

'Dick's Dispatch'

Columns 251 through 275

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.

•••

These 25 columns appeared in The Press between April 16, and Oct. 1, 1987, and have been slightly edited and annotated [shown in brackets] by Jack Sanders in 2024.

#251: VEGA FAMILY FLEES CASTRO

Those who were taken in by Fidel Castro were many, and they were not just Cubans, seeking relief from the very oppressive Batista regime. Peace-loving people throughout the world, including the United States, saw the end of the Batista dictatorship as a step in the right direction.

Castro, from his headquarters high in the mountains around Havana, had promised his countrymen a democratic form of government. The long-suffering Cuban populace looked forward to a share in the operation of their government, but it was not to be.

Within weeks after his triumphant march into the streets of Havana, it became apparent that Castro was veering in the opposite direction. Those who closely observed the operations could see that the Cuban people would be faced with more oppression. Of equal concern was Fidel Castro's love affair with the Soviets.

Anyone who voiced the slightest disagreement with Castro's policies could look forward to very severe treatment.

The aims of the new regime quickly became obvious to Manuel Vega. This young international lawyer from a very prominent family was one of the first to understand Castro's real ambition and it frightened him.

In the early days of the Castro administration, Fidel carried on an extensive search for prominent people to serve in his cabinet. Their first qualification would be their unquestioned loyalty and allegiance to his leadership. If those selected were well known abroad, they would add greatly to the image that Castro would like to present to the world.

By the time that Castro's emissaries arrived at Manuel Vega's office, that very bright young attorney had seen through the facade behind which Fidel was operating. Even so, he was not prepared when he was offered the office of attorney general.

No doubt he was worried as to what would happen to him if he turned down a post that many would consider attractive. Therefore, Manuel wisely sent word back to Castro that he would need a little time to consider accepting such a prestigious position.

The Vega family owned and operated a large and very beautiful plantation in Cuba. It had been in the family for generations and Manuel had every intention of having his children take over the operation at some future time. This fine family had a great love for their country. These thoughts must have been running through Manuel's mind as he rode out to the plantation and informed Mrs. Vega of Castro's proposition.

His conscience would never permit him to accept the post. He was well aware that to do so would reduce him to being just another of Castro's vassals. Yet, the alternatives were very risky. If he turned down the offer, the welfare of both he and his family could well be in jeopardy.

Manuel and Mrs. Vega were still quite young, and looked even younger. However, they had nine children and another on the way. This fact had a very serious bearing on any decision that would be made on their future plans.

After discussing the matter thoroughly and considering all alternatives, Manuel stated that he had come to the conclusion that the family must leave behind its beloved plantation and flee to the United States. Mrs. Vega was very supportive in this momentous decision and plans were quickly drawn to bring their escape to fruition.

It must have been a very sad and very tearful Vega family that felt forced to leave their homeland. I was never quite sure as to why Ridgefield was selected as their destination. However, their journey ended, at least temporarily, when Manuel and Mrs. Vega, with their nine children and the governess for the children, arrived at the house we have been writing about at 70 Barry Avenue.

Needless to say, there was much excitement in the neighborhood. It was the biggest increase in population that Ridgefield had experienced in many years and soon the 10th child joined the family.

The Vegas were a wonderful family and it was my good fortune to know them quite well and be considered their friend. I remember the names of some of the children. Fernando was the oldest, then Manuel Jr., who most everyone called Manolo, Marguerita, Rosita, Pedro, Mercedes, Ricardo and little Jose.

They were very lively kids, but they were also very well behaved as well. It should also be noted that, like their parents, these young people were all quite handsome. I would bet that by 1965, Marguerita had become a beauty queen and Fernando and Manolo would be heartbreakers. Manuel Vega would remind one of Clark Gable and Mrs. Vega resembled Elizabeth Taylor, when Liz was at her very best. If you were meeting Mrs. Vega for the first time and she was introduced as the mother of 10 children, you would just never believe it.

During the short time that the Vegas graced our town, Manuel commuted to New York City, where he was associated with an international law group. Immigration laws prevented him from opening his own law office until he had worked in a law office and resided here for five years.

Local tradesmen and merchants looked at the arrival of the large Vega family with great anticipation. None showed a greater interest than the milk companies. The milk business has always been highly competitive and I should know, for I was in it for many years.

Ridgefield was about one third of its present size in population at the time, and there were more than half a dozen milk companies, all looking for business. To them, the Vega family looked like the bonanza of the century. Never did any family receive such attention.

Word of all those kids got around very rapidly and each milk company called on the Vega family, with offers they could hardly resist. Whereas, it had been common practice to drop off a sample quart of milk to any new family, the amount of samples was greatly increased with the Vegas. Soon they had enough milk to start their own store.

One milkman offered free milk for a week, while another extended it to two weeks and it went on from there. It was a sure thing that if I was going to get the Vega business, some other tactics would have to be employed.

When milk samples failed to acquire the business, some milk companies began to offer discounts of such proportions that little profit could be made.

#252: THE ELECTRIC COW

So the intense battle between the milk companies for the privilege of selling milk to the large Vega family continued. It went on for more than a week, with all kinds of promises and offers being made.

The big milk companies made such ridiculous concessions that the smaller companies began to drop out of contention. As a result, it just seemed as though little “Dic-Rie Dairy” was not large enough to continue the competition.

Then something happened that turned things around. A new diner was soon to open in south Wilton and Orem's Dairy, which supplied me with milk, had contracted to serve the new restaurant.

For a commercial establishment of this kind, it was customary for the dairy to supply a milk dispenser. This came in the form of a large stainless steel cabinet that would sit on the shelf behind the service counter. The dispenser held two cans of milk, each of which contained 20 quarts.

Milk was drawn from the dispenser by merely holding a glass against the handle of a spigot that was conveniently located on the bottom of the dispenser. The milk was kept cold by electric refrigeration.

While at the dairy one day, I noticed the shiny new dispenser being made ready for delivery to the diner. It looked like the answer to my problem and I explained my plan to Dick Hoyt, the owner of Orem's Dairy.

Dick loved to beat the competition and we quickly made a deal. The result was that I drove off with the dispenser and a new order was placed for one. I had no idea that the plan would meet with such success. There was considerable activity, connected with the trip by the Vega family from Cuba, but it is doubtful that anything ever approached the excitement that was kindled by my arrival at the big white house at 70 Barry Avenue, with what the children promptly labeled “the electric cow.”

While the dispenser was being installed, the kids lined up with their glasses held at ready, as they anxiously awaited their turn to sample the new gleaming gadget. The milk flowed in an almost continual stream and it was a novelty that did not wear off quickly. In fact, there was a sharp increase in the milk consumption at 70 Barry Avenue.

It would be safe to say that they were a happy and healthy bunch of kids and Dic-Rie Dairy had its biggest milk customer.

The oldest boys, Fernando. and Manolo, went to Fairfield Prep and the younger ones attended Saint Mary's School. They were all readily accepted by their classmates and became very popular.

The father, Manuel, was a man with a very calm exterior. However, I remember one occasion when he addressed one of our local service clubs and as he described his family's flight from Cuba, it was difficult for him to control his emotions.

He was not alone in this, as his audience was quickly caught up in the deep feelings that the family experienced.

One day Manuel approached me with a worried expression on his handsome face. In his hand, he carried a very official looking envelope. He handed it to me and asked that I read the

contents. It was from the United States Immigration authorities and concerned his visa. You can be sure that it had nothing to do with a credit card, as they had not yet come into being..

Actually the letter notification that the Vega family had been in this country for one year and if they wished to retain their visiting rights, they must leave the United States for at least 24 hours and then they were free to return.

I never knew the benefits that would be gained by such a move and perhaps today, this regulation may no longer be in effect. However, the regulation was very much in vogue at the time and Manuel was very concerned about the matter.

The frightening alternative was that, if the order was not complied with, the family must return to Cuba, with all the connotations that would accompany such a move.

Manuel Vega did not look forward to complying with the immigration order, but he knew that he had no other choice. The move from Cuba had been a painful ordeal and a repeat performance would not be relished. It should be noted that, whereas the number of Vega children had increased to 10 since their arrival in Ridgefield, number 11 was by this time well on his way.

Planning the exodus of such a large group was no easy matter. It would tax the ingenuity of even the most seasoned travel expert. These kids were exceptionally well behaved, but they were also very lively.

The joyous thoughts, generally associated with an excursion, must shrink rapidly at the thought of traveling a great distance, in the confines that public transportation offered. Some thought was given to taking the family on a trip to Mexico, where there would be no language barrier. However, the great distance that had to be traveled proved to be an obstacle.

My suggestion that the Vegas take an overnight trip to Canada brought big smiles to the faces of Mr. and Mrs. Vega.

Manuel lost no time in chartering a Greyhound bus for the trip to visit our friendly neighbor to the north. Plans called for the Vega family to visit Montreal, stay overnight and return to Ridgefield the following day. However, once there, they found the historic old city so intriguing that they stayed an extra day.

Apparently, regulations concerning the practice of law were so rigid that no exception could be made, even for a refugee of the Castro regime. Manuel would have to work for another lawyer for five years before he could open his own law office. This prospect did not appeal to a brilliant attorney, who had already been quite successful in his native Cuba.

So when offered a haven in Spain, where he could open his own office at once, Manuel decided he must leave Ridgefield for Madrid. It was a sad day when the Vegas left 70 Barry Avenue, for they had made many friends here.

While on a business trip to New York, Manuel paid us a visit. Fernando and Manolo are now attorneys in their own right and he said that there were then 13 children — but that was some time ago.

#253: THE FIRST 'SNOWBIRDS'

In the story about the house at 70 Barry Avenue, it should be noted that after the Vega family moved to Spain, the large house became the residence of the Albert Ernst family.

In telling about the Jacob Walters family, at 62 Barry Avenue, I neglected to mention Robert as one of the Walters children. This fact was brought to my attention by Bobby Walters' sister-in-law, the former Jacqueline Leighton. "Jackie," as we used to call her when she was the bookkeeper at the Conklin Dairy, now lives in Fairfield but keeps in touch with her hometown,

as so many others do, by reading *The Ridgefield Press*. So thank you, Jackie, for bringing the matter to my attention.

Robert Walters was the youngest of the Walters children and may have been the best musician in a very musical family. Bobby was a concert pianist and was good enough to have a recital at Carnegie Hall.

I am sorry to report that all four children of Jacob and Bertha Walters have passed on. Jane Walters, daughter of Jackie and Gerald Walters, now lives in upstate New York. Jane has a son, Michael, who will be entering Colgate this fall. I fully expect that in the near future, the sports pages will be carrying stories of Mike's prowess on the football field. So good luck, Mike!

Across the street from the Walters house, live Margaret and Marie Kilcoyne at 57 Barry Avenue. The Kilcoyne family have lived in this fine example of the architecture of the late 1800's for well over half a century. Marie retired several years ago, after a long and honorable career as a school teacher in the Ridgefield school system.

