‘Dick’s Dispatch’

Columns 201 through 225

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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#201: JACK WARD, CITIZEN OF THE CENTURY

A visit to Ward Acres Farm would, without a doubt, be listed as one “of the more memorable” events in a person’s life. The beauty of the grounds and the grandeur (if the mansion are just cause for anyone to just stare in admiration.

Then as you talk to Jack Boyd Ward, you quickly get the idea that the most important part of this lovely estate is its product. The product, of course, is just about the finest stable of beautiful horses to be found anywhere in this country.

There seems to be a great fondness among most people for the word “farm.” Many select a pet name for their home and then add the word farm to it. The appellation does not necessarily guarantee that the place harbors any number of domesticated animals. There may be a few chickens, a stand of fruit trees, or perhaps a hive of bees, maybe a small vegetable garden.

Then there are the places where the owner considers his place a farm, without actually having any of these things that were once a part of the family farm.

To those moving here from a crowded city to a half-acre lot, probably adding the word farm to the name of their place makes it seem more liveable.

If the spacious acres at Jack Ward’s showplace have not earned the word farm, then certainly his great horses have. They have also earned a reputation that is well known all over, not just this country, but Europe as well.

Passing through his trophy room, Jack will point with justifiable pride to a picture that hangs among the hundreds in his gallery. It is a picture of a little three-gaited mare with a blue ribbon attached to the side of her bridle. Astride the mare is a serious looking young man.

The picture was taken many years ago but the young rider, with the look of intense pride, is readily recognized as Jack B. Ward.

Jack had every reason to feel proud as this was to be the first of many championships . for Ward Acres Farm. The mare’s name was Mi-Nute Mystery.

Jack had been winning ribbons since he was a lad of ten, but winning the championship at the Devon Horse Show was equivalent to a racehorse winning the Kentucky Derby, a ball team winning the World Series or a football team winning the Super Bowl.

The picture of Jack and Mi-Nute Mystery carries the caption, “The Pony Who Started It All.”

The mare really did start something, for until you win a championship at the Devon show, you have not as yet joined the elite in horse circles. It has been said that a win at this show is the dream of every horseman. To have a repeat winner is a dreamer's dream.

Ward Acres has won a mind-boggling 22 championships at the very prestigious Devon show. It has won just about every major championship that this fine show has to offer. In the opinion of veteran horsemen, this is a record that will never be broken.

Jack Ward was reaching the top in the field of great horse breeders when World War II came along. Jack entered the US. Air Force and went overseas. When he returned he had an aggravated back injury that would prevent him from riding in the show ring again.

However, his enthusiasm was as great as ever and he was still able to drive and show his hackney ponies and horses.

Ward Acres Stonehenge Carousel is the present Devon Champion. This elegant hackney horse is of international fame and well he might be as he is unbeatable. Until you have seen a top flight hackney showing his wares, you have not witnessed the beauty of the zenith of the animal kingdom.

Stonehenge Carousel is rather difficult to describe as you will quickly run out of superlatives. However, picture, if you will, this magnificent hackney as he steps by with hoofs barely touching the ground and muscles rippling under a hide that you can easily imagine as enclosing the combined power of Thor and Zeus, you will begin to get an understanding of what you are viewing.

It is obvious that Carousel enjoys performing for the onlookers and his hoofs are not just lifted, they are snapped up in perfect unison and placed back down in the same manner.

This great horse is like a finely tuned violin, except that you do not have to listen for the music, it is right before your eyes. To watch the hackney is to see perfection in action. No other animal can match the hackney as it exhibits its tremendous pride and style.

We must also note that Ward Acres has been rounded out through the years with some of this country's finest racing thoroughbreds. It is interesting to note that of all the many great horses that Jack Ward has owned, the one that seems to be his favorite, is the one that cost him the most. That horse was named Evening Cloud and Jack bought him at the sales in Lexington, Ky., for $35,000 [about $560,000 in 2022] many years ago.

Up to that time, it was the highest price ever paid for a Saddlebred. Jack says he was well worth the price.

Great credit was given by Jask to the handlers and trainers that he has had through the years and is especially proud of his present manager, George Mink, who has been with Ward Acres for over 40 year

Olaf Olsen has been Jack's friend and companion for many years. Olaf is an excellent photographer and as a former actor has spent considerable time on both sides of the camera.

His favorite diversion is showing moving pictures to shut-ins who would otherwise never have the opportunity to enjoy his beautiful films. Olaf has shown his pictures to patients at Southbury Training School and at Fairfield Hills as well as other surrounding institutions.

Though his efforts have brought much happiness to these people, the picture showing has not been without some risk from patients with mental problems. Olaf takes these things all in stride as he relishes the satisfaction that he derives from making these unfortunate people happy.

Jack Ward is in a class by himself when it comes to kind acts that will benefit his fellow man. I can recall that when he first came to town, he noted that our ambulance was a well-worn Ford. It was not long before the Board of Selectmen received his kind offer to replace the vehicle

with a brand-new Cadillac. That was almost 30 years ago and Jack is still giving another one which we will presently receive.

Soon Jack was elected an incorporator of Danbury Hospital. When the local American Legion Post was in need of assistance he donated more than $5,000.

Ward Acres was the scene of a fundraiser for the DNA and shortly thereafter he again opened his home to the children from Southbury. After making a very substantial gift to Jesse Lee Memorial Church for landscaping the grounds for the new church, he then gave $150,000 for a new unit at Danbury Hospital.

The Ridgefield Volunteer Fire Department made Jack an honorary chief at a party which be hosted at the Farm, for 95 paid and volunteer firemen. Danbury Hospital was again the recipient of a gift of $100,000 that paid for a cobalt unit, in memory of Jack's mother, Mrs. Ethel Ward. Jack Ward has been especially good to the DNA and on one occasion gave a new car to the District nurse.

After he had spread several hundred thousands of dollars to worthy recipients in this area, Jack was named "Citizen of the Year" by the Ridgefield Rotary Club. Perhaps the inscription should read: "Citizen of the Century."

#202: WHEN POLO PONIES GALLOPED AT WESTMORELAND

Across the street from the entrance to Ward Acres, there is a rather level tract of land that supports a highway known as Westmoreland Road. The name of the road is, of course, derived from the name of the great estate of which this area was an important part.

The flat surface was the site of the polo field more than 50 years ago. I guess that it was the only polo field that Ridgefield ever had.

We used to have great fun watching Jim and Chester Doubleday and their friends as they raced across the field with their horses at full gallop, and their mallets raised on high. They were closely following a little white ball which they attempted to knock between goal posts at either end of the field.

Polo does not seem to be quite as popular as it once was. One of the reasons may be the cost of maintaining a stable of horses.

Polo is a very rough game and it is hard on both the horse and the rider. Therefore, it was necessary for each player to have a spare horse. They used to call them polo ponies but any that I ever saw were big enough to classify as horses.

The horse had to be considered a competitor as well as the rider. He had to learn to follow the ball with little guidance as the rider would have to concentrate on hitting the ball.

Chester Doubleday had a horse named Warrior and he was well named as he was a real competitor. Warrior was absolutely fearless and despite the frantic swinging of the players' mallets that no doubt hit the horses more often than they hit the ball, he seemed to revel in the game.

Though he was a nice dark bay, Warrior would never be mistaken for a show horse. He had a hammer head and a Roman nose and in general looked like the warrior that he was.

Jerry McCarthy was the horseman at Westmoreland and he had a half dozen charges that included Alice Doubleday's "Gaileon" and her father George's stocky black mare "Water Witch."

George Doubleday used to bring his wife Alice Moffitt Doubleday and their three children to Ridgefield to spend each summer in the early 1900's. At first the family would stay in

a house that they rented or leased for the summer months. There was one house on West Lane and another at the end of South Main Street near the blinker light

It was not long before the Doubleday family became enraptured with Ridgefield and decided to call it home. George, who was by now a rising young executive with Ingersoll-Rand, began to look for a more permanent place for his family. He made a fine choice when he selected the Francis D. Bacon place on Peaceable Street.

The mansion had been built by Mr. Bacon in 1896 and was a rather pretentious building. It became even more so as George Doubleday climbed the corporate ladder to success in his company. The end result, as far as the mansion is concerned, is the fine manor house that is now home to Temple Shearith Israel [Congregation Shir Shalom] at 46 Peaceable Street.

George grew quickly in the ranks and became president and board chairman of Ingersoll-Rand. The company itself grew to a point where it was considered one of the very largest manufacturers of road machinery at the time. The Doubleday estate kept pace with the rapid growth of Ingersoll-Rand.

Mr. Doubleday proceeded to buy up just about every available piece of land that adjoined his home. While he was at his office in the city, he would have his superintendent, Frank Girolmetti, keep a lookout for additional land. There was no available acreage to the south or to the east and very little to the north.

It just naturally followed that any expansion was going to be to the west, hence the name Westmoreland. Francis Bacon had originally called his place "Nutholme."

The Doubledays took an active part in town affairs. George was president of the Ridgefield Golf Club for many years and Mrs. Doubleday was active in the Garden Club. She also had a great singing voice and sang in St. Mary's choir.

Her sister was Mrs. John H. Lynch, who lived where the Congregation of Notre Dame [Ridgefield Academy] is now located on West Mountain.

By the time the U.S. had entered World War I, Westmoreland had grown to more than 100 acres.

The War brought with it the terrible flu bug and a great many civilians as well as members of the military succumbed to it during the epidemic that it caused. Among the victims of the flu was Frank Girolmetti, who had helped to put Westmoreland together. Ciro Montanari became superintendent and remained for many years until succeeded by Varisto Costanzi, who had been associated with Westmoreland since its early days.

In the year following the War, Mrs. Doubleday entered the mansion on an inspection tour. It was the month of March and the place had been closed up since the previous fall. Unless you have actually experienced the terrible cold that seems to sink into an unheated building during the winter months, you can never understand the deathly, penetrating chill it creates.

Though only in the house a short time, Mrs. Doubleday contracted the dreaded flu and failed to survive.

In later days, George Doubleday married his secretary, Mary May White, and the saga of Westmoreland continued. The second Mrs. Doubleday was equally as active in the Garden Club and was one of the fine women who started the Ridgefield Boys' Club.

To put Westmoreland together, George Doubleday purchased land from C.P. Anderson, Mr. Bacon, George Pratt Ingersoll and Charles Carey among others. Mr. and Mrs. Fred Gabel have made their home on Peaceable Hill in the house that was once Charles Carey's farm house.

Westmoreland extended to where Holmes Road, Webster Road, Remington Road, Conant Road, and Hamilton Road are now. It reached west from 46 Peaceable Street to Peaceable Hill Road and north to Barry Avenue and Bryan Avenue.

Mr. Doubleday was at an advanced age when Steele Roberts decided to sell his property following the disastrous fire previously described. George never hesitated and, in buying the Roberts place, added 43 more acres to his large estate.

It is now about 20 [55] years since Jerry Tuccio developed what is still called Westmoreland.

#203: B.O., HIS COTTAGE AND PRISONS

During the 15-year period, 1895 to 1910, a great number of wealthy families decided to make Ridgefield their home.

At the time, city people were seeking a place for their families that would afford them more space in which to raise their children. It seems that today, they still want to escape the confines of city life. However, the bountiful open space no longer exists and soon we will be almost as crowded as those in the city.

For many who came in the early part of the century, our town was just their summer home. Hence the term “summer cottage” was applied to the large mansions that began to appear along the shady, tree-lined streets as well as in the sparsely settled outskirts of the town.

Taxes were almost nil, land was not expensive and help could be hired for very little. Another growth factor was that train service from Ridgefield to New York City was good and commuters found it to their liking.

Ridgefield, with its 35 square miles and a population of only 2,700 at the time, offered not only the desired space, but an ideal setting for lovers of pure natural beauty. Some of that beauty has fallen victim to the onslaught of developers and the numerous condominiums that have appeared.

There is no question but that Ridgefield made an ideal haven for the wealthy families. However, it was also a great place for just ordinary folks, and their children could grow up with every expectation of finding a place to live in their hometown. Today, only those who are really very fortunate among the young can look forward to remaining in Ridgefield.

It seems generally agreed that ever-increasing taxes, both federal and local, have had a profound effect on the large estates in Ridgefield. As the great estates disappeared, they were replaced in most instances by developments.

The resulting tremendous growth during the 60's and 70's made Ridgefield for several years the “fastest growing community.” percentage wise, in the State of Connecticut. Today it is ten times the size in population than it was at the turn of the century.

Those who commuted to the city each day were, for the most part, young or approaching middle age. As they began to grow older and presumably more prosperous, many considered converting the “summer cottages" to year-round residences.

This was a great boon to the local plumbers. Coal was the main source of energy, so a half dozen coal dealers were made very happy.

Some, like Miss Mary Olcott, the Ballards, the Bulkleys and the Doubledays, used their new heating systems in the fall and early spring as a means of extending their stay in Ridgefield. However, when the real cold weather came along, they closed their mansions and their gates and escaped the ravages of winter by moving to their city apartments or traveling to a warmer climate.

Another who continued to use his mansion as a "summer cottage" was Benjamin Ogden Chisolm. He had an excellent heating system and storm windows as well as a great storm enclosure for the large front porch, but when it got real cold, everything was shut down for the winter.

B.O., as Mr. Chisolm insisted on being called, and his wife, Bessie, bought land on Peaceable Street in 1902 from Christine Beckwith. Like the King family that owned so much land on High Ridge, the Beckwiths at one time owned a great deal of the valuable land along Peaceable Street. The Chisolms continued to buy more land on Peaceable Street and High Ridge and in Bryon Park until they had amassed a sizable estate.

The great white clapboard mansion was built at what is now 38 Peaceable Street. It was bordered on the west by Westmoreland (now Temple Shearith Israel [Congregation Shir Shalom]) and ran north to Bryon Avenue as well as east to High Ridge where the garage and stables along with the superintendent's cottage are located.

There were several outbuildings at the rear of the mansion including a very nice conservatory. There was an entrance on all three streets mentioned.

Mr. Chisolm was an international inspector of prisons. He was appointed to represent the United States on that commission by President Calvin Coolidge and spent a considerable amount of time traveling in foreign lands on tours of inspection. He was a prolific writer and authored several books on his travels and findings.

B.O. was the speaker at Ridgefield High School's graduating exercises in 1929. The title of his talk was "Scaling the Wall." He gave the graduates an inspirational talk during which he exhorted them to climb over anything that stood between them and success. Then he told of how he had found a poem entitled "Scaling the Wall" and it impressed him so much that he had cards printed with the main features of the poem and mailed them out at Christmas.

One of the cards went to a friend who happened to be a prison warden. The warden wrote right back and said that he hoped the poem would not give any ideas to the inmates.

B.O. Chisolm was born at College Point, N.Y., in the family mansion that later became New York City's Summer City Hall. He served for 41 years as secretary and treasurer of New York's Greenwich Savings Bank.

Mrs. Chisolm became an invalid after a very unfortunate fall. In order to facilitate her getting around with her wheelchair, an elevator was installed in the mansion.

Two specially made Buick convertibles were ordered. The red one, was called the Red Bird and the blue, the Blue Bird. The doors were made extra wide and the roofs extra high. This made it easy for the chauffeur who appeared each afternoon at 3 to take Mr. and Mrs. Chisolm for a ride around the town that they were so fond of.

In later years, Paul Laszig became the owner of the Red Bird. Paul was rather a little man and somehow he did not look just right when he drove that big car.

For many years, Louis DeVantry was the chauffeur for the Chisolm family. Louis was a throw-back to the days when it was necessary for a chauffeur to also be a mechanic and capable of making any necessary repairs.

In the 1930s Louis DeVantry left his job as chauffeur and took over the Socony service station that had been run by John Moeer. This is the present Mobil station.

After a short time Louis moved across the street to where Pamby Motors is now and established Central Garage. His son-in-law, Charley Cain, moved in to the quarters he had vacated and gave Louis some real competition.

#204: B.O. CHISOLM'S MANY INTERESTS INCLUDING THE 'GRAND HOTEL'

When Louis DeVantery decided to go into the garage business, Thomas Salter replaced him as chauffeur for the Chisolm family. Tommy had been the horseman for the family for several years so the transition was easy.

