. Their efforts with the coffee pot produced that familiar pleasant odor and it wafted through the door and out onto Bailey Avenue as two men were passing by.

The three wanderers had finished their meager repast and were reclining on their cots when a knock came at the door. Then the door burst open before anyone could answer the knock, and two visitors walked in, rather unsteadily. They were looking for some coffee, but none was left for them.

The two newcomers were not in a very jovial mood and soon began to argue with each other. A bottle passed back and forth between them as the argument intensified and its volume increased. This began to annoy the lodgers who only wanted to get some sleep. Up to this point they had listened patiently while they waited for the uninvited guests to leave.

When it became obvious that the two locals had no intention of leaving, one of the hoboes opened the door while the other two pushed the inebriated pair out onto Bailey Avenue. C.S. and G.R. could still see well enough to recognize the tall form of Frank Taylor approaching and they beat a hasty retreat. The three hobos returned to their cots for the balance of a restful night.

The knights of the road were joined in some way into a kind of fraternity. They had a compassion for each other that caused them to leave some kind of a sign that would direct those who followed them to any place that they had found where food could be acquired.

During this period, Mrs. Richard A. Jackson lived in her large home at the intersection of Main Street and King Lane. Her cook was Susie Christopher.

Susie was not an ordinary cook. She was not only a wonderful lady from a very fine family, she was also just about the very best cook you could possibly find. Good cooks were hard to come by and in most of the mansions in Ridgefield the cook was apt to be the one who actually ran the household. Such was the case at the Jacksons', but Susie tempered her authority by always going through the proper channels.

Early one morning as Susie hustled around the kitchen, there was a knock at the door. When she opened the door there stood a bedraggled looking character begging for some food. Susie asked him to sit on the screened-in porch while she checked the matter out with her Madame.

Of course, Mrs. Jackson told Susie to do whatever she felt best to do. Susie returned to the kitchen and prepared a breakfast that was fit for a king. The poor tramp almost swooned with delight as he waded through the mountain of goodies that was served him.

When that man left the Jackson residence, he left a sign for his brethren who followed. A table and two chairs remained on that porch for many years and I cannot tell how many

hundreds of knights of the road got their start each day with a sumptuous breakfast prepared by the compassionate Susie with kindly Mrs. Jackson's approval.

It was funny to see these men, who had never been in Ridgefield before, leave the town hall in the morning and cross to the western side of Main Street. They would then walk south until they came to King Lane where they made an abrupt right turn as if some unseen mechanism controlled their actions. At the Jacksons' driveway another sharp right turn was made and soon they were on the porch enjoying what was probably the finest meal they had ever eaten. They all did it the same way and though we used to stop the milk truck and search the sidewalk, the trees and the stone wall, we were never able to find the mysterious directive that guided these wandering individuals to their morning feast. We even asked one how he knew where to turn, but he only smiled and went his way.

#82: TALES OF CHRISTMAS PAST

Most everyone, with the possible exception of those who have to clear the roads, will look forward to a White Christmas. Perhaps it would be nice to look at some over the years that were white and some that were not.

It is interesting to note that more than half of the last 60 Christmas seasons had snow. Some were just light dustings of white while others were of blizzard proportions. There were no patterns set, as sometimes several years would elapse without a snowflake and then there would be four or five years in a row when the ground was covered with white.

So Christmas 1983 is here and by now everyone must be caught up in the spirit of the season. Some will experience the joy and the peace that this holy period brings to them. Others will feel the great urge to give something nice to people they are close to and better yet, some will make life brighter for those they may not even know. Most of us will be touched in one way or another.

In looking back, we will skip a few that are a little vague and start with 1920. It was white that year and the snow was about 20 inches deep. We helped to decorate a little old cedar tree that we thought was very beautiful.

It is doubtful if any such trees are used in Ridgefield today. We have become accustomed to the imported pines, balsams, and firs that are so pretty and then we tend to over-decorate them so much that the tree itself is completely hidden. These modern trees have a bright green color whereas our little cedar had some dark green interspersed with some faded brown.

An important feature of the cedar tree was that it did not cost anything. All that was necessary to acquire such a tree was a trip into the great wooded areas of town where they flourished on some of the poorer soil.

After cutting the tree with a hatchet, it was fun dragging it home over the carpet of snow. There always seemed to be snow back then.

There was considerable excitement associated with the decorating process. No electric bulbs were used and only a very few candles. When they were lit, someone was required to be in constant attendance as the tree was a veritable tinderbox, just waiting to be ignited.

A long rope of golden tinsel was woven through the branches of the tree and sugar plums were hung, along with candy canes and popcorn balls that my sister Mary had made in advance. If one had never seen the overdressed, over-lighted trees of today, they would no doubt agree that this quaint little symbol of Christmas, in all its simplicity, was actually a thing of great beauty.

Christmas day started with a trudge through the snow to church and only after that, were the presents that came during the night, opened. I got a railroad engine that year that Santa had placed under the tree. It was red and by vigorously pushing it a few times, weights and springs that were carefully concealed, were activated, causing the little engine to run from room to room. It should be noted that two of my older brothers, Jack and Charley, worked on the railroad and this must have influenced Santa.

Christmas dinner was always served at 1 p.m., and though we had a large family, nine children, we always had company as well. Mom used to put the turkey in the oven of the old coal stove, the night before, as it took a long time to cook.

The pumpkin and mince pies were hand made, as was everything, including the cranberry sauce (not jelly) and the plum pudding, with its delectable hard sauce.

We also had nuts of various kinds and some came from our own butternut tree. Butternuts were hard to crack and we used to take an iron from the stove that was used for pressing, turn it upside down between our knees and use a hammer to open them. It was even more of a job to remove the meat but they were so good it was well worth the effort.

After dinner was over and everything was put away, the older ones sat around the pot bellied stove in the living room to talk or play games while the younger ones walked to New Pond for an afternoon of skating. It seemed that skating started much earlier then, sometimes even as early as Thanksgiving.

That year, on Christmas night, it rained and froze a very heavy crust on the snow. The crust was strong enough to support a grown person. We had great fun the next day, making tunnels under the crust and crawling around under it.

The next year we had an even heavier snow storm and on Christmas morning there was a pair of ice skates under the tree, with my name on them. They were the kind that clamped onto your shoes and a key was used to tighten them, but they always seemed to come loose. The skates had a familiar look and I don't think they were brand new. Perhaps Santa took them from some boy who had outgrown them. However, they worked out fine and after a few falls, we got used to them.

I should have mentioned that in those days, fresh fruit was always a treat and we always looked forward to getting an orange.

We did not have snow for Christmas in 1923 but under the tree this time was a fine Hohner harmonica. I found later that my cousin Ed Sullivan had given it to Santa for delivery. This was an exceptionally fine musical instrument and I soon taught myself to play it. In fact, in the next few years, I made considerable money with it. It was the same harmonica that I played on the program that opened radio station WICC in Bridgeport in 1926.

It snowed again in 1924 and this year the church was allowed to celebrate midnight Mass for the first time in 25 years. It was snowing hard as we walked to church carrying our lanterns. There were no street lights on Catoonah Street and only a very few on Main Street at the time.

It has always been my opinion that people tend to remember only the things they want to remember. Therefore, the year 1925 is pretty much of a blank to me. It was that year that I had to leave friendly little old Titicus School and advance to the big school on East Ridge. The advancement was not appreciated in the least.

However, two things happened around Christmas that broke through the barrier. One of my newspaper customers lived in one of the apartments over Bissell's Drug Store. Her name was Mary Cooney and we called her Miss Cooney. She was a doctor and I think she was a

chiropractor. At any rate, she took a liking to me and bought a chance in a raffle at S.D. Keeler's store, across the street where Ridgefield Auto Parts is now. Miss Cooney put my name on the raffle ticket and when I delivered the paper to the store, they informed me that I had won the 25-pound turkey that was offered as a prize.

The store offered to deliver the huge turkey to what was then 181 Main Street (now 612 Main). However, I was so excited that I placed the turkey in my little red wagon and raced home with it. In those days the food given to poultry did not contain the vitamins we have today and a good-sized turkey would be around 15 pounds. I was very proud to have made this contribution to our family's Christmas, but I guess that this monster caused my mother all kinds of problems because of its size.

Also, about this time, Jimmy Begin bought Charles Wade Walker's "Happy Hour Store" and gave me the job opening the store in the morning. This was a big thing for me and I took my new responsibilities very seriously.

Our original intention was to write a little something about each Christmas and whether or not it was white, from 1920 to the present time. As can be plainly seen, I will not get by the first five years. So perhaps there will be another time.

My mother, my brother Joe, and my daughter Elizabeth Ann were all born during the Christmas season and we always felt that their birthdays suffered a little because of the proximity to the Lord's birthday.

We thought Lizzie might be a Christmas present but instead she was the first baby born in Norwalk Hospital in 1942. The William Roys had beautiful twin girls, Mimi and Margy, born the next day, on January 2. They were good friends of Elizabeth Ann and came to her party one New Year's Day when they were still little girls. Someone asked them why they were not born on New Year's Day and Mimi quickly answered, "We would have been, but my Daddy had to go hunting that day."

We will take this opportunity to wish everyone a happy, healthy, and holy holiday season and a better 1984.

#83: CHARLES ELLIOTT, A MAN WHO HAD NO ENEMIES

So Charley is gone. Those who know him had only good things to say about him. He did a lot for a good many people. He had no enemies.

Of course, we are talking about the late Charles F. Elliott. Charley passed on while still in the harness. That was the way he would have wanted to go. He was only a few days short of his 83rd birthday, Christmas Day. Probably did not want to interfere with the festivities of the holiday.

I was about 10 when I first met Charley. He was the express agent for Ridgefield. He did the office work as well as making the deliveries with his horse and that high-wheeled express wagon. Years before, my father had been the express agent, and he too had used the same wagon. In the late 20's, the American Railway Express Company decided to become motorized and the wagon was sold. Edward Simon bought the wagon on the advice of Bert Anderson or Gottlob Riede, whoever was his superintendent at the time.

Mr. Simon owned Hillscroft Farm on St. John's Road in the 20's. They used the wagon for various purposes as it was handy and could be turned around in a small space as the front wheels were not as high as the rear wheels and could cut right under the body of the wagon.

Later on the wagon was stored in a shed at Hillscroft after the estate had been sold to Dr. Royal C. Van Etten. When I became superintendent for Dr. Van Etten, I was delighted to find the

wagon again. There was no driving horse at Hillscroft at the time, but I lost no time in acquiring one, as I had to have a ride in the old wagon.

Incidentally, the horse's picture appeared in last week's Press, drawing a sleigh. When I asked Dr. Van Etten what we should call the horse, he looked at all those white and brown spots and said, "He looks like a circus horse so let's call him P.T." So P.T. he became and he knew as many tricks as any circus horse. My father's express horse was named "Joe" and the one Charley Elliott had was named "Evo."

Dr. Van Etten was aware of my fondness for the old wagon and he gave it to me. When we moved from Hillscroft, it was stored in Clifford Seymour's barn. The barn was sold and eventually torn down, which meant I had to find another place to keep the wagon.

Bill Lynch in South Salem had a fondness for old wagons and offered to take it. He said he would like to paint and repair the wagon. Alas, he never got around to do anything with the old wagon. However, it is still around after all those years and can be seen on Bill's front lawn, just two houses on this side of Mead Street, in South Salem. It has to be more than 80 years old and at this time is in a sad state of disrepair.

We started out to say something about Charley Elliott but had to tell about his old wagon. Years ago, a great deal of stuff was shipped by express. Some of the wealthy families received almost daily deliveries. It was not unusual to make two deliveries in one day to the F. E. Lewis estate (now Manor Estates).

When the volume of express was so great that Charley could not get it all on the wagon, he would remove the seat to make room for it. I used to ride with him and when the seat was not used, we sat on the apron that was intended for your feet. This brought you very close the horses rather largerump. It was all right for Charley but I was so little that I could not see where we were going.

During these years, Charley and his family lived upstairs in the large Tudor building that has been known as the Biglow building, the Ballard building, the Martin Block and more recently as the Pizza building. This great building also housed the Telephone Company and several operators were employed there keeping Ridgefield connected with itself and the outside world.

When Charley started to build his own home on the north corner of Mountain View and Hillsdale Avenues, he would get Harold "Buck" Mead to sub for him on the wagon. Charley's great pal, Ernest Sturges, helped him with the building. These two could do just about anything. They were both full of the devil and would engage in a wrestling bout at the drop of a hat. One day they were on the roof of the new building when they started to tussle. They were so intent on getting the best of one another that they failed to realize how close they were to the edge of the roof. As might be expected, they landed on the ground and it was a small miracle that neither was seriously injured.

At times, Buck would be unavailable to fill in for Charley and on these occasions he would let me make some of the deliveries. I guess I must have been the proudest kid in Ridgefield as I guided Evo up Depot Hill to Main Street.

Eventually, Evo was retired, in favor of a Model A Ford truck and with that my interest in the great American Railway Express Company came to an end.