In the 20's and 30's Margaret was the office manager for McCarthy Brothers when that plumbing and electrical business was located where The Yarnbee is now, at 413 Main Street.

Whereas, the McCarthys had their office and showroom on Main Street, they also had two wooden buildings at the rear of the office. One building was used as storage of their supplies and the other was a workshop. Both of these old buildings have long since disappeared. One sat where Dale Ventres operated his repair business until a couple of years ago and the other sat where the present commercial ice machine is now.

With the start of World War I, Margaret Kilcoyne, as her part in the war effort, accepted a position in Washington, D.C. Following the war, she returned to Ridgefield and became associated with our First National Bank and Trust Company that later became The Fairfield County Trust Company and is now The Union Trust Company [Wells Fargo]. The original name sounded good.

The grand house at 57 Barry Avenue was built just before the turn of the century by George E. Ward. George was the owner of the Ward Steamship Line, which was a rather large enterprise at the time. He had his own carpenters, plumbers and other tradesmen employed to keep his ships in repair, so he just brought them to Ridgefield to build his new home.

Being a man of the sea, George Ward felt his house should reflect that fact. The desired nautical effect was provided with the addition of a large wrap-around porch. That porch, which really had a touch of the sea as its flooring was just like the deck of a ship, was removed several years ago. The terraced lawn of the place is still very attractive.

It should be mentioned that the area we are covering produced a number of performers for that great minstrel show of 1926 that we keep referring to. In fact, in a cast of 58, there were 20 who came from Barry Avenue, Bryon Park and High Ridge, a radius of about a quarter of a mile.

It may also be of interest that the cast included no less than five sets of sisters. There were Margaret and Marie Kilcoyne, Curly and Molly Seymour, Elizabeth and Isabel O'Shea, Mary and Katherine O'Hearn, and the Mitchell twins, Madeline and Genevieve.

Margaret Kilcoyne was a very accomplished musician and was a member of the Ridgefield Mandolin Club, which starred in the show. The club was very popular in the 20's and in 1926 it appeared on the initial broadcast at the opening of WICC in Bridgeport.

Margaret also excelled on the piano and for several years was the organist at St. Mary's Church.

Traveling west on Barry Avenue we come to the next house past Kilcoyne's which is the attractive home of the William Brown family. I remember that it once belonged to James H. Ripley and it seems as though a family named Ronk lived there in the early 20's. However, the house became vacant and remained so for several years during which it fell into a state of disrepair.

In the early 30's, George Doubleday was still in the process of adding to his already considerable real estate holdings. The Ripley place adjoined Doubleday's property to the north and the east and its acquisition would give him a solid block from Barry Avenue to Peaceable Street and extend west to Peaceable Hill Road. This would then comprise his estate which he called Westmoreland and would later become the development that is known by that name today.

The purchase of the Ripley place entailed considerable litigation, but once completed George Doubleday lost no time in starting the restoration of the Ripley house. He had two full-time carpenters on his estate, Ernest Finch and Stanley Walker, as well as an apprentice, Fred Montanari, so George did not have to look far for tradesmen.

When the renovation was completed, the place was dubbed "The Villa" by the Doubleday family and served them for winter weekends, while their mansion on Peaceable Street was closed down during the cold winter months. The Villa was much easier to heat than the large mansion that is now the Temple Shearith Israel [Congregation Shir Shalom].

It was customary for wealthy families to close down their mansions in the fall and retreat to an apartment in New York City, or perhaps to one of the southern resorts. They would then return in the spring and must have been the original "snowbirds."

It is interesting to note that whereas such migration was restricted at the time to only the very rich, it has become commonplace for those of much lesser means to enjoy this kind of lifestyle today. Call it a sign of the times. Ridgefield was not a ghost town from November until May, but you were made quickly aware that the winter season was approaching when the gates to the large estates were closed for the duration.

#254: THE TRAIN THAT NEVER CAME

Westmoreland was one of the very largest of the huge estates that Ridgefield once boasted of. Like Rome, it was not built in a day. George Doubleday just kept right on adding to his holdings by purchasing every available bit of land that adjoined his estate.

It was only after months of negotiating back in the early 30's that Mr. Doubleday was able to add the Ripley property on Barry Avenue to his already sizable estate. What made the acquisition of this property so very difficult was the fact that there was a right-of-way through the property. The right of way was in the hands of a group, called the Ridgefield, New York Railroad Corp.

It was more than a century ago — in fact it was in 1867 — that these people incorporated. Their purpose was to build a railroad from Port Chester to Ridgefield. The new corporation received a charter from the General Assembly in Hartford and work was started on this sizable project.

Land was purchased, culverts were installed and some grading was done. However, the economy of the country took a nose dive in 1873 and the very hard times that followed, resulted in the suspension of the activities.

The project had not gone un-noticed by the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad Company. The New Haven was already a large and well established firm and jealously

guarded its standing in the area. If the New Haven could not get control in any other way, it would buy up the competing franchises, whenever they became available.

At the turn of the century, wealthy New York City businessmen were moving their families to the tranquility that beautiful Ridgefield had to offer. Train service from the Ridgefield Station (where Ridgefield Supply is now) was good. However, the line that had been proposed to Port Chester would have been more direct and no doubt would have cut down on the travel time.

This would have offered some real competition to the New Haven. Therefore, when talk about reviving the Ridgefield, New York Railroad was rekindled, the New Haven kept a close watch on the proceedings.

The talk about resuming construction on the railroad also caught the attention of the General Assembly in Hartford. In an effort to keep the project moving, that august body in 1907 adopted a regulation that required a certain amount of work to be done, or the charter under which the railroad company operated would expire.

This ruling met with the approval of the New Haven, for they had been made aware that the fledgling railroad could never raise the money that was needed to complete the project. As was expected, attempts to borrow money to resume construction were unsuccessful and the Ridgefield & New York was bankrupt.

For six years, the idea of another railroad in Ridgefield lay completely dormant. Then in November of 1915, *The New York Sun* reported that work would soon be resumed on the Westchester, Northern Railroad. This new name was applied by a group that had taken over the defunct Ridgefield & NY RR.

The charter obtained by the new outfit was in the name of the New York, Westchester and Boston Company.

If you have guessed that the new company was a subsidiary of the New York, New Haven and Hartford, you would be quite correct and can go to the head of the class.

There was a great deal of excitement over the prospect of the new railroad finally becoming a reality. New plans called for a considerable extension over what had been proposed by the original railroad company. Now it was planned to lay the tracks all the way from White Plains to Danbury, where connections would be made to Boston and other points north.

Of interest to the people of Danbury was that the railroad would pass right near the Great Danbury Fair. Perhaps this might have saved the fair or perhaps the railroad might have been a boon to the mall that replaced it.

It began to look as though the new plan might be successful. More than half of the right-of-way for the new road had been secured, or options on the land had been taken. Work on the roadbed was resumed, but was short-lived.

It was about this time two things happened that put the idea of a railroad direct to Danbury from White Plains to rest for good. Travel by rail began to lessen somewhat, as Henry Ford discovered the production line that produced Model Ts like there was no tomorrow.

Then World War I was spreading throughout Europe and the attention of most industries, especially the railroads, was diverted toward the war effort.

This time, when work ceased on the railroad, it was never resumed.

There are still several reminders in Ridgefield today of the abandoned roadbed on which the tracks were never laid. Plans had called for the railroad tracks to enter Connecticut just north of the former Bell estate (now a restaurant) where West Lane enters Route 123 [in Lewisboro]. It was to run through the former George G. Shelton estate and cross Route 35 (South Salem Road) near where Cedar Lane connects with that road.

The roadbed would pass near the present residence of the Harry Neumann family [100 South Salem Road] and then cross Golf Lane. At this point the roadbed is still clearly visible. As a matter of fact it was here that it finally provided a service as it is now the driveway for the houses that have only recently been built at 115 and 119 Golf Lane.

The rail line would then continue northeast, across Westmoreland and cross Barry Avenue at the former Ripley property (where the Villa is now). It would cross Ramapoo Road about where Bruce Maine lives now and continue across New Street, just north of where it intersects with Pound Street, crossing North Salem Road at the cemetery, where North Street starts.

There was a large building at this point that was known as the Kellogg mansion. It was owned by the railroad and besides the Kelloggs, it was home to the James F. Kennedy and the Ciro Ciuccoli families. From that point the rail line would follow along Route 35 (Danbury Road) [and Route 7] to the fair grounds.

Perhaps the town could have used it for the much talked about by-pass of Main Street.

#255: BIG JIM'S FARM & OLD TURKEY SHOOTS

Anyone who has attempted to complete a transaction with a bankrupt firm is sure to discover complexities of monumental proportions. George Doubleday was to learn this very quickly in his negotiations concerning the purchase of the Ripley property on Barry Avenue.

The right of way over the property, which had been secured by the defunct New York, Westchester and Boston Railroad, caused a real problem. Once the problem was solved and the property was acquired, Doubleday did a great job of renovating what came to be known as his villa. In later years, the villa became the home of George's brother, Chester Doubleday.

There were no problems connected with George Doubleday's purchase of the former Irving Holmes farm at 99 Barry Avenue. This addition to the large Westmoreland estate took place in the late 20's, some four years before Doubleday purchased the Ripley property.

Incidentally, the name Westmoreland seemed quite appropriate, and even prophetic, as practically all of the land that Doubleday added to his large estate was west of his mansion on Peaceable Street. It certainly was an indication as to what direction he intended to move. George not only knew where he had been, he always seemed to know which way he was going.

Irving Holmes had a considerable amount of land on Barry Avenue, which he had operated as a farm for some years. It was a good farm and had proven to be quite profitable. However, farming was hard work and Irving must have been happy when Doubleday made him an offer that would have been difficult to refuse.

To be sure, 1928 was a good year to sell, because the economy was at its peak, just a year before the great Wall Street crash. So Irving Holmes accepted the offer and with his wife and two daughters Beatrice and Clara, moved to the Farmingville area and took over the operation of the Winters place. It was noticed that about this same time, Irving started smoking rather expensive cigars.

We should note that his granddaughter Joan is now Mrs. Edwin Allan and lives with her family at Stonecrest.

With the addition of the Holmes and Ripley property, Westmoreland now stretched from Peaceable Street, north to Barry Avenue and west from the mansion to Peaceable Hill Road.

George Doubleday's appetite for land did not subside with age. It was about 10 years later, and he was well past middle age, when he purchased the Steele Roberts property on Peaceable Street. This added about 43 acres to Doubleday's already large holdings.

This purchase was made possible by the disastrous and spectacular fire that destroyed the Roberts mansion, as described in Dispatch No. 197.

After acquiring the Irving Holmes farm, George Doubleday set to work to transform the nice old farmhouse into the attractive mansion it is today. When renovations were completed, the place became the home of George's daughter Alice and her new husband, John Holbrooke. As you probably already know, it is now the home of Fred and Nancy Montanari.