This is not to make it sound as though someone was always in the wings ready to succeed the one just ahead. However, the cook in the Chisolm household was named Julia and she had a niece named Bridget. Bridget was a very pretty girl with bright red hair, and she served as Julia's assistant. It just seemed to naturally follow when Julia retired, Bridget became the cook.

You can bet that when Bridget came to town, the local boys paid her plenty of attention. The lucky boy was Fritz Loetterle who worked for John Franzmann at the A&P Store when it was located where Brunetti's Market is now.

So Fritz married Bridget and they had five children, all of whom graduated from college. Fritz has passed on but Bridget still resides in Brooklyn.

Pompeo Roberti was the houseman for the Chisolm family, or perhaps butler would be more appropriate. Pompy. as he was called, always had a pompadour, which kind of went along with his name.

He was very good at a lot of things, which was a requirement for a man in his position. Pompy also found time to work in the conservatory where he always had roses or some other romantic flower in bloom. Every evening at dinner time B.O. would go to the conservatory to pick a flower for his wife, Bessie Rhoades.

Joseph Kasper (father of Ralph) was the superintendent on the Chisolm estate for many years. Joe was very interested in the Boy Scout movement and I believe that he was Ridgefield's first scoutmaster.

Julius Tulipani followed Joe Kasper as superintendent on the estate. Mrs. Tulipani still resides in the super's cottage at 137 High Ridge Avenue. Julius himself was a real success story and that is a story in itself.

B.O. Chisolm was a man of many interests, but one of the things that he enjoyed the most was a good game of billiards or pool. He had two very fine tables in an excellent game room that was the envy of local sportsmen.

B.O. was very good at both billiards and pool and was constantly on the lookout for an opponent worthy of testing his skills. Many of the local "pool sharks" were invited to play in his elaborate game room.

Of the ones who accepted the challenge, Tabby Carboni turned out to be B.O./s favorite. Tabby was a great competitor and they had many rousing sessions.

The Chisolm estate had been called Wickopee Cottage but with the arrival of the Chisolm family the name was changed to Wickopee Farm. The word farm was justified by the fact that the place supported several beautiful saddle horses and a couple of cows.

The word Wickopee may have been derived from Wickiup which the Algonquin Indians called the huts in which they lived. One thing was sure, the Chisolm mansion was no mere hut.

Speaking of the saddle horses, one of my greatest delights was seeing Priscilla Chisolm and her sisters, as they rode by in elegant style. They always carried soft riding crops with long silky tendrils. The crops were carried for the sole purpose of brushing. aside any pesky fly that might have the temerity to land on the glossy hides of their favorite steed.

Neville Davis, who later married Priscilla, used to ride with her and when they rode by they were just about the most handsome couple that you could imagine. It was really a great treat to see them.

Priscilla still lives over on Nod Road and is just as pretty as ever. She was always a favorite of everyone who knew her and spent much of her life doing nice things for people. Just a few of the many organizations that she belonged to, most of which she headed at one time or another, were the Village Improvement Society, the Ridgefield Garden Club, The District Nursing Association, the American Women's Voluntary Service, the Ridgefield Boys Club and the Wadsworth Lewis Fund.

There were also those acts of charity that she did on her own and many unfortunates benefited from her kindness. In recognition of her many years of service to the community, Priscilla was named Citizen of the Year by the Ridgefield Rotary Club [in 1975].

B.O. Chisolm was a man of varied interests and he was always willing to contribute to any worthwhile cause. He was particularly fond of moving pictures more than 60 years ago, when they were shown in St. Stephen's parish house and in the old Town Hall auditorium.

Those were the days of the silent movies. They were shown in the Town Hall each Saturday night and Arthur Ferry was the proprietor.

B.O. rarely missed a show and there were times when the proceeds were not enough to cover the expenses. On such an occasion Mr. Ferry could always expect a bill large enough to cover expenses, which Mr. Chisolm would slip to him in a very discreet manner.

As the silent movies passed into oblivion, Arthur Carnall started to beat the drums for a new movie theater in which the talking pictures could be shown. One of his greatest supporters was B.O. Chisolm. As a result of their great efforts, the fine theater that now houses the Village Bank and Trust Co. was built and opened in 1940.

Up to that time, it was necessary to drive to New Canaan or Norwalk, or to Danbury which boasted three movie houses: The Capitol, The Empress and the Palace. All these places did a booming business before television interfered.

B.O. helped financially and wrote a series of columns for The Ridgefield Press which was an excellent public relations vehicle for the new theater. His last column was published the week that the new Ridgefield Playhouse was opened to the public and it was entitled "The Last Roundup."

Mr. Chisolm had great compassion for those who were suffering through the Great Depression and felt that he should do something to furnish employment for those who were unable to find it. In the mid-30's he hit on the idea of building a new barn. It should be said that the last thing he needed at that time was another barn. However, he felt that in doing this he was doing his part, as he phrased it, "to drive the depression blues away."

The result of his planning was the huge barn that still stands at 137 High Ridge Avenue which was later converted into a very nice home for Si and Phyllis (Tulipani) Franceschini, who still reside there. [The building was torn down in the 1990s to make way for several large houses.]

The project was most welcome as it furnished considerable employment for some very happy tradesmen.

When the great barn was complete B.O. had a huge sign erected on the front of the building that read: GRAND HOTEL.

#205: BEATING THE DEPRESSION BLUES WITH B.O.'s 'GRAND HOTEL'

Benjamin Ogden Chisolm had two very good purposes in mind when he built the huge red barn that still stands at 137 High Ridge Avenue [razed for new houses at the turn of 21st Century]. The most important, of course, was that it provided employment for building

tradesmen that were having rather tough going at the time. As Mr. Chisolm himself put it, “It will help to drive the Depression blues away.”

Of great importance to me was the fact that completion of the building was just cause for Mr. Chisolm to have a party. It can be truly said that no one enjoyed a good party any more than B.O. Chisolm.

The reason that the party was important to me was that B.O. called and asked me to furnish the music for the affair. Ballroom dancing was at its heyday at the time (mid 30’s) and Benny Goodman and other big bands were popularizing swing music.

The party was originally intended for the people who worked on putting the building together, and their families. However, once word got around that a party would be held, it was necessary to add the names of many of the neighbors and local dignitaries to the guest list.

The great barn was made ready for the festive occasion by the use of appropriate decorations that included very pretty Japanese lanterns. A huge sign with gold lettering was hung across the front of the building. It announced to all the world that the name of the spanking new building was Grand Hotel.

We suspect that the name was a reflection of B.O.’s feeling for a movie of that name that was very popular at the time.

The barn had several straight horse stalls and two box stalls. One of the box stalls was as large as most living rooms. There were also two straight stalls with stanchions for cows as well as a box stall for a cow that served as a maternity room on occasion.

There was still a large space for vehicles that were removed on that memorable evening in order to provide space for the guests to dance.

Mr. Chisolm certainly knew how to put on a party and he thought of just about everything that would make it a success. He had the large box stall transformed into a bandstand and even had a piano imported for Jim Bacchiochi to play.

The stall had ample room for Jim and the piano, Paul Waldarke and his sax, Gene Casagrande and his violin, Val Roberti and his trumpet, and me and my drums. A dance band performing in a horse's box stall was unique.

By now you must have recognized this as a rather unusual party. The manner in which the host greeted his guests was in keeping with the happy mood of the occasion. Mr. Chisolm stood in the doorway as the people arrived. He had a bottle of milk in one hand and a bottle of champagne in the other.

After greeting his guests and exchanging pleasantries, he would then ask “Which will you have, milk or champagne, they both cost me the same.”

At that time, one man was supposed to easily take care of 20 cows and at Wickopee Farm there were two men to care for two cows, so B.O.’s greeting can be considered to contain more truth than poetry.

As previously noted, B.O. Chisolm was a prolific writer and authored several books dealing with prison life and prison conditions in various parts of the world. Not all of his travels were made as an International Inspector of Prisons. He had a great love for his own country and did much traveling, especially through the western part of the U.S.

Many of his trips were recorded in book form and were detailed reports of the great open country. One little book that he gave me was entitled, “The Western Travelogue.” Once again I made the mistake of letting someone borrow it.

Mr. Chisolm's love for his country was equaled by his feeling for Ridgefield. He could always be counted on to contribute to or participate in any worthwhile endeavor that would benefit our town.

That house that now sits at 38 Peaceable Street is a lovely modern home. However, the great white mansion that previously stood on this site was a real classic and we feel bad that it is gone forever. It is especially sad that the young people of today will not have the opportunity of viewing the graceful architecture or the chance to enjoy its elegant atmosphere.

When Benjamin Ogden Chieolm passed away in the mid 40's, the George Doubleday family lived next door where Temple Shearith Israel is now. The Doubledays wasted no time in purchasing Wickopee Farm and some thought that they just wanted something to say about who would live next door. It was more than that, however, and Jimmy Doubleday, as was his wont, tore down the great white mansion. The present structure then served as a home for the senior Mrs. Doubleday.

One of my very early meetings with Mr. Chisolm might be of interest. I was just a lad when sent by Irving Conklin with my team, Kit and Lady, to plow a field that was a part of Wickopee Farm. It was a large field that ran almost the length of the south side of Bryon Avenue. The field is now overgrown with trees and was recently much in the news as a proposed development.

A very picturesque lane, which served as the back entrance to Wickopee Farm, passed through the center of the field. The nice gateway is still visible from Bryon Avenue [the old gate has been removed during development of the "Village Park" neighborhood].

Kit and Lady were a fine pair of black percheron mares that I had the pleasure of breaking and training. They were full sisters, just a year apart, and each had a white blaze from her ear to her nose. They were identical except that Lady weighed 1,450 pounds while Kit tipped the scales at 1,500.

Orders were to back furrow the field. This meant that rather than plow around the outer edges of the field and work toward the center, I must start in the center and plow out to the edges. The procedure was to first pace off the opposite side of the field and when the center was found, a marker, generally a handkerchief attached to a stick, was used to mark the exact center. The starting point was then found by pacing off the other side of the field.

When the exact center is found, the plow is placed in the ground and the team is headed for the fluttering handkerchief across the field. If the team keeps on a straight line, both outer edges of the field will be reached at the same time. Kit and Lady were so good at this that they could almost do this without guidance.

As I started across the field Mr. and Mrs. Chisolm rode into the lane behind me and stopped to watch. When I plowed back across the field, B.O. left his car and said to me, "Boy you sure plow a straight furrow."

That was one of the finest compliments that this boy had ever received. I in turn passed the kind words along to my horses.

#206: THE ARRIVAL OF THE BIDDLE SISTERS

The very nice house at 30 Peaceable Street has undergone several face lifting jobs in the last 65 years. The original owners probably would not recognize the house as it is today.

The place was once owned by the Beckwith family. The Beckwiths must have become wealthy from the large amount of land that they sold. on or around Peaceable Street.

Lucy S. Overton bought this particular place from Christine Beckwith in 1921. The mansion was built in the style of the times but through the years it did not stand the weather as well as it might have. Then it seems that the place was vacant for some time after the passing of the Overtons. By 1939 the house was empty and somewhat the worse for wear.

In the 40's and 50's, large places such as the Overtons' were going begging. They cost too much to keep up and people were looking for smaller homes. Somehow things got turned around and now the exact opposite seems to be true.

Several of these wonderful houses became in such a state of disrepair that it was necessary to tear them down and it was feared that this could be the fate of this fine old mansion. However, help was on the way in the form of three elderly but lovely sisters. Soon the old place would smile again.

In the early 1900's Edward R. and Harriet W. Biddle lived in an area of New Jersey that they felt was becoming a little too congested for them. They had four children — Harriet, Christine, Edna, and Henry W. — and they needed more room as they enjoyed the open spaces.

The Biddles were of an old and very prestigious American family and like so many others, while visiting friends in Ridgefield, they just fell in love with the town. It offered them the room they were looking for plus the natural beauty and charm and friendly atmosphere, much of which is still evident today.

The family was particularly interested in and attracted to a farm on Branchville Road. It is now the very impressive home of Ralph E. Ablon and his family at 306 Branchville Road.

In the year 1907, this farm belonged to Fred Studwell. Fred had acquired the place six years earlier from the estate of Ebenezer W. Keeler. Eben, a noted farmer and politician, had passed on right at the turn of the century.

Farming in Ridgefield was never considered the easiest way of making a living. In fact it was not unusual to find references to a farm family in which it is stated that they eked out a living. The soil was fertile enough but Ridgefield's hills and stones and ledges were a real impediment to those hardy souls that followed the agricultural route. There were fields that were level and devoid of ledges but they were the exception and most of the farms were a real challenge to the farmer.

Fred Studwell had six years in which he learned how difficult it was to operate a local farm. Following Eben Keeler was no easy task, for he was an extraordinary man. Keeler, of course, is an old Ridgefield name and Eben was a descendant of the original settlers, a family of which we have precious few left today.

Ebenezer Keeler approached the operation of his farm with the same tenacity of his forebears and he could make that farm work where others just could not make it go. This same rugged spirit must have spilled over into his political life.

Eben was elected first selectman of Ridgefield back in the days when it was necessary to elect a board of selectmen each and every year. He won in 1877 in 1878 and again in 1879. After losing in 1880 and in 1881, he came back to win in 1882, in 1883, and in 1884. He lost again in 1885 but came right back and was returned to office in 1886 and 1887.

Once again he lost in 1888 and by so doing missed the "pleasure" of serving the town during the great blizzard of that year. However, Eben stormed back to win in 1889 and again in 1890, truly a remarkable man. By the time he was elected for the last time, he was an old man and just a few years later passed on to his just reward.

Fred Studweil took over the operation of the farm in 1901 and put a great effort into making it work. However, he must have been overjoyed when, after six years of struggling, Edward Biddle appeared with a fistful of cash and he was freed of the hard life on the farm.

Mr. Biddle started at once to add to the acreage of the farm by purchasing land from Benjamin Corlies and the Greims family. He then had the presence of mind to engage the services of Edward Sweeney to supervise the farm activities.

The extensive acreage of the farm covered both the side where the nice mansion is now and the area across the highway [Branchville Road] where Nutmeg Ridge is today. The steep hill with the sweeping curve became known as Biddle's Hill and is still so called today.

In a blizzard in the 20's, my brother Jack was walking home from Branchville Station one night and as he neared the top of the hill, he felt something solid underfoot. It was a dark night but he swept away the snow and discovered that he was standing atop a New England bus. The bus had been used to replace the commuter train that brought passengers back and forth from Branchville Station. Fortunately, the passengers had been removed.

In 1939, the three Biddle sisters had tired of operating the large estate that their father had put together. In looking for a smaller place they came upon the Overton mansion and it seemed to be just what they wanted. After acquiring the place they engaged Nelson Breed, an outstanding architect from neighboring Wilton, and a smile returned to the face of the Overton house.

Cortland Emlaw was a retired New York fireman who lived on the lower end of Peaceable Street and he was engaged as chauffeur for the sisters. When Cort passed on the sisters drove themselves around town.

They were very active in church work for St. Stephen's as well as in the Garden Club. The sisters worked hard in supporting our armed services in both World War I and II. One of their favorite pastimes was instructing children in the proper care of a vegetable garden.

Ed Sweeney retired before the sisters moved to Peaceable Street and he was replaced by Edward Allan. Ed was a carpenter by trade and he made a scale model of the mansion as a mailbox. It was such an exact replica that people stopped to see and admire it. There was a trick to opening it and each new mailman had to learn it. Can't help but wonder how long the box would have lasted with the vandals of today to contend with.

#207: MAYNARD MANSION MYSTERY: THE STRANGE DISAPPEARING FAMILY

On our trip west. along Peaceable Street, we described the stately old homes and some of the people who lived on the south side of that lovely street. On our return trip we have told of the interesting people and the mansions on the north side of that street.

As we approach the corner of High Ridge Avenue and Peaceable Street, we arrive at one of the largest and one of the most imposing mansions in Ridgefield. It is doubtful that anyone could possibly drive by this place for the first time without slowing down for a closer look, stopping altogether or perhaps even turning around to drive by a second time.

The mere size of this "summer cottage" is enough to attract your attention. Its imposing entrance and the four, large, perfect, Corinthian columns present a fine example of the elegance that was Ridgefield in the early part of this century.

Effingham T. Maynard bought this choice comer property from the estate of J. Howard King in 1900. The story is that he then engaged the very famous architect, Stanford White, to design the great structure that would serve as a refuge during the summer months from the family's Lexington Avenue domicile.