Charley was not a big man but he made up for that in "know how." He was well versed in the use of leverages and could handle the biggest and heaviest trunks with ease. Fish used to come in barrels, packed with ice and must have weighed around 300 pounds. The barrels were no problem as S.D. Keeler's Store where the ground was fairly level. However, at Hibbart's (later

Schultz's and now Cappiello's), it was a different matter. There was a slope to the platform and the rear of the wagon must have been two feet higher than the front. How Charley got those barrels up that incline and onto the platform was something to see.

We told in Dispatch No. 37 of how Charley danced to the tune of Ted Mead's 45 calibre revolver, so we won't go into that again. Along with the change from Evo to the Ford truck came the Great Depression and a decided lessening in the express volumes and Charley began to look for other employment. .

He started the Elliott Refuse Service which is still carried on by his son, Charles Jr. Then the firm K.E.B. was formed with Warner Keeler and Francis Brown. They bought the service station business from John Moser on Danbury Road where Mobil is now. The three were well-liked and an immediate success. They were well-suited to each other.

Charley was a good businessman and had an analytical mind. He could figure with the best of them and would have made an excellent politician in the very best sense of the word. He was very trusting and helped an awful lot of people who needed a tire or a battery when they did not have the cash during the hard times. He also loaned money to those in need.

Just a few years ago, on Christmas Eve, one of my mail carriers was finishing his route in the Twixt Hills area after dark. It had rained all day, and then as darkness fell, it started to snow. The carrier entered a driveway on the south side of Old Barlow Mountain Road. It has to be the steepest drive in Ridgefield. He got to the house but then slid off the driveway and bogged down in the mud, and had to leave the truck there.

On Christmas morning after church, I went up to see about getting the truck out. The temperature had dropped to zero during the night and the truck was encased in what had been mud, but now was as hard as a rock.

I called Charley and he came right up with a tow truck. After much maneuvering, the vehicle was still frozen solidly. Then the heavy cable snapped and could not be repaired. By now we were both about frozen as well.

Undaunted, Charley called another garage for an even larger tow truck. The tow truck had to be guyed to a tree to prevent it from sliding down the hill as it tugged at the mail truck. After a great deal of work, in that bitter cold, the mail truck was dislodged. It was then after six o'clock. Charley was then in his 70's but he would not give up.

It was an awful way to spend Christmas Day, but one could not ask for a better man to spend it with. Charley never mentioned that it was also his birthday. He was that kind of man.

Happy New Year.

#84: A HISTORY OF A LITTLE DOG

Economic laws can be very interesting when used to compare one era with another, or comparative prices in volume purchasing. The fact that coffee may cost \$2 per pound does not mean that two pounds will cost \$4 or less. Sometimes the two-pound can will cost more per pound.

Something like that applies to the barber trade. In the 20's, when the population of Ridgefield was about 2,700, our tonsorial needs were administered by seven or eight barbers, working out of four or five barber shops. Since our population today is in the neighborhood of 22,000 to 23,000, it may be assumed that it would require more than 30 barber shops and some 60 barbers to keep us well trimmed. The last time I looked, there were less now than there were in the 20's. Perhaps visits to the barber shop have become less frequent.

In the mid 20's, a Mexican, whose name was Mike, opened a shop where the Candlelight Shoppe is now. He had two barbers working for him and one of them had a marked resemblance to the reigning cowboy movie star and was promptly dubbed "Hoot Gibson."

At the time "Baldy" had his barbershop in the large three-story building where the Ridgefield Savings Bank is now. The venerable Conrad Rockelein had his shop across the street, over S. D. Keeler's Store.

Con moved his shop around quite a bit. He was a very good barber but it always seemed like you had to go looking for him. He was still cutting hair in his 80's, at his home on the corner of Mountain View Avenue, and Danbury Road.

Mike Massamino had his shop at 3½ Catoonah Street where J. R. Interiors is now. Mike had a Charlie Chaplin-type mustache. He even looked very much like the "Little Tramp," but no one ever called him Charlie.

Mike was a nice little guy and a good barber. However, he was the victim of hard times and experienced great difficulty in keeping his bills paid. I had a rather extensive newspaper and magazine route at the time and he was one of my customers. One time his bill got to be what was considered a rather large amount by the standards of the time. Mike offered to give me a dog in payment of the bill. Further negotiations looked hopeless and I reluctantly agreed to the settlement.

I had never seen the dog and did not know what to expect. The next time I went to the shop, Mike had a little white poodle waiting for me.

Daisy was a rather forlorn little bundle of white curls that were heavily infiltrated with burrs and nettles of all kinds. She was the albino type and her little pink eyes always seemed to be running. Mike had her tied with a rope that could have moored the Queen Elizabeth II.

In those days, a toy poodle was not considered the proper dog for a boy and I was thinking that I would be the butt of considerable kidding. All of this, plus her bedraggled appearance made me want to reconsider our agreement and I felt like backing out of the deal. However, it looked like my only opportunity to settle the bill so I finally left the shop with Daisy in tow.

When Daisy and I finished the route and arrived home, there was a lot of explaining to do. The first order of business was to make Daisy a little more presentable. My father was experienced in removing burrs from horses' tails by using kerosene to make them slip along the hair. He helped me and we finally got the last one off the little dog, though the tight curls made it difficult.

After a bath that Daisy seemed to fully appreciate, we started the business of becoming friends. She followed me around each time, on my route and got to be a well-known fixture.

A year or so later, my brother Gus got married and I had nothing else to give him and Stella for a wedding present, so I presented them with Daisy. They lived on Market Street in a garage apartment at the rear of the Main Street home of Dr. William H. Allee (now the office of the D.N.A.) The building has since been moved further down Market Street and converted into a large home.

A year or so later, Daisy had four, very cute, little brown and white pups. Gus gave one of them to George G. Scott, who was then both town clerk and judge of probate. "Tippy" probably became one of the best known dogs in Ridgefield. She used to accompany Judge Scott each day to the town hall. They fixed a little window box for Tippy and she sat in the front window of the town clerk's office for years and never missed a day. She yelped each time that

someone came to the door and then would jump down to meet the visitor. She was a very friendly little thing and I guess you could say she was the official greeter.

In the meantime, Ridgefield's dog population increased much more rapidly than that of the humans, as Daisy continued to have puppies and her puppies began to have puppies. By now they began to increase in size and came in various colors.

In the 30's Eddie Schmidt had one of the pups and in the 40's Peter Edel had another of the offspring. Peter lived with his mother in the Ashland Cottage, at 321 Main Street, where the Hess family now makes their home.

By now the dogs, through the generations, had increased in size to that of a large springer spaniel. When Peter's dog, Queenie, decided to join the production line, she had a litter under the kitchen floor. The year was 1948 and there was no basement under the kitchen at that time.

Queenie would crawl out to eat, but never brought the pups with her. They must have been about two weeks old when I brought them out to face the world. They were a nice shiny black and you could see they were going to be big dogs.

A couple of months later, the Knights of Columbus was having a carnival and a crisis developed when they ran out of prizes. I remembered the puppies and mentioned them to John Bacchiochi. Johnny took off for the Edels' home and bought the litter. When he returned with the puppies, there was great joy among young and old alike, and the games went on with renewed interest.

When our family moved to its Olmstead Lane home in 1951, we found that the John Moore family next door had one of these puppies. It was now as big as a small black pony. Peter Carboni had one and so did Joe Sheehy. They must have all been males so the lineage that started with a little white poodle, some 30 years before, had come to an end, as far as we know.

Mike Massamino sold that barber shop to Andrew Geria. Andy's wife was a beautician and was herself, a beauty. They were great dancers and it was a great pleasure to see them glide over the floor at the many dances we used to have. After a few years they moved to Croton Falls, N.Y., and in 1937, invented a therapeutic device for use in beauty shops and by chiropractors. Andy and Mary had the gadget patented and I guess it is still in use today.

The Gerias sold their business to Paul Laszig, who did his barbering there for many years. Paul made a sizable fortune in the stock market, by listening to advice from his customers; one of which was Philip D. Wagoner [head of the Underwood typewriter company].

Mrs. Laszig, who died only a few years ago, was kind enough to leave a portion of that fortune, in trust, for worthwhile organizations like Meals on Wheels.

#85: THE 11-FOOT SNOW DRIFT AND OTHER WINTRY ADVENTURES

We will soon be coming into the season where great snowstorms of the past have occurred. Each large storm is compared with another, with fervor, by those who have been affected. Some of the big ones have arrived in February and the famous Blizzard of '88 occurred in the middle of March. Many have claimed that '88 was the granddaddy of them all.

However, the late and beloved Miss Jennie Holmes, who lived through that terrible storm, always maintained that the blizzard of February 1934 was the biggest snowfall ever in Ridgefield. Jennie witnessed them both so I will take her word for it. She published her comparisons of the two great storms in *The Press* many years ago.

Jennie said that while the drifts in '88 were deeper, the snow on the level in '34 was greater. She noted that the wind, which really makes a blizzard, was of hurricane velocity in '88.

It piled snow in places where it would cause the most trouble — in highways and against buildings, especially around the doorways. At the same time, open fields were swept clean by the gigantic winds.

My father told me of how he was driving a horse car in New York in '88. He kept going until noontime during that storm and when the horse could go no further, he unhitched the horse and rode him back to the stables. A horse car is like a trolley, except that a horse is used to draw it. The only place you can find such a conveyance today is at Disneyland or Disneyworld.

We experienced the one in '34 and find it hard to believe that any storm could be worse than that one. Our version of that storm will come later.

It seems that in recent years the big storms came at about 10-year intervals, like in '47, '57, '69 and '77. These storms caused many problems for individuals and also for the town, especially the one in '47, as we still did not have sufficient equipment to handle all that snow.

In '47 we had several storms, one just two days before Christmas. Then the day after Christmas it got down to snowing in earnest. We were at Hillscroft Farm on St. John's Road at the time. We had a truck with a snow plow and used to keep the road clear from Wilton Road West to the bottom of the Silver Hill. Not this time though. There was just too much snow for the truck to handle.

On Olmstead's corner, near Windy Ridge (so aptly named), the snow drifted in to a depth of 11 feet. There were things needed from the store, so I put a saddle on Dr. Van Etten's saddle horse and started for town. The snow was so deep we kept out of the road and up on the high bank from which much of the snow had blown away.

Everything went well until we reached Olmstead's corner. Here, Mavourneen slipped off the bank and began to settle in the 11-foot drift.

It was a rather eerie experience to find the horse sinking beneath me. I scrambled off her back and struggled up onto the bank, still holding the reins. I was struck by the terrified look in the eyes of my gallant steed.

Fortunately, she had considerable confidence in me and I was able to calm her and stop the thrashing of her hoofs. By now the only things exposed were her head and the top of the saddle. With soft words of encouragement and a gentle tug on the reins, she began to clamber up the path I had made to higher ground. Once out of her predicament, Mavourneen and I had a conference and agreed to continue our trip.

Kathleen Mavourneen was a beautiful gray Irish thoroughbred that had been given to Dr. Van Etten by Tommy Hitchcock. The good doctor had performed successful surgery on Mrs. Hitchcock, and Tommy was most appreciative. In case you are too young to remember, Hitchcock was probably America's greatest polo player, in an era that spawned such all time champions as Babe Ruth, Jack Dempsey, Bobby Jones, and Bill Tilden.

So it was three days before the corner was cleared of snow. The town trucks had tried unsuccessfully several times and gave up. It took Serfilippi's bulldozer to do the job and it was no easy task, even for that sturdy machine.

Once the road was opened, there was real good sleighing for the rest of the winter. The light snowstorms that followed were "just enough to patch up the sleighing," as the saying used to go. However, after 1947, snow removal crews plowed so quickly and so thoroughly that sleighing became a thing of the past.

I guess there are few, if any, who remember when instead of clearing the roads, they used a large wooden roller and packed the snow down on the highways. As each storm occurred,

the snow was just rolled on top of the last one. This made for excellent sleighing before the advent of the cursed automobile.

This method did cause a tremendous problem as spring approached and the snow melted during the day and then froze again during the night. The resulting ruts in the highway made traveling a very bumpy proposition.

Some farmers began building large wooden "V" plows that were pulled by teams of horses. Each farmer took care of the section of road nearest his farm. Of course, when they did not comply, it created a situation similar to what we have today when someone fails to clear his portion of the sidewalk.

The towns then began to make an effort to plow the highways but they were not equipped to handle the big storms. There was a practice of supplementing the meager town equipment with that of local contractors. The theory was that construction was slow during the winter months and contractor's equipment was readily available.

It seemed like we had an awful lot of contractors for a town with a population about one fifth of what it is now. There was Bacchiochi, Bedini, Keeler, Morganti, Serfilippi, and Tortellini as well as individuals who were available to plow snow.

The situation was hopeless in the blizzard of '34, but the thought was that we would never have a storm like that again. The '47 storm was not quite as bad but it did cripple operations and First Selectman Harry E. Hull decided to do something about it.