Almost across the street, at 92 Barry Avenue, is a fine old farm house. It is now the home of the Paul Korkers. Just behind the house is a large barn that Paul has recently reconstructed. The barn serves as a studio for Paul, who is a professional photographer.

During the era of which we are writing, it was the farm of the James H. Smith family. "Big Jim," as he was known, was the subject of Dispatch No. 18, when the Smith family lived at 644 North Salem Road. Jim Smith was one of Ridgefield's most colorful and best known characters.

He was a rural mail carrier and when not delivering mail, or hunting, or fishing, he was raising turkeys and chickens at his Barry Avenue farm. Jim was also an outstanding bowler and captained several championship bowling teams.

In telling about the famous turkey shoots at the Smith farm, I described an old 12-gauge Parker shotgun that Irving Conklin used to borrow from Howland Adams. [*Note: For those unfamiliar with old-fashioned turkey shoots, the turkeys were the frozen prizes, but not the targets, which were made of paper.*] The gun was not only exceptionally accurate, but also had the nice habit of bunching the shot in the middle of the target. The gun was the envy of all the marksmen, as it won most of the turkeys.

Somehow the gun disappeared and we did not see it again for years. Then we discovered that it was in the possession of Howland's brother, Joe Adams.

As the old saying goes, just about everything can be replaced and sure enough, my brother Jack came up with a Remington pump gun that did the job. The Remington bunched the shot equally as well, or even better than the old Parker. Jack won so many turkeys with that gun that he had to buy another freezer to store them all.

Jack was a crack shot and enjoyed competition. He was also a very good sport and used to let others use his famous gun. Therefore, there were many occasions when he found himself competing against his own gun.

I remember one time when I used Jack's gun and put seven shot in the desired circle of the target. I felt reasonably sure that no one could beat that and no one did. However, Jack tied me by putting seven shot in the circle. This necessitated a shoot-out and again I put seven shot in the circle.

Then Jack shot and, as you probably have guessed, he put eight shot in and beat me.

After Big Jim Smith passed on, his wife Beatrice kept the farm going for a while. However, it was just too much work and she sold the place to George and Rose Kaiser.

We are sorry to say that just two weeks ago, George passed on to his reward. George Kaiser was a very fine man and worked very hard, as did all his family, in keeping the farm going as the Smiths did.

One of the most necessary things to have in the successful operation of a farm is children who are willing to work hard. George and Rose had eight. They were Charlotte, George Jr., Corinne, James, Rose Mary, Joseph, Patricia, and John. You can be sure that they worked hard and you can be equally sure that they never got in any trouble.

With the passing of the Doubleday family, Westmoreland has become a large development and more recently, the Kaiser farm has followed suit. So just about all the old Ridgefield farms have disappeared.

The price of land being what it is only a rock and roll singer would have enough money to operate a farm and they are not the kind to be interested in farms:

#256: WHEN THEY MIGHT HAVE SAID, "HI, HI."

If you were to be out walking on Barry Avenue in the 30's, after passing the turkey farm you would come to what is now 110. It was a cute little old white house, with green trim.

The house was old even then and it was quite close to the highway. The long front porch that has since been removed made it seem even closer to the road. The house is considerably larger today as through the years additions have been made to the north side. Also, the color has been changed from white to red, and a garage has been added.

If your walk was taken on a nice day and it was made during the late afternoon, chances are that as you passed the house, your attention would be drawn to a white-haired little old lady sitting on the porch. It was Annie McGlynn's habit to enjoy watching the sun go down behind West Mountain and in her many years, she saw a great many sunsets.

Annie was a sister of Michael T. McGlynn, who lived just a little farther out on Barry Avenue. She had a very kindly face and would have made an excellent subject for a picture by the great Norman Rockwell as she sat there in her rocking chair.

Annie never married and lived alone in that house as long as I can remember. Just as her face would indicate, she had a very pleasant disposition and it was always nice to stop and talk with her.

Though she seemed to live apart from the world at large, Annie kept up on things and was well aware of what was going on. *The Press* kept her informed on local news and her little Atwater Kent radio brought in news of the world.

I believe this house is now the home of the Francis X. Kobe family

Next door and traveling west is a fine stucco house at 112 Barry Avenue that is now the home of the Philip Knoche family. The house was built by Charles W. Riedinger in the early 30's. Charley, one of our local electricians, was described in Dispatch No. 62. He was an excellent tradesman and a real fussy budget, so you know that only the very best went into the building of this very nice house.

The Riedingers lived next door, at 118 Barry Avenue, while their new home was being built. This made it easy for Charley to keep a watch on the progress that was being made, and you can be sure that he did just that at every opportunity. He shuttled back and forth, checking this and that and, of course, he did the electrical work himself. The inspections that Charley made and the suggestions that he gave to the other tradesmen, resulted in the splendid house that became his dream home.

The Riedingers passed on after only a few years, but at least they enjoyed their fine home for a time. The place then became the home of the George G. Scott family.

George was for many years Ridgefield's judge of probate and town clerk. In fact, for some time he held both jobs at the same time. Come to think of it, George Scott must have been the last judge of probate who was not a lawyer. Despite not having the benefit of legal training, I never heard of any of his rulings being questioned and the records in the probate office were all exceptionally well kept.

George wrote with a smooth flowing hand, as anyone who has had cause to examine the records in the town hall will attest. When in school he must have learned the long forgotten Palmer Method.

His signature, which appears thousands of times in the many record books, is mindful of that of the great John Hancock. Those who are able to write like that today are few and far between.

George held offices in several fraternal organizations. He also served many times as the moderator at town meetings. He owned some of the buildings in the business area on Main Street and conducted business in some of them. All in all, George Scott was a very busy man.

The Scotts are one of Ridgefield's real old families and at one time there were so many of them and they owned so much land that the Scotland District was named for them.

Both George's father, Hiram K. Scott, and Hiram K. Jr. were postmasters for many years. They served at intervals that were dictated by changes in the administration in Washington. Hiram K. Sr. was the 11th postmaster of Ridgefield and first took office on April 7, 1851.

This might be a good time to note that yours truly holds the record for continuous service as postmaster. Since that record spans more than 20 years, it is reasonable to assume that it will not be surpassed in this century.

The youngest of George Scott's sons was named Hiram. He must have been the third or fourth to be given that name, so when he was a boy we called him "Sonny." As he grew older, the name Sonny was dropped and we called him "Hi." This served a double purpose as when you met him on the street, "Hi" was both a name and a salutation.

Many will remember Hi as a great bowler, when the bowling leagues used the Congregational Church House alleys. After conducting an auto body shop for many years, just off Main Street, where Morelli's Inc., is now, Hi and his wife Marion moved to Florida.

Sidney Scott is a grandson of George and is retired after many years of service as a mail carrier from the Ridgefield Post Office. I believe that Sid and his son Russell are the last of the venerable Scott family in Ridgefield. The town sure has changed.

At any rate, when the Riedingers moved from 118 Barry Avenue to their new home next door, 118 became the home of my brother, James A. (Gus) Venus and his wife, the former Estelle Lynch. Then, in the late 30's, 118 was purchased by Patrick and Helen Potter and it is still the home of their daughter, Rita.

Pat and Nellie Potter were a great couple and lots of fun to be with. Pat worked on many of the large estates that Ridgefield used to have. Like his brothers, Tom and Chris, Pat was a very strong man. He was also very quick and was handy with his fists. With a combination like that you can be sure he commanded plenty of respect.

Fortunately, he was also an exceptionally good natured man. Pat loved to play cards and was very good at pinochle, setback, 45 — an old Irish game, and poker. To play poker with Pat was an unforgettable experience, and we did many times.

#257: THE BRIEF ADVENTURES WITH SPOT

In telling about Patrick Potter, it should be noted that he was one of those who helped to drive the Ku Klux Klan from the town hall on the last visit of that terrorist group to Ridgefield.

It happened in the middle 20's and that very exciting evening was described in Dispatch No. 73. It is my guess that the Klan had not anticipated having an encounter with someone like Pat. One thing is sure, he must have made a lasting impression, for there has been no repeated performance in more than 60 years.

Pat was a great outdoorsman and loved hunting and fishing. His favorite sport was fox hunting and he always kept a couple of real good fox hounds. I must have been eight or nine when Pat made me a present of a beautiful young fox hound.

I was delivering newspapers at the time and I took the large dog along with me on the paper route. It was with great pride, after finishing the route, that I presented "Spot" to my family.

My brothers quickly accepted him, but mother was not the least bit enthusiastic. Spot was lodged in the basement for his first night in the Venus household and after dinner plans were made for a more suitable place to keep him.

However, as it turned out, there was no need for the plans, for alas, during the night Spot chewed a hole in the door. In the morning, the dog and I got our marching orders that ended with the directive, "Take the dog with you on your paper route and do not bring him back."

So Spot and I started out and at each stop he was offered to a family free of charge. There were no takers, until we reached Lou Barrett's house on Titicus Hill. Lou was an avi fox hunter and quickly recognized that Spot had the makings of a fine fox hound. However, Lou would not accept my free offer and insisted on giving me a dollar or two.

Lou Barrett had two other hounds, but Spot proved to be the best of the lot. Word of Spot's prowess soon got around and within a month a man stopped at the Barrett house and offered Lou \$150 for him. Lou turned down the offer and the next night someone stole Spot along with one of the other dogs.

The very next house is the home of the Arthur Miller family at 124 Barry Avenue. Like so many of the older houses, it sits right close to the highway. It had been the home of the Lockwood family some 60 years ago and later became the home of the John W. Smith family.

Jack Smith had been the superintendent on the Frederic E. Lewis estate, "Upaganstit," for many years. When that great showplace — now Manor Estates — closed down in the 30's, the Smiths, who had lived where the Joseph Dunworth family live now, had to move.

At that time, Jack Smith bought the Barry Avenue house from the estate of Hannah Lockwood.

Jack had made a great name for himself, with the many prize winning flowers that he exhibited at the National Flower Show in New York in the old Grand Central Palace. It was in the great conservatory at the Lewis place that Jack had succeeded in growing orchids. He is generally credited with being the first in this country to have done so [with certain species].

Jack Smith could not live without a greenhouse, so the first order of business, when the family moved to Barry Avenue, was to build one at the rear of their new home.

After Jack passed on, the greenhouse was taken down. It had housed many varieties of flowers but his favorites were the 16 original orchid plantings which he had brought with him from the Lewis estate. Foremost among that collection was the Louis Cymbidium, which had been a perpetual winner at all the shows.

Jack Smith's success with flowers and especially with orchids, was known far and wide. This resulted in his being asked to judge at flower shows all over the country, including the big one in New York.

During this period, Wadsworth Lewis (son of Frederic) was in the process of establishing a large estate between Limestone Road and Great Hill Road, and Jack was called on to supervise this project. It was not as large as "Upaganstit" but it turned out to be a beautiful estate.