White's participation in the construction of the mansion has never been confirmed, as far as we know. However, we feel that the net result was certainly worthy of his widely recognized ability.

The great mansion is now the home of Dr. John J . Benusis and his family. It is indeed fortunate that someone with his love for such a place and the ability and talent to care for it, came along at the right time.

There had been several owners since the last of the Maynards passed on some 30 years ago. The appearance of the place did not improve with age and with each new owner the large house seemed to be losing ground.

One family lived in the mansion only a short time and then, for reasons best known to themselves, took off for Europe. Their departure was rather strange, in that it was made very quickly, quietly, and without fanfare.

The family left their young daughter behind, apparently to take care of the place until their return. However, they never came back and no one that we know ever saw them again.

There were people who came to my office to inquire as to the whereabouts of these people. When the daughter came in to pick up the mail, we would ask where her parents were but she would never divulge her secret.

Then came the time when the daughter also disappeared and left several cats and dogs locked inside the building. Needless to say, the animals did nothing to improve the appearance — or the aroma — of the great house.

Eventually, it was necessary to have Deputy Sheriff Joseph McManus break down the door in order to release the very distraught household pets. They were in terrible condition, as a result of this very inhumane treatment.

The bank that held the mortgage on the property at 2 Peaceable Street spent a considerable amount of money in restoring the mansion and making it salable. Dr. Benusis provided the finishing touches that brought the cosmetics of the place back up to their present excellent condition.

Much of the acreage was sold off by one of the previous owners and smaller homes began to dot the landscape around the mansion. It was during this period that the superintendent’s cottage and the large garage were sold off separately from the estate. They are located on High Ridge Avenue and are both private residences today.

Parts of the great gardens at the rear of the mansion remain with the two acres that presently make up the Benusis estate. These gardens once featured many exotic shrubs and flowers as well as rows of pergolas for the Wisteria and other vines to climb on.

Although the Maynards were reputed to be millionaires many times over, they were never successfully accused of just throwing their money around. However, one area in which cost was no object was in providing the necessary ingredients that would produce a successful garden.

Back in their days they would think nothing of purchasing 65 tons of manure each year for topdressing the soil. The very rich, black earth on this place must have been at least two feet deep. The fertilizer was purchased from Irving B. Conklin Sr. and I was employed by Mr. Conklin at that time.

(Incidentally this may be a good time to correct a misconception that may have been gained through a picture that appeared with column 205. The picture was of a beautiful team of black mares and I was depicted as their owner, whereas they were actually owned by Irving Conklin. In a sense they were my team since I trained them and was their teamster. I would guess

that Kit and Lady were always referred to as my team, in much the same way that jockey Willie Shoemaker, after winning the Kentucky Derby, labeled Ferdinand as his horse.)

Kit and Lady did a lot of work around the Maynard estate. One of the many jobs they performed was the semi-annual moving of eight citrus trees to and from the porch of the mansion. They were lime, orange, and lemon trees and were quite decorative on the large porch.

The trees were growing out of boxes and were stored during the winter months in a greenhouse at the rear of the superintendent's cottage. The first time I was sent with Kit and Lady to move the trees was in the spring of 1933. The trees were so small that they could easily be carried by two men. They were placed on a stone boat for transportation to the mansion.

A stone boat, for those unfamiliar with that terminology, is like a very large toboggan. It is made of thick wooden planks and generally measures about four feet in width and ten feet in length. Since the device lies flat on the ground, it is relatively easy to lift heavy objects, either onto it or off of it. Even when heavily loaded, it slid fairly easy on the ground.

Like everything else on this place, the trees grew like "Topsy" and it was necessary to enlarge the boxes that held the trees several times. The last time that I moved the trees, they had increased in size to where the boxes measured four feet square and the trees were more than 12 feet in height. It now required eight men to lift them on or off the stone boat.

A large iron hook was placed on each side of the box and a long pole was threaded through the hooks. This allowed four men on each side to lift the trees. It was finally necessary to build a regular house for the trees.

#208: THE PATIENT CHAUFFEUR McKAY AND HIS LARGE-HATTED LADIES

There was a considerable expense incurred in the moving of the eight large trees from their winter storage to the lengthy porch of the Maynard mansion and returning them in the fall to their hibernating quarters. It was, however, an expense that did not in the very least disturb Effingham Maynard's daughters, Mary H. and Helen L. Maynard.

There were also two sons who shared in the great estate left by the senior Maynard but there was plenty enough to go around.

The two sisters never married and to them was left the responsibility of maintaining the home on Lexington Avenue and the "summer cottage" on the corner of High Ridge and Peeeeeble Street. Even though it was also necessary to rebuild the storehouse several times to accommodate the rapid growth of the trees, the two venerable ladies were never heard to complain about the cost. This building still stands [but not in 2022], along with the greenhouse, at the rear of what was the superintendent's cottage at 121 High Ridge Avenue. As far as we know, it was the final resting place for the citrus trees.

We are not sure what happened to the trees after Mary and Helen passed on. However, it would be safe to say that if they were sold at a price that would reflect the cost of the many times the trees were repotted and the several occasions on which the storage building was enlarged, plus their semi-annual trips, back and forth, they would have ranked with the most expensive trees ever.

During the spring, summer and fall, the great gardens produced an abundance of very beautiful flowers. Many samplings of these flowers were exhibited and won prizes at the flower shows.

During the winter months the greenhouse flourished under the guiding hand of Charles Coles and several times each week, he would ship bundles of flowers to the Lexington Avenue address of the family. In those days it was possible to ship perishable products by express from

the freight house that still stands in the freight yards. The building now houses a woodworking shop. The service was excellent and if produce were shipped by 9:30 in the morning, it would be delivered in New York City in the afternoon.

Whereas the cost of caring for the trees and flowers was of little or no consequence to the Maynard sisters, they were considerably more conservative in other areas. They always had a houseful of maids who worked very hard for a dollar a day and their keep. When one of their employees married, the lucky couple could expect to receive all of $5 as a wedding gift.

It should be noted that fifty years ago, the sisters were considered to be millionaires several times over. One can only guess what their fortune would have amounted to by today's standards.

The great mansion was not only impressive to anyone who approached its front entrance, it was even more so when one entered the massive entrance hall. Not only was the entrance hall huge, but it also separated two enormous rooms. On one side was the very formal dining room and on the other an equally large ballroom. We do not recall this great expanse ever being utilized for anything as frivolous as dancing but it could easily have accommodated several hundred people.

It is our understanding that the gold bathroom fixtures have long since been removed by some previous owner and the old-fashioned furnaces have given way to a modern heating system. However, the rest of this very beautiful building is pretty much as it was during the glory days.

Daniel McKay had been the coachman for Effingham Maynard and when the Maynards were in Ridgefield, Dan and his wife lived over the stables in a very nice apartment. This building, which later became the garage, is now the home of Edward Kruelski and his family at 125 High Ridge Avenue.

With the advent of the automobile, it was necessary for Dan to bite the bullet and agree to learn to operate the infernal machine. An expert was sent to show Dan how to drive and how to repair the family's first auto, a Pope Hartford. Dan proved to be an apt pupil and he quickly, though reluctantly, learned to master the vehicle.

The Maynard's fleet of automobiles at one time consisted of an enormous Pierce-Arrow touring car and a Brewster limousine. The Pierce-Arrow was not only large, it was also high. You did not climb into it, you climbed up on it.

When the sisters went out for their afternoon ride, it was really something to see. The canvas top was carefully folded back and the ladies in their traditional black dresses with white collars and large hats, secured by scarves, were perched ori the rear seat.

They always looked straight ahead and I always had the feeling that they really did not get to see much of the countryside. That was their style and you can be sure that they never deviated from it, not in the least. It would be fair to say that the two Maynard sisters were graphic examples of the very essence of Victorian fashions.

One story is that when on one of their afternoon rides through the countryside, they traveled up Barrack Hill Road. As usual the top of the old Pieree-Arrow was down and the two elegant ladies were elevated on the lofty rear seat.

Whereas the heads of the ladies extended into the rarefied atmosphere, a low hanging tree limb showed little respect for the dignified passengers in the open car. Helen Maynard's great hat was torn from her head and landed unceremoniously on the roadside. The scarf that was to have held the hat in place landed nearby.

Hardly a greater tragedy could have occurred. Fortunately the group had almost reached The Port of Missing Men. The hat was so badly damaged as to render it beyond repair and there was just no way that the lady would allow herself to be seen on High Ridge Avenue without the protection of a hat. Therefore the sisters waited at the inn while Dan MacKay made the long trip back to Peaceable Street to procure a replacement hat.

Dan McKay was a big man who was possessed of a great sense of humor. That humor Would stand him in good stead in handling the many little idiosyncrasies he would encounter as a chauffeur for the Maynard sisters.

It was necessary for Dan to make many tripe to New York City for Helen and Mary Maynard liked to do their shopping in the large stores along Fifth Avenue. On such trips Dan had to contend with the horrendous city traffic as well as the many instructions he would receive from the rear seat of his vehicle.

It was not unusual when traveling south on one of the busy streets to be told to turn around and go north. The ladies did not mean go to the next corner and turn, they meant for Dan to turn right there in the middle of the block. This caused complications that were solved only through Dan's friendship with many of the policemen.

Dan always did as he was told and when he received orders to polish the cars every day, that is exactly what he did. Through the years, the paint started to disappear but the ladies did not seem to notice.

#209: THE SISTERS WANTED CHAINS IN SUMMER

So Daniel McKay served a number of years as the Coachman for Effingham Maynard and his family. He was also destined to serve many more years as chauffeur for Effingham's daughters, Helen and Mary Maynard.

His total years of service to the family were in excess of 50 and when he finally retired, the sisters showed their fondness for Dan by presenting him with the old Pierce-Arrow.

The great car, almost devoid of paint from the daily polishing it received, would be a collector's item today. Moat autos had headlights that were a little less than three feet apart. Those familiar with the great Pierce-Arrows will remember that they were one of the first to have their headlights embedded wide apart in each front fender.

The McKays spent their declining years at 5 Mary's Lane, now the home of Jack and Jeanette Jones. Fortunately there was a large barn in which to keep the grand old car with its right hand drive and outside shifting levers. We can't help but feel that Dan missed having on the back seat, the very sedate sisters, in their black dresses and white collars.

Dan's successor was chosen with great care and considerable screening by the Maynard sisters. The one selected turned out to be Richard Fleming.

Dick was a very experienced chauffeur who had spent several years driving his wealthy employers in and around New York City. He could properly be called a picture chauffeur and when dressed in his natty uniform with its shiny visor, you just knew he was something special.

When smoking, Dick always used a cigarette holder and when asked why, he always answered that his doctor had told him to stay away from tobacco.

Dick and Mrs. Fleming, and their children Mary, Florence, and Richard Jr., moved into the garage apartment at 125 High Ridge Avenue. The children always looked forward to coming to Ridgefield each summer as they had established firm friendships with other children in the neighborhood.

We are sorry to report that Richard Jr. has passed on but Mary lives in New Milford and Florence, who married Freddy Leary, still lives in Danbury.

Along with the new chauffeur came a brand new Lincoln touring car to replace the Pierce-Arrow that had been retired along with Dan McKay. The Lincoln was not nearly as large as its predecessor and its height was considerably less. This made for much safer passage under the low hanging tree limbs, when the sisters rode with the top down.

A new limousine was soon added to the Maynard fleet and it was elegant to behold. The rear seats, with their camel hair covers, were completely enclosed but the front seat was entirely open, although a thin leather cover was available and could be attached over the driver's head in inclement weather. There were no side curtains so the driver was pretty much exposed.

On a wall inside the garage that separated the auto storage area from the old horse stables there was a picture of a beautiful ship. The picture must have been four feet in width and at least six feet long. It was in full color and the golden lettering on the bow of the great ship proclaimed it to be the Leviathan.

It was considered the largest ship afloat at that time. I can remember Dick Fleming telling me that a chef on this very famous ship was none other than John Scala (Bob's father).

John, for many years, was the chef at Ridgefield's famous Outpost Inn, where the Fox Hill complex is now. The Outpost Inn was considered one of the very finest restaurants in the entire country.

John was not only a master at preparing culinary delights, he was also an expert sculptor. We remember a Lion's Club Ladies Night at which our band played many years ago. As dessert was about to be served, the doors of the kitchen swung wide as a large table on wheels was pushed into the dining room. On the table was a huge block of ice that John had carved into a large lion.

There was terrific applause and it continued until John Scala came into the dining room to accept his accolades. When it became known that John possessed such talent at sculpturing, he was called on many times to perform.

At the time that the Fleming family came to Ridgefield, there were a number of wealthy families that had their own chauffeurs. They formed a nice organization and were quite active until World War II when their numbers began to decline.

One of their social events was the annual chauffeur's ball and it was a very well attended affair. Some very good stories, mostly about their employers, were exchanged at their monthly meetings.

The retired Daniel McKay and the new chauffeur Richard Fleming were both first-class gentlemen. They were, however, of entirely different temperament. Dan was of the old school that obeyed all orders, no matter how ridiculous they might seem. Dick, on the other hand, had a mind of his own and never hesitated to make a stand on an issue.

The Maynard sisters were very safety conscious and possessed of a great sense of self-preservation. Their driver must exercise extreme caution whenever they traveled by automobile.

When Dan McKay was driving and it started to rain, he was ordered to put on the skid chains. This was true, even on the hottest summer day. Dan always complied without question, much to the amusement of the other chauffeurs.

Dick Fleming had not been on the job long before Helen and Mary scheduled a trip to New York City. The weather was threatening and as Dick brought the limousine to a stop at the entrance to Lord and Taylor's, it had started to rain. As the ladies prepared to dismount, Dick was

instructed to return for them at 3 p.m., and then came the order to put on the chains before returning.

Dick was not sure that he was hearing correctly so the order was not only repeated but a tag line was added, “and don’t come back without them.” Before climbing back into the driver's seat, Dick replied, “I will be back at 3 p.m., but do not expect this car to have chains on."

The rain prevented further discussion of the matter and it was still raining when 3 pm. came around and the limousine rolled to a stop at the entrance of the great store. When the sisters saw that there were no chains on their car, they began to vent their displeasure on the harried driver.

Dick stood his ground, however, and said, “You can take your pick between me and the chains.” Then he added, “If this car goes back to Ridgefield with chains on, someone else will put them on and someone else will be driving it."

Helen and Mary Maynard were not accustomed to having their wishes questioned. However, after a quick conference and without another word, they climbed into the rear seat for a very quiet ride home.

That was the last time the order for chains was ever given.

#210: WHAT THE OLD-TIMERS USED TO SAY

As a young fellow, I always enjoyed listening to older people. There were times when their sayings were rather frivolous and others when it was felt that they contained the wisdom of the ages. Through the years, many of the axioms uttered by these people were just salted away, only to resurface later on in life when something happened that reminded me of their origin.

One time Howland Adams came over from South Salem to help fill the silos at Irving Conklln’s farm with corn silage. It was heavy work and the days were long.

Howland put away a tremendous breakfast and we asked him why he would eat so much. We always thought his answer was a classic when he replied, “When you have hard work to do, you better pour on the coal because you just can’t get up steam with feathers.”

When ordering a drink one time, Bill Winthrop asked that it be on the rocks and then as an afterthought added, “I just don’t like to drink a lot of water to get a little tea.”

Fleet Sperry, when asked one time what formula he used in the purchase of a horse, proceeded to recite a little verse,

One white hoof try.
Two white hoofs buy,
Three white hoofs are worth a gamble,
Four white hoofs and a white nose,
take off his hide and feed him to crows.

We never quite believed Fleet’s little poem as one of the finest horses we knew had four white boots and a white nose.

Tom Kehoe always said, “Buy a big team because they can do big jobs and little jobs, whereas a small team can only do the small jobs.”

Harry Thomas used to say that “a nervous horse is like a nervous man, they are the ones that can get the job done.”

“You can’t make a silk purse out of a sow's ear,” was one of Irving Conklin’s favorite expressions when evaluating someone who did not measure up.

He had a lot of such sayings and I once heard him say, “You should always wave to a man pushing a wheelbarrow or carrying two pails of water.” This saying did not mean very much to me at the time, but several years later it suddenly came back to me.