Harry knew that when spring came, the enthusiasm for purchasing the necessary equipment would diminish rapidly. The pain created by killer storms was something like childbirth after a while it passed. So Harry started his campaign to secure the necessary equipment while the pain was still fresh in everyone's mind.

He was successful, though there was considerable opposition to the expenditure of some \$30,000, and the town purchased two large trucks, a loader, and Molly. There will be more about Molly.

#86: ACHILLE'S TANK & CURTIS'S MOLLY FIGHT THE WORST WINTER STORMS

The blizzard of February 1934 caused people to recognize the need for more and better removal equipment. However, when spring came, thoughts were turned to other, more immediate things that needed doing. Roads were badly in need of repairs, classrooms in our school system were becoming overcrowded and there was always that eternal hope that Ridgefield would be spared from another killer storm.

Local contractors took a more practical stand on ways to combat the tricks that mother nature could provide during the cold winter months. Achille Bacchiochi went so far as to purchase a World War I Army Tank. His boys then constructed a huge wooden plow to fit the tank.

The plow had a straight blade. It was made of oak and must have been at least six inches thick, ten or twelve feet in width and about four feet in height.

The tank itself was a monstrous machine with armor that was probably more than a half inch thick. One could only guess what the great vehicle weighed, but it must have been many tons. It must have been 10 or 12 feet high and fifteen or twenty feet long.

There was a certain sense of security in knowing that this enormous machine was available in case of another emergency. However, the straight blade of the plow pushed the snow rather than creating the scouring action of a plow that could be turned on an angle. This made for numerous stops to clear away the mountains of snow that built up in front of the plow.

The tank also used a lot of gasoline. A lot? I once asked Johnny Bacchiochi how many miles he got on a gallon of gas. Johnny laughed and said that it had to be figured in gallons per mile rather than miles per gallon. They had to keep a truck loaded with gasoline following the monster as it plowed.

This machine did the job, however, and absolutely nothing could stop it. We recall a rather large storm in the year following the blizzard. Six of us from Conklin's Dairy Farm spent most of the day shoveling by hand from the farm (where Overlook Drive now intersects with Ramapoo Road) to Gilbert Street.

The storm was not considered a blizzard as there was no wind and therefore no drifts. There was lots of snow, however, and it must have been nearly 30 inches deep. The tank had been kept busy opening roads that were more heavily traveled. At any rate, we finally reached Gilbert Street and just as the last shovelful was being deposited, we saw the tank on its way down High Ridge Avenue on its way to our rescue.

We had some large snowstorms in the 30's and 40's and the worst since the blizzard of '34 occurred in 1947. First Selectman Harry E. Hull set about the task of convincing the Board of Finance that they should appropriate the necessary money to correct the situation. The snow had come early that year and the big storm was the day after Christmas.

Harry decided to strike while the iron was hot. With clouds of smoke coming from his old corn cob pipe, Harry implored the financiers to provide him with the tools to do the job. He was not looking for stop gap remedies, it was all the way for him.

The proposal was for not only two additional trucks, but a loader to be used in carting snow from the business areas, as well as a large grader. The grader probably caused Harry the most trouble in getting agreement on the appropriation. He stood his ground and sold that excellent Board of Finance on his progressive idea.

Later on Harry had to give a repeat performance, this time at a Town Meeting. By now he was an expert at defending his proposal and the opposition melted, just as the snow finally did. That winter was a cold one and the snow stayed around until late the following spring.

In April of 1948, the people assembled at the Town Meeting were convinced that Harry was on the right track and approved an appropriation of some \$30,000. By today's standards that seems like a rather small expenditure, but in those days it was considered colossal.

Bonding was used very sparingly at the time. It was generally reserved for large projects, such as a school. Because of that fact, Ridgefield enjoyed an excellent financial rating. I think that a bond issue may have been used for this large but necessary rating. I think that a bond issue may have been used for this large but necessary appropriation.

With the arrival of all this new equipment, Ridgefield was prepared to handle any large snow storm. It did pose a new problem, however, because the garage under the Town Hall (knew I'd get back to it) was not nearly large enough to house the equipment. Especially in need of shelter was the controversial grader. It was considerably larger than the other pieces of equipment.

Harry's active mind had already anticipated this problem and had made plans to house the machines in other buildings that the town owned, such as the barns that were acquired with the purchase of the present Community Center [in 1945].

It was no problem finding operators for the other pieces of equipment, but the grader was something else. At the time, it was considered a very complicated piece of machinery. A slight touch of the hydraulic controls would turn the plow at various angles. It could even shift the rear wheels so that they did not track with the front wheels.

Curtis Leighton was introduced to the new grader and it was love at first sight. Somehow the big red machine was named "Molly" and the name was painted on both sides of it.

A person once said that the large, sea-going vessels were always referred to as "she" because it took a man to handle them. At the risk of being labelled a male chauvinist. I feel that the same reasoning may have applied in the naming of the grader.

One thing is sure, Curtis and Molly became a great team and he treated her to kind, loving care. Countless times they opened the many drift-filled roads in the Ridgebury area, Prospect Ridge, St. John's Road, and others.

Harry was smart and got a "V" plow for Molly as well as the conventional straight blade. When the V plow was used in the big storms, Molly was just about unstoppable.

Harry Hull's insistence in acquiring Molly has long since been vindicated and even the most vocal opposition was stifled when she performed her marvelous deeds.

After 20 years of valiant service to our town, she was sold to the town of Brookfield where she performed great service for another dozen years, and only recently was traded in on a new machine.

#87: GILBERT ASKS ABOUT JAIL CELLS; MUGSY UNEARTHS THE ANSWER

Just the other day, we received a kind letter from Victor Gilbert. Victor moved away about 20 years ago, but still retains an active interest in Ridgefield. He was especially interested in our Dispatch No. 81 about the basement in the old Town Hall.

On the chance that you may not have been here when Victor Gilbert operated his famous Stonehenge Inn, we will attempt to enlighten you on what you missed. Victor always referred to himself as a "Skinker" and wrote a popular column "Not Skinking" each week for The Press. The column was very interesting and covered a variety of subjects.

Recently The Press, in its 25 Years Ago column, reprinted Victor's condemnation of the location of the new (at that time) post office in the shopping center [north end of CVS today]. He noted the woeful lack of parking in front of the post office for postal customers.

Victor was also annoyed about the physical layout of the office and the lack of space provided for the employees. He felt that the change from a closed window service area to an open counter provided no privacy for the postal workers. He will be happy to know that this has been greatly modified.

Victor exhibited considerably more foresight than the postal officials who were responsible for our present post office. It was a terrible mistake. The town was so desperate for a new postal facility, it was ready to accept almost anything.

The workroom area was very cramped, even when the office was moved there. We find it difficult to find the proper word to describe it 25 years later, with Ridgefield's population more than three times greater than it was then.

After my more than 20 years there, I know first-hand of the difficulties encountered in providing good service to a long suffering public. Each of the postal workers should get some kind of a medal for putting up with the unfavorable conditions.

This most beautiful of towns deserves a postal facility that everyone can be justly proud of. It almost seemed that the brass in Washington had something against Ridgefield. It might be interesting to hear Victor's comments on the new post office, presently under construction.

Victor was always right on top of local happenings. People used to do a lot of ice skating on the many local ponds. When some of the better ponds were closed to the public, he put an ad

in The Press, inviting everyone to come and make use of his pond at Stonehenge. He even installed lights so they could skate at night.

We recall one of Victor's columns that told about his father. It seemed that the senior Gilbert possessed a very unusual talent. He was employed by large construction firms to go around, driving crow bars into the ground where it was proposed to build a skyscraper. Somehow by listening to the vibrations of the crowbars, Victor's father could tell how high they could go with the building.

We are tempted to liken this maneuver to dowsing except that Mr. Gilbert was the only one we ever heard of that could perform this particular feat, whereas many, including myself, have found that they have dowsing powers.

Victor used to have a weekly radio program from his establishment. It was called Sunday at Stonehenge. Since the inn attracted many world famous people, and still does, Victor had the opportunity of interviewing these people on the air.

Sometimes, around election time, the program took on a political tinge. We recall the campaign of 1955, when Harry Hull, Harvey Tanton, Paul Morganti, and I had what was listed as a debate, with Victor as moderator.

Some people made sure to be home that Sunday afternoon to hear what they thought would be a real battle. I guess they must have been disappointed, for as we remember, it was a very quiet, friendly affair and no blood was let. It was not successful for me as Harvey Tanton knocked me off the Board of Selectmen by eight votes that fall.

Victor Gilbert is now in the U.S. Virgin Islands where he operates his very fine King's Alley Hotel in St. Croix. He is still writing and does a column "Victor Gilbert Observes" for the St. Croix Avis. True to form, he covers a variety of subjects and does not hesitate to take issue with the public utilities form lack of service, or individuals whose autos make unnecessary noise.

Victor asked what happened to the old Town Hall jail cells and we attempted to find out for him. We thought the iron work had been sold, as it was still in good shape. Our inquiries failed to turn up any leads until we talked with Mario J. Frulla, better known as Mugsy. Having been a policeman at the time they were dismantled, he had more than a passing acquaintance with the lock-ups.

Mugsy said that no one knew what to do with the cells, so Curtis Leighton offered to take them away. Curtis was still the operator of "Molly," a big grader and had become foreman of the road crew at the time. Mugsy maintained that the cells were still in the Leighton back yard and offered to go and take a picture of them.

Curtis has since passed on but Mrs. Leighton informed Mugsy that their septic system had acted up a few years ago and when the new system was installed, the jail cells were buried with the pipes. So Victor, that's what happened to them.

Speaking of Mugsy reminded us of a little story from the mid-50s. The State Police were then located where our local police are now and of course our town police were in the basement of the town hall. It was the custom for one group to help the other when necessary.

State Policeman John Small was returning from Danbury with a prisoner. He was almost to Ridgefield when the prisoner flew into a rage, kicked out the rear window of the police car and tried to escape. A hurried call to the local police brought Mugsy to the scene.

We will not go into the tactics used. However, Mugsy was noted for the use of unorthodox measures. To be sure, the prisoner was quickly subdued and Trooper Small always laughed knowingly when asked about the incident.

We should tell you about the very beautiful grandfather's clock in the selectmen's office. It is probably the most valuable of the town hall's furnishings and when you are in the building, for whatever purpose it would be worth your while to go upstairs and see it. This great clock was a gift to the town by Victor Gilbert when he left for the islands.

Thank you, Victor.

#88: MANY FACES OF TOWN HALL; JOHNS THROW PUNCHES OVER LABOR

All things considered, I would guess that few buildings, if any, have ever been as serviceable as our town hall. It has been used as a movie theater, a garage for road equipment, as a school, a forum for lectures, as a jail, a place for committee meetings, a ballroom, a place for theatrical productions, for high school graduations, Town Meetings, political caucuses, for rummage sales and other fundraisers, a courtroom, for the Red Cross bandage-wrapping and blood banks, a voting place as well as various sporting events, including wrestling, boxing, and basketball.

The old building has a truly remarkable record of service to our town. It seems hard to believe now, that some 35 years ago the building was almost abandoned.

The Lounsbury House had been purchased and was seriously being considered as a new town hall. A proposal was made to sell the old town hall and move the town offices to our present Community Center.

Some very knowledgeable, very sincere, and very hard-nosed citizens worked very hard to effect this dramatic change. Their concerted efforts culminated in a call for a Town Meeting in August 1948 that would empower the town fathers to carry out their wishes.

The meeting developed into several heated debates on the relative merits of making the move, or renovating the old town hall, as opponents of the proposal were equally adamant in their stand.

After several hours of wrangling, a vote was taken and the proposal was passed. The vote was not by a very decisive margin and the losing faction immediately girded itself for battle.

Apparently this group found some empathetic ears in those who had not attended the August meeting. Two months later, a second Town Meeting was called for the purpose of rescinding the action of the previous meeting. This time, those who favored retaining the town hall were successful.

There seemed general agreement that the physical makeup of the town hall needed drastic altering. The addition to the big school on East Ridge had a fine gymnasium, where athletic events could take place, as well as social affairs, such as ballroom dancing. It also provided a larger place, in a growing town, for a polling place.

The school auditorium was an ideal place for the presentation of plays, minstrel shows, and other theatrical productions, Town Meetings, and political caucuses.

Therefore, it was decided to renovate the old town hall, eliminating the auditorium and in its place to build the many office rooms that the town hall now enjoys. Bacchiochi Inc. was awarded the contract for this project and the result was our present, relatively modern municipal office building.

It is a very busy place. I attended a meeting at town hall one evening a week or so ago and found there were four or five different meetings being held simultaneously.

The building is almost 90 years old and is still structurally very sound. It would be nice if it had a little more parking space.

There are a lot of good stories about events that took place in the old town hall, some of which we cannot print in this paper.

One story, which we think typifies the spirit and vigor of the town many years ago, has to do with a court case. I was a little kid, delivering my newspapers, and heard that the case would be tried that afternoon at 5 o'clock. It was in the middle of the winter months and at court time, it was quite dark.