After Wadsworth passed on, the place was purchased by the noted Henry Luce and his equally famous wife, Clare Boothe. It is now owned by Hans P. Kraus, who has kept it in excellent condition.

At about the time that the Wadsworth Lewis estate was completed, the New York World's Fair was being put together. Jack Smith was called on to select and supervise the plantings at Flushing Meadows.

Incidentally the materials for this enormous undertaking were furnished by Ridgefield's famous Outpost Nurseries. Outpost also did the landscape gardening for the Fair and it was acclaimed for the great job it did.

Somehow in his busy life, Jack Smith found time to serve on Ridgefield's Board of Selectmen.

I guess it sounds as though all Jack ever did was work. That is not quite true. He was blessed with a very fine voice and he appeared in that 1926 minstrel show that we keep mentioning. Jack was also a good golfer and a very fine bowler. Like his neighbor Big Jim Smith, Jack also captained a bowling team on which I once bowled at the Old Congregational Church alleys.

There is a nice open field, between 124 and 134 Barry Avenue that has somehow miraculously escaped from the developers. It was once a part of the property at 134 and perhaps it still is.

The grand old house is now the home of the Robert Knoche family. It was once the home of the Michael T. McGlynn family.

"M.T." or Painter Mike, as he was called in order to distinguish him from his cousin "Plumber Mike," was a prominent painting contractor. Mr. McGlynn had his paint shop in the small building on the north side of Catoonah Street, just as you start up the hill.

He used to drive a horse named Tommy and we used to ride with him from the shop to his home on Barry Avenue and then walk back. It was worth the walk just to ride behind that horse. At the end of the ride I was always given the admonition, "Save up your pennies, for when you get old they will be the only friends you have."

M.T. was a director of the Ridgefield Savings Bank for many years and for just about a half century, he was a member of the Board of Education, when it was still called the school board. Ridgefield has long been credited with having an excellent school system.

M.T. was always in favor of the best quality education, but without any frills. You can bet that any budget that had his approval was utterly devoid of any padding.

He loved to tell the story of an old friend of his, who served on the Katonah, N.Y., Board of Education. The friend told M.T. that he could never understand a system whereby a mother, on a winter's day, would dress her child in warm woolen clothing, put the child on a heated bus for a ride to an overheated school, where the youngster would then take off most its clothes to run around a million dollar gymnasium, in order to get its exercise. I'm sure that M.T. heartily agreed with his friend.

Incidentally, Mr. McGlynn passed on in his 98th year.

#258: OLD JOE KNOCHE AND HIS MILE-LONG WALL

The large white house at 131 Barry Avenue has been in the Knoche family for many years. It is now the home of the Terrance Knoche family.

Unfortunately, Terry passed on just a few years ago. Mrs. Knoche is the former Helen Golden and her name must be added to those who took part in that great 1926 minstrel show.

Terry and Helen had six children, most of whom became tradesmen and all of whom are very industrious. Terrance Jr. is a plumber by trade and is with The Ridgefield Water Supply Company. Terry lives a short distance away on West Mountain.

Robert followed in his dad's footsteps and became a fine carpenter. Bob and his wife live right across the street from the old homestead, at 134 Barry Avenue. John became a real good electrician and lives with his wife and family at 374 Branchville Road, from where he conducts Knoche Electric Inc.

Philip is a surveyor with the Henrici Company and lives with his family just around the corner at 112 Barry Avenue.

Mary Ellen and her husband, Arthur Miller, live just across the street at 124 Barry Avenue. Of course, the very popular Charles Knoche owns Knoche Realty at 34 Bailey Avenue. Charlie and his wife, the former Debbie Morganti, live at present on Catoonah Street, but will soon be moving to Perry Lane.

They used to say that the youngest in the family stayed the closest to home. However, in this case the youngest, except for John, will live the farthest from what we call the Knoche compound.

Helen Knoche is justly proud of a family that has Charlie to furnish the property to build a house on; Phil to survey the property and draw a blueprint of it; Bob could do the carpentry work and put the house together; while Terry could install the plumbing and John could take care of the electrical work, leaving Mary Ellen to run the whole operation.

Before this family of Knoches, there was the one headed by the patriarch of them all. Joseph J. Knoche was well over six feet in height. He was of slender build, with wide and square shoulders and was quite strong.

His head was covered with an abundance of snow white hair and he had a large moustache to match. At the very least, it would be fair to say that he presented a very impressive appearance.

Old Joe, as we will call him to distinguish him from a younger Joe, married the former Mary Hickey and they had four children. A daughter, Elizabeth, attended local schools and later taught kindergarten, before joining the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, at Philadelphia's Saint Elizabeth Convent. As a nun, Elizabeth took the name Sister Mary Alberta and worked among Black people and Indians in the Southwest. She passed on to her eternal reward only a couple of months ago.

Then came Terrance, Teresa and last but by no means least. Joseph Albert Knoche. Terry became one of Ridgefield's premier carpenters and builders. Teresa married Joseph Sheehy and still lives in what was the original family homestead on Pelham Lane. Teresa also appeared in that much mentioned 1926 minstrel show.

Joseph Albert (young Joe) married Margaret Quinn and they live in their very nice home, next to the old homestead on Pelham Lane. Not too far away, on Nod Hill Road, lives their son Joseph (Joey) and his wife, the former Patricia Sheehan and their nice little family.

Young Joe, like his brother Terry, became a fine carpenter and the two brothers joined forces in the building trade, under the name Knoche Brothers. It became one of Ridgefield's best known and most successful enterprises. As might be expected, Joey followed in his fathers footsteps and learned the carpenter trade.

Three things are quickly noticeable about the Knoche family. They are close-knit and live near each other.

Mentioning the old Knoche homestead on Pelham Lane brings to mind the fact that this road, which connects Nod Road with Nod Hill Road, is the border line between Ridgefield and Wilton, on their eastern sections. As you travel over this winding road, you are one minute in one town and the next minute, you are in the other.

I am not sure where the name Pelham came from. [Editor's note: The name comes from the John Pelham family that farmed that neighborhood in the late 1800's.] This road, for many years, was known as Knoche Road. I can understand that, as the Joseph J. Knoche family must have been one of the early settlers of that area and lived there for some years before moving to Barry Avenue. Some years ago, the Edward Knoche family also lived on this road.

Old Joe, the patriarch, by trade was a stone mason par excellence. Some of his creations are still around today, as monuments to a craftsman who believed that everything that he built must last forever. I get the feeling that old Joe's aspiration to produce fine work must have rubbed off on his sons.

During World War I, when the Knoche family still lived in the old homestead they had a neighbor, who lived on the corner of Pelham and Nod Hill Road. His name was J. Alden Weir and besides being president of the National Academy of Design, was known as one of this country's foremost landscape artists.

It was about this time that Mr. Weir commissioned old Joe to build a stonewall fence around his quite sizable estate. Weir knew another artist when he saw one and the only directive that he gave old Joe was that no cement would be used in building the fence.

This restriction did not faze old Joe in the least, as he had built dry walls before. However, this wall would prove to be a bit more difficult, as there were places where the wall must cross swampy areas.

Old Joe did not have to go very far to his work, as the wall started almost in front of his home. The great wall of Ridgefield (or Wilton) would be about one mile long and each stone had to be cut so that it fit properly and it must have taken a very long time to build it. More than 70 years later, the wall is still intact, even as it passes over the swamp areas. The only stones that have moved in all those years are ones that have been moved intentionally for one reason or another.

#259: HOW OLD JOE OUTFOXED MR. MONEY BAGS

One of the nice things about being a builder is that if you are good at your trade, and live long enough, some of your creations may become monuments to your ability. If the material you use is cement, stone or brick, the result of your work may last for many years after you have passed on.

This was especially true in the case of Joseph J. "Old Joe" Knoche. Several of his monuments are worth telling about.

There is the story about the magnificent gateway entrance to the former Philip D. Wagoner estate on Oreneca Road. This great showplace is now the home of the Harrison Horblits.

Unfortunately, Old Joe passed on before he had the opportunity to see his work on television, in the form of a commercial.

As the story was told to me, a prominent family on West Mountain had a weekend guest who was affiliated with a very large advertising firm. One of the firm's best known clients was the Anheuser Busch Corporation. While riding along Oreneca Road, the man's attention was drawn to the very impressive entrance to the Wagoner estate. The grandeur of this fine structure

shifted his mind into high gear. He could see that here was something that would provide a perfect background for an ad that his firm was working on.

This happened during the fall of the year and soon the famous Budweiser Clydesdales would be appearing at the Great Danbury Fair. The ad man lost no time in securing permission to stage what was to become a familiar scene on millions of television screens. On their way to the Fair, the trailers that transported the huge horses were diverted to West Mountain and television cameras whirred as the gates opened and the beautiful horses passed through, pulling the big red wagon.

Another story about Old Joe was one my father delighted in telling. He felt that it graphically illustrated the advantage of knowing how to do a job correctly.

In this story, Old Joe was boss on a job that required a lot of stone-cutting. On this particular day, two of his men were engaged in splitting a very large stone. They were burly men and one stood on either side of the stone, flailing away, with mighty blows from their large sledgehammers. The stone resisted their best efforts and it began to look as though they would never crack it.

Old Joe watched the men from a short distance and finally went over and asked the men to step back. He examined the stone carefully in order to determine which way the veins ran. Then he raised his hammer and with one sharp blow, the large stone split in several pieces. It was all in knowing where, and how, to strike the stone.

My own favorite story about Old Joe had to do with an anecdote that demonstrates not only his business acumen, but the fact that he possessed a deep sense of humor. It just naturally followed that a man blessed with Old Joe's fine craftsmanship would have among his customers many of the wealthy people of this area.

One in particular had made use of his talents on several occasions and always seemed pleased with the work that was performed. This customer was one of the wealthiest of Ridgefield's wealthy, and always paid his bills. However, he was also very slow in paying and Old Joe was aware of this from the jobs he had done for this man over the years.

The man and his family, like many of the well-to-do, did not spend their winters in Ridgefield. In late fall they would leave for a warmer climate and like the migrating birds, they returned in the spring. On this particular spring, Old Joe received a phone call from his wealthy customer to the effect that his fireplace was in need of repairs. Old Joe was exceptionally good with fireplaces and agreed to have this one in fine condition when the family returned after their hibernation in the warmer climate.

The family returned in a spring that was so exceptionally warm that there was no occasion to use the fireplace. However, with the coming of fall, it was a different matter. It was in October when, on a crispy Sunday afternoon, the man decided to enjoy the warmth of his fireplace. The butler brought in some kindling wood and a few logs, and proceeded to light the fire. Alas, within minutes smoke began to float out into the room and it became necessary to extinguish the fire.

It was not long before Old Joe's phone was ringing and a very irate customer was complaining about his repair job. To make matters worse, the man was embarrassed because he had a house full of company.