The Maynards employed extra help during spring; summer and fall to assist Charles Coles in the operation of their Ridgefield estate. Where they spent the winter months, I don’t know but each spring Patrick Harmon and Michael Kiley would appear, as if by magic. Perhaps this sounds like the start of a Pat and Mike joke but it is not intended that way. Pat was a rather quiet little fellow while Mike was a big burly man, with a hale and hearty personality.

In those days, it was the custom, when passing by with a horse or a team, to wave to anyone that you might meet along the way. If you happened to be riding in an auto, a gentle beep of the horn would serve the same purpose. It was a friendly habit in a friendly town where everyone knew most everyone else.

On this particular day I was returning to the Conklin farm with my team Kit and Lady. As I came down High Ridge and crossed Peaceable Street, Mike Kiley could be seen pushing a wheelbarrow that was loaded with geraniums. My wave to Mike was just automatic, without thought of the results.

It was Mike’s habit to return such a greeting with a vigorous wave that culminated in a rather militaristic salute. As he dipped one hand and then the other, the wheelbarrow started to weave erratically. It was then that I recalled Irv Conklin’s admonishment, “Always wave to a man with a wheelbarrow or two pails of water.”

The wheelbarrow came crashing to the ground as Mike went into his very elaborate saluting routine. I am afraid that some of the geraniums were a little the worse for the jostling they received.

The results were pretty much the same when I waved to Dick Bennett one time, as he carried two pails of water to the flower beds on the Malcomb S. Wilson estate on Main Street. This place is now the home of Attorney Richard J. Fricke.

On this occasion Kit and Lady were on a trot so Dick did not have very much time to return my wave, though being an old friend he felt obligated to do so. He first started to put down the pail in his left hand and then the one in his right. The result was that both pails descended with a great splash. Dick and I had many a laugh over this little incident.

One of the several jobs that we performed on the Maynard estate was gathering the hay in the orchard and on the lot just west of the mansion. This lot has since become the site on which the W. Parker Dwelley family now resides at 20 Peaceable Street.

I mowed the tall grass with my team and later when it was cured, Irving Conklin came with his team and a Yankee dump rake to put it in windrows. He was driving a young team of palominos, Ginger and Minny.

They were perfectly matched and with their light manes and tails and sleek, shiny golden hides, they made a beautiful picture. Ginger, as her name suggests, was a very spirited animal and Minny was also very full of life.

It was late in the afternoon of a broiling summer’s day and the horses had been working quite hard all day. Suddenly Minny started to lag behind and it was obvious something was bothering her. They were allowed to rest in the shade before starting the trip back to the stable but on the way home Minny again showed definite signs of fatigue.

By the time they reached the stable the mere was so lethargic, Mr. Conklin felt it necessary to call a veterinarian. There were two fine vets in Danbury and since Dr. Knapp was

out on a call, Irv got Dr. Keresy to come and he arrived in less than a half hour. He pronounced the ailment as being sunstroke and said that he would need a bottle of gin to rub on the horse.

Prohibition had just been repealed and the first liquor store in town was in what is now Barry Finch's building at 426 Main Street. I was dispatched to get the necessary ingredient but alas, I was not quite old enough to be able to make the purchase.

There began a considerable negotiating session and finally I was able to convince Jimmy that the gin was for a very sick horse.

On my return to the farm the gin was handed to Dr. Keresy who immediately removed the top from the bottle, took a big drink and then rubbed the bottle on the side of the mare. He then repeated the procedure several times and it became obvious that I had been taken.

Then the old doctor prescribed a straw hat for the horse. Holes were cut for the horse's ears and a wet sponge was placed under the hat.

The second treatment proved to be quite effective and the fine mare was back to work the next day, but she was used sparingly.

#211: PEA-COUNTING MAYNARDS AND TAVERN-SAVING CITIZENS

We have been describing the Maynard estate and some of the interesting people that were associated with it. Column 210 was to have been the last of the Maynard story but then two things happened.

First, I met Mrs. John E. Davis the other day. Mrs. Davis is a long-time summer resident of Ridgefield and was a friend of Helen and Mary Maynard. She has some real good stories about the sisters and I encouraged her to write them and submit them for publication.

The second thing that happened was a chance conversation on the golf course with a gentleman who lived and actually grew up on the Maynard estate. This gave him first-hand knowledge of these interesting people.

Charlie concurred in my opinion that the Maynard place had the richest soil in town. He even went further. While I felt that the black topsoil was about two feet deep, Charlie said that it was at least twice that deep. One thing we both agreed on was that the soil was so rich you needed only to throw out the seeds and then watch as everything sprouted up.

Charlie remembered the large citrus trees that we moved every spring and fall to and from the porches of the mansion. It is his belief that after the sisters died the trees were left in the storage house that was built especially for them and still stands at 121 High Ridge Avenue [it was recently razed]. The trees were just allowed to die as no one could afford to care for them as the Maynards did.

We talked about the great wealth of the Maynard sisters and Charlie said that he had personally witnessed several incidents that graphically illustrated their innate ability to preserve that great wealth.

He told of the methods they employed to make sure that vegetables grown on the place would not stray to tables other than their own. Tomatoes, beets, carrots, and onions were all counted and recorded, even though their numbers far exceeded what they could have possibly consumed.

The oddest thing was the manner in which the peas were harvested. Instead of merely counting the pods the sisters insisted that the pods be opened and each pea counted.

Vegetables were not the only foodstuffs that were doled out for use by the cook. An excellent set of scales was installed in the kitchen and each morning the amount of sugar and flour was carefully weighed for the day and dutifully recorded.

Perhaps the greatest example of the sisters' ability to protect their properties was the method they practiced in controlling the use of their liquid assets. And by this I do not mean watered stock. Although Helen and Mary were well-known Prohibitionists, Charlie said they always kept at least 2,000 bottles of liquor, wine and liqueur in their tremendous wine cellar that he said looked just like one of today's liquor stores.

When Helen and Mary moved each spring, from their Lexington Avenue home in New York City to their "summer cottage" in Ridgefield, it was the duty of Charlie's father and a helper to count and record each bottle as it was removed from the New York wine cellar. Several trips had to be made in order to transport this deluge of medicinal liquid to the arsenal on the corner of High Ridge and Peaceable Street.

The counting was repeated, under the watchful scrutiny of the sisters, when the precious cargo arrived in Ridgefield. The entire operation took the better part of two days. The same ritual was repeated in the fall when all the liquor had to be returned to the city.

It is not known how much was dispensed at either location, but should a drink be served to some lucky guest from the well-protected cache, a ruler was brought forth and after measurements were taken a mark and the date were inscribed on the side of the bottle. You can just bet that the Maynards were never accused of hosting a wild party.

Keeler Tavern

On another trend it just does not seem possible that 20 years have passed since a group of fine, civic-minded citizens joined together to form The Keeler Tavern Preservation Society. Just some, but not all of them were: Mrs. Richard L. Jackson, Mr. and Mrs. William Phillips, Paul and Kathryn Rosa, Daniel and Louise McKeon, and of course the late Francis D. Martin.

The ultimate goal of these dedicated people was the purchase and the restoration of Ridgefield's famous and most historic landmark. At the time, the place belonged to Vernon and Glenna Welsh, who had moved here from Pound Ridge several years previously.

Vernon Welsh was president of General Dynamics and he and Glenna had a yen for historic places. Glenna later wrote *The Proprietors of Ridgefield* after exhaustive research on the subject.

When they purchased the old tavern, the Welshes felt they were getting the oldest house in Ridgefield. It was a few years later that they discovered that the Hauley house further north on Main Street was actually the oldest.

Eventually the house that was originally built for the Rev. Thomas Hauley was put up for sale and the Welsh family bought it and their goal had been reached.

This made the Keeler Tavern available and there was genuine concern about the future of that historic old structure. Since there was considerable property connected with the tavern, there was fear that the place could become a development and even that the building itself might be altered. The fears were for naught since the Welsh family would make sure that the tavern would go to someone who would preserve it.

The Keeler Tavern Preservation Society lost no time in contacting the Welsh family and soon negotiations were underway.

Somehow these people were able to secure the financing and it just seemed to follow — and appropriately so — that the date set for the transfer would be July 4, 1966. It was felt that such a momentous occasion should be something to remember and the society set about planning an elaborate program for the day.

The tavern had been known for many years as the "Cannon Ball House." Of course, as everyone knows, there is a cannon ball embedded in the north side of the building and that it

lodged there after being shot from a cannon by the British during the Battle of Ridgefield April 27, 1777.

Someone on the committee preparing for the July 4th affair came up with the idea that it would be nice to have a little pageant depicting the battle. Somehow I was selected to write the script and stage the affair.

#212: REMEMBERING 1966 BATTLE REENACTMENT

So the 4th of July this year was just cause for all freedom-loving people to celebrate the 100th birthday of the great lady in New York harbor. It also marked the 20th anniversary of the founding of the Keeler Tavern Preservation Society and this important event was appropriately observed at the tavern.

More than 200 people attended the festivities, during which there were two showings of the movies that depicted the first reenactment of the Battle of Ridgefield. The films were taken by the late Russell Fairbanks, who had been a photographer at the Nuremberg trials. Russ's idea was to record the proceedings for posterity and when he gave me the films, he asked only that they be shown as often as possible.

Those who observed the showings on the 4th will attest that Russ's wishes have been followed, as the film has been shown so many times that it has become quite brittle and is much the worse for wear.

At any rate, it might be interesting to give an account of how the first reenactment of the Battle of Ridgefield actually came about. The purpose of the event was to commemorate the transfer of ownership of historic Keeler Tavern from Vernon and Glenna Welsh to the newly formed Keeler Tavern Preservation Society.

It should be noted that I was taken by complete surprise when asked to write and stage a suitable tableau that would be performed in front of the tavern. Frankly, it was a challenge that I was not completely prepared for and it took some time for me to adjust to the task.

Writing the script for the affair was not a real problem for history was my long suit and the facts concerning that exciting and fiercely fought engagement were readily available. However, staging the affair was something else as it required the cooperation of an awful lot of people.

The local service clubs, as well as local fraternal societies, were canvassed in the hope that they would provide the necessary participants. In our recruiting efforts it was quickly noticeable that some were very enthusiastic about being a part of the action, while others offered to help but shied away from any active participation in the battle itself.

Then there was great difficulty in acquiring authentic muskets that would provide the necessary realistic flavor. This was before the forming of the Fifth Continental here in Ridgefield. Word of the impending battle was spread over a large area and slowly but surely someone would come forward with an ancient firing piece and a source of black powder with which to fire it.

Tim and Elisha Keeler were among the first to volunteer. They were both so very important. They had muskets and they knew of others who had muskets. Of equal importance to me was the fact that the Keeler brothers were descendants of Timothy Keeler, who owned and operated the famous old tavern which was the cause of all this activity.

The original Tim Keeler was also Ridgefield's fourth postmaster, when the office was located in the tavern. He also participated, with the patriots on our Main Street, in what would come to be the only inland battle fought in the State of Connecticut during the entire War for

Independence. We felt that the participation of the Keeler boys in the reenactment of the famous battle, in which their ancestor played an important part almost 200 years earlier, provided us with the necessary momentum.

Soon Don Ruehl, Dick Godbout, Buck Argenio, Dick Scala, Frank Provino, Wayne Rohinson, and many others, some of whom we never learned the names of, came forward for front-line duty. One of great importance was Dexter Street. It was obvious at once that Dexter had theatrical ability and he proved to be invaluable in assisting with the direction of the affair.

We needed a horse for General Silliman and when David Tarsi came forward and offered his mahogany bay, it was not only accepted but David was awarded the part of the great general who at the time of the battle was Commander-in-Chief of the Connecticut Militia.

Finding someone to play the part of Benedict Arnold was not so simple. There were two reasons for this. First there was a reluctance to be the one who would personify the treasonous general. Then it had to be considered that if the staging was to be authentic, Arnold's horse must be shot from under him.

Once we assured Jim Hackert that we had no intention of destroying his fine saddle horse, he accepted the role. Jim then performed valiantly in the exciting battle, while astride his very nervous gray horse. As a matter of fact, Jim's noble steed probably traveled further in reverse that day than he did forward. It just seemed to be that every time the horse whirled around, he found something that would cause him to back up. Perhaps the horse was aware of the overwhelming odds which would negate a charge against the superior forces of the invaders.

Things were shaping up well for assembling a group of patriots, but it was still necessary to furnish them with red-coated opponents. In acquiring uniforms for the participating troops, we visited the very cooperative Scott Fanton Museum in Danbury. At the museum this problem was discussed and it was suggested that we contact Bob Morris in New Milford.

This turned out to be a most valuable suggestion and Bob was one of our very best discoveries. He not only had a number of red-coated supporters but of most importance, the group owned a little cannon of ancient vintage and it was just the size of the canon from which the ball was fired that is still lodged in the side of the Keeler Tavern.

Incidentally, for many years most people referred to the venerable old building as The Canon Bali House. Some old-timers still call it that.

When the cast of characters was complete, it was necessary to turn our attention to acquiring various props that would add to the entertainment which we were charged with providing. The script called for transporting lead from the northern part of town to the tavern, where it would be made into musket balls.

Joe Young had offered to drive his pretty team of strawberry roans but he did not have a suitable carriage to use for this purpose. Since the intent was to deceive the British into believing that Timothy and Mrs. Keeler were just out for a ride, the vehicle must be of fancy design rather than one that might be used for transporting freight. A search was then conducted for a suitable vehicle.

More about that next week.

#213: TIME FOR BATTLE APPROACHES

As previously reported, a search for a suitable carriage that would carry tavern-keeper Tim Keeler and Mrs. Keeler was conducted over a wide area. Those who owned such a vehicle felt that it was their most prized possession and their reluctance to part with it was intensified when they learned that it would be a part of a battle scene. So the search continued.

In the meantime, interest in the reenactment of the Battle of Ridgefield continued to mount. By the end of June 1966 enlistments had reached a point where the use of a draft was considered unnecessary. Joining those who had already signed up for front line duty were, Peter Smith, Joe Pinchbeck, Otto Jespersen, Roy Deeks, Roger Deeks, Gordon Plummer, Vern Robinson, Durrel Titus, Art McKenna, Bill Church, Glen Moore, and Roger Beal.

The ranks of the continentals had increased so rapidly that they now outnumbered the British. This would never do, for as everyone knows, in the actual battle which took place April 27, 1777, it was the British who had the overwhelming forces. Therefore, in order to make the pageant authentic, more redcoats were procured and we loaned some of the patriots to the invaders.

Dick Scala and Pete Smith were among those who went over to General Tryon's forces and they paid the penalty as both were wounded in the ensuing battle.

A break in the search for an appropriate carriage occurred when we remembered a beauty that was part of a collection at the Great Danbury Fair. The only problem was that it was owned by John Leahy who operated the fair for so many years and John was not about to part with his precious surrey for even one day.

John quickly raised the question of insurance should his priceless vehicle be damaged in any way. After considerable discussion, a written agreement seemed to have overcome this obstacle. Then there was the question of transportation and we countered with the fact that Francis Martin had a truck that was available for this purpose.

By now we felt that the negotiations were equivalent to borrowing the QE II for a cruise on the Hudson. However, John Leahy was himself a showman and it was to this trait that we appealed, feeling that he could not resist the opportunity to be a part of this colorful tableau. At last John's more benevolent side surfaced and before he could change his mind, Steve Martin and I, in his grandfather's truck, were at the Fairgrounds where we quickly loaded the prized vehicle and headed for Ridgefield.

Things were rapidly falling into place and some practice sessions were held in order that the participants would be familiar with their roles. My goal was to synchronize the action with my script that would be read as the battle unfolded. Nello Ciuccoli had graciously consented to furnish a fine public address system in order that those assembled on Main Street could hear, as well as see an important part of Ridgefield's history reenacted.

It occurred to us that people in the surrounding areas, as well as shut-ins, might enjoy listening to the script and the sounds of battle as the action moved south on Main Street. Paul Baker at WLAD in Danbury was very enthusiastic about the idea of broadcasting the event. Sponsors for the broadcast were needed and Craig's Jewelry, Bedient's Hardware, King Neptune, and the Ridgefield Savings Bank came forward quickly.

Paul brought Ralph Lowenstein with him to do the narration and Ralph did a real professional job. Paul later gave me a copy of the tape of the affair and it is one of my prized possessions.