It was during a time when unions were making a determined effort to unionize employees. This was especially true in the construction trades.

We had a contractor named John and we also had a union delegate or union organizer whose name was also John. The two Johns developed an extreme dislike for one another.

It seemed that the union delegate was attempting to organize the contractor's employees, or some such thing. Their animosity was becoming increasingly evident.

The long-simmering feud finally erupted into fistcuffs one day on the job. In the fracas, one John knocked the other John down. We will not say which one. We will just say that one John had the other John arrested.

The courtroom was located upstairs in the town hall, exactly where the selectmen's office is now. It was the same room that was used at the time as a dressing room for the basketball players. The room was rather small and light was provided by a single hanging electric bulb.

There must have been 40 men in the room that would have been crowded with only 25. Everyone had to stand up. With considerable effort I was able to squeeze my way into the dark room.

There was a very small candle on the table that served as the judge's bench. Someone had stolen the lone light bulb and Judge Peter McManus sent one of the onlookers to procure another. The person returned after some time and stated that he had been unsuccessful. He did bring, however, a very large candle.

With the two candles it was just possible to make out the shapes of those who had pushed their way into the packed "courtroom." The smoke was so dense that even with the two candles, it would be very difficult to recognize the person that you were standing next to.

When the trial proceedings were finally in motion, Judge McManus had the accused stand before the bench. He then asked John if he wished to plead guilty or not guilty. John promptly replied "guilty."

There was disappointment in the crowd, which had hoped for a lively legal battle.

Judge McManus banged his gavel and rendered a fine of \$5. John threw a bill on the bench and turned to walk away. In the glimmering light of the candles, the judge noted that it was a \$10 bill. He told John to wait for his change.

John turned and retorted: "Keep the change. When we get outside, I'm going to hit the SOB again."

#89: CUTTING OPEN MASONIC HALL; TWO CATS NAMED TOMMY

Just south of the town hall stands the three-story Masonic building. The originals of both these structures were completely destroyed in the town's most terrible fire in 1895. Both were immediately rebuilt, so they are the same age.

Jerusalem Lodge No. 49 A.F. & A.M., was 175 years old in 1983 and was the first of Ridgefield's fraternal organizations. The lodge still owns this large building and still uses the

second and third floors for its fraternal activities. Masons came from miles around to help the Lodge celebrate its 175th birthday, as well as Ridgefield's 275th Anniversary.

The Masonic Building was home to The Ridgefield Press for many years. The Press occupied the first floor in the rear of the building, where it had its editorial and composing rooms. The actual printing of the paper was done in the basement of the building.

Historian George L. Rockwell tells of how an attempt was made to save as much of the printing equipment as possible before the roaring flames engulfed the building. They managed to remove a desk, some books, newspaper files, mailing lists, a few cases of type, and a chair that Horace Greeley had used at a political convention, before the Civil War.

David W. Workman was the editor of The Press when I was a kid. It seemed like there were only four or five people employed at The Press at the time. This was despite the fact that much of the work was done by hand.

The late Carleton Scofield eventually became president of the Ridgefield Savings Bank, but during the 20's he worked in the basement where the huge rolling mechanism turned out The Press, one sheet at a time.

It was kind of exciting to see the paper rolled out onto a forked-like hand that laid it out for Carleton to fold. On Thursday afternoons, the newsboys would be lined up, waiting to take the papers as Carleton passed them along for delivery.

Typesetting was done by hand and must have been hard on the typesetter's eyes. I guess he had to be able to read backwards as he took the little leaded pieces of type, or slugs, and hammered them into place.

In 1938, only a short time after Karl and John Nash took over the operation of The Press, some great changes were made. The garage on Bailey Avenue that had been Herb Bates' and then Jake Walters', became available and the Nash boys did not hesitate. More space was of vital importance to production of a top-flight newspaper and the boys jumped at the opportunity.

The move from the Masonic Building to the present location of The Press was a short one, probably no more than 150 feet. However, it did pose a few problems, the most important of which was the large Linotype machine that had been purchased a few years before.

The Linotype had arrived in pieces and was then assembled in The Press office. Now the machine would not fit through the door, even with all excess equipment removed from it. The situation was similar to a person we knew who built a dog house in his cellar, only to find that it was too large to be moved outside.

The problem of getting the Linotype moved could be solved only by cutting a larger doorway. It was the middle of the night and too late to get permission to enlarge the doorway. So the boys took the initiative and with a saw, made an opening large enough to extricate the large machine.

A local builder, Lawrence Brundage, was hired to make the necessary repairs and restore the building. As luck would have it, a member of the Masons — probably Billy Pettit — discovered the operation in the morning, before Lawrence could put the building back together. The problem now really started to grow. After considerable negotiating, it was decided to wait and see what the building would look like after the repairs were made. Fortunately, Lawrence Brundage was a fine carpenter and when he finished his cosmetic operation, it was to the satisfaction of all concerned.

The new Press office provided the space needed and the newspaper changed rapidly to meet the needs of a growing community. It was a one-story building and remained so for almost

40 years. The second story was added almost ten years ago and operations were further streamlined.

In the front part of the Masonic Building, on the first floor, was Louis Joffee's tailor shop. Later it would house the Ridgefield Thrift Shop and now the Gordon Walsh Agency. Louis was a real good tailor and numbered many of the wealthy "summer people" among his customers.

It was Louis Joffee and Joseph Hartmann that first discovered the smoke and spread the alarm, relating to the disastrous fire of 1895. The terrifying experience must have had a profound effect on Louis and he became a lifetime member of the Ridgefield Fire Department.

Like all good tailors, Louis did his sewing by hand, while seated in the show window of his establishment in full view of the passersby. Also like other tailors, he kept a tom cat in the window with him. It seemed that tom cats were a necessity in the operation of a tailor shop.

Of course, the cat's name was Tommy. From a distance he would appear to be sleeping, but whenever anyone approached, he would rouse himself and strut around spitting and hissing, acting as disagreeable as possible. The big reddish-yellow feline had a regular skit that he performed to the amusement of onlookers.

We once heard Tom Kehoe put down a rather pompous person by telling him that he reminded him of a tailor's tom cat. The pompous one would have been so much better off if he had let the matter drop right there. However, he made the mistake of asking why he was being compared to a tom cat. Tom went on to explain in great detail, which we will not do here as some of it was unprintable.

At any rate, Tommy lived to a ripe old age and when he finally passed on, one of Louis's customers gave him a young cat the exact color of Tommy. Louis was quite pleased and promptly named the new cat Tommy. He was a good provider and soon had the cat growing at a rapid rate. Even Louis was surprised at how fast the new Tommy filled out.

One morning when Louis unlocked the door to his shop, Tommy failed to greet him. Louis went to the back room of his shop and there on a pile of soft fabric was "Tommy" with five cute yellow kittens.

#90: THE INCREDIBLE BLIZZARD OF '34 ISOLATES TOWN FOR THREE DAYS

It has been almost 100 years since the Blizzard of '88 and it is just 50 years since the Blizzard of '34.

Many of the oldtimers have expressed the opinion that the storm of March 1888 was the granddaddy of them all. That storm was before my time, but I sure witnessed the one in February of 1934. Some who were around to see both of these killer storms have said that in '88, the drifts were greater while the snow, on the level, was much greater in '34.

I am sure that those who were around 50 years ago will never forget hardships caused by that terrible storm. Those unborn at the time probably will not believe that it could have been that bad in Ridgefield. Young people today are apt to give you an incredulous look when you recount some of the incidents that occurred in that great storm. They also find it hard to believe conditions that existed during the Great Depression.

Many seem to operate on the theory that modern snow removal equipment would insure against the town's ever being isolated again, as it was for three days in 1934. They are equally confident that government safeguards will protect against financial disasters such as occurred in 1929. We sure-hope that they are right in both instances.

At any rate, Feb. 19 was a Monday in 1934. It started to snow at four o'clock in the afternoon. It looked like an ordinary light snow and gave no indication of what was to come. However, around nine o'clock, the skies opened up and the snow came down like never before.

Ridgefield had two trucks with snow plows, one large and one of medium size. First Selectman Winthrop Rockwell ordered the plows out. Raymond "Buck" McClean drove the big one and I think Raymond Fish operated the other. Both were excellent drivers, with plenty of experience.

By eleven o'clock that night, both trucks were hopelessly stuck, one on West Mountain and the other in Ridgebury. Win Rockwell's favorite expression when perplexed was "Judas!" and for the next few days it must have been used a great many times.

Buck managed to get all the way to Lyman Keeler's (where Keeler Drive is now). The snow had become so heavy he could go no further. He backed into Keeler's driveway to turn around, only to find that the snow had drifted in behind him. The truck was stuck there for a couple of days and had to be shoveled out by hand.

Tuesday morning the snow had slackened off somewhat and an attempt was made, with two little graders, to open Catoonah Street, in order that the fire trucks could get out. They were not very successful and a crew of snow shovelers had to help. The fire trucks would not have been able to go very far as Main Street was completely impassable.

Win called Hartford for assistance and was authorized the use of CWA workers. The CWA work force was a Depression-inspired program, made up of men who could not find employment of any kind. They were a big help in this crisis.

The State Highway Department had its own station in Ridgefield at the time and Cap McAllister was the foreman in charge. They were no better off than the town crew. Cap had his men on the job, but the two state highway trucks were both stuck and had to be shoveled out. The two trucks had to be hitched together as one truck could not make it alone.

This made for slow going and it took two hours just to make a single track from the town hall to the fountain.

Since the storm had eased a little, there was hope that the great effort put forth by the workers would be successful. Alas, in the afternoon the storm became more intense and snow fell even heavier than before. To make matters worse, it became very cold and the wind started to blow very hard.

The big storm continued through the night undoing the hard work of the day before. The state highway crew had cleared a single track to the Danbury Town Line by three in the morning. They retired, expecting to open the road wider the next day. However, the wind had drifted the snow right back level across the track they had made.

By Tuesday evening the shelves in the food stores were just about empty and it would be Thursday before trucks with supplies could get to Ridgefield.

Only a few people had oil burning furnaces in those days and delivery of both coal and oil could not be made. Wednesday afternoon Lou Price announced that a freight train had finally made it to Ridgefield with a carload of coal. One oil burner in Byron Park exploded and blew the cellar door in the air.

To add to the woes of the people of Ridgefield, the electric power went off at 11 o'clock Monday night. This was not such an unusual occurrence in those days, but during a storm of this dimension, it created real hardship.

An emergency hookup was made with the electric power of neighboring Katonah, N .Y. but the current was not sufficient to meet the needs of the whole town.

Through the heroic efforts of the hardy electric crewman, full power was finally restored at nine o'clock on Tuesday night. Power went off again several times but for shorter durations.

Several unsuccessful attempts were made to plow a single track to the coal yards on Bailey Avenue. Ernest Scott owned the block where Ridgefield News Store is now. He had to supply the heat for all those stores and the apartments. Ernie was one of the town's large coal dealers but he was like the cobbler whose children had no shoes. At the height of the storm it was found that the coal bins in his building were empty. It was necessary for his men to carry the coal on their backs from the freight yards to the empty bins. A bag of coal weighs about 100 pounds and trudging up the hill through all those drifts must have been extremely difficult.

Telephone service went off several times, but for only short periods. It was our only link to the outside world on Tuesday and Wednesday. Bacchiochi's caterpillar tractor tried to open Branchville Road, but a huge drift at the top of Biddle's Hill repulsed its every effort. The firm had not yet acquired the huge army truck that was used in later storms.

Duncan Smith issued the sage observation that "we should bear with the weather, for in a few short months, the girls will be wearing skirts again."

More Next Week

#91: BOBSLEDDING THE MILK IN THE BLIZZARD OF '34

So, many Ridgefielders went to bed on Monday evening while an ordinary little snow storm was making the change to a very extraordinary blizzard. By 4:30 in the morning we had about 16 inches of snow and it was still coming.

It was now Tuesday, Feb. 20, 1934, and the milk had to be delivered. We lived only a little over 100 yards from the Conklin Dairy on Ramapoo Road and it took about 15 minutes to negotiate that little distance.

We well remember how happy we were at the prospect of delivering the milk with the horses. It was obvious even then that there would be no motor vehicles moving for some time. This, even though we were unaware that the town's two snow plows had been stuck since 11 o'clock the night before.

At the dairy, the first order of business was to get the bobsleds down from under the roof of the wagon shed. They had been hung there with baling wire, for just such an occasion. Once the bobs were hooked together, the body from one of the wagons was lifted and placed on the bobs.

Irving Conklin had three teams of horses. He drove Dick and Major, a pair of dappled greys. I drove Kit and Lady, a big pair of black percheron colts. Harry Terpenney drove Duke and Diamond, a pair of strawberry roans.

The roans were an older team. The blacks were a little young for such a test. The greys were long legged and seemed ideal for snow, so they were chosen for the first tour of duty. Before this day was over, all three teams would be pressed into service — and exhausted.