Old Joe calmly listened to the man for a while and then reminded him that, whereas the work had been performed seven months previously, he still had not been paid for his services. Negotiations were carried on over the telephone and finally Old Joe agreed to come right over

and fix the fireplace. It was also agreed that Mr. Money Bags would first pay Old Joe for the work he had done as soon as he arrived.

The customer was really a very nice man—he just had the annoying habit of keeping tradesmen waiting for their money. In this instance, he was standing on his front porch, with money in hand, when Old Joe arrived, with no tools to fix the fireplace.

After receiving his pay, Old Joe entered the mansion and strode across the living room to the fireplace as the man and his guests watched with great interest. In dramatic fashion, Old Joe knelt in front of the fireplace and extended one of his arms up the chimney. When his hand reappeared, it was holding a large pane of glass that had been blocking the path of the smoke.

He then relit the firewood and the fireplace worked perfectly. It was all done in such a professional manner that the all guests broke into laughter and even Mr. Money Bags had to join in the merriment.

He later enjoyed telling about how he had been outfoxed by Old Joe.

#260: A NURSERYMAN'S COLLIE & AN AD MAN'S MUSIC

When the Knoche family moved to Pelham Lane (Knoche Road) in the early 30's, their home at 131 Barrv Avenue was leased at least twice. First it became home to the Charles Sterling family and then the Paul Case family came for a short stay.

Charles Sterling was perhaps best known as one of the area's finest musicians. Charlie was an accomplished violinist and played with several of the popular dance bands of the 20's and 30's. He also had his own band and played many times at the old Odd Fellows Hall on Main Street in the building that now houses Marshall's, Rodier's, Cortina's, Century 21 Associates, Gigi's and Rubin Associates. Of course, he also played in the old town hall auditorium and the various church houses.

It was a time when ballroom dancing was very much in vogue. Those dances were so much fun and we wonder why we do not have them anymore. In those days people really danced and gracefulness, poise and balance were equally as important as one's ability to perform gymnastics, to what now passes for music.

This was also a time when a dance band was not complete without at least one violin. Amplifiers had not yet come on the scene, so there was no blasting from the bandstand. The music was easy on the ears and people could actually carry on a conversation while it was being played. It was a generation or two before eardrums started being destroyed by the jungle drums that are aided and abetted by all those electronic gadgets.

Charlie Sterling was an affable little gentleman, with a well-trimmed moustache and he was very well liked by his fellow musicians. While on stage leading his dance band, Charlie kept a watchful eye on the couples as they danced by. This enabled him to view the effect his music was having on the dancers and he was always able to select the songs that would be most pleasing to them.

Keeping the crowds of dancers in a happy mood was only one of Charlie Sterling's talents. He was also an excellent salesman. In fact, he was the ad salesman for the Acorn Press for several years and was very successful in that role.

When Charlie was not performing with his violin, or selling ads for the paper (he was the first ad man for *The Press*), he would turn his attention to the actual printing of the paper.

The Sterlings had two daughters, Frances and Betty, and it was just a natural thing that they were musically inclined. Betty had a very nice voice and I thought she might have a career as a singer. However, through the years I have lost track of the girls.

When the Paul Case family arrived at 131 Barry Avenue, they brought with them a couple of small children and a huge collie dog. Paul had come to Ridgefield in the 30's and was associated with the Outpost Nurseries.

When the Depression slowed down activities at the nursery, Paul, like several of the nurserymen, started a business of his own. Several local men were employed in Paul's new venture and the business seemed to thrive. It probably was World War II that caused him to go out of business.

I have good reason to remember the Case's dog. He was a beautiful black collie and was as big as a small pony. For many years this breed of dog enjoyed a fine reputation as a family dog. This was especially true with farm families, for whom it performed many tasks, such as herding the farm animals and it was treated as one of the family.

The collie was highly intelligent and had a fine disposition that matched his very handsome appearance. There are some who believe that the great writer, Albert Payson Terhune, played a major role in some changes in the collie that were not necessarily for the betterment of the breed. Besides writing many books about dogs, Terhune served for many years on the editorial staff of the old *New York Evening World*. Terhune's books were very popular back in the 20's and 30's. One that I liked very much was *A Book of Famous Dogs*.

Mr. Terhune had a great love for the collie dog, but was always trying to improve his appearance. His large estate in New Jersey was called Sunnybank Farm and it was here that he operated extensive kennels for his favorite dogs.

By inbreeding, Terhune sought to produce a collie with a much longer nose and a much more narrow head. Some of his friends advised him against his experiment, saying that it was like "gilding the lily." Perhaps he should have listened.

At any rate, the collie's heads became more slender and the noses grew a lot longer. It just naturally followed that as the head narrowed, the distance between the eyes became less and there was less room for the brain to develop. There were some dog fanciers who felt that the old collies were not only more intelligent, but a whole lot better-natured.

I do not know whether Paul Case's dog came from Sunnybank, but he had a very narrow head and close-set eyes. I was to find out that he was not a very good-natured dog. In fact, he was vicious.

We had a couple of milk routes at Conklin's Dairy at the time and Irving Conklin himself delivered to the Case family. He told me one time about how the Case's collie would attack without the slightest provocation. Irving said that the dog was so dangerous, he would leave the milk out by the mailbox rather than risk putting it on the porch, as was the custom.

There came a time when, in Irving's absence, I was called to deliver his route. By the time I got to 131 Barry Avenue, I had completely forgotten the warnings about the dog.

It was still not quite daylight as I approached the house carrying several glass bottles full of milk. I was about 25 feet from the house when there came a very loud growl from the direction of the front porch and the dog came flying out from under it.

The big dog meant business and leaped right for my throat. In desperation I threw up my left arm to ward him off and one of his fangs caught the strap of my new wrist watch that Marie had given me as a birthday present. The watch went flying into the semidarkness and with it went my usual good nature.

As the dog turned to renew the attack, a bottle somehow found its way to the small space between his eyes.

The next time Irving Conklin delivered his route, he told of how when he got to the Case house, their big dog came out from under the front porch and ran as fast as he could go in the direction of West Mountain.

#261: WILLIAM DINGEE: CHEF, ELECTRICIAN, OFFICIAL

In the early days of this century, the Patrick Geehan family lived on Mopus Bridge Road. The property was later purchased by the great Shakespearean actor Walter Hampden, and is still the home of his son, Paul Hampden. Pat Geehan and his wife Bridget had nine children. The youngest was named James and we have something in common, since I too am the youngest of nine.

In those days, it was generally expected that, as the children in a large family grew, the older ones would move on and maybe the youngest would remain and take care of the parents. By the time World War I came along, the Geehan family had dwindled to a point where a large house was no longer necessary. So Pat, Bridget, and their son James moved to a nice little house, at what is now 135 Barry Avenue.

The house is still there, but it is larger now than when the Geehans lived there, and it is still very nice and neat. True to form, Jim Geehan remained with his parents and after his father passed on, Jim stayed and cared for his mother. He never married.

Jim was only middle aged when he became ill and expired. He was then followed only three months later by his mother. The Barry Avenue property was left to Jim's sister Elizabeth, who was married to Thomas Curley, whom we told about in Dispatch No. 81 — that was a long time ago.

Mrs. Curley kept the place for a few years, until she was also called to her just reward. The place was then placed on the market.

It was just a little over 50 years ago that a young couple, William and Eleanor Dingee, were looking for a place to bring up their family. The Geehan house was ideal, and just what the Dingees wanted. So they lost no time in purchasing what was to be their family home for more than half a century.

Why is it that today there are few, if any, places available in Ridgefield that newly married couples can afford to start out in? Why do developers continue to build homes that are so large that only those in the higher brackets can afford them?

Bill Dingee had done a hitch in the U.S. Navy, where among so many other things, he learned to do electrical work. So when Bill came home from the Navy, he worked for various electrical contractors.

He had a good eye for business and no doubt looked forward to the day when he would have his own electrical business. However, this ambition had to be put on the backburner for a while, as soon after Bill and Eleanor bought the Geehan property, an opportunity arose that proved to be of great interest to them.

John Pappageorge and his brother-in-law, Peter Chrisifis, had been operating The Fairfield Lunch in the store where The Question Mart is now [*today, A Touch of Sedona*]. For more than a dozen years it had been a popular eating place and was a thriving business.

John and Pete had decided to open an even larger restaurant in Cambridge, Mass., and let it be known that they were going to sell their Ridgefield business. Bill had also learned to cook and prepare food while in the Navy, and was anxious to try out his culinary talents.

Though it was only a few months after acquiring his new home on Barry Avenue, Bill was equal to the challenge and soon he was doling out food to a lot of happy customers at The Fairfield Lunch.

Though business was brisk, it was a lot of hard work and Bill soon decided that he could do better in the electrical business. In short order — no pun intended — Bill sold the restaurant to Florence (Mrs. Fred) Bates, who changed the name to The Village Grille, and ran the place for several years. Florence expanded the operations to include the store next door to where The Horologist of London is now [*today, Sedona Art*] and changed the setup to include a bar.

When Leo Pambianchi took over the business a few years later, he changed the name to The Belmont, and added the store where the Candlelight Shoppe is now and it was a big thing in town at the time.

Once free of the restaurant business, Bill Dingee gave full attention to the electrical business and soon established the firm that still operates today, under the name Dingee Electric. It proved to be a very successful enterprise and is operated today by two of his former employees, Wilfred Weaver and Richard Carboni.

Woofie and Dick have carried on the high standards that were set by Bill Dingee so many years ago. Bill found time in his bus life to serve in several positions in our local government.

Both he and his good friend, Ernest Sturges, were progressive and could be considered moderates. Yet, when they were on the Board of Finance, they would not allow any wild spending sprees and demanded a dollar in value for every dollar spent. It seems that Marty Carr is the only one asking questions at budget time today. He is like “A Voice Calling in the Wilderness,” but Marty would have had lots of support from Bill and Ernie. They would want to know why both school and town budgets are up, while school enrollment is down and during the past year there has been no appreciable increase in population, and they would insist on satisfactory answers.

Ernie and Bill also served on the Board of Tax Review (we used to call it The Board of Relief) and both men proved to be very compassionate. The Board of Relief seemed like a good name for that committee and it begins to look like relief is what some people are going to need when they look at their new tax bills next week.

Bill and Eleanor Dingee had two sons, Robert and Richard. They were among the lucky ones, who got their homes before the housing market went crazy. Bob is a teacher in the Norwalk school system and lives with his family on Soundview Road. Dick is second assistant chief in the Ridgefield Fire Department and lives with his family in the old family homestead on Barry Avenue. He comes from a family of firefighters. His dad was a member of the Hook and Ladder division of the old Volunteer Fire Department. His uncle Arthur drove the Reo fire engine in the Phineas Lounsbury Engine Company and his grandfather Roswell Dingee belonged to the Hose Company.