It was felt that these activities should be recorded on movie film for posterity and Russ Fairbanks stepped forward to do this for us. Russ had been the photographer at the Nuremberg Trials and, as expected, he did a fine job. When Russ had the film developed he made me a present of it and it has been shown many times. Most recently I showed the film and played the tape a couple of weeks ago on July 4th and on the 20th anniversary of the reenactment at the Keeler Tavern, as it was also the anniversary of the ownership of the famous old building passing over to the Keeler Tavern Preservation Society.

A dress rehearsal was held in the parking area at the Methodist Church on the night before the big show. Two fellows showed up that I had never seen before, nor have I ever seen them since the battle. One wore a very elaborate buckskin suit with long tendrils of leather streaming from arms and legs of the outfit. He also brought with him a very expensive musket and proved the next day that he was a crack shot as he mowed down the invaders. Really wish that I had gotten to know him, he was a good actor.

The other new volunteer was a young fellow who had heard that a patriot was shot from the roof of the tavern during the battle. This story has never been substantiated, as far as I know. However, this daring young man expressed a keen desire to act out this part. We quickly objected to anything of this kind taking place as our insurance would not cover such an act.

The British contingent arrived for the dress rehearsal and brought their little cannon along with them. When it was unloaded it was discovered that the iron tire on one of its wooden wheels had become disengaged from the wheel. The tire would not stay on the wheel and without its protection the wheel itself would fall apart if it were wheeled out onto the street.

This upset Dexter Street no end, as an important part of the proceedings was the firing of the cannon to simulate the actual firing on the tavern, during which the ball was lodged in its side almost 200 years before.

We had. encountered a similar situation many years ago and asked that someone procure a child's portable swimming pool. It just so happened that Richard Mitchell had one for his children and after we filled it with water, the wheel with the tire in place was lowered into the water. We assured Dexter that the wheel would be as good as new in the morning and sure enough during the night the wood swelled up and was encased firmly under the iron tire.

The script called for all the church bells to ring at 11 o'clock the next morning, to signal the approach of the British. Following that, little Dane Kyeor would appear riding his gray pony, Cinders. Dane would be carrying messages from the north end of town to Generals Silliman and Arnold who with their troops were awaiting the arrival of General Tryon and his redcoats.

General Wooster had already been fatally wounded on North Salem Road. General Silliman had come through the night from his home in Fairfield and General Arnold had made a forced march all the way from New Haven.

#214: DESPITE PROBLEMS, THE BATTLE SUCCEEDS

At exactly 11 o'clock on the morning of July 4, 1966, the church bells in Ridgefield began to ring. They were heralding the approach of British forces under the command of General William Tryon.

Shortly, a group of Continental troops, commanded by General Gold S. Silliman, would engage the Redcoats in a simulation of the actual battle that took place on Ridgefield's Main Street, April 27, 1777. The original battle would be the only actual land battle to be fought in the State of Connecticut during the War For Independence.

There were two brigades of British troops, each numbering about 2,000 Redcoats while the Continentals were composed of some 400 patriots. The numbers of those engaged were somewhat less almost 200 years later.

It seemed that exhaustive preparations had paid off and everything was in readiness for the reenactment of the famous battle. However, there are those times when the best-laid plans go awry.

An important part of the tableau would be the firing of the little cannon by the Redcoats. To fire it, after the powder was placed in the muzzle, it was necessary to put dampened papers on top of the powder and tamp it in tightly. The man entrusted with providing the paper had forgot to bring it with him.

A hurried and frantic search of the neighborhood was conducted and I finally found some newspapers in a garbage can beneath the back porch of the Hawley house, which was the home of the Vernon Welsh family at the time. As I ran back to the parking lot at the Methodist Church where the British were waiting for the signal to appear on Main Street. Joe Young with his team and carriage were encountered at the intersection of King Lane and Main Street.

Joe was in a very precarious position as the traces on one of his horses had become disengaged from the whipple tree. The situation quickly became more serious as the horses were not accustomed to all this excitement and they became so nervous that Joe was unable to leave the carriage to make the necessary repairs.

Naturally he was very concerned about the safety of his very important passengers, Francis Martin and Cynthia Cleveland. Joe was greatly relieved when he saw me crossing the street. The bundle of newspapers was quickly passed to someone else and I managed to rehitch the horse without further incident.

When Joe had regained his composure, he started his team down the street to the Keeler Tavern with Marty and Cynthia in authentic colonial garb waving to the crowd that now numbered about 3,000. This all made a beautiful picture and the crowd responded with a terrific ovation. Once the lead that was carried in the carriage was safely delivered to the Tavern, we were ready to start the battle.

Just as the sound of the British muskets was heard from the north, Dane Kysor came galloping down the street on his gray pony, "Cinder." Now that Dane had delivered his report on the advancing enemy to the Continentals who had formed near the War Memorial at the intersection of Branchville Road, the battle began in earnest.

Soon there were wounded soldiers, both British and American, lying along the roadside. One of the patriots, in the person of Buck Argenio, was draped across the sign marking the office of Dr. Mead. When later he was asked why he picked that spot to land, Buck said that he thought he should cover the sign as it was not there in 1777.

Mrs. Robert Coller, Kathryn Rosa, Louise McKeon, Marge McKenna, Sheila Rideout, and Mrs. Macy Willets served as nurses and they were kept busy tending the wounded with bandages that had been previously treated with red ink. It began to look very real as one soldier after another fell and had to be carried from the field of battle. To their great credit, the kind nurses gave equal treatment to both friend and foe.

Our friend in the buckskin suit was observed kneeling and taking careful aim in the middle of the street. It was said that he never wasted a shot but hit his target every time.

An interesting story about one of the participants in the actual battle recently appeared. He was William Edmond, after whom the town hall in Newtown was named.

At the time of the Battle, William had been a student at Yale but dropped out to join the Continental Army. William was 22 when he was wounded on our Main Street. A musket ball shattered his knee and such a wound must have been very difficult to treat, with the knowledge and meager equipment that was available at the time. He spent months at the home of Dr. Perry, a Woodbury physician, and after a year the wound became even worse.

Dr. Perry called for a consultation of surgeons and they decided that amputation above the knee was necessary. William Edmond did not concur in this opinion and said that if he must die, he would die whole.

The doctors retired to attend a meeting and during their absence William had a servant bring some surgeon's tools to his bedside. While confined the courageous young man had studied anatomy and was confident he could perform the operation himself. He made the incisions to the bone with his own hand and removed the splintered bone and the diseased portions and after cleansing the wound he replaced the flesh and bandaged his leg. The doctors on their return were very much surprised that the operation was successful.

William returned to Yale and graduated. He became a lawyer, was a member of the Connecticut General Assembly, and later a Representative to Congress. It should be noted that he lived to the ripe age of 83.

Back to the reenactment. The great crowd was very well behaved and John Haight Jr. and Sgt. Ronald Molles with Bill Church's assistance handled the situation very well.

John Haight Sr., who was then our chief of police, was on the porch of the tavern when General Tryon rode his horse up the sidewalk in front of the tavern. Tryon was brandishing his sword as he rode after the retreating Continentals.

At this point the fellow — who unbeknownst to us had practiced falling from the porch roof — came crashing down and landed between two large stones. His face looked very white and the chief shouted, "I knew that fool with the sword would hurt somebody. Call the ambulance."

With that, the fellow blinked his eyes and scrambled to his feet, much to the surprise of everyone.

An unperturbed Mrs. Van Allen Shields sat nearby and got a big kick out of it and she was then in her 96th year. It seemed a very fitting climax to a very exciting tableau on a very hot July 4th.

#215: THE ONLY HOUSE ON KING LANE

We were in the process of telling about the mansions along Peaceable Street and some of the interesting people who lived in them. Somehow, we got sidetracked into describing the first reenactment of the Battle of Ridgefield, as it was staged on Main Street 20 years ago. Our trip along that very aptly named street had just about been completed with the telling of the story about the Maynard sisters and their beautiful estate.

There is one more house, although it does not carry a Peaceable Street address. In fact it is listed as 44 King Lane and is presently the home of the Paul J. Meyers family. This very imposing structure has its own rather different personality and sits proudly on the corner where King Lane becomes Peaceable Street, at the intersection of High Ridge Avenue.

When crossing this intersection traveling north on High Ridge, it is necessary to stop and turn left for about 20 feet before bearing right and continuing north on High Ridge. This has the effect of slowing traffic along this very beautiful thoroughfare and people have the opportunity of enjoying the pretty surroundings.

So far no traffic lights have been installed and while it is necessary to stop at the intersection, there is no gridlock and no one sits waiting for a light to change. There also has been no attempt to straighten out the little jog in the famous High Ridge, so at least for now, traffic must move a little slower.

The "correction" of a similar situation on Main Street is now in the planning stages. When—and if—this scheme is ever completed, it will be comforting for pedestrians in the parking area to know that the medics and ambulances are nearby.

At any rate, until quite recently, the Myers family home at 44 King Lane and the Odd Fellows Hall at 21 King Lane, were the only structures on this short street to carry a King Lane address.

The very nice place at 44 King Lane was once a part of the fine estate that stretched from Main Street to High Ridge Avenue. At the settling of Ridgefield, when the home lots were distributed, this land became the property of Benjamin Hickock. We are not sure whether or no: Ben ever built on this site but it was not long before the King family came along and owned the property for many years.

The King mansion, with various additions that were made through all those years, still stands on the corner of Main Street and King Lane.

Richard A. Jackson purchased the property in the early part of this century and kept everything on the place intact for a long time. The place at 44 King Lane had very few owners for some 200 years but in the past 40 years it changed hands several times.

During the early 20's Richard Jackson passed on and when Mrs. Jackson followed her husband to her just reward in the 30's, the estate was left to their son Fielding Jackson. For some reason Fielding sold off the property at 44 King Lane to Estelle de Peyster Hosmer in 1940. Why he sold off this part of the estate, we do not know, as he was left plenty of money as well as the property.

Perhaps the Great Depression had put the squeeze on Fielding Jackson. It is equally difficult to understand why the Hosmer family would want this property as they owned and lived in the beautiful place at 181 Main Street that is now the home of the Patrick James Crehan family.

At one time, before Fielding Jackson sold the property at 44 King Lane, it was rented as a private residence to John Northrop and his two sisters. They did not appear to be people who could afford to rent such a place but then you never know about such things.

The Northrops were very nice people and John was a pleasant little man who worked for many years as a yardman at the old Ridgefield Lumber Company, which is now the Ridgefield Supply Company. His last place of employment was as custodian of the town dump.

The pay of the custodian was commensurable with the amount of use that the dump could generate. There were no fees involved, as use of the dump was free. Therefore, it would be reasonable to assume that John's salary was not great.

However, it was said that John, who always had a real Santa Claus-type beard, had a keen eye for valuables that others discarded. Because of that fact, although the dump was not greatly used at the time, John made a good living by salvaging.

Since business at the dump has skyrocketed in the ensuing years, one cannot help but wonder about how profitable salvaging rights might be today. This is especially true when one considers that despite the numerous tag sales, people are more apt to throw out useful articles today that would have been considered to have value back in the Depression era.

At any rate little John went quietly, if not merrily, about his chores at the dump and in the process did very well for himself.

Winifred Browne bought the King Lane place from Estelle Hosmer in 1946. Winifred did not stay very long and three years later sold to James Doubleday. Jimmy, as we have previously pointed out, had a penchant for buying nice places and then tearing them down. To be sure, he

always replaced the house that he eliminated with another fine structure. However, whether the new home was better than the old one was at least debatable.

In this instance, Jimmy departed from his usual procedure. Instead of tearing down the house, he set to work restoring it and put a very nice addition on the rear of the building as well. We always thought that it was nice that he retained the ornate New Orleans style wrought-iron work at the front doorway. We kind of feel that his lovely wife Betty had a strong influence on the change in his modus operandi. The Doubledays stayed at their King Lane home for eight years, which was some kind of record for them.

In October of 1957 the Doubledays sold to William P. and Georgette Dyer. Bill was a product of two old Danbury families, the Cunnifs and the Dyers and like everyone else he had always wanted to live in Ridgefield.

The Dyers quickly entered the social life in town and many were the parties held at 44 King Lane. One memorable event was attended by a United States Senator and the Governor of Connecticut. The Dyers stayed 11 years and sold to Gordon Walsh, who after three years sold to W. Lee Noel, who sold to Christian A. Nast. Chris became vice-president of Chesebrough Ponds and six years ago, sold to the present owner, Paul Myers.

#216: SOME NORTHERN HIGH RIDGE HOMES

Many areas of Ridgefield have undergone considerable change in the past half century and then there are areas that have changed very little. High Ridge Avenue is unusual in that it has examples of both retention and change.

With the exception of the development of the Maynard estate, the west side of this beautiful street remains relatively unchanged from the way it looked back in the 20's.

The same can not be said for the east side. Most of the land on this side of the street was a part of the estates owned by wealthy families that lived on Main Street. They were not about to part with backland that they considered protection.

Of course, there was not the great demand for building lots that there is today. It is also true that taxes were so low that it was possible to hold on to vacant land on the pretext that our rural atmosphere was being preserved.

At any rate, the east side of High Ridge Avenue in the 20's, from West Lane to King Lane had only three homes: Elmer Bouton's, the Gray family and Mrs. Elvine Richard's. From King Lane north to Catoonah Street there were only four houses, the one at 44 King Lane, and then no more until 154 High Ridge, now the home of Thomas Shaughnessy.

In the 20's this was the home of the Howard C. Freer family. Howard was a local businessman and had an agency for Ford cars and I think Hudsons and the Essex as well. He also had a radio store where Homestead Realty is now located at 414 Main Street. He also was musically inclined and played trumpet in the local band.

Two of Howard's sons, John and Edward, still live with their families, here on NewStreet.

The next house north of 154 was the home of the James Sheridan family and is now the residence of the Hanford family. Jim Sheridan was a good carpenter and carried on an extensive business. Francis Connell and Sereno Jacob were two of those who worked with Jim.

The home at 162 High Ridge is the last before Catoonah Street is reached and during the 20's it was the home of Catherine Connery. I seem to remember that the Frank Moylan family also lived in this house which is now the home of Octavius J . Carboni, better known as "Tabby." He was featured in several articles on the Carboni family, about three years ago.

With just these few houses on the east side of High Ridge, you can imagine that there was a considerable amount of open land. Griffith Lane had not been built so there were no houses off the Ridge either.

There was one building on what is now 8 Griffith Lane. It was a brown shingled, windowless structure and had the rather peculiar duty of protecting a water supply. This area was a part of the Lounsbury estate on Main Street and sported two windmills. One windmill was located near the reservoir that was covered by the previously described wooden structure. The other stood in back of the governor's mansion and about where the south parking lot is at Veterans Park School.

The reservoir was large and must have held a tremendous amount of water. When the public water supply was installed in what is now our Community Center, the windmills and the reservoir were no longer needed. Just after World War II, Mrs. Griffith, the governor's daughter, allowed the land on High Ridge to be developed. Peter McManus could see the possibilities presented by the reservoir and bought it. With the water drained, he had an already-built basement and proceeded to build a very nice home over it. Peter's sister, whom we have always known as Aunt Netta, still lives in this fine house at 8 Griffith Lane.

We have already told of B.O. Chisolm's "Grand Hotel," just across the street from the entrance to Griffith Lane and Julius Tulipani's home at 157 High Ridge. The next place on the west side going north was built early in the century by Samuel Carpenter. Sam was very active for many years in the social and political life of Ridgefield.

This place is located at 145 High Ridge Avenue and is the home of Frances Cleaners, Inc. This establishment has been owned and operated by the former Frances Zandri for more than 40 years.

The next house on the west side is 153 High Ridge and for many years was the home of Rudolph Martin. Rudy was a brother of Francis D. Martin and, like Marty, was very active in local affairs; he also ran the Ridgefield Water Supply Company. This place is now the home of the Jerry Bryers family.

The house at 159 High Ridge sits on the south corner of the intersection of High Ridge Avenue with Bryon Avenue. The place has a rather special meaning for me as it was here that Marie lived before we were married several years ago.

This house was home to James and Johanna Regan for many years. They were Marie's granduncle and grandaunt and of the same family after which Regan Road in the Ridgebury area was named.

Uncle Jim was born at the end of Regan Road, where the Ridgebury Firehouse is now located. He was employed as super on several of the large estates, such as the John Ames Mitchell on West Lane and Harris Dunscombe Colt (Peter Parley house), now Preston Bassett, on High Ridge.