The task of assembling the sleigh, harnessing, and hitching the horses was all done with the aid of kerosene lanterns and flashlights as electric power had been off since the previous evening and would be off until Tuesday night.

By the time the sleigh was loaded with 360 quarts of milk, all in glass bottles, it was a little after 6 o'clock and still quite dark. We had only the one sleigh, so Ernest Sturges, Percy Humphreys and I accompanied Irving to make the deliveries.

By the time we had struggled up the little grade from the dairy to Ramapoo Road, it was apparent that no plowing had been done. Gilbert Street was always one of the first roads to be

opened, so when we reached it and there was still no sign of a plow, we became aware of the tough job ahead.

There was no sign of life on Gilbert Street until we reached Arthur Carnall's house. Arthur was always an early riser and he greeted us from an upstairs window.

It was seven o'clock when we reached Main Street and it was beginning to get a little light so we decided to try to get a picture. It came out but not very well. We were to get a number of good pictures later on.

By 7:30 we stopped in front of the bakery (where Roma Pizzeria [Planet] is now). The bakery was a good place to buy milk so we left them a good supply for those with the courage to venture out in this storm.

Up to now we had all been so busy that we did not think to look at a thermometer. There was a big one in front of Oscar Schultz's Market (where Cappiello's was later).

Jimmy Dixon was manager of the market and lived only a short distance away on Catoonah Street. Jimmy had already opened the market in anticipation of customers who would want to stock up. Ernie Sturges was on that side of the street and as he said hello to Jimmy, he noted that the temperature was just 10 below zero. It was to get much colder.

Just south of the market, Ernie came upon a huge pile of snow in front of Howard Freer's Store. It looked like a drift, almost to the second story. Ernie brushed some snow away and discovered a little Chevrolet coupe with the front bumper of the car within an inch of the show window.

Dr. Francis E. Woodford had received a call during the early morning hours from a family on Abbott Avenue. Sometimes babies seem to pick the most unusual times to make their entrance into the world.

The good doctor bravely started out from his home at 325 Main Street. He spun and skidded for almost a quarter of a mile until he found himself on the sidewalk, against the store window. Undaunted, and in the best tradition of the "country doctor," Fritz, as his friends called him, left his car and walked the rest of the way to Abbott Avenue. Some time later, little Doris Hunt appreciated his arrival as she increased the population of Ridgefield to an unprecedented 3,427.

Just the other day, Mrs. Woodford told me, when I reminded her of the story, that on his way home, the doctor stopped by the market and bought a large ham from Jimmy Dixon. He was unaware that neither of his daughters, Joan and Anne, liked ham, so it must have lasted long after the storm.

By 9:30 we were out of milk and had to retrace through the only tracks, the ones we had previously made, to the dairy for another load. This gave us a chance to partake in the marvelous breakfast that Mrs. Conklin could provide.

We used the blacks for the second tour and as well as the bottled milk, we added a couple of 40 quart cans full of milk. Some of the customers came out to meet us with little pails and we obliged by using a dipper that held one quart, to provide for their needs.

Some of the other dairies had as yet been unable to get out on their routes so we dispensed the milk to all who came out to meet us. Although by now the milk was freezing rapidly, despite the blankets we used for cover, people were glad to get it frozen or not.

In the early afternoon we returned to the dairy for a third load and the strawberry roans. When all the milk was gone we had to wait for the cows to replenish the supply. It was impossible to cover all of the town so it was decided to go to visit the other areas the next day, Wednesday.

Early in the evening there was a call from a family with a little baby and they needed milk. I was put on the back of one of the big horses, with a two quart can of milk strung over my shoulder and took off for West Mountain. The gratitude of that family seemed to make it all worthwhile. However, the mercury had dropped to 15 below and I wound up with two frozen feet.

Wednesday turned out to be somewhat better as it stopped snowing around noon time and the sun came out. However, even with the sun shining, it got colder and soon was down to 20 below.

Employees of the stores faced a monumental task in clearing the sidewalks. Duncan Smith gave Bissell's credit for being the first to have theirs clean. Freddy, Johnny and Squash did the job.

Continued next week

#92: WHEN THE THERMOMETER HIT 32 BELOW ZERO

It seems only fitting to end the saga of the Blizzard of '34 with a few of the many human-interest stories that accompanied the great storm.

There was the one about the very important local gentleman, who was the president of a real large corporation. He called and asked for transportation to the Branchville Railroad Station. The board of directors of his firm was holding a meeting in New York City and he just had to be there.

This important gentleman lived in the northern section of town and it was 11 o'clock at night when the two mares, drawing an open sleigh, pulled up at his mansion. He came out, dressed in a coon-skin coat that extended to his ankles. He wore a little derby hat, with no ear muffs and had no gloves. When asked where in the h--- he thought he was going in such an outfit, he became very annoyed. However, after getting a feel of that terribly cold air and it was explained that it was then 25 below zero, he began to get the message.

The gentleman disappeared into the house and in a few minutes returned with a woolen shawl over his derby. He was also wearing huge, elbow-length gauntlets and carried several bottles of Johnny Walker.

It was a long ride to Branchville and a couple of detours through the fields had to be made. One of the necessary detours was at the very top of Biddles' Hill, near where Nutmeg Ridge is now. The drift in that cut was so great that even the caterpillar tractor was unsuccessful in opening it.

It was near three in the morning when Mr. — was deposited at the station. He was a little the worse for wear and needed assistance to board the special train that had been waiting on the siding for him since six o'clock the previous evening. He was still clutching the bottles (all except one) as he began his train ride to the big city.

On Wednesday morning, Bill and Jimmy Christopher started from their farm (now the Hobart Keeler farm) in North Salem for Ridgefield. The milk trucks had been unable to get to their farm to collect the milk. They were unaware that the trucks from Clover Farms Dairy in Norwalk had still not gotten to Ridgefield. Bill and Jimmy arrived in front of Mignery's Drug Store (now the Yardage Shop) about 1:30 in the afternoon. Their old bay team was nearly exhausted and they were just about frozen. They had ten cans of milk (400 quarts) on their wood shod sled. A sleigh of this kind had a flat body and no seat. As the name implies, the runners were made of wood, rather than steel.

The two men were very discouraged when they found that there was no way to get their milk to Norwalk. Prohibition had recently been repealed and there was a liquor store across the street where Dr. Martin and Dr. Doty now practice optometry.

Jimmy never drank anything stronger than milk, but Bill took up the slack. Bill crossed the street and procured a fifth of gin and, doing double duty, finished it off in some 20 minutes. I have been told that this cannot be done without the imbiber dying. I saw it happen and Bill did not spill any. The thermometer registered 20 below at the time.

It was suggested that rather than try to drag all that milk back to North Salem, they stop at Conklin's Dairy and run it through a cream separator. The ratio is ten to one so they would have one can of cream to take home along with nine empty cans. At least they could make butter from the cream.

The drain from the dairy emptied into a little brook that emanated in Bryon Park and 360 quarts of skim milk froze as it hit the outside air. The little brook remained white for more than a week.

This has not been a happy story and the rest is even worse. Jimmy and Bill started their long and lonely trek back to North Salem with a much lighter load. However, the terrible trip to Ridgefield had taken its toll and when they got as far as Farrar's Lane, one of the horses played out, went down, and it was necessary to shoot the noble animal.

The two men left their sled and its contents and rode the other horse all the way back to their farm. They must have suffered greatly.

That evening Dick Rapp and Bernie Christopher, a cousin of the two just mentioned, started by auto for Danbury. They got only as far as the Danbury town line, just this side of The Yellow Shutters. The Danbury State Highway crew had not opened Route 35 and they managed to turn around and come home.

There was a family that lived on West Lane, just over the New York State line. They were very poor and as this was the heart of the Depression, there were many like them. It was Thursday before Ernie Sturges and I got that far with the sleigh. We found this family, father, mother, and three children, huddled around a pot-bellied stove. They had the rug pulled up from the floor and wrapped around them, in an effort to get some warmth. They had no coal or oil, or even wood. All they had to feed the stove was a small pile of newspapers, which when inserted in the stove, just made a puff as the burning paper flew up the chimney. A bottle of iodine froze and broke on the table right next to these people.

This family was very glad to see us as they had no other food in the house. They owed \$34.10 for milk, which was a lot to owe in those times. Somehow they were able to get moved out when the storm finally subsided and we had no idea of where they went, and it was concluded that they would never be heard from again.

The nice part of this story is that all members of the family became quite famous as writers and two years later came a check from Chicago for \$34.10.

The mercury continued its descent and we saw it hit 30 below zero. Francis Martin, who kept good records of the weather, said that his thermometer registered 33 degrees below zero. It is doubtful if it ever got that cold before or since in Ridgefield.

The water mains froze in places and one burst on the corner of High Ridge and Bryon Avenue. Arthur Carnall was passing at the time in his green Essex. The cascade of water hit his car and by the time Arthur stopped, near Catoonah Street, his car looked like a huge, green ice cube.

There were many other stories about the great storm but you must have had enough for now and we should be looking forward to spring. Interestingly, on the following Sunday, the snow started again but this time it was only eight inches, just enough to patch up the sleighing and practically went unnoticed.

#93: WHEN THE HOBOS SET TYPE AND THE MUGAVEROS CUT HAIR

Despite all the modern machinery that is used today, the production of a newspaper is still a very complicated matter. In the years past, it was a very laborious project.

When The Press was located in the Masonic Building, back of where The Gordon Walsh Agency [Coldwell Banker in 2020] is now, the type was set by hand. The type was produced on pieces of metal, approximately two inches in length, one inch in height and about one quarter of an inch in thickness. The type for each page of the paper was set in a large rectangular case or tray.

A typesetter had to have considerable talent. Each little slug of type had to be placed in its proper sequence and then hammered in tightly. He also had to be proficient at reading backwards as in the printing, this was all reversed.

Once the type for an entire page was in place, the tray was placed in the printing machine where it slid back and forth under a huge roller to which the paper was attached. As the page was printed, the paper left the roller and was deposited on a fork-like affair that laid, it in front of the person assigned to fold it. The late Carleton Scofield did the folding when I was a kid and the late David W. Workman was the editor.

S.C. O'Connor was the manager of the paper before Mr. Workman became editor and "Tabby" was a typesetter. "Tabby," of course, is Octavius J. Carboni, who we are happy to say, is still around and still very active.

No doubt, Tabby was a very good typesetter as he was very talented and very alert. He tells of how The Press never seemed to have enough help and used to augment its staff by hiring hobos that had printing experience. These men were passing through town and always paid a visit to the local paper in each town where they stopped over.

Typesetting was a rather tedious job that required not only good eyesight and reading ability, but considerable patience as well. These men seemed to have an abundance of these attributes and were a welcome addition to the staff at The Press.

An apprentice was known as a "printer's devil," but these men were considered real pros. They would stay just long enough to build themselves a "grub stake" and then move on to other towns, until more funds were needed.

These "knights of the road" were different from those who used to stay for the night in the jail cells at the old town hall. As a matter of fact they would exhibit disdain for the free lodging that the town provided and opted instead for the cots in the basement of the Masonic Building, which the manager of The Press had thoughtfully provided.

Unlike their counterparts who made their one-night stands at town hall and then moved on, never to return, many of those who did typesetting made periodic visits. Somehow they always managed to turn up at a time when they were most needed.

Tabby got to know some of these nomads and remembers one in particular whose name was Masterson. His first name was unknown and he was promptly dubbed "Bat." Bat was a great story teller and never failed to regale the staff at The Press with his experiences in journalism and the world of travel. His listeners marveled at these tales, but some were so far-fetched that they concluded the stories were mere figments of a very vivid imagination.

Karl and John Nash acquired The Press in 1937 and the following year bought Jake Walter's garage on Bailey Avenue. The Press moved that year to its present location.

The late Howard Freer then moved into the quarters vacated by The Press and operated his radio business there for several years. Mr. Freer and John Hubbard were two of the very earliest radio dealers in Ridgefield.

This part of the Masonic Building is now the home of Mike's Barber Shop. In July of 1950, Jerry Mugavero moved the barber shop that he and his brother Vincent operated, from where James of Ridgefield is now to where the radio store had been.

Vincent had started the business in 1930 as The Ridgefield Tonsorial Parlor at 392 Main Street. We had never heard the word tonsorial used in connection with a barber shop and wondered if it was a place where throat operations were performed. Vincent and his wife Bernice built and operated the restaurant called The BV Ranch on Route 7.

Vinnie retired and Jerry kept the family business going. It should be noted that they are nephews of Brooklyn's Bishop Mugavero. Just to keep the family flavor, their father used to come to Ridgefield each summer and help his boys during the busy season. He was an old retired barber and gave me the best haircut I ever had.

In 1956, Michael Pontello made his appearance. Mike married Agatha Mugavero. Agatha is Jerry's daughter so you just know he had to be a barber.