#262: COTTAGE STREET PIONEERS, GRANNY KEELER'S CLAN

It was during the mid 40's that the late Harold O. Davis decided to develop a piece of land that he owned on Barry Avenue. I think that at least a part of Harold's purpose was to provide employment for young men who were returning from service in World War II.

It was not a large tract of land and is probably one of the very smallest of Ridgefield's many developments. The project, when completed, consisted of only three dwellings. The road serving these homes is called Cottage Street and is less than 100 yards in length.

One of those who worked at building the homes on this little street was Evo Principi. Evo is a carpenter by trade, and knew first-hand that the workmanship in the houses was very good. So, with a display of confidence in his own work, Evo bought one of the houses and he and his family became the first residents on Cottage Street and they have lived there ever since.

For those who are not acquainted with Evo Principi, you should know that he comes from a family of athletes. He himself was one of the finest baseball players that Ridgefield High School ever produced. Evo set some enviable records and there were those who thought he might pursue a career in baseball. Perhaps his decision not to do so was based in part on his reluctance to leave Ridgefield and we can understand that. However, Evo still retains a great love for our nation's favorite pastime, and follows the efforts of all the teams, especially the Mets and Yankees.

The house on the corner of Cottage Street and Barry Avenue was first owned by Dr. Charles Izzo, a prominent dentist who practiced in Ridgefield for many years. His office was located over the store where Ridgefield Auto Parts is now [until recently, Deborah Ann's].

This house was also once owned by Colonel Bernard J. Finan, who lived there with Mrs. Finan for several years. Col. Finan was retired from the United States Air Force, after serving in both World Wars I and II.

The Colonel was a fine gentleman who, as you can imagine, lived a very eventful life. His tall and very erect figure had a definite military bearing that made him quite easy to recognize. A son, Bernard J. Jr., is now a colonel, and of course he is in the U.S. Air Force.

Unfortunately, there was just not enough available land in the little development to provide for a road that would meet the town's specifications for its acceptance as a town highway. Therefore, the road is actually an accessway, or private road, and those who live on it are saddled with the expense of maintaining it.

Of course there are certain benefits that are enjoyed by those who live on a private road or a dead-end road. They do not have to contend with wild drivers racing through their little settlement.

Directly across Barry Avenue from Cottage Street there is a fine old house that has been vacant for a long time. It is hard to imagine a house in Ridgefield being vacant for very long.

During the period of which I am writing, this was the home of Warren E. Keeler and his wife, the former Marv Fahey. Mary was called "Granny" by most everyone who knew her.

Warren E. and Granny had three children that we knew: Bernard F., Mary and Warren J. Warren E. passed on at a relatively young age and Granny and her son Warren J., lived on in the old homestead for many years.

They were joined on weekends by Granny's daughter, Mary Keeler Burke. Mary worked in New York City during the week. Mary's daughter, Rita Burke, also lived and grew up here under the watchful eye of old Granny. Rita was a pretty, curly haired blonde and was very popular with her classmates. I believe she now has a family of her own and lives in California.

Bernard F. Keeler did not stray far from the old homestead. In fact, he and his wife, the former Mary Scanlon, lived right next door where the Gavin family lives now at 152 Barry Avenue.

Bernie served as a corporal in the Home Guard during World War I. He was also very active in local affairs and was a member of the school board (Board of Education) for several terms.

Bernie was a staunch Democrat at a time when, if you wanted steady employment, it took a considerable amount of courage to belong to that party. He was a longtime member of the Democratic Town Committee and was also a past Grand Knight of Marquette Council K. of C.

Warren J. Keeler, like his brother Bernie, was a painter by trade. Also like Bernie, he was quite tall and it was said that they needed a ladder only when it was necessary to reach a very high ceiling.

Warren was not as outgoing as Bernie and never married. Though he had a rather gruff exterior, Warren was a kindly person. However, a person would be well-advised to think twice before crossing him, as we will see.

The Bernard F. Keelers had three children: Catherine, Joseph F. and Bernard R. Keeler. Young Bernie was called Dick, to distinguish him from his father, and like his father and his uncle, he was also a painter.

His brother, Joseph F., was a carpenter by trade and built his own home, just a short distance further down Barry Avenue. Catherine lives with her husband, Stanley Piasta, in the Branchville area of town. Both Stanley and Catherine are staunch Democrats and Stanley served for many years on the town committee. Catherine retired some time ago after being the office manager at the Danbury office of the State of Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles for many years.

So Granny Keeler was the matriarch of a close-knit family. She was rather feisty and she was also a fountain of wisdom and information. It was always an enlightening experience to hear her proclaim on the state of the neighborhood, the state of Ridgefield in general, or for that matter, the state of the Union itself. You can be sure she kept up on all those things.

It must have agreed with her, for Granny lived to the ripe old age of 98 and was as sharp as a tack to the very end.

#263: JONES, McMANUSES AND MORE FROM MARY'S LANE

Traveling along Barry Avenue, we come to another short, dead-end street. It is called Mary's Lane and I believe this road was named for Mrs. Peter McManus, the former Mary Connelly. Peter McManus had been the owner and developer of this property.

Mary's Lane runs south and west from Barry Avenue. As you enter the little street, your attention would be drawn to a rather large house on your left. It is the old, and very well kept, home of John T. and Jeanette (McManus) Jones. It was in this very nice setting that Jack and Jeanette raised their four daughters: Elizabeth Ann, Virginia, Arlene, and Monica.

During the period of which I am writing, this had been the home of Daniel McKay and his family. Dan had retired after having been the coachman and later the chauffeur for the Effington Maynard family.

At the rear of this place there was a large barn, at the end of which there was a nice apartment where Mr. and Mrs. Robert Barnes lived for many years. The barn also housed a gigantic Pierce-Arrow touring car. In a rare display of generosity, the Maynards had given this fine old car to Dan, as a retirement present.

You did not just get into this high-wheeled, right-hand-drive vehicle, you actually climbed in. Once perched upon its plush, black leather upholstery, you could look down on the rest of the world.

As reported in Dispatch 208, Dan — as directed — polished the car daily, for so many years that the great old car became devoid of all its paint. Even without the paint, the car had a brilliant shine and would be worth a fortune today.

The Jones family acquired this place in the 40's after Dan McKay passed on, and have lived there ever since. As a young lad, Jack Jones lived with his parents and sister Nancy, just off Main Street, on Branchville Road. His father was superintendent for the Misses Annie and Ellen Stone when they owned and lived in the mansion at 212 Main Street. This place was later the home of Miss Emily Buch and today it is the home of George J. Goodstadt and his wife Alexandra.

Jack Jones was always athletically inclined and was a fine baseball and basketball player. He would have been the star catcher on our high school team, except his father took a position in New Canaan, and the family moved to that town.

In those days, New Canaan was known as "The Next Station to Heaven." Of course, that was because Ridgefield was the next station.

As well as being good at baseball and basketball, I remember that Jack Jones had a set of boxing gloves that he knew how to use. Today his athletic activities have been relegated to a weekly game of golf at Dhly Ridge, where I am told he still shoots in the 80's.

Like any sensible person, Jack made his way back to Ridgefield, at the very first opportunity. Continuing his display of good judgment, Jack married Jeanette, his childhood sweetheart, and remained in his favorite town.

Jack became a member of the Connecticut State Police Department and advanced to the rank of lieutenant before retiring after many years with that fine law enforcement agency.

Jack had another talent that is worthy of mention and that was his ability to do the Irish step dances. He was not as good as his father, who was an expert, but young Jack could sure shake his feet.

It should be noted that the Jones homestead had a Barry Avenue address for many years. However, when Mary's Lane was built, it connected with the Jones's driveway. This caused the address to be changed to 5 Mary's Lane, even though the house faces Barry Avenue.

By the same token, the house directly across Mary's Lane from the Jones house faces Mary's Lane, but because the driveway connects with Barry Avenue, it has the address 159 Barry Avenue. This house, which is now the home of Arthur Keeler and his wife, the former Kathryn Brady, was built back in the 30's by Richard Cogswell.

Dick was a fine plumber, associated with McCarthy Brothers, and you can be sure that this house is well put together. It later became the home of Mrs. James Dobbie and her sister Miss Eva Emerson.

The other homes on Mary's Lane are relatively new and are owned today by Michael Holleran, Peter Thonis, D. K. Boufford, Joseph McManus, and Jack Croce. Jack is also a retired state police lieutenant and has served several terms on Ridgefield's Police Commission.

Of course, Joseph McManus, better known as "Jo Jo," is the youngest son of Peter and Mary McManus. He is a carpenter by trade and built the house where he and his wife "Totsy," the former Augusta Meyer, raised their children: Michael, Catherine, Mary, Joseph Jr., and Jane Anne.

"Totsy" is secretary for Attorney Sidney Burger and is the daughter of Fritz Meyer who operated a noted woodworking shop in Wilton for many years. She is also known for her culinary ability and makes an exceptionally good mince pie.

It is interesting to note that the barn, with the apartment, that stood behind the Jones homestead, has either been replaced or remodeled and is now a much larger structure, with the address 15 Mary's Lane.

Just a few feet beyond Mary's Lane, there is another dead-end road. It is called Woodcock Lane and we would like to think it was named for our former and very popular first selectman, Joseph M. Woodcock.

The road serves another small development and the five homes that were built here are of recent vintage. With West Mountain as a backdrop this place is very picturesque.

At one time, this road served as the back entrance to the William Harrison Bradley estate. William Harrison Bradley was a direct descendant of Col. Philip Burr Bradley, a local Revolutionary War hero and Ridgefield's second postmaster.

#264: ARTIST FREDERIC REMINGTON AND HIS HOUSE

Directly across the street from the Jones homestead, there are two stone gateposts. They stand on either side of a very long driveway that leads to the home of Griswold Forbes at 154 Barry Avenue.

This large estate [now subdivided] has been known for many years as "Oak Knoll." It has a mansion, a superintendent's cottage and a barn that is set on the highest point of some 50 acres of land. The acreage extends north and west from the driveway for about a quarter of a mile on Ramapoo Road and then east for another quarter of a mile on Ramapoo Road. There are some swampy areas on this large piece of property.

At one time the mansion was clearly visible from Barry Avenue. However, more than 40 years ago, hundreds of pine trees were planted along Barry Avenue and the mansion is now screened from public view.

The trees also screen a swampy area, on which valuable peat bogs were discovered several years ago. It proved to be a high-grade peat and plans were made by Mr. Forbes, to harvest the sphagnum. He was assisted in this venture by Donald Scott.

A method that was quite ingenious was employed in getting the peat out of the swamp. A large drag scoop was attached to a long endless conveyor cable that was powered by a "donkey engine." The scoop then ran out into the swamp and gathered the very dark peat. It then returned the peat to higher ground, where it was bagged for market.

The bags carried the name "West Mountain Peat" and I remember it being on display at Joe Young's store on Catoonah Street and at several other outlets. It was considered a very good grade of peat moss.