On the north corner of Bryon Avenue lived the Archibald V. Davis family. When the First National Bank (now Union Trust) [now Wells Fargo] opened in 1900, on the corner of Governor Street, Archi went to work there as a clerk and rose to the rank of top official in that institution.

Archi's lovely wife was the former Sylvia Barhite and as a young girl grew up in her family home, which was located directly behind the graceful old elm tree that some of our very misguided officials are trying to murder [on Main Street opposite Prospect]. (Just can't help wondering what Mrs. Davis would have to say about this proposed attack on this very innocent work of nature.)

The fact that Archi and Sylvia were both highly intelligent people was no guarantee that their children would inherit this trait. However, both Mary Alice and Elizabeth turned out to be exceptionally smart as well as pretty. Lizzie was in my high school class and was everyone's favorite.

Next house north was the home of James E. Ryan. Everyone should have the opportunity of knowing Jimmy Ryan. He was a perfect example of a real gentleman and it can be truly said that he did not have an enemy in the world.

If you drove up Catoonah Street to High Ridge and failed to turn right or left, you would run in what we used to call the Buckley house. Teresa Buckley married Louis Baker in the early 20s and after that the place became known as the Baker place.

Louis had been a theater manager but then joined the ranks of the newly organized state police. In those days, the state police had a few model T Fords. They were one seated runabouts and probably had a top speed of about 50 miles per hour.

This was not fast enough for pursuing some of the speedier cars of the day, so motorcycles were employed. The three popular motorcycles were Harley Davidson, Henderson and Indian. Louis Baker became an expert on the Henderson and used to perform trick riding in the field that is now a parking area at Boehringer Ingelheim [the old East Ridge School/Ridgefield High School].

Somehow, Louis did not really have a great sense of humor. He did, however, take each order seriously and did his level best to carry them to a successful conclusion.

For example, the late Leo Carroll told me that one time when he was in charge of the local barracks, an order came in to pick up a man in Norwalk on a charge of non-support. Leo passed the order on to Louis who wasted no time in getting to Norwalk.

On arriving at the given address, the officer broke in the door and found the culprit in the midst of shaving. He had finished shaving one side of his face but the other side was still covered with a thick lather and that is exactly how he appeared when they returned to the Ridgefield barracks.

#217: GREAT PEOPLE — AND SMART FLIES — IN BRYON PARK

The appellation "Bryon Park" is not used much anymore. It seems like just a few years ago that people living on Bryon Avenue, Greenfield Street or Fairview Avenue. would consider themselves as living in Bryon Park, but now they are identified by the street on which they live.

The name Bryon denoted the man who developed the area in the very early years of this century. He always signed his name B. Adelmer Bryon and followed that with an M.D. We are not sure of the spelling of his first name, but have always felt that the use of plain B. rather than the full name indicated a bit of displeasure with the name his parents gave him [Benn] .

However, many of those who knew him well always referred to him as "Barney" and this was not said in a manner of disrespect. We used to think that it might have something to do with Barney Google, who with his famous horse "Spark Plug" was a comic strip character of another era.

Others were of the opinion that the name was derived from the rapid manner in which he drove his auto, which they felt resembled that of Barney Oldfield, a famous racing car driver of the time. We have seen the name in writing and it is not Bernard, of which Barney would have been a normal nickname.

At any rate, B. Adelmer Bryon was a doctor and his patients felt that he was an excellent practitioner of the medical profession. When I was a kid, he and Dr. R.W. Lowe, Dr. H.P.

Mansfield and Dr. H.W. Allen were the four Ridgefield doctors and they handled things very well.

Dr. Mansfield was very highly thought of but had a penchant for imbibing liquid spirits. But when this was overdone, he always had the presence of mind to take another physician along with him when making a sick call.

Dr. Bryon may have been one of the very early professional men to supplement the income from his practice with earnings made in the field of real estate. Before Dr. Bryon, the only professional men involved in real estate were Indian chiefs like Chief Catoonah, who showed that he did not know the value of land when he sold this town to the original settlers. Of course, many doctors and lawyers are involved in the real estate market today.

Dr. Bryon must have been very good at the development of real estate and Bryon Park was just one of his many ventures. Perhaps it is difficult to picture an area, as close to Main Street as Bryon Park is, as being undeveloped only 80 years ago. There were some homes in the area but the place bore little resemblance to the well organized and well kept little colony that we have there today. Barney was truly a man of vision and the town is better off because of his efforts.

The doctor and his family lived in a fine large house that stood back from Main Street and about 150 feet in front of where the Grand Union [CVS] Store is now. There were at least six beautiful elm trees on the property that added greatly to the beauty of our famous Main Street. They would have provided much needed shade to that homely and hot parking area.

Of course, the trees would mean that fewer cars could park and leaves would have to be picked up each fall. Perhaps that is why the developer wanted to cut them down. When this plan was opposed he merely put the bituminous concrete paving right up to the trunks of the trees and it naturally followed that the trees would die from lack of water. It is sincerely hoped that such a ruse will not be employed in eliminating the last of the elms in what is now a matter of public interest. That last elm looks so healthy in comparison with nearby trees in Ballard Park that are badly in need of attention. [The tree Dick is talking about in 1986 was finally overcome by disease and cut down in 2013. Where it stood is now the new entrance to the CVS center.]

So back to Bryon Park. As you enter Bryon Avenue from High Ridge, the first house on the left or south side is the home of Mrs. Lawrence Coleman, the former Mildred Denton. For more than half a century, it was the only house on that side of the street.

Lawrence Coleman was for many years with the D.F. Bedient Company. He was the son of Michael Coleman who ran the lunch wagon between the Town Hall and Acorn Press and Mildred was the daughter of Samuel S. Denton, one of the largest property owners in the history of Ridgefield.

The first house on the right is now the home of Mrs. Merle Partrick, the former Gertrude Humphreys. Many years ago it was the home of William Anderson when he was the chauffeur for the Hyde sisters on High Ridge. Later on, Dick Lane lived there when he was the chauffeur for Miss Amy Low Huntington. We sure had a lot of chauffeurs in those days.

Frances Mahoney and her father lived in the next house that is now the home of Yole Casagrande. Frances was a clerk in Brundage and Benedict's store, where Fitzgerald and Hastings is now [Dr. George Amatuzzi in 2023]. She was a very pretty girl with a nice shade of red hair and very light blue eyes. Frances had an excellent disposition and was very well liked by everyone, especially me when I was a little kid delivering newspapers for that store.

The Mahoneys had a little white dog that I was just crazy about. One day while on my paper route, Mr. Mahoney gave me the dog, which was described in a previous column. Sport was the greatest of the many dogs that I have had.

Next door was the home of the Daniel Robinson family. Daniel was a butcher by trade and had previously lived and had a meat market on Grove Street just across the street where the Poly Clean Center is and on the lot where Pamby Motors park their care. When the Robinson family moved to Bryon Avenue, Dan continued the meat business and delivered house to house in a little red Model T Ford that had a canopy over the pick-up type body that made it look very much like the panel trucks of today.

Dan had a bell which he rang when he stopped in front of a customer's house. By the time the lady had arrived to make her purchase of meat, he would have the back of the vehicle open and the steaks and chaps were on display. When the lady made her choice, Dan would cut off the selected portion and weigh it on a scale that slid out from beneath the roof of the truck.

As you can well imagine, flies were a big problem in warm weather. Dan had a son-in-law who was quite a storyteller. George used to say that the flies that congregated around this traveling meat market were a special breed and had better than average intelligence. To illustrate his point he told of how when Dan was on his way home, he would start up Catoonah Street with a swarm of flies behind him. Upon reaching the top of Catoonah Street, it was necessary to turn left on High Ridge for about 200 feet and then right into Bryon Avenue. George swore that the educated flies did not make the turn but went straight across lots to meet Dan as he drove in his driveway.

#218: INTERESTING OLDTIMERS FROM BRYON AVENUE

A person traveling west on Bryon Avenue in the 1920's would come to what is now number 22 and was at that time the home of the Charles W. Riedingers.

Charley was an electrician and a good one. He operated his electrical supply store and shop on Bailey Avenue, just across the street from Herb Bates' Livery Service and Garage, where The Press is now [was] located. That was in the days of the large estates and Charley had a flourishing business that gave employment to several men.

Charley's talents were not limited to electrical work. He was knowledgeable in just about anything mechanical and could fix most anything. When Irving Conklin became superintendent of Dr. George G. Shelton's estate in the early 20's, the doctor and Irv went over the list of mechanics that should be called when their services were needed. When the two came to electrical work and who should be called, the doctor said that his choice would be Charles Riedinger. Then the doctor added, "Actually Charley would do anything from fixing your watch to taking out your appendix, but we must give others a chance so it will be best if we use him only for electrical work."

Charles Riedinger was not only good at this trade but had some very good electricians such as Frank Bailey and Bill Dougherty working for him.

About the time of which we are writing, the late Harry Goodwin and his family arrived in Ridgefield. Harry's first job in town was as Charley Riedinger's bookkeeper. His last job, some 50 years later, was in a similar position for Joe Young's feed store. In between Harry must have taken care of an awful lot of books for several different businesses.

At this time there were many electrical accidents. We are not sure of the reason for this but it may have been that there were not so many safeguards at that time.

Charley Baxter was severely burned while atop a utility pole on Gilbert Street one stormy night. The Riedinger firm was engaged in doing extensive work on the Ingold estate (now the home of Dr. Patrick Neligan and his family) on West Mountain, when a tragedy occurred. Bill Dougherty was on the roof of one of the buildings when he accidentally touched a live wire and was electrocuted. The entire town was saddened by the death of this very popular young man.

Charley Riedinger himself was not immune to the hazards of his trade. On one occasion he was severely burned on the back of his left hand. The accident caused his hand to shrivel to such an extent that from then on, the use of that hand was limited to holding Charley's ever-present cigar.

Another electrician who came to Ridgefield during these years was the late Harry Perregaux. Harry came from the north country and eventually took over Riedinger's business. He also took over the home at 22 Bryon Avenue when Charley Riedinger built a new, very nice stucco house that is now the home of the Philip Knoches at 112 Barry Avenue.

In the late 20's Ruth Miller was voted the most popular girl in Ridgefield. Harry Perregaux was in complete agreement with the outcome of the voting and soon he and Ruth were very good friends. The friendship led to their marriage and it just naturally followed that they became a popular couple. Ruth was secretary for Thaddeus Crane, whose office was next to Brundage and Benedict's store [Dr. George Amatuzzi's offices], in what we used to call the Telephone Building, later the Martin Block and now I guess it could be called the Pizza Building as it is owned by the proprietors of Roma Pizzeria.

Thad Crane was one of the three or four real estate brokers operating in Ridgefield at the time. He also carried on an insurance business and when Thad was killed in a very unfortunate railroad crossing accident in Wilton, Ruth took over the business.

After Ruth and Harry were married they combined their businesses and operated from the north side of the D.F. Bedient building. Ruth still owns the home at 22 Bryon Avenue.

The next house is at 26 Bryon Avenue and actually is on the corner of Bryon Avenue and Greenfield Street. In the 20's this very attractive house was the home of George Weir.

George was the conductor on the railroad train that traveled from our station on Prospect Street to the Branchville station. Since both railroad stations are within the boundaries of Ridgefield, it could be said that the train traveled from Ridgefield to Ridgefield.

At any rate George Weir was a very dignified gentleman, as conductors were expected to be and he looked the part, as conductors were expected to do. The conductor was the undisputed boss of the train put in his charge.

The Weir house was later owned by George and Julia Huber and today is the home of John and Ethel Garbin. The former Ethel Zandri is very active in town affairs and John, who is an expert in landscaping, watches over their very nice home with the eye of a perfectionist. If an impudent weed would dare to have the audacity to raise its ugly head in John's well-manicured lawn, it would never reach a height of two inches before being whisked away.

On the other corner of Bryon Avenue and Greenfield Street is number 30 Bryon Avenue. It is now the home of John Patrick and Ada Leary.

Pat is a retired painter and Ada still holds forth at the counter in Bissell's Drug Store where she has been a fixture for many years.

At the time of which we are writing this nice home belonged to the George Browns. Mrs. Brown was a daughter of Samuel D. Keeler, a very prominent merchant who ran a very large meat and grocery store in the building that he owned where Ridgefield Auto Parts is now

[until recently, Deborah Ann's Sweet Shoppe]. S.D. also had a large grain business which he operated from his elevator building on Bailey Avenue, where Knoche Realty and the Woodworks are now [and which is being removed].

George Brown worked as a clerk in his father-in-law's store and through hard work, rose to become manager of that great old store. He had a very high-pitched voice and experienced no trouble in being heard.

George was addicted to the chocolate ice cream sodas that Squash and Freddie Romeo used to make across the street at Bissell's soda fountain, and he also was known for his abruptness. As he crossed the street one afternoon for his soda, a car stopped in front of him and the driver asked, "Is this Danbury or Ridgefield?"

Without breaking stride, George answered, "Yes" and went right on.

#219: MORE BRYON FAMILIES — AND STORIES

In the nice white clapboard house at 34 Bryon Avenue live the Sileos, Francis and Mary and family. I really never got to know Francis so well, but understand he is a first-class gentleman. I know Mary well for she was one of the very fine nurses that took such good care of Dr. Van Etten in his declining years, and she was a real gem.

The house was for many years the home of Jack and Julia Cranston. Jack was an electrician by trade and he was the local manager of operations for the Connecticut Light and Power Company.

Previous to that he had been superintendent of the Ridgefield Electric Company, when our electric power was generated in the old Power House on Ivy Hill Road. Jack's duties were varied and included heading the crew of linesmen, as well as being trouble shooter for the electric company.

He was a rugged individual and looked the part. He was a tall man with an abundance of prematurely gray hair that capped a pair of piercing light blue eyes and a lean weather-beaten face. That he had a thorough knowledge of his trade is beyond question.

In the balcony of the auditorium in the old town hall, there was a projection booth that was probably 10 or 12 feet square. This was known as Jack's domain, as he operated the movie projector. His first allegiance was to the utility company that employed him and if there was trouble on the power lines, the showing of the old silent movies had to wait until Jack had straightened out the problem with the wires.

The early movie films became very brittle from the heat of the bulb in the projector and on numerous occasions, the film would break. It was not unusual for this to happen at a crucial time in showing of the movie.

Hoot Gibson would be racing his horse across the desert in hot pursuit of a cattle rustler, or Tom Mix was just about to be captured by a band of roving Indians and bang, the film would come apart. It could even happen while Charlie Chaplin was losing his grip on some lofty ledge to which he had been clinging, in desperate fear of falling, or just as Francis X. Bushman was about to plant a kiss on the inviting lips of Mary Pickford, who was America's Sweetheart at the time.

When such a very irritating incident occurred, the unperturbed Jack Cranston would calmly stop the projector and repair the faulty celluloid. To placate the movie patrons while repairs were made, the music which always accompanied the silent movies was intensified. The songs would be suitable to accompany fast-running horses or perhaps the romantic melodies more befitting the beautiful Miss Pickford and her lover.

The music would come from the violin of Willis Boyce and the piano played by his wife Charlotte, or on other occasions from the piano of Arthur Ferry and the violin of Andy O'Connor.

The films came on large reels that were encased in metal containers and it took, several reels to show a complete movie. At the conclusion of a reel, the message END OF REEL I, or REEL I, as the case might be, would be flashed on the screen. After a pause, the next reel was activated and the show went on. It was all so very exciting.

One of the jobs that young boys would vie for was rewinding the film on reels, when the show was over. This was done by turning the reels by hand and packing them for shipment to the nest town for showing. It was all done under the watchful eye of Jack Cranston and he made you feel as though he was doing you a great favor by letting you turn the reel-winder.

Julia Cranston was a very energetic lady and belonged to several of our local and political organizations. She was secretary for many of these organizations.

James Mullen was Julia's first husband and unfortunately he died at an early age. I have samples of his handwriting and he wrote with the flourish of a John Hancock. Funny how you will remember certain things about a person, such as the fact that he wrote with such a flowing hand.

I guess that James Mullen's writing would properly be called script and it was really something to see. Herb Mills was another person who would write in script.

When my father took a pen in his large gnarled hands, it was always a real pleasure to see the result. The writing of my brother Joe was very good and that of Mrs. Irving Conklin, Sr. was and still is very distinctive. I would recognize their fine hands immediately.