Jerry also has a son, Peter, of whom it is said that he was born with clippers in his hand. Peter, like the dutiful son that he is, served his apprenticeship with his father and then opened his own "Peter's Barber Shop" in the Branchville area at 43 Ethan Allen Highway. It is hard to believe that Peter is already in the 22nd year of operating his own business.

It is even more amazing when you consider that the combined barbering of Peter, his brother-in-law Mike, his father Jerry, his uncle Vinnie and his grandfather, total almost two centuries of service. If all the hair that these five gentlemen have cut, was placed in one pile, it would make a small mountain.

After 54 years in Ridgefield, the Mugaveros must be considered one of the community's oldest family owned services.

Mike has been plying his trade for 28 years and has some interesting observations concerning the many changes in the barbering profession. He proudly displays the examination papers that he had to take to become a licensed barber, his training records, etc. None of these are required today. You still must have a license to be a barber. However, the examining board no longer exists, inspections are few and far between and your qualification to perform is dependent, to a great extent, on your ability to squeeze a pair of scissors together.

Mike takes a rather dim view of the flimsy regulations that govern the operation of a barber shop. It is obvious that he takes great pride in carrying on the family tradition.

Mike likes outdoor sports and is an ardent fisherman. He also has several hobbies, not the least of which is his passion for woodworking. Several of his creations are on display in his shop. We were much impressed with a fine rocking horse which Mike recently donated to the Ridgefield Family Y.

#94: THE HAPPY STORY OF THE CRAIGS; THE SAD TALE OF HARVEY LOWN

A family owned business is not unusual in Ridgefield. There was a time when we had a lot of them and we still have a few.

Next door to the Masonic Building is Craig's Jewelry Store and it has been a family venture for the past 34 years. The late Helen Craig (Mrs. Ross Craig) bought the business from

the late Francis D. Martin in 1950. The store was at that time located where the Yarn Bee is now at 415 Main Street.

Mrs. Craig, assisted by the then Elsie Fossi, kept the business going while her son, Norman, went to school to learn watch repairing, as well as gain knowledge of jewelry in general. Norman had a great interest in rare gems and after graduating, quickly exhibited his knowledge in that field by asking Elsie to marry him.

Norman and Elsie have three children, Karen, William, and Lori, and they are all actively engaged in the operation of the store. More recently, there have been three little grandchildren, whom we fully expect will keep Craig's Jewelry Store going in the years to come. There must be something very satisfying about seeing your children carry on a tradition such as this.

Beside being an avid golfer, Norman has been involved in numerous civic affairs, and has chaired several fundraising events. He has been active in local service clubs and fraternal organizations and his interest in politics has resulted in his recent election as Democratic Town Chairman.

The building where Craig's is now located was built in the 20's by the late George G. Scott who was for many years our judge of probate and town clerk. It is now owned by another former judge of probate, Attorney Joseph H. Donnelly.

It was known for many years as the Scott Block and since there was another Scott Block, directly across the street and built about the same time, you just had to know that these Scotts were not related. The Scott Block on the west side of Main Street, which was recently sold to the Addressi brothers, was built by Ernest Scott.

The original wooden building that stood where Judge Scott built his block was completely destroyed by the great fire of 1895. After the debris from that terrible fire was cleared away, the lot remained vacant for more than 20 years. Al Girolmetti and others remember when the Masons used to hold their annual carnivals on the unused property.

Judge Scott's new building was a welcome addition to the Main Street scene and the stores were quickly occupied. Earl Roberts was the first in the store where Craig's is now. Earl was an electrician and sold electric products at his store. Then came Harvey B. Lown and his insurance business and later George Grunig operated his real estate business from that store.

Harvey Lown was one of my favorite heroes when I was a kid. I still think he was a very good man despite the trouble he encountered later in life.

Harvey was born in Lewisboro [Ed: Wilton] and came to Ridgefield as a young boy. He had a very pleasing personality and was very easy to like. He was a great baseball player, an exceptionally good hitter and baserunner, and played the outfield with the grace of a Tris Speaker or Joe DiMaggio.

If Harvey had an enemy, it must have been himself. Everyone thought he was just a great fellow. He could never refuse any favor that was asked.

During World War I Harvey served in the U.S. Navy aboard the U.S.S. Minnesota. He contracted pneumonia, was transferred to a transport, the USS Tenadore, and made eight trips to France. He was shipwrecked in the Bay of Biscay and drifted two days in a lifeboat before being rescued.

After the war Harvey returned to Ridgefield and went into the insurance business. His popularity was such that he probably would have been successful in any business venture. He was one of the organizers of the Promoters Club that was a forerunner of the Lions Club, of which he was also a charter member.

If there was any worthwhile activity being carried on in town, you were sure to find Harvey involved in it. He put great effort into many civic projects, served on the school board, and was chairman of its building committee. Later on he became assistant town clerk.

It was while Harvey was a young man that a Mr. Big in Ridgefield got himself in a lot of trouble. He asked Harvey to take him off the hook and as usual Harvey obliged. As we have said, he was young at the time, but he must have deeply regretted it later on.

We like to remember Harvey, with his deep resonant voice, leading the singing at various song feasts. He was always the life of the party.

It seemed only natural that this very popular man would enter the political arena. When he ran for the office of tax collector, he was a shoo in. He served several terms and was always a top vote getter.

I really think Harvey could have been elected to just about any office. It should be noted that the fact that he always tipped me for delivering his newspapers really had no bearing on my fondness for this nice man. Well, maybe a little.

Mrs. Frederic E. Lewis was president of the local chapter of the American Red Cross for many years. This very elegant lady never failed to give Harvey the lion's share of the credit for the great success of Red Cross projects.

Harvey married the very pretty Elizabeth O'Shea. Elizabeth was a very popular school teacher, as was her sister Isabel, who became the beloved principal of Veteran's Park School.

Everything seemed to be turning up roses for the Lowns. He was successful in business as well as in politics. They built a very fine home on Wilton Road West and both were in great demand wherever nice people got together. When important people were planning a party, it would not be unusual for them to start their guest list with Elizabeth and Harvey.

However, there were to be dark days ahead. First there was the tragic stock market crash and then the Great Depression was to have an adverse effect on most everyone, in one way or another.

Money was very scarce, people were out of work and could not pay their bills, bankruptcies were commonplace and people were doing things that they just never believed they would be doing.

It was rumored that in the State of Connecticut, people in political office were misappropriating money from accounts that it was their duty toward.

(Continued Next Week)

#95: TRULY A SAD CHAPTER IN RIDGEFIELD'S HISTORY

During the Great Depression it was suspected that there was considerable commingling of funds on the part of some public officials. During the late 30's the State Tax Commissioner was successful in getting the General Assembly to pass a law requiring periodic audits of public officials handling taxpayer's money.

It was said that some officials could see the axe about to fall and were successful in getting their houses in order. Several audits were made and failed to disclose any wrongdoing. Then in November of 1939 the auditors came to Ridgefield.

Harvey Lown had just been re-elected tax collector the previous month and was again one of the top vote-getters. When the examiners paid their visit and continued to stay, there were rumors that they had found a shortage.

The original estimate was that a shortage of about \$10,000 existed. The audit continued all through the month of December and each time a figure was released, Harvey would make a

replacement. At the conclusion of the audit the shortage had increased to about \$14,000 [about \$260,000 in 2020 dollars].

After more than 12 years as tax collector, Harvey Lown resigned his spot on Jan. 16, 1940. He was arrested and charged with embezzlement. It was as though a bomb had been dropped in our little community.

There was a general feeling of disbelief among the townspeople. Many wanted to see the auditor's report. First Selectman Winthrop E. Rockwell said that he could not release the report until the authorities gave their consent.

Win Rockwell was a shaken man when he scheduled a meeting with the Board of Finance. He asked the newspaper reporters to leave the meeting. The reporters said that they were not demanding to see the report, they just wanted to cover the meeting. A taxpayer, John Eustis, refused to leave and vigorously defended his right to be present at the open meeting.

The very confused meeting was further muddled when the town counsel, Judge Light, ruled that the meeting should adjourn until the room was cleared and then it could be reconvened. The board never voted to clear the room.

The case finally came before judge Carl Foster in Bridgeport, with State's Attorney Lorin Willis as prosecutor. Willis was an able prosecutor and noted for his toughness. [Editor's note: Both Judge Foster and Prosecutor Willis were prominently portrayed in the 2017 biopic, *Marshall*, featuring Justice Thurgood Marshall.]

Harvey Lown was represented by Attorney William Hanna, who declared that the whole matter was a simple case of intermingling of funds. He stated that rather than an actual shortage, there had just been a lot of poor bookkeeping.

It was revealed that Harvey was having a difficult time in collecting his insurance premiums and the insurance companies were pressing him for payments. When this happened he used available tax dollars to cover the premiums, replacing it when he was able to. Actually he was also having difficulty in collecting taxes from people whose incomes had been drastically reduced because of the hard times through which the country was then moving.

We know of several people who went to see Harvey when they were unable to pay either their premiums or their taxes. After hearing their plight, he would agree to carry them until they were back on their feet. There were some, but only a few, of those he had assisted, who were quick to condemn Harvey. However, most people felt sorry for this fine man who was always ready to do a favor.

Harvey had a host of friends and probably his closest were Joe Roach and Bob Richardson. We used to see them each morning when they went out for coffee together. When Harvey was going through his ordeal, they stood staunchly beside him.

One day while at the service window of the First National Bank (now Union Trust) [Wells Fargo], we overheard one V.I.P. make a snide remark about Harvey's unhappy position. Apparently Bob, who was an officer of the bank, heard the remark, too. He whirled around and, loud enough for us all to hear, informed the person that if he had paid Harvey what he owed, the whole thing would never have happened.

The court case started with Judge Foster presiding. State's Attorney Willis was vigorous in his successful prosecution of the matter. The result was a verdict of guilty of embezzlement.

Judge Foster in meting out the sentences of two to five years was almost overcome with emotion. In a halting and choked voice, the judge acknowledged that this man deserved every ounce of credit possible, but the law must be upheld.

If the authorities were looking for someone to make an example of, Harvey had to be ideal for their purpose. As we have indicated, he was probably the most popular person in Ridgefield. He was a highly respected athlete. He was an authentic war hero. He was active in so many worthwhile civic ventures. He was a member of the school board. He was chairman of the School Building Committee. He had been assistant town clerk. He had been Ridgefield's representative to the General Assembly in Hartford. Not only had he been the tax collector for more than 12 years, he was also president of the State of Connecticut Tax Collectors Association.

The very stiff sentence handed out to Harvey must have struck fear to any others who may have been so inclined.

This tragic situation had a profound effect on many people. The person most affected, after Harvey himself, was his ever loyal wife. Elizabeth stepped into the breach and carried on the Lown Insurance business with a great assist from Robert "Twitter" Seymour.

There were those sympathetic people who came forward with offers of assistance. They were anxious to help relieve a little of the pain. An example was Dr. and Mrs. Robert DuBois, who, to show their support, doubled their insurance with the Lown Agency.

The harshness of the sentence contrasts sharply with the kind of justice meted out today. Harvey not only had to serve two years in prison, but during the first year could receive no more than one letter each week and his wife was limited to only two half-hour visits per month.

When he was released, Harvey's business was intact, but the strain had taken its toll. The once vibrant and enthusiastic Lowns would never be the happy people they had been.

Elizabeth died much younger than she should have, and so did Harvey. It was truly a sad chapter in the history of Ridgefield.

Harvey's loyal friends have always felt that he never shortchanged anyone but himself.

#96: SHOES, BOOZE AND PLUMBING AND 'GOOSING' A TICKLISH COP

The store next to Craig's has been used to enhance the appearance of our townspeople, ever since it first opened more than 50 years ago. First there were the Mugaveros and their barber shop, as related in Dispatch #93. Now it is James of Ridgefield Beauty Salon.

We seem to have a large number of places devoted to the beautification of mankind. Perhaps that is why Ridgefielders look so much better than those from other towns, especially the ladies, or haven't you noticed.

The next store [390 Main Street, now Shine Salon] was Frank Gabbianelli's Shoe Store. Frank had previously been in business in the old three-story building where the Savings Bank is now. When that building was moved to about where Colby's of Ridgefield is now to make room for a new bank; Frank moved his business to the spanking new Scott Block.

Edward Hyde had been manager of the A & P Liquor Store, where Liberta's Spirit Shoppe is now. Ed was quick to note that the people of Ridgefield had a particular fondness for his products. His business was greatly enhanced by people from South Salem and Wilton, who did not seem to mind traveling a little to get what they could not obtain in their own towns.

The combined commotion of the inhabitants of the three towns must have raised the eyebrows of the state liquor commissioner. He probably would have been afraid to drive through town until it was explained that the per capita consumption had to be shared with at least two other towns.

At any rate, when Frank Gabbianelli decided to go into semi-retirement in 1940, Ed Hyde saw his opportunity and moved from one Scott Block to the other where he established his

own business. Jack Jones was a young fellow at the time and assisted Ed in the operation of the store several years. Jack is now a retired state police lieutenant.