Mr. Forbes' mother, Mrs. Nina Newton Forbes, was a previous owner of this very, very nice place. Mrs. Forbes had acquired the place from the estate of her father George Henry Newton, who in turn, had purchased Oak Knoll from the Hauser estate in 1918.

George Newton had been a prominent Western banker who retired at a rather young age and moved with his family to Ridgefield.

Oak Knoll was intended to be a kind of gentleman's farm and Nina Newton Forbes continued to run it as such. Enough of the acreage was tillable and supported two cute little Jersey cows that Mrs. Forbes was very proud of.

She also had a large brown dog that policed the estate and was very protective. It was an Afghan and liked to hunt. Warren Keeler was almost a next door neighbor and he had a flock of chickens, so the Afghan did not have to go very far to do his hunting.

Warren noticed that periodically one of his hens would be missing. He also noticed that the visits of the Afghan were becoming more numerous, so he kept a careful watch over his chickens. One day Warren spotted the dog leaving his place, carrying one of his hens. He lost no time in confronting his neighbor with what he had seen.

Naturally, Mrs. Forbes defended her dog as she felt that he could never be guilty of such an atrocity. It was a meeting of two very strong-willed people.

So Warren loaded his gun and bided his time. It was not long before there was a repeat performance and Warren trudged up the long driveway, carrying the unfortunate chicken in one hand and the Afghan in the other. It was all rather convincing.

I do not remember the most famous of the owners of Oak Knoll, as he died before I was born. However, my father and my older brothers remembered him very well. He was, of course, the great Frederic Sackrider Remington, one of this nation's finest artists.

Frederic Remington was born in Canton, N.Y., in October of 1861 and died, while living in Ridgefield in December of 1909. In that short life span of 48 years, Remington accomplished so much and traveled so far that he must have been a human dynamo. Though his greatest fame was derived from being America's foremost painter of army and Western life, he was equally adept at sculpturing and writing.

Remington's father, Pierre, was a news editor and had his heart set on having his son's become a writer, and encouraged him at every opportunity. The Remington family moved to Ogdensburg, N.Y., where Pierre was the customs collector when Frederic was a young child.

After attending local schools he went to Highland Military School, in Worcester, Mass. From there he went on to Yale Art School, where he received his only training in art, though he quit after only a year and a half.

While at Yale, Remington showed a greater interest in sports than in art. He excelled in football and though in his freshman year, was selected by the great Walter Camp to play on Yale's great football team.

Frederic was only 19 when he quit college to go west. He was an excellent rider and quickly learned to throw a lariat and handle a six gun. He was also a very good boxer and his powerful fists gained him a reputation and the respect of the ranchers and cowboys.

Remington loved the rough life of the cowboy and roamed all over the West, from Mexico to Canada. He also prospected for gold in the Apache country and lived with the roughest and most colorful people, both settlers and Indians. He owned a small ranch in Kansas and even had a part ownership in a notorious cowboy saloon in Kansas City.

All these experiences caused Remington to realize that the West was rapidly changing and soon its colorful life would be history. This made him determined to capture the color and glamor of the great open spaces and preserve it on canvas.

However, his early efforts were not very successful and he was broke when he returned to New York in 1885. Here his luck changed and his rise to success was rapid. Soon he was one of the best known and most highly paid illustrators in the world.

When the Spanish-American War broke out, Remington became a war correspondent and this must have pleased his father greatly.

On his return from the war he devoted much of his time to sculpturing. His first bronze was one of his best and of course it was "The Bronco Buster."

As postmaster I attended the First Day of Issue of the Brien McMahan postage stamp. Stamp collectors from all over the area attended and many beautiful stamps were displayed for sale, including the one honoring the late Senator McMahan. However, the most popular stamp at the show, by far, was one of Remington's paintings of cowboys and Indians that had been made into a postage stamp several years before. [Actually, six U.S. stamps have honored Remington and his work.]

In Ogdensburg, N.Y., there is a Frederic Remington Art Museum that has a beautiful display of Remington's paintings and sculpture work. Also at the museum, there is an exact replica of Remington's last studio, with the notation that the original is in Ridgefield, Connecticut. Art lovers will find that a trip to this museum is well worth their while.

This would be a good time to give Griswold Forbes great credit for the loving care that he has given, not only to Oak Knoll itself, but also the care he has given the studio, which is exactly the way that Remington left it.

Remington suffered an emergency appendectomy and was thought to be well on the road to recovery when he died the day after Christmas 1909. His request that his epitaph would read "He Knew the Horse" is exactly how it appears at his grave in Ogdensburg.

#265: THE MANY KEELERS OF BARRY AVENUE

Across from the Forbes estate on Barry Avenue, there were more members of the venerable Keeler family.

Several of the houses on this side of the street are relatively new, but at the time of which I am writing, that of Joseph F. Keeler at 163 Barry Avenue was quite new. Mrs. Joseph Keeler, the former Teresa Sfondrini, still lives in this very nice home. It was built by her husband, who was a carpenter and a son of Bernard, whose family was subject in Dispatch No. 262.

Joseph was in early middle age when he passed on. He and Teresa had a son, Arthur, mentioned in No. 262, and a daughter Christine. As you can see, there are a goodly number of Keelers on Barry Avenue and more to come.

The house at 193 Barry Avenue is now the home of Donald T. MacDonald and his wife, Joan. Donald is well known as a clerk at the Ridgefield Post Office. Mac, as he is called, has been with the postal service for more than 25 years.

Joan, who grew up in this house, is the former Joan McCarthy and is the legal secretary for Judge Romeo G. Petroni. They were blessed with two children, Robert and Patricia.

Joan's father was the late Dennis McCarthy who was in the employ of the White Rose Bread Company. Dennis was a handsome man, with a very pleasant personality, and was an excellent salesman. His truck was made in Bridgeport by the White Motor Company and it seemed appropriate that the White Rose Company would have trucks that were named White.

Joan's mother, the former Helen Keeler, was as pretty as Dennis was handsome. Sadly, both Dennis and Helen passed on while Joan was still a young girl. Fortunately, her good grandparents, Howard and Sadie Keeler, raised Joan to be the fine lady she is today.

It was Howard Keeler who built the MacDonalds' home in the early part of the century. Howard was a chauffeur for several of the wealthy families in this area.

When he was a boy, the automobile was still looked on with a certain amount of suspicion and many were those who believed that it could never replace the horse as a reliable means of transportation. In the early days of the auto, there were those with fast-stepping horses, who took particular delight in passing a slow moving car or one that had broken down along the highway. In such instances it was standard procedure for the horseman to call out the familiar phrase "Get a horse," as he passed in triumph around the unlucky motorist and his discredited and detested automobile.

So, while Howard Keeler grew up at a time when the horse was still king, he kept his eyes focused on the growing popularity of the heir apparent. He learned all he could about the

operation and the working parts of the automobile. It was well that he did for in the early days of the auto, a chauffeur would have to know not only how to operate a car but also how to repair it.

Howard Keeler and his wife, the former Sadie Elliott, had three children, Helen whom we have already mentioned, Edward and Albert. Edward lives on North Street in Ridgefield and Albert lives in neighboring Danbury.

Edward Keeler inherited his father's love for the automobile and became a chauffeur. He learned the proper care for the vehicles that came to be in his charge and they always looked as though they had just come out of a showroom. His own personal autos were always easily distinguished by their highly polished and gleaming appearance.

Edward and Jane Keeler had three daughters, Helen Jane, Doris Ann and Margaret. It was just four weeks ago that we witnessed the untimely passing of the very popular Helen Jane. Helen had been associated with the H.P. Bissell Company for many years. Doris Ann now lives in Charlotte, North Carolina with her family and Margaret, who lives with her father, has had a lengthy career with our local Board of Education.

Next door, at 195 Barry Avenue, is one of the very oldest houses on the street. It was built by Arthur Keeler during the latter part of the 19th century, probably in the early 1880's. Arthur and Esther Keeler were the parents of Howard Keeler.

By now you probably would agree that the saying "The apple does not fall far from the tree," would certainly apply to the orchard in which the Keeler family tree was flourishing.

Oddly enough, this old Keeler homestead in the 30's became the home of yet another Keeler family, though this one was no relation to the ones of which I have been writing. Raymond Keeler and his wife, the former Ruby Holabird, raised their four children, Roy, Russell, Pamela and Nancy, while living at 195 Barry Avenue.

Raymond Mortimer Keeler and his family can trace their ancestry back to the original settlers of the town. I have mentioned Ray in this column on several occasions and he was depicted as a fun-loving man. I feel that it is a correct description of a fine man, whose very agile mind lent itself to some of the most humorous incidents that I have ever had the pleasure of witnessing.

However, Ray had his serious side and when the situation called for it, he could be as hard-nosed as any businessman. I guess he was just seriocomic by nature.

As a member of a family that had been engaged in farming for so many years, it was expected that Ray would continue in the tradition of those who had a great love for the tilling of the soil. Therefore it was not surprising that he enrolled in the Connecticut Agriculture College, which later became the University of Connecticut.

However, after graduating from that fine institution, Ray decided there were other means of using the land. His attention turned to general contracting and soon he had a thriving construction business, which he conducted from his Barry Avenue home.

Always looking for an easier and quicker way to get a job done, Ray learned to use explosives as a method of establishing small lakes and rivers. He could plant dynamite at strategic points that would allow it to explode at intervals, opening the earth in such a manner as to lessen the use of heavy excavation machinery.

In his later years, Ray became involved in real estate, following in the footsteps of his uncle, William R. Keeler, who was one of the one or two realtors in Ridgefield when I was a kid.

#266: WOOFIE, ADRIENNE, & KEHOE'S MIDNIGHT RIDES

In writing about the late Raymond M. Keeler, it should be noted that despite a busy life, Ray found time to serve our town in several capacities. He was a longtime member of the Republican Town Committee and was elected a constable on a number of occasions.

Ray also served on the Board of Tax Review and was a member of Ridgefield's first Police Commission. He was an active member of the Rotary Club and spent many hours in collecting scrap metal for war use during World War I.

Ray was an inveterate pipe smoker and each day he opened a fresh package of Granger. He was an antique car buff and his favorite was the Franklin, of which he had several. Ray was a member of the American Franklin Auto Club and exhibited in various antique car shows in this area.

The Franklin had an air-cooled engine and because it had no radiator, the car had a graceful glooping hood that made it quite attractive. It also made it easy to recognize and there was no mistaking Ray and his auto.

The present owners of 195 Barry Avenue, Wilfred L. Weaver and his nice wife, the former Adrienne Benninger, are both native Ridgefielders. I guess that "Woofie," as Wilfred's friends call him, and Adrienne are good examples of people who were quite young at the time of which I am writing and can be considered as models of those who grew up in the halcyon days of Ridgefield.

In the early years of this century, a great many Ridgefield people were employed on the many private estates that dotted the area. For example, Woofie's father, Maurice Weaver, was at one time the horseman at Hillscroft Farm, when that lovely place was owned by Edward Simons. His grandfather, Fred Weaver, was superintendent for Dr. William S. Rainsford's "Savin Hill," where the restaurant is now.