Anyone who received a bill from S.D. Keeler's store, which later became Walter Stewart's store, later still Perry's Market and finally Gristede's, must have marveled at the writing thereon. This was one bill that you might even look forward to receiving.

Of course, the writing on these missives could be no one's but that of Miss Mary Huber. Mary was the bookkeeper for all those great stores and I bet that she still writes like that today. The stores changed but Mary never did.

Some will say that the ability to write well is inherited, but others will say it is just a matter of working hard to achieve perfection. My father always attributed his success in writing with a fine hand to the length of the ruler and the accuracy with which it was wielded by Brother Ambrose, in a Christian Brothers School.

Years ago we were taught to write by use of the Palmer Method. Observing samples of present day writers, we have to assume that this method of training the hand has long since disappeared.

Next to the Cranstons, at 36 Bryon Avenue, lived the Edward Smith family. It is now the home of Francis and Pauline Moylan.

Francis is a carpenter by trade but always had a great love for the Ridgefield Volunteer Fire Department. He spent many years as a member of that fine organization during which time he served in many capacities including that of chief and as Ridgefield's fire marshal.

Pauline, besides raising a fine family, has been involved in real estate and also is the Republican registrar of voters. Both Francis and Pauline are natives of Ridgefield.

Ed Smith, like the present owner of 36 Bryon Avenue, was a carpenter. He had at least three sisters that I knew and they were from an old Ridgefield family. These ladies were all very petite and they were ladies in every sense of the word.

#220: MORE BRYON AND FAIRVIEW FOLKS WHEN THE GRANGE WAS GRAND

In our travels along Bryon Avenue we had reached number 36, where the Edward Smith family lived a half century ago. They had a daughter Marion, and she had a very good speaking voice so it seemed just natural that Marion was also a good singer.

We remember that Marion sang in the Village Minstrels in 1926, a show that ran for two nights to a packed audience in the old Town Hall auditorium. The hits of the show were Joe Bacchiochi and Agnes (Kelly) Carnall singing and dancing Tea for Two. It was like a Broadway production and everyone loved it.

Marion later married Thomas Shaughnessy who operated a tree surgery business that later became Knapp Brothers, Inc. Tom, who still lives at 154 High Ridge Avenue, became Ridgefield's tree warden and served in that capacity for many years.

Next door to the Smiths and on the corner of Bryon and Fairview Avenues, in a very comfortable brown-shingled house, lives Mrs. Helen D. Pierandri. It is now 42 Bryon Avenue and has been home to the Pierandri family for more than half a century.

At the time of which we are writing, it was the home of Edward Mead. Ed Mead. like his next door neighbor Ed Smith, was a carpenter. We had a number of carpenters and electricians on this street.

At that time we did have a large number of tradesmen but it should be remembered that in those times they did not build houses in a matter of days. However, you can be assured that the houses that these fellows built were very well put together. The two Eds worked together on some of the great mansions that were built in the early part of this century.

So we have completed our tour along Bryon Avenue but we must call attention to a bonus that was provided to the people who lived on the north side of this street. It was simply the privilege of watching the beautiful horses of the B.O. Chisolm and the George Doubleday families as they cavorted in what were then the open fields on the south side of the street.

The Doubleday horse stables were just inside the back entrance to that estate at the south end of Bryon Avenue. Horses running free in a large pasture always seem to present a picture of exuberance and beauty that is unmatched by other animals.

This was especially true when the horses were cared for by horsemen such as Jerry McCarthy for the Doubledays and Tom Salter for the Chisolms. These men kept the horses well-tuned and just so full of life.

Around the corner, on the right or eastern side of Fairview Avenue, lived the Arthur Thomases, the Fred Thomases, the Allen Reynolds, the John McCarthys, the John Mitchells and the Christopher Kanes.

Arthur and Fred Thomas were brothers and they were also cousins of my good friend Harry Thomas, the blacksmith. All of them were descendants of Benjamin Stebbins of Revolutionary War fame. The Stebbins homestead was right in the middle of the Battle of Ridgefield, on the corner of Main Street where now there's an entrance to Casagmo.

The Thomas brothers lived side by side on Fairview Avenue for many years. Arthur was a clerk in the Ridgefield post office where his pleasant and kindly mannerisms endeared him to the patrons of that office. Arthur's wife Bessie was a frequent contributor of interesting articles to *The Press* and I believe that this was a practice which she continued, even after leaving Ridgefield for the sunny southland.

Bessie was such a prolific writer, it just seemed natural that she was elected secretary of most of the organizations that she belonged to. Arthur and Bessie had a daughter Elizabeth, who

was a classmate of mine. We also belonged to the Juvenile Grange together. Lizzie, as we all called her, played the piano well and was a very popular girl.

Fred Thomas was once the ticket agent in the old railroad station on Prospect Street and later on became yard foreman for the Ridgefield Lumber Company. Fred's wife was the former Margareta Belle Seymour, a descendant of yet another family of early settlers. Belle, as she was called, was a sister of one of my very best friends, Clifford A. Seymour.

Fred and Belle had a son who was given the name Seymour. Seymour's son Gordon still lives in the family home on Fairview Avenue.

The Thomas family came from an agricultural background, as did many of the old Ridgefield families. When the Ridgefield Grange No. 165, Patrons of Husbandry, was organized in 1906, you can just bet that Arthur and Fred Thomas were among the charter members. This fine organization had in its membership some of the very finest people and it was always a pleasure to be in their company.

News of the activities of the Grange has considerably lessened in the last few years and it is assumed that this is directly caused by the demise of farming in this area.

Allen Reynolds was for many years the chauffeur for Mrs. Howard Lapsley Thomas. Mrs. Thomas lived in the very picturesque brick mansion that she built in the early part of the century at 35 Golf Lane. It is now owned by Cary Wellington.

Allen's wife was the former Margaret Northrop, so you just know that they belonged to the Grange. I would guess that every member of the Northrop families was a staunch supporter of the Grange.

The Reynolds had three children, Irene, Pauline, and Allen Jr. Irene went to live and work in California. Pauline worked in the office at Perry's Market with Mary Huber. Paul Berglund also worked at the store and after he and Pauline married, they moved north.

Allen was a star center on the Ridgefield High basketball team and because he was so very handsome, he was selected to play the lead in several plays.

John J. McCarthy was a prominent businessman and with his brother Robert Emmett McCarthy, conducted an electrical and plumbing business in the store just south of Thaddeus Crane's office. Perhaps we should say just north of today's Roma Pizzeria [Planet Pizza].

John handled the electrical part of the enterprise and Emmett (some folks called him Bob) took care of the plumbing. Both of these fine gentlemen were considered experts in their respective trades and they had a thriving business.

John McCarthy, in later years, served as Ridgefield's building inspector. It was at a time when our town was experiencing the early stages of tremendous growth and John's insistence on excellent work performance by contractors placed him at loggerheads with some of them.

#221: BUILDING BATTLES & THE MEDIA MANOR MESS

By the late 1950's, the building boom was in full swing in Ridgefield and houses were appearing where many felt they would never be built. This put a rather severe strain on those charged with the responsibility of seeing to it that buildings were properly constructed.

The Board of Selectmen were in the process of drafting a building code that, when adopted, would provide some protection to the home buyer. John McCarthy insisted on a strict adherence to the code and many were the stories he could tell of attempts by some builders to bypass the code.

These were hectic times in this fast-growing town and some developers strongly objected to what they felt were restrictive and unfair regulations. There were numerous court

cases in which the code and the methods of inspection were tested to the limit. Some of these cases unearthed flagrant violations.

Developers arrived in Ridgefield, put up a number of houses and then disappeared as quickly as they came. It was later found that the fields in some septic systems were actually running uphill in pitch.

We remember one new building on North Street where the plans called for a louver at each end of the attic. The contractor supplied the louvers, but they were useless because he had merely nailed them in place, without making an opening behind them through which the air could circulate.

In that same building, a hole was cut in the bathroom floor, on which a toilet was to be: set The hole had been cut by a blow torch, rather than by a saw. The resulting hole was so large that when the toilet was set, there was grave danger of its falling through the floor into the basement.

A large home on West Mountain had been wired by an electrical contractor from a neighboring town. While making an inspection of the wiring, John McCarthy found that in establishing a ground for the electrical system, the contractor had merely dropped the ground wire on the side of the building and then kicked some leaves over the end of it.

John McCarthy ordered work on the building stopped and the negligent electrician was required to appear before the Board of Selectmen, who at that time had jurisdiction in such matters. There were two matters to consider: the correction of the violation and whether or not the electrical contractor, who had been cited for previous infractions, should be allowed to keep his license to ply his trade in Ridgefield.

On the evening when the contractor appeared before Leo [Carroll], Paul [Morganti] and me, he was represented by a prominent and very reputable attorney from his town. It soon became apparent that the errant electrician had failed to inform the attorney of the true nature of things that had caused this hearing.

John had prepared his charges in great detail and presented the case well. When the contractor had to admit that the charges were true, the attorney became so incensed that he drove back to Danbury by himself and the contractor had to hire a taxi to get home.

Probably the most widely publicized case was that which involved Media Manor. Media Manor is composed of land surrounding what is now known as Marcardon Avenue.

It all happened about 30 years ago and it took two years to settle the dispute, which was very costly to all concerned and that included the Town of Ridgefield. In the process, both John McCarthy and the town were sued and John's property and bank account were attached.

This was a very serious thing that could cause numerous complications. If allowed to stand it could make it very difficult, if not impossible, to attract people to serve a municipality in a position where their actions could result in having their bank accounts tied up. Fortunately, I believe the law has been changed to protect such individuals from this embarrassment.

The property in question consisted of some 24 building lots and it had several owners over the years. Some of the previous owners were speculators and some were developers.

The problem centered around the type of septic system that would prove to be most suitable for this particular property. Soil tests had revealed that a small portion was type C soil, while most of the soil was type D. Type D provides very poor drainage and is composed mostly of hardpan, or clay.

Just as there are various types of soil, there are also many different types of septic systems. The trick is to get the right one for a particular lot.

A firm named Scott and Rice were owners of the property in question. The previous owner was Simon J. Milberg of Stamford. Scott and Rice hired a sanitation engineer who prepared plans for the proposed septic systems.

Dr. Francis B. Woodford, as Ridgefield's health officer, and John J. McCarthy, in his capacity as plumbing inspector, reviewed the plans and declared them to be inadequate. Their decision was based on the fact that much of the land in the proposed development was classed Type D, indicating poor drainage.

Plans were redrawn and resubmitted several times. The changes in the plans were considered to be insignificant and were repeatedly turned down. Scott and Rice sued the inspector and the town for $500,000 and later added another $250,000 to the damages they sought.

During the course of two years, the case was brought before no fewer than half a dozen different judges. It was finally heard in Superior Court in Bridgeport before Judge John P. Cotter. Our present judge of probate, the Honorable Romeo G. Petroni, was town counsel at the time and as such, was charged with the responsibility of defending both the inspector and the town.

After several postponements, the trial finally got under way. There were an awful lot of witnesses called to testify and a bunch of lawyers involved in the case, which was replete with charges of conspiracy, coercion and restraint of trade.

Judge Cotter exhibited considerable patience and continually attempted to get some kind of agreement between the two factions.

The previous owner of the property, Simon Milberg, held the mortgage on the land and had received no payments over the two-year period of litigation. This may have been a factor in the final settlement of the case.

At long last Milberg came forward with a proposal to return a substantial part of the purchase price and drop his request for interest on the delinquent payments.

Judge Cotter ordered permits issued for the septic systems and the electrical work, in accordance with the state code, and threw out the charges against John McCarthy and the town.

Before moving on, we should note that John and Katherine McCarthy had two very pretty daughters, Helen and Mary. Mary married John Hyatt and moved to Danbury.

Helen became a supervisor of nurses at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City. Her very pleasant features and calm mannerism must have been very reassuring to an apprehensive patient that might be facing surgery. Dr. Van Etten rated Helen very highly and our own son, when a patient at Lenox Hill, thought that she was just the greatest.

We understand that Helen has now retired after heading the nursing staff in Ridgefield's school system.

#222: STURGES OF THE FIRE DEPARTMENT, KANES OF MUSIC AND THE INN

Just north of the McCarthy family on Fairview Avenue in the 20's and early 30's lived the John Mitchell family. John was a plumber and a good one. Like so many of his fellow tradesmen, he worked on many of the great mansions that were built in Ridgefield in the early years of this century.

The Mitchells had three daughters, Madeline, Genevieve and Rita. The three girls were all very pretty and attended our local schools.

Madeline and Genevieve were identical twins, and both appeared with their father in the Village Minstrel Show in 1928 in the old Town Hall.

For some reason, with which I am not familiar, the family moved to Norwalk. Since it was during the heart of the Great Depression, John may have found work more available in that city. It had to be a good reason to cause the family to leave the town they all loved.

It is interesting to note that in recent years Rita moved back to Ridgefield and now lives at Ballard Green. Like so many others who have returned, Rita must find it difficult to adjust to the many changes in her old home town.

The Earl Sturges family bought the former Mitchell house at 28 Fairview Avenue and have lived there for many years. Earl is a painter by trade and worked with his brother Ernest, until Ernie retired some years ago. At that time, Earl and Peter Grommes, who had worked together for a long time, took over the business and called their firm, Sturges and Grommes.

Earl and Rita Sturges had two sons, Robert and David, both of whom I think have located in the Maryland-Delaware area.

Both Rita and Earl were born in Ridgefield and Earl came from an old Ridgefield family, many of whom were noted outdoorsmen. Earl inherited his great love for the outdoors and has always been an avid hunter and fisherman. He was also fond of sports and played on Ridgefield's fine Spartan football team.

For many years, Earl has served in our great Ridgefield Volunteer Fire Department. It is worthy of note that within a large city block live three former chiefs of the fire department, Earl, Donald Ligos and Francis Moylan. Must have been something about the atmosphere in Bryon Park.

The very next house north was also the last house on the eastern side of Fairview Avenue, at the time of which we are writing. It was the home of Christopher and Page Kane, who purchased it from Ernest Scott in the early 20's. Chris Kane was semi-retired but Page was a music director in the New York City school system and continued to commute to the Big City for many years.

Commuting was relatively easy when the Kanes first arrived for we had excellent train service at the time. However, when the service was discontinued, getting to New York got to be a chore. A person would have to drive to the Branchville station, or take a bus, on which service was irregular, or drive the entire distance. None of these alternatives appealed to Page Kane.

Page was an exceptionally talented lady and played the piano in much the same style as the incomparable Miss Mary Fox. Like Mary, Page also excelled at the pipe organ and played in several churches, including Saint Mary's. Page's extraordinary ability in the music field was matched by her prowess in directing stage shows.

All this did not go unnoticed by people in her adopted town. In no time at all Page found herself immersed in so many local activities that some people wondered if she ever had time to sleep. She was always in great demand by organizations that wanted to put on various kinds of shows. Ridgefield was a much smaller town at the time but the many stage productions, plays and minstrels, made it seem like Broadway. Of course radio was just beginning to bloom and television had not even been thought of.

Because of a thirst for entertainment, people would flock to the old Town Hall or the various church halls to hear the great singers and dancers and actors that were presented. When it came to the dancers, Page depended on her good friend Margaret McGlynn and Margaret was always happy to oblige. She was a great dancer herself and knew how to train others in "tripping the light fantastic."

Margaret McGlynn taught Monica McManus, Jeanette McManus, Patricia Potter, and Nancy Jones along with James McManus, Jack Jones and myself to do the Highland Fling and

the Stack of Barley and woe betide anyone who missed a step. It was all great fun, for both the audience and the performers. Perhaps we could use some of that kind of fun today.

Page Kane was particularly expert when it came to minstrel shows. When she sat down to the piano, she did not just play the instrument, she commanded it.

It was not necessary for her to look at either the music or the keyboard, as she knew everything by heart. Therefore she was able to turn her head in the direction of the stage and give full attention to the performers.

Her disposition was rather low key and when a performer needed correction, it was done in that manner — at least it was done that way the first time around.

It was Page Kane who directed the great minstrel show in 1926 that is still remembered so well. The show was put on for the benefit of the fine Ridgefield baseball team and there was an SRO crowd both Friday and Saturday nights.