Business was brisk in Hyde's and Ed's sons Douglas and Brian soon began to help in the store. Ed passed on and the boys kept the store going for a while and then sold to Rosemary McLinden, who later sold it to Barbara McCarthy. The present owner is Frank Zarro. Despite the changes in ownership, the business is still known as Hyde's Wines & Liquors.

Next door, in the two-story structure where DeLuca's Footwear is now [388 Main, now Weichert Real Estate], was the McGlynn & Ryan Plumbing Shop. Michael "Tinker Mike" McGlynn was the senior partner in the firm and his son-in-law, William H. Ryan, was the junior partner. Tinker Mike's two sons, Thomas and Richard, worked as plumbers for the fun, making it pretty much of a family affair. Thomas is still living and is the father of our fire chief, Richard McGlynn.

Aldo Salvestrini, Peter and Lynce Carboni and the late Joseph McGlynn were young plumbers who got their start with this firm. Francis D. Martin once said that he started his watch and clock repairing business in the front show window of the McGlynn and Ryan Plumbing Shop.

Will Ryan took care of the store and did the bookkeeping and also operated a picture framing business in the store. There was a long wooden porch along the front of the building and one had to walk up two steps to make entry to the stores. When I delivered newspapers to this store, if business was slow, Will Ryan and I would pitch pennies against the wooden steps. It seemed that I won most of the time and Will must have arranged it that way, as he was not a person who would take advantage.

Much of the firm's plumbing equipment was stored in the basement of the building. In those days, before copper tubing came into vogue, it was the custom to use lead in sealing waste pipes. The lead had to be heated until it was in liquid form. It was then poured into and around the connections.

The lead was heated in an iron pot on top of a gas heater. As might be expected, the gas was capable of creating intense heat in order to melt the lead. The heaters were also stored in the basement when not in use.

The venerable Frank I. Gilbert was the janitor for all the stores in the Scott Block. Frank I., one of the better known persons in town at the time, was diligent in the performance of his duties.

One afternoon he was cleaning the basement under the plumbing shop when he decided to light his pipe. Unbeknownst to Frank I., the jet on one of the melting pots had loosened and gas was escaping. As the match was struck there was a terrific explosion.

Frank I. was knocked to the floor and the basement door was blown out into what is now the parking area. Soon the whole store was ablaze. Quick work by the always-dependable Volunteer Fire Department avoided a repeat of the conflagration of 1895.

However, the building was extensively damaged and could not be used until major repairs were made. One thing in the store that did not need to be replaced was the tin ceiling which is still there today. Among the changes made were the removal of the old wooden porch and a complete new light colored brick face that took the place of the porch, reducing the two steps to just one.

By the time the new facelift was completed, McGlynn and Ryan had moved their operations to the building just off Catoonah Street that now houses the Ridgefield Thrift Shop. The building had at one time been St. Mary's Church. When the new church at the top of

Catoonah Street was completed, the old building was moved back to its present location and became a blacksmith shop. This is just one of the many, many buildings in Ridgefield, that do not sit on their original sites.

Harry M. Thomas, the village blacksmith, had just moved to his new shop in the building west of the firehouse. I get the feeling that this building will soon disappear in the name of progress. [Ed: It's still there in 2020, home of New Beginnings Landscaping.]

When the former plumbing shop was completely renovated, Harold Finch took it over and established his United Cigar Store. As previously noted, the store now had only one step and it became a favorite place for our town policeman to stand and make a surveillance of the activities on Main Street.

One day as the policeman stood on the step, he was approached by a stranger who was seeking directions. The very cooperative officer happened to be the one described as being excessively ticklish. in Dispatch #63. As he bent to give the very well-dressed stranger his directions, the door behind him opened just enough to allow Ray Keeler's ever-present yardstick to emerge. A deft poke of the yardstick to the policeman's rear resulted in the stranger's being deposited unceremoniously on the sidewalk.

Gus was mortified and picked up the stranger, apologizing profusely as he brushed off his unhappy victim. To make matters worse, at this point Ray again applied the yardstick and in a repeat performance the stranger went sprawling on the sidewalk a second time.

#97: OLD STORES ON MAIN STREET; FOLKS WHO LIVED OVER BISSELL'S

The store next to DeLuca's Footwear was once the J. Howard Burr Men's Clothing Store [384 Main Street, now Rodier Flowers]. The Burr Store had its home base in Danbury and the Ridgefield store was managed by Samuel Patterson.

The store did a fine business as the quality of its merchandise was of the very best. During the Depression the going got rather tough and Burr relinquished ownership to Sam Patterson. Sam was very popular in town and did well for several years until his health began to fail.

As well as fine clothes, the store had another feature. Heim's Music Store in Danbury was the leading store of its kind in the area. So many Heim's customers came from Ridgefield that Sam and Heim's worked out a deal whereby a portion of Sam's store was devoted to the music trade.

In the days when many people provided their own entertainment, Ridgefield seemed to have a great number of people interested in music. Young people were encouraged to play the piano, the violin, the banjo, or the mandolin. Now it seems to be easier for them to carry around a transistor with ear plugs.

Heim's did well in Ridgefield, selling a lot of sheet music as well as a variety of musical instruments. The heavy influx of radios had an adverse effect on the trade and the music store went out of business in Ridgefield.

1938 arrived and so did Edward Rabin. Ed established his Ridgefield Hardware Store where Sam Patterson had conducted his clothing business. So another family-owned business was born. Today the store is still operating with Ed's son, Jerry, as president. Jerry is ably assisted by his mother, Dorothy, his wife, Sandy, their daughter, Kim, and son, Todd.

Peter Gabbianelli (Frank's son) was on the original staff. The popular Pete stayed with the store for 35 years and now lives in Maine. Laura Tones, who will be 89 this year and lives in Derby, was also with the store for many years.

After 46 continuous years of operation, this must be considered the oldest of the family owned and operated businesses on Main Street. Ten years after the business started, it had grown to such proportions that the limited space caused a large portion of the sales to be conducted on the sidewalk in front of the store.

Ed Rabin looked to the future and purchased an old house and lot directly across the street. Before construction started on his new store, he used this property as a garden center. Upon completion of the new store in 1948, the business was moved to its present location.

Rose Serfilippi (now Belardinelli) had been operating her Rose's Kiddie Shoppe in a little store on Bailey Avenue. The town was growing at a rapid pace. Kiddies were arriving at regular intervals, new schools were being built, and older ones were being enlarged.

The Kiddie Shoppe needed more room, so when the hardware store moved across the street, Rose's relocated at the more spacious Main Street address. Helen Goldsmith now operates her Sweaters Etcetera from this store. The Etcetera covers a multitude of other items of ladies' apparel.

Originally there were apartments over these stores and they are much needed today for young married couples to get their start. The problem seems to be that because of the great need for additional business space, these former apartments generate much greater revenue by using them for offices.

The next building houses one of the most famous of all businesses in the history of Ridgefield. Of course, we are referring to the H.P. Bissell Drug Store. The building is an imposing, three-story structure and at one time the upper two stories were devoted entirely to apartment use.

A lot of very nice people lived comfortably in those apartments. Just a few were Frank Taylor, the first policeman we ever knew. Frank lived with Mally and Mabel Knapp. Mabel was Frank's daughter and Mally was the golf pro at Bloomerside Golf Course at Peach Lake. Mally was not a tall man and in later years put on considerable weight. We used to think he would have some difficulty in seeing the golf ball, but he managed very well.

The late Ernest Sturges moved, with his wife Esther, to Florida several years ago. The Sturgeses made a practice of returning to Ridgefield for a visit each summer and Ernie always stopped by to see me. On one occasion as he knocked at my office door. I noticed that he kept one hand behind his back. Ernie was full of tricks and I did not know what to expect. Then with a broad smile, he said he had something that Esther had been using for a walking stick which he felt I would put to better use. and with that Ernie handed me Mally Knapp's old putter. It has Mally's name engraved on it and is, of course, one of my most prized possessions.

A few of the others who lived over Bissell's store were Miss Mary Cooney, our first chiropractor, and the Ed Burrs and Arthur and Marion McGlynn Mullen. There were many others through the years. but by far the most interesting was my old friend and famous character. Jimmy Rogers.

We have previously described Jimmy's natty wardrobe, his red complexion and his green eyes in Dispatches 46 and 61, so we won't go into that again. Suffice to say that you would laugh just to see him, and making people laugh seemed to be Jimmy's main purpose in life. In making people use whatever muscles we use in laughing, he was eminently successful.

We promised to periodically dole out some of the zany things he used to do, so here is another. Jimmy had a funny voice that he could change from a high pitch to a very low pitch at will. He probably was the nearest thing to a ventriloquist that we had at the time. He had great fun throwing his voice around while keeping a straight face and unmoving lips.

Jim Bacchiochi and I used to stop in at the Fairfield Lunch for breakfast after church on Sunday morning. On this particular Sunday, Jimmy Rogers was just a little ahead of us as we approached the entrance to the restaurant.

Jimmy as usual was immaculately dressed and wore his camel hair cap. He waited and held the door for us and suddenly his attention was directed to a large truck coming from the north end of town. We could see nothing unusual about the truck, but because Jimmy had that certain look, we felt it was necessary to see what he would do next. Others in the restaurant had the same feeling and crowded to the doorway to see what had been concocted in Jimmy's fertile brain. They did not have long to wait.

As the truck passed, we could see that it carried three large horses. Jimmy's mouth opened wide and from it came the unmistakable whinny of a horse. The three horses turned their heads and whinnied right back at what they thought was one of their brethren, much to the delight of the onlookers.

#98: THE POWER PEOPLE OF BISSELL'S AND THE EVER POPULAR SQUASH

The H.P. Bissell Co. has been an institution in Ridgefield for many years. Its popularity stemmed not only from the routine dispensing of drugs for those who were ill, but other sidelines as well.

In 1853 it sported the town's first soda fountain and for a century, it was a big attraction. Hiram K. Scott owned the store at that time. During the 19th Century, he must have been a real spark plug for the town. Both he and his son, Hiram Jr., were postmasters for many years. Hiram Sr. was also a longtime town clerk for Ridgefield. He was very active in the local Masonic Lodge and served as master. In 1859, he was elected Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Connecticut. His name is listed on just about every committee that functioned in the town.

When he was the postmaster, the post office operated out of his store. The store carried enough different commodities to qualify it as a general store.

In 1895, Harvey P. Bissell purchased the store and continued to operate it under Scott's name. Just a few months after Mr. Bissell took over the store, it was destroyed in the great fire of that year. Within a short time Mr. Bissell built the present building [destroyed by fire May 26, 2005] and changed the name to the H.P. Bissell Company.

Mr. Bissell became a power in the Republican party, not only in Ridgefield where he was the town chairman of the party, but in the state as well. He served as the state comptroller in the early 1920's.

As a matter of fact, Harvey P. Bissell and his close friends, Dr. Russell W. Lowe and the Rev. Richard E. Shortell made up a triumvirate that pretty much controlled the political action in Ridgefield. At a testimonial that I was tendered on becoming postmaster, the Rev. Hugh Shields, pastor of the First Congregational Church, told a story that pretty much sums up the power that these men had in the political arena.

Mr. Shields was a nationally known speaker and noted for his recitation of poetry, especially poems by James Whitcomb Riley. We were delighted to see this fine man at the speaker's table.

He told of how during the late 20's it became necessary to find a new representative to the General Assembly in Hartford. According to Mr. Shields, a meeting took place in the back room of Bissell's store, with all three of the leaders present. Mr. Bissell and Dr. Lowe argued at some length as to who the replacement would be. Father Shortell stood quietly by, listening to the other two, extolling the virtues of their candidates.

When, after some time they were still at loggerheads, they turned to him and asked who his preference was. Father Shortell brought up a name that had not been mentioned and said, "The best qualified man is the Rev. Hugh Shields."

Mr. Shields then added, "and that is how I became Ridgefield's representative to Hartford. The political process was rather simplified in those days."

During Prohibition, Bissell's was kind of an oasis for those who were denied access to their favorite alcoholic beverage. The store offered two ways of securing it. A prescription from a sympathetic physician would do it — of course, for medicinal purposes. If one knew the right word, he might call at the basement door in the rear of the building. In this door was a little sliding window from which one could be identified and through which many bottles passed.

To be sure, Bissell's had several other attractions, not the least of which was the aforementioned soda fountain. The employees at the store were adept at making chocolate syrup in a large washtub and probably made vanilla as well, from vanilla extract purchased from William J. Humphreys. Mr. Humphreys was noted for the excellent extract that he produced at his home on the corner of Main Street and Danbury Road. The Humphreys house sits on an angle now, but used to be square with the corner before being moved back in 1925, as described in Dispatch 35.

Bissell's used Horton's Ice Cream for many years and then turned to Rider's. Both were considered the best product available. Until you had savored one of Bissell's ice cream sodas, you really had not ever lived. They were so good that people were attracted from miles around.

When the store was completely remodeled some 20-odd years ago, the great soda fountain was removed. I was fortunate enough to acquire the large mirror that framed the back of the fountain. It now hangs on the back of a door and makes an excellent full-length dressing mirror.