The big hit of the show was Joe Bacchiochi and Agnes Kelly, singing and dancing Tea for Two. Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers could not have done it better. Sixty years later we are still whistling that great tune.

Despite all her other activities, Page found time to serve as the Democratic Registrar of Voters, a post that she held for several years.

Just north of the Kanes, on the corner of Fairview and Barry Avenue there was an empty lot owned by Michael T. McGlynn. Page and Marion Greene bought the lot with intentions of building on it. However, the Depression came along and changed all that and only in recent years was a house built on that lot.

Marion Greene was also a teacher in the New. York school system and she went on to purchase other Ridgefield property, including Sam Carpenters' house on High Ridge, now the home of Frances Cleaners.

In the late 20's George Pratt Ingersoll passed on and his home on West Lane was put up for sale. Chris and Page Kane sold their home at 32 Fairview Avenue and bought what is now The Inn at Ridgefield [more recently, Bernard’s]. They named the place The Kane Inn and carried on a successful business there for several years.

#223: MORE TALENTED FAIRVIEW FAMILIES

When Dr. B.A. Bryon started the development that would carry his name, he exhibited not only a great deal of foresight, but a considerable amount of courage as well. There seems little doubt that it was the biggest, if not the very first, project of its kind, ever attempted in Ridgefield. The doctor had the good fortune to live long enough to see the completion of his plans as most of the homes were built before he died.

Over a half century ago, on the southwest corner of Fairview Avenue, lived Mr. and Mrs. Jack Galli and Mrs. Galli’s children, Aldo, Tina and Elvira Girolmetti. For many years, Jack worked next door on the Doubleday estate that is now the large development known as Westmoreland.

Mrs. Galli married Jack after her husband, Frank Girolmetti, passed on, a victim of the flu epidemic during World War I. Frank had been George Doubleday’s superintendent during the formative years of the great Westmoreland estate.

Elvira was a classmate of mine at Ridgefield High School. She was known to her legion of friends as "Lil." Lil was a very pretty girl, with an excellent disposition and well loved by all who knew her. Her untimely death at an early age caused great sadness in our town.

In the days before television, when people provided their own entertainment, most families saw to it that the young ones in the family were taught to play a musical instrument. Lil took lessons from Ruth Harris and became very proficient on the violin. Tina was taught to play the piano by Charlotte Boyce and when the two sisters played together, it was a duet that was well worth listening to. The family had a nice player piano but, as good as it was, it was not quite as nice as the real thing.

Tina married Arthur Sfondrini, one of the proprietors of the Hayloft Restaurant. The Hayloft was just over the line in South Salem and Tina was the hostess at that great eating place when it was one of the most popular places in this area.

People on the dance floor today appear to be suffering from some strain of inertia and rarely make it around the floor in the course of an evening. In the days when people actually danced, Tina was considered an excellent dancer and it was (still is) a real treat to lead her onto the dance floor.

Trombonist Aldo became a fine carpenter and has been retired for some time after being associated with Bacchiochi Inc. for many years. He was very fond of sports and played both basketball and baseball for Ridgefield High School and still plays a very good game of golf.

Aldo learned to play the trombone and played in Aldo Casagrande's Ridgefield Boys Band that later became the second Oreneca Band. Aldo Girolmetti's prowess with the trombone must have made a good impression on the fine bandmaster, for later on he became Al's father-in-law when Anne Casagrande became Mrs. Aldo Girolmetti. Their very popular daughter Patricia is married to Donald Ligos.

It is nice to see that the Ligos family lives just across the street from where Patty's father grew up. Just wish that it could be possible for more native Ridgefielders to follow such a pattern and find a place to live in their hometown.

Next door to the Gallis and traveling north on Fairview Avenue lived the Ernest Swanson family. Ernest was the chauffeur for George Doubleday and we have previously told of how he was a real professional driver. Somehow those chauffeurs had that particular ability to project an image and create the impression that their passengers were very important people — and you could just know that they were.

The Swansons had two sons, Ernest Jr. and Carl. Ernest became a carpenter and worked as such on the Doubleday estate, as Fred Montanari did, when he was a young man. Ernie and Fred had good teachers, as Ernest Finch and Stanley Walker were the regular carpenters for the Doubleday family.

Ernest and Stanley were excellent in their trade and probably would be classified as fussbudgets today. One thing was sure, when they finished a project it was as near perfect as it could possibly be.

Perhaps it is hard to imagine in this day and age that there once were estates large enough to warrant the employment of full-time carpenters to keep the many buildings thereon in shape. However, there were several such estates in Ridgefield in the early part of this century. It is very doubtful that we will ever see their like again.

Ernest Swanson Jr. married another classmate of mine, Miss Alice McCoy, and they had two fine children, Robert and Elizabeth Glennon.

Bob, like his father, became a carpenter and inherited a love for antique automobiles. He made a study of the ways to restore these old cars and cannot only make them look like new but can give you a history of where they were made and what their good and bad features are.

I guess most parents dream of having their children grow up, get married and continue to live in Ridgefield. Bob Swanson was one of the lucky ones. He married Debbie Lynn Ramey and they have two very cute daughters and live on Soundview Road just a few doors from where Bob grew up.

It should be noted that Bob's pretty sister followed his lead. Elizabeth Glennon, better known as “Glenny,” married Peter Montanari and they live with their cute little daughter on High Ridge Avenue.

I had not seen Glenny for several years but just a couple of weeks ago while taking our pony Maggie for a drive, a nice lady with a little girl, stopped her car to say hello and when she smiled, I recognized that it was Glenny. We always find it quite amazing to see how quickly the kids grow up.

Next to the Swansons, at 15 Fairview Avenue, were Peter and Mary McManus. Peter came to this country from Bonnie Scotland at the turn of the century. He was an architect by profession and became associated with a fellow Scotsman, the great James F. Kennedy, who was Ridgefield's premier builder at the time.

The two men made a real good team and they were responsible for some of the great homes in Ridgefield. Peter's job had a rather special bonus as it afforded him the opportunity to meet Mary Connelly, who was Jim Kennedy's niece. Peter knew a good thing when he saw it and soon Mary became Mrs. Peter McManus.

#224: AN ARCHITECT TURNED BUILDER AND A DRAMATIC CHILD RESCUE

By the time that Peter A. McManus arrived in this country as an aspiring young architect from Scotland, James F. Kennedy had established an enviable reputation in the contracting business. His honesty had endeared him to the wealthy people, who had come to Ridgefield from the city, harboring a fear that they might be taken advantage of.

It got to a point where some of these people were asking Big Jim to perform tasks that were not normally associated with the building trade. One of these people was George M. Olcott, who built the great mansion that once graced the area where the development called Casagmo is now.

As you no doubt are aware, Casagmo stands for “Home of George M. Olcott” and has an Italian flavor. Mr. Olcott's attraction to things Italian surfaced again when it came time to establish the great gardens at Casagmo. He asked Jim Kennedy to lay out and oversee their construction and asked that one of them be a sunken Italian garden.

Jim Kennedy was a master of many things, but when it came to gardens, an expert in botany he was not. Therefore, the task of laying out the great formal gardens at Casagmo was assigned to the young architect. It was one of Peter’s very first jobs and you can be sure that he put forth his very best effort. Nothing was spared and the beautiful gardens were a very great attraction that made Casagmo one of the show places of the area.

The Kennedy firm was engaged to do a great deal of construction on the estate of Melbert B. Cary, just before World War I. Cary was a noted author and lived in a mansion on the corner of West Lane and Country Club Road. The beautiful home was destroyed by fire just a few years ago and the estate is now being developed.

An elderly gentleman stopped by the post office one day and asked for directions to a place that he had visited as a boy. He tried as best he could to describe the road on which the place was located. He had forgotten the name of the people but he did remember that the place was called “Wildflower Farm.” I remembered that Melbert Cary had called his estate by that

name [actually, evidence is that he called it “Wildfarms”] and it was my sad duty to inform the old fellow that the great mansion was no more.

Melbert B. Cary’s success as an author was almost matched by his good luck in the stock market. While the Kennedy firm worked at Wildflower Farm, Big Jim and Mr. Cary frequently engaged in conversation. It was only natural that Cary would occasionally brag of his phenomenal success in the investments that he had made. It was just as natural that Jim would be fascinated by the stories of high finance, as spun by the well-known author.

Jim Kennedy had always worked very hard for his money and the opportunity to make it in a much easier fashion must have had a great appeal to him. At any rate, he was bitten by the Wall Street bug and soon found himself riding on the train to New York City each day with Melbert Cary.

His initial investments were rather modest but, when under the expert tutelage of Mr. Cary, his returns had a high yield, Jim Kennedy began to invest his life savings in very large quantities. It can generally be expected that a country gearing up for a war will have its economy at full speed ahead.

It can also be counted on that the economy of that country will go into a rather sharp decline at the end of hostilities. Our country’s economy, before, during and following World War I was no exception and among those caught in the squeeze was Jim Kennedy. When the inevitable slump came following the war, Jim was ill prepared to handle what turned out to be a very bad situation. His losses were considerable and he became very disillusioned.

To add to his woes, his fine business operations had suffered because so much of his attention had been diverted to Wall Street. Perhaps because of this, Jim closed up shop and the Kennedy family moved to Bridgeport.

At this point, Peter A. McManus, who had been closely associated with the Kennedy operations and had married Jim’s niece, Mary Connelly, decided to go into business for himself. Peter was very energetic and soon became a very successful building contractor.

Many young carpenters and painters — Dan Tobin, Tom Scott, Terry Knoche, Gus Venus, John P. Leary, Warren Keeler, Andy O’Connor and Porter Stannard, just to name a few — got their start with the McManus firm.

In the meantime, Peter and Mary McManus were in the process of raising a good-sized family. First there was a son James, who was destined to become Ridgefield's building inspector. Before that could happen, Jim had to learn the carpenter trade and go through the rigorous training that Peter's other carpenters were subjected to.

Then along came Monica and Jeanette, who as previously reported, learned to dance the Highland Fling under the watchful eye of Margaret McGlynn. It should be mentioned that Margaret, like both Peter and Mary McManus, was a native of Scotland. They also spoke with a decided accent that was richly flavored with a delightful burr that was quite pleasing to the ear.

Following the McManus girls came sons Richard, Fred, and Joseph. The youngest is better known as Jo Jo and he became a carpenter like his brother.

Perhaps this would be a good time to relate a little anecdote that reveals how, in years past, neighbors were able to depend on one another. It was a Sunday evening and I must have been about four at the time.

A call came from the McManus household requesting assistance. The youngest member of the family was having great difficulty in breathing. Mrs. McManus had tried calling the few doctors we had in town at the time, but they were all out on calls and none was available.

In desperation, Mrs. McManus called my mother, who after raising nine children of her own, had come to be regarded as somewhat of an expert in handling problems of this kind.

Mom grabbed me by the hand and we ran, what must have been about four or five blocks, from our home at what is now 612 Main Street to the McManus home, at 5 Ramapoo Road.

By the time we arrived, the face of the child had turned a very dark blue. Without a moment's hesitation, Mom opened the little mouth and inserted a finger, with which she flipped over a tiny tongue. With another deft movement she replaced her finger with a small spoon, until the proper color reappeared to the little one's face.

#225: THE MANY INTERESTS OF PETER McMANUS

Peter and Mary McManus had six children of their own, all of whom had a number of friends. This just about guaranteed that the house at 15 Fairview Avenue was never without plenty of people.

The family had a nice piano that Monica played very well and many were the songfests in the McManus living room. Peter was a firm believer in the theory that singing was an excellent exercise for the body and mind, as well as for the vocal cords. Therefore, it was not unusual for him to join in the singing.

When the young ones would run out of popular songs of the day, Peter would inject some of his own. Then with a burr equal to that of the legendary Bobby Burns, he would give vent to such Scottish favorites as Roamin in the Gloamin' and Loch Lomond. It was all great fun.

In the midst of this activity, Mrs. McManus would be busy serving refreshments to the singers. She was always her very gracious self and it never seemed to bother her, no matter how big the crowd might be.

Peter McManus was still a young man when he was bitten by the political bug. After working in several election campaigns and various political assignments, he ran for and was elected a justice of the peace. It was at a time when Ridgefield had its own Justice Court and the courtroom was upstairs in the old Town Hall where the selectmen's office is now.

A justice of the peace was selected to preside in this little courtroom and many were the cases that were heard there. Some of the cases were involved with bootlegging and some had to do with domestic disputes, but most of the cases were concerned with motor vehicle violations.

Peter presided over some interesting cases, including the one that involved the two Johns, as described in Dispatch No. 88. Back in the 20's, the details of every arrest were carried in *The Ridgefield Press* and generally they made the front page. As a matter of fact, for some time there was a column on the front page that carried the caption Judge McManus's Court.

It was at a time when automobiles were not as plentiful as they are today and many of the drivers had only recently switched from driving a horse to the operation of an auto. Some of these people reasoned that as long as a driver's license was not required to drive old Dobbin, they should not have to get one in order to drive the family car. We knew of one man who drove an auto all his long life without ever having a license. Some felt they would be safe, providing they were able to avoid an accident.

The State Police were stationed in town at the time and every once in a while, they would set up a spot check for driver's licenses. It was like shooting fish in a barrel.

One particular court session involved 16 people, all of whom were found to have no licenses. After their plea of guilty, they paid the $10 fine, plus one dollar for court costs.

Following that court session, Judge McManus offered the opinion that half the people in Ridgefield were driving without a license.

Constables were used as keepers of the peace in those days and sometimes they became over zealous in the performance of their duties. One of these fellows, whose name we will not mention as some of his relatives are still here, became involved in what turned out to be a real boomerang.

One Sunday afternoon in the early 20's he followed a car in which three men were riding from just over the state line in South Salem to 65 West Lane where the State Police barracks were at the time. There he stopped the car and accused the driver of traveling in an erratic manner.

By the time he had dragged the driver to the front door of the police barracks, he was also accusing the driver of being under the influence of liquor.

Sgt. John C. Kelly was then in charge of the barracks and he did not agree with the constable's diagnosis. Sgt. Kelly refused to lock up the accused driver and suggested that the constable take the man to the jail at the Town Hall if he were to insist on locking the man up.

The constable was chagrined but toted his quarry off to the Town Hall and put in a call for Justice McManus. The upshot was that the man was ordered released by the judge and the constable was himself arrested for being intoxicated.

Peter McManus was fond of stage shows and plays and always enjoyed taking part in them. His favorite role was that of the interlocutor in a minstrel show. He served in that capacity, in the great minstrel show of 1926.

The word "interlocutor" is defined as one who serves as an interpreter. A person hearing Peter's very pronounced accent for the first time, might feel the need of an interpreter in order to understand the interlocutor.

Peter's role in politics was not limited to that of justice of the peace. He was elected and served in several other capacities including a tour as a member of Ridgefield's Board of Assessors. He was also elected as one of Ridgefield's representatives to the General Assembly in Hartford.

While he was in Hartford, his work caught the eye of Governor John Lodge who saw fit to appoint him to the State Labor Commission. He must have done a good job for after Lodge was defeated by Abe Ridicoff, Peter was reappointed to the labor commission. To satisfy the chief executive of both political parties must have taken some doing.

Being a true son of bonnie Scotiand. Peter was partial to scotch whiskey. He was also very fond of card games, especially poker, and we had many a spirited game through the years. I would guess that what little I know of the game, I learned from Peter Michael Dowling, Jim Driscoll and of course, Tabby Carboni.

On the south corner of High Ridge Avenue and Griffith Lane, there used to be a brown-shingled building. To all intents and purposes, it looked like just an old shed.

Actually the building served as a cover for a reservoir that supplied water to what is now our Community Center on Main Street. Two windmills pumped water into the reservoir. One windmill was about where the gymnasium at Veterans Park Schooi is now and the other stood near the reservoir.

After the great mansion started getting its water through the public water supply, the reservoir was abandoned after being drained. Peter realized that the building was in an excellent location and that it would not be necessary to dig out a basement. So he bought the piace and

turned it into a very attractive residence. Peter's sister, whom we have always called Aunt Netta, still lives at the Griffith Lane address.

Meanwhile, the old homestead at Fairview Avenue is still in the family. James McManus had the foresight to marry Patricia Potter and like Jim's parents, he and Patsy had six children, Michelle, Eileen, Feter. Maureen, Sheena and Mark.

That would ensure that there would never be a dull moment at 15 Fairview Avenue.