There have been several owners of the famous store. James J. Kelly had been Mr. Bissell's partner and bought out Mr. Bissell's interest in 1928. Mr. Kelly took in Edgar C. "Dick" Rapp as a partner and Dick, in turn, became the owner in the 30's. Mrs. Cornelius S. Lee bought the business and the building, which she still owns, and then Joseph December bought the business.

Then Pat DiMearia bought it and it is now owned and operated by James Dubuque. Jim is ably assisted by Paul Willis, Ada Leary, Judi Peterson, Amy Baird, Lisa Judson, and Anne Johnson. Through all those ownerships it retained the name Bissell's.

Those who worked in the old store were always considered to be very accommodating and Duncan Smith used to say in his column that Bissell's sidewalk was the first to be cleared after a heavy snow storm.

Many are the young Ridgefield people who got their start in Bissell's Store. Just a few of them are my brother Paul and my son Richard Jr.; Danesi Birarelli, later to become Father Birarelli; Jerry Zandri; Fred Romeo; my nephew Michael Venus; Helen Keeler; and many others, including the popular Aldo "Squash" Travaglini. The late Johnny Gunn was the pharmacist for some 30 years. They were all very loyal to the old store and its customers.

Squash told me the story of how he got his start at Bissell's and we think it is worth retelling. It seems that as a kid he was sitting on the porch of the Masonic building, back in the late 20's, watching the workmen as they cleared the lot next door, where the brick building known as the Scott Block (now Donnelly's) was to be constructed.

Squash's daydreaming was interrupted by the appearance of one of Bissell's clerks, Jerry Zandri. Jerry asked him if he would like to work in the store.

Does a bear like honey?

Every kid would have liked to work in Bissell's. So Squash jumped at the opportunity. Jerry Told him that he would have to go to see Mr. Kelly for an interview.

Mr. Kelly was a very meticulous gentleman with a rather severe countenance that belied a man who was actually very kind. Squash did not relish coming under the scrutiny of the pharmacist. However, after having a talk with Mr. Kelly, Squash was informed that the job was only temporary and would not last more than six months. When he asked when he would start, Mr. Kelly remarked, "Right now. Go home and change your clothes."

Squash says it was a long six months that became 25 years duration.

#99: SOOTY, TOOTSY AND THE BOMB

We have been writing about Bissell's Drug Store, and while this story has actually nothing to do with the store as such, it did take place in the immediate area.

Back in the 30's, there was a chimney sweep who came to Ridgefield from Bridgeport on a regular basis. There were many families that depended on this fellow to keep their chimneys clean. For want of a name, we will call him "Sooty." The name does not describe his appearance, but rather his trade.

Sooty dressed in the very best tradition of the chimney sweep, complete with a nice blue serge suit and a high silk hat. He was rather short, about five feet tall, with a nice personality and was very loquacious. He could quickly convince anyone that failure to avail themselves of his services would most certainly result in a disastrous fire.

We are not sure of how much Sooty really knew about cleaning a chimney for he never got physically involved in the operation. Somehow he was always able to employ two young men to do the work for him.

The little fellow drove a black Ford panel truck, in which he carried the bare necessities of his trade. There were the usual coils of rope and the round wire brushes of various sizes. If his brushes did not fit your chimney, he could improvise by wrapping a burlap bag around a stone of the proper dimension to slide up and down inside the chimney. Though he had a rack on top of his truck, we never saw him carry a ladder.

The reason Sooty had no need of a Ladder was that he had the foresight to always hire a couple of acrobats to do the actual work of cleaning the chimney. We found it remarkable that each time he came to town, he had two different boys. The boys he had previously used no doubt had joined a circus. Where he found the new boys we never knew, but that they were acrobats, there could be no question.

I have seen these young fellows in action many times and they put on a good show. A large mansion presented no more of a problem than a small bungalow. It just took a few minutes longer.

One of the boys would approach the building and select an overhang such as a porch roof. He would leap into the air and grasp the projection. Somehow he would then swing himself up and the next thing you knew, he would be on the roof and then he would stand atop the chimney with a foot on either side of it. He was truly a human fly.

Once atop the chimney, his partner would toss up the tools of the trade: ropes, brushes, etc. The articles were deftly caught and quickly put to work.

The partner, in the meantime, had disappeared into the basement with brushes and pails to gather the soot which had descended to the bottom of the chimney. The roles played by each of the young men were reversed from job to job.

Each of them was expert at scaling any building. When asked if they ever encountered a building devoid of projections to aid in their climb to the roof, they explained that it would be a rare occasion and they would then use a grappling hook.

Sooty would wait in this truck for the job to be completed, when there was only one chimney to clean. However there were times when there was a great number to do in the same area. In such instances Sooty would instruct his boys as to what homes to service and he would then drive off and come back later to pick them up.

During his many trips to Ridgefield, Sooty got to know a number of people. He fancied himself as a ladies' man and many of his acquaintances were housewives. On West Mountain there was one in particular that caught Sooty's attention and when she responded to his overtures, he was smitten by her very obvious charms.

We will not describe Sooty's paramour as a rare beauty. However, she was comely and possessed of a delightful personality. The fact that she had at least three other boy friends was unknown to Sooty. He probably would have overlooked this fact anyway as he was completely captivated by, let's call her, "Tootsy." It was said that she had the ability to make a man feel that he was the only one on earth.

One afternoon about 2:30, I drove into town to make a deposit for Conklin Dairy at the First National Bank (now Union Trust [Wells Fargo]). As I parked in front of where Ridgefield Hardware is now, there appeared to be a gathering of people in the driveway between Bissell's and where Sweaters Etc., [Rodier Flowers] is now. After making my deposit, I walked down to where the people were gathered and inquired as to what was of such interest.

Someone pointed to Sooty's little black panel truck and said that Ray K. had planted a bomb in it. The truck was parked just south of where the Town Clock is now. At the time, parking was allowed all along that side of the street as the traffic lights had not yet been installed.

Sooty had given his boys enough work to keep them busy for a long period and had gone off for a ride with Tootsy in her car. It should be explained that the bomb referred to was actually quite harmless. However, to an unsuspecting victim it could be terrifying. As soon as the ignition key is turned on, the bomb is activated. First a loud siren is set off and clouds of black smoke are emitted from under the hood. This is followed by a blast from the bomb and it is extremely loud.

The crowd waiting for the return of the lovebirds grew, as word spread of the approaching event. As the crowd grew it would have been easily discovered by anyone with a clear head. To avoid detection some people went inside the stores and watched from the windows.

At last Tootsy's black 1933 Ford with its yellow wheels was seen approaching from south Main Street. She parked the car in front of the bank and Sooty hopped out.

The anticipation of the crowd was a fever pitch as he got half way to his truck. Suddenly he wheeled around and retraced his steps. Sooty wanted one more kiss before going to pick up his boys. Anyone whose mind was not saturated with thoughts of love could have easily heard the numerous "Oohs" and "Ashe" emanating from the crowd of onlookers.

Their patience was finally rewarded when after a last lingering kiss, Sooty made it to his truck. After a few more waves back and forth, he turned the key. There was the screech of the siren and the billows of smoke and the thoroughly frightened Sooty was so confused that rather than exiting through the door he had just used, he dash through the vehicle to the rear doors just as the bomb went off.

To the delight of the crowd, the doors burst open and Sooty, minus his top hat, raced down the middle of Main Street in an effort to escape what he surely must have felt was his very end.

Up to now the story has contained a great deal of humor. However, we regret that it must end tragically. Tootsy's husband was an exceptionally fine gentleman and when he learned of her numerous conquests, it upset him to the extent that he took his own life.

#100: BISSELL BUILDING IN THE DAYS OF FLINTS AND BRUNETTI'S MARKET

Before we start Dispatch #100, we feel we should correct #97 in which we inadvertently listed Joseph December as an owner of Bissell's Drug Store. Joe did manage the store for Mrs. Lee, but did not actually become a proprietor until he acquired Smith's Drug Store at the other end of Main Street.

Bissell's Drug Store has remained in the same location, with the same name, since the building was erected 88 years ago. The same cannot be said for the other store in this fine old building.

Originally George Scott operated his painting business from this store. When his son, George Jr., joined him in the operation of the business, it also became an automobile dealership. I believe that this is the only time that there was ever a Chevrolet franchise in Ridgefield. It may have been a subsidiary of the Lewis Chevrolet Co. of Danbury. At any rate, when the business shut down, George Jr. went to Danbury and the firm of Scott and Lewis was born.

George Jr., who passed on only recently, was a very well liked gentleman and he sure sold an awful lot of Chevys. Later on George went into the insurance business and again was very successful. In the sale of autos and insurance, he depended greatly on the many friends he had in his old home town.

In the early 20's, two brothers, Jacob and John Walters, took over the store. They had the agency for three automobiles, the Flint, the Durant, and the Star. Where the name for the Star originated, we are not sure, but the other two were named after the Michigan cities where they were built.

They were a fine family of cars and built to last on highways that were not nearly as easy to travel on as the roads we have today. Francis Martin bought a Flint touring car and in the mid-'20's drove it all the way across the country and back, pulling a trailer as well. It was a camping trip as motels as we now know them, had not yet hit the scene. Doris and Phil Martin and Ralph Brundage accompanied Marty on what we felt was a very historic trip.

The Walters brothers did very well in their business. John had a very nice personality and he ran the store and kept the books. Jake was an excellent mechanic and took care of the repair business. The repairs were made in a long narrow building that stood directly behind the store. It had formerly been a six-lane bowling alley and suited Jake's purposes very well.

The repair business was not as great as it is today. Of course, there were fewer cars to repair but the quality of the cars was another factor. The very best of metal was used in the manufacture of automobiles and as stated previously, they were made to last. It was said that the cars that were sold by the Walters and others such as the Hupmobile, Hudson, and Essex, were built so well that they did not wear out fast enough.

At any rate when General Motors was formed, it gobbled up many different automobiles, including the Flint, the Durant, and the Star and the process of getting them to wear out quickly was soon discovered.

It was a little more than 50 years ago that Herb Bates went out of the taxi business that he operated from his garage on Bailey Avenue. Auto Sales had been crippled by the Depression but good mechanics were still needed so Jake Walters moved his part of the business to the garage vacated by Herb and then in the late 30's, the building was taken over by the Nash boys and The Ridgefield Press.

In the meantime, John Walters became an excellent carpenter and built some fine houses, including his own at 362 Wilton Road West. We have always felt that this very nice home is one of the finest structures in Ridgefield.

After the store was closed someone took it over briefly, we think it was Leo Pambianchi. At any rate, Franklin D. Roosevelt had just been elected President and someone decided to name an auto after him and they were sold from this store. [Ed. note: Other historians say this car, made in 1929 and 1930, was named for President Theodore Roosevelt.] To show his impartiality, Bernard Christopher, a staunch Republican, bought one of the new Roosevelts. The car gave him excellent service but the company itself became another victim of the Depression and did not last nearly as long as F.D.R.

The repair business in back of the store was revived by Nicholas Romeo and John Kehoe. A young man named Harry Pambianchi learned his trade here from the two master mechanics. When World War II came along, mechanics were vitally needed in other fields and the repair garage was closed.

For many years the only bowling alleys available were at the Congregational Church House. They were great alleys but only two in number and many of our bowlers had to go to Danbury to do their bowling.

“Marty” Marinelli and “Ratsy” Rossini came forward about this time and rejuvenated the garage back to its original status, a six-lane bowling alley. The bowling alley did very well for a long time but then was torn down to make room for the present parking area of the Donnelly Shopping Center.

Just north of the bowling alley there was an old red barn that also bit the dust at this time. It had been used as a storage house by George Scott and by McGlynn and Ryan. North of the barn was the very large three-story house that had been moved there from where the Savings Bank is now and near the town hall was a smaller house. They were all removed to make room for the new shopping center.

In the meantime, the A&P left the small store where Allan's is now [440 Main Street] and moved to the Bissell building next to the drug store. John Franzman was the manager, Jimmy Dixon the butcher. Fritz Lotterele was the grocery clerk and Elmer Mayer was the vegetable clerk. We could not remember Elmer's last name and neither could a lot of other people. Everyone knew Elmer — but Elmer who? His last name was finally supplied by Mrs. Elmer Evans.

After World War II, Joe Brunetti joined the staff as a butcher and when in the early 60's, the A&P moved to its new and larger quarters on Danbury Road, Joe elected to stay behind and open his own store. He must have been aware of the old adage in the business world, to the effect that when people become accustomed to traveling to a certain location to make their purchases, they find it difficult to change.

At any rate Joe's foresight in going into business for himself resulted in another of Ridgefield's many success stories. With many of the old A&P customers, plus the new ones that the hardworking Joe attracted, Brunetti's Market became a very busy place.

Joe is now retired and has turned the business over to the very capable Ed Bowie, who had worked for Joe for many years. Ed keeps things going very well while continuing to prove that a small business can successfully compete with the big boys.