Albert Benninger, Adrienne's father, was the superintendent for many years on the Gerard P. Herrick estate, "Gray Shingles," on High Ridge Avenue, which is now the home of William and Christine Bradt.

I have often deplored the fact that so many of Ridgefield's young people have had to move to areas where employment is easier to come by and where the cost of living is more affordable. Fortunately, Woofie and Adrienne have been able not only to stay in Ridgefield, but to prosper while so doing.

As related in Dispatch No. 261, Woofie and Richard Carboni took over Dingee Electric, when Bill Dingee retired several years ago. That business is still being conducted from the Weaver home at 195 Barry Avenue.

Adrienne inherited her father's interest in botany with the result that her nice home is surrounded with many forms of plant life and colorful flowers. She is also justifiably proud of the fine collection of antiques that she and her husband have expertly restored.

Woofie has been a member of the Ridgefield Volunteer Fire Department for many years and is still very active in that fine organization. It would be a rare occasion that he would not be seen right there at the fire, helping in every possible way. He is also a very good drummer and is greatly responsible for the rejuvenation of the excellent bugle and drum corps, known as "The Flamesmen."

Taking a cue from their parents, the Weavers' two sons, Keith and Eric, both have settled down in Ridgefield, no doubt they are motivated by love for their hometown.

Next door to the Weavers, at 217 Barry Avenue, we find a new family, Edward and Amy Yasko. In the 1930s this fine old house was the home of Thomas and Mame Kehoe and their family.

Tom was described in Dispatch No. 26 as a man who excelled in the operation of farm machinery. It was difficult for farmers to purchase machinery that they would use only once a year for planting or harvesting, and then have to store it until the following year. The answer was to hire Tom Kehoe, who would travel from farm to farm with his large collection of machinery. He had land plows, cultivators, harrows, rollers, stone boats, mowers, corn harvesters, reaper and binders, as well as a huge thrashing machine.

Tom never seemed to hurry and the time of day did not have a great effect on him. It was not unusual for him to move his machinery from job to job in the middle of the night.

Both the reaper and binder and the thrashing machine were huge contraptions and it took a big, strong team of horses to pull them along the highway. All Tom had for a light was an oil lantern that swung back and forth on the rear axle of whatever machine he was moving.

You can imagine Tom Kehoe being pulled along by a big team of horses at 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning, while perched high on some monstrous machine. There were no street lights on the country roads that he traveled and Tom either had the eyes of an owl, or he had complete confidence in those horses. Perhaps it was a combination of both.

Mrs. Kehoe was the former Mame Scallon. She is the oldest of the nine Scallon children and is now in her 94th year and still lives in Ridgefield. She is possessed of a most pleasing personality and no one could meet Mame without experiencing the feeling that she is something special.

When the Kehoe family moved from 217 Barry Avenue, it became the home of Grover S. Phelan and his wife, the former Harriet M. Whitlock. Grover retired after many years with the Gilbert and Bennett Wire Mill Company in Georgetown. He was a tall handsome man, with a perfectly trimmed moustache and had a pleasant though very quiet manner.

Just to the north of this house, there is another building, which the Phelans acquired. It had been a large barn, in which Tom Kehoe had kept the horses that he called Tom and Jerry. Tom also stored some of his machinery in the barn and it had a shop where he repaired all that machinery during the winter months. You can be sure that when spring came, everything was in good shape and ready to go.

Ray Phelan, who was the son of Grover and Harriet, converted the barn into a very nice dwelling and it became the home of Ray and his wife, the former Yolanda Salvia. Ray served on several town boards and carried on a business that supplied tools to many of the area garages that did repairing. This place, at 223 Barry Avenue, is now the home of Ralph and Carol Ficker, who recently moved there from Great Hill Road.

#267: THE DOWSER OF WEST MOUNTAIN

Traveling along Barry Avenue, we come to its intersection with Ramapoo Road. At about this point you will find that the name of the highway changes and becomes West Mountain Road.

At the southeast corner of West Mountain and Ramapoo Roads sets a fine old house that once had a West Mountain Road address. It is now 221 Ramapoo Road and the change, of course, is due to the fact that while the house faces West Mountain Road, the driveway enters Ramapoo Road.

This place is now the home of Mrs. J. Gordon Coffin and her son, Barry. Mrs. Coffin is the former Ann Woodford. Ann is fondly remembered as the pretty little blonde daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Francis B. Woodford.

As a young girl growing up at 325 Main Street, Ann must have been exposed, to some degree, to the care of people in need of medical attention. Her father was a general practitioner and treated patients who had a wide variety of ailments. The fact that Ann is today a fine nurse's aide is no doubt due to a great extent to her early experiences as the daughter of a father who was recognized as a fine doctor and a mother who was a fine nurse.

During the period of which I am writing, this nice old house was the home of Theodore B. Bailey and his wife, the former Mary Lambert. Some people may have called him Ted, but to me he was always Mr. Bailey.

He was a retired blacksmith and farrier when he came to live in our town back in the 20's. A blacksmith worked at shaping various metals and fusing them together, whereas a farrier was a person engaged in the shoeing of horses. Mr. Bailey used his considerable knowledge and talents to excel in both categories, as did the late Harry M. Thomas.

Mr. Bailey was very old when I got to know him. He had a very abundant crop of gray hair, both on top of his head and on his face. He was of medium height and he had a slender build that belied the fact that he was a very strong man. He exhibited a rather striking appearance, as he walked down the street, with his gray mane partly covered by an old floppy hat and a large walking stick that was more like a cudgel, clutched in his hand. One thing was sure, Mr. Bailey made a distinct impression and once seen, he was not easily forgotten.

When still a young man, Mr. Bailey established a blacksmith shop in the Bald Hill section of neighboring Wilton. He was a kindly, outgoing person, with a good singing voice, which he frequently used while at his work. While singing, the sentences of his songs were punctuated by an extra hard blow of his hammer, and he always timed it perfectly.

Mr. Bailey's engaging personality caused his shop to become a favorite place for people of the area to congregate. This was true whether or not they had metal work to be done, or a horse to be shod. People affectionately referred to him as "The Blacksmith of Bald Hill."

At the time of Theodore's marriage to Mary, he was living in Katonah, N.Y., and Mary lived in Bedford, N.Y. The wedding was set to take place in January and during the previous night there had been a terrible, howling blizzard, accompanied by sub-zero temperatures. The roads were so clogged with snow that travel, even by horse and sleigh, was impossible.

The weather proved to be no deterrent to the young and strong Theodore Bailey. It was just 6 a.m., when he started to walk through the snowdrifts to Bedford. Despite the snow and the terrible cold, he arrived at noon, just in time for the wedding.

Obviously the young couple wanted not only to get married, but also to stay married. It was while they lived on West Mountain that they celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary. Are you listening, young newlyweds?

Mr. Bailey gained considerable fame in his later years as a water finder, dowser or douser — take your pick. Many were the requests for him to come with his divining rod, or forked stick, to locate an underground source of water.

There were a number of skeptics and I was one who just did not believe that it could be done. To those unfamiliar with the art of dowsing, it is apparently something that only certain individuals can do successfully. Those so favored use either metal divining rods, or a forked stick, cut from a birch, peach or apple tree, or some other tree that they feel works best for them. Two

ends of the stick are grasped in either hand of the dowser, while the other end extends outward from his hands.

As the dowser walks over the selected area, the end of the stick will commence to move when it passes over underground water. The greater the quantity of water, the greater the movement of the end of the forked stick.

If the subterranean deposit of water is of sufficient size, the end of the stick will actually twist until it points straight down at the exact spot. This seems to be true no matter how strong the dowser is, or how tightly he holds the divining rod.

In 1931, my brothers Jack and Joe built their service station on Danbury Road. It is now owned by Dino Giardini and is called Limestone Service Station. There was a need to dig a well for water and Jack decided to ask Mr. Bailey to locate the spot for it.

I was there one day when Mr. Bailey appeared, coming up the highway, driving his old sorrel horse "Joshua." Though I had the utmost respect for Mr. Bailey, it was difficult for me to suppress a laugh when he brought out his forked stick and confidently guaranteed to find water, providing there was some available in the area.

Mr. Bailey grasped two ends of his divining rod, and with the other end pointing directly out in front of him, started his march around the property. In just a few minutes there was a slight movement of the point of the stick, which I firmly believed was being induced by some manner by the dowser, without our seeing it.

The movements of the stick increased and both Jack and Joe believed they could dig right there and get water.

Mr. Bailey cautioned that he still had not found a sufficient supply. Suddenly, the stick really began to act up and twisted until it pointed directly toward the ground. Lo and behold, I became a believer, when after a few feet of earth had been removed and it was discovered that they were uncovering an old abandoned well.

#268: WHAT DOWSING DICK FOUND

Theodore B. Bailey may have dispelled any doubts that I may have harbored concerning the validity of his prowess in finding water, but others were skeptical. The debate over the ability of dowsers to discover underground pockets of water has been going on for many years.

What makes it so interesting is that it seems apparent that not everyone can make the divining rod perform. Added to this is the fact that some of those who can, are apt to cloak their unusual powers in an aura of mystique, and those who cannot, may scoff at the idea and shunt it off as pure trickery.

I do not believe that Mr. Bailey ever showed anyone how to perform with the divining rod. No doubt, he wanted to guard against having someone encroach on what he felt was his private domain.

However, it is my feeling that many others could make the forked stick work, if they ever had a chance to try it, after being properly instructed in its use.

A case in point occurred many years after Mr. Bailey had located the old well at the Limestone Service Station. It happened at a meeting of the Kiwanis Club, when that organization held its luncheon meetings at Luigi's Restaurant in the Branchville area.

James Hackert, a member of the club, was an amateur dowser and enjoyed using the divining rod just for the fun of seeing it act up. On this particular day, Jim, who had been asked to give a talk to the club on dowsing, appeared with several forked sticks that he had cut from several different kinds of trees.

After giving a very interesting talk on the art of dowsing, Jim invited the club members outside, where he proceeded to give a graphic demonstration of how the rod works. There were the usual number of doubters, but they all enjoyed the show as they watched the point of the rod quiver and twist in Jim's grasp.

After the exhibition, Jim asked if there were any of his audience who would like to try their hand at dowsing. I am not sure how many accepted his offer, or what kind of success they had. However, when I was handed the forked stick, it did nothing until Jim showed me how to properly hold it.

After only taking a few steps, I began to feel a slight movement in the rod. As I continued to walk, the movements became stronger and finally the end of the rod twisted until it pointed straight down.

Everyone laughed, but Luigi (Lou Ridolfi) stepped forward and exclaimed, "Hey, you are standing right over my septic tank."

My thoughts went back to how Mr. Bailey had found the well so many years before. We put a tripod over the abandoned well. The tripod had an iron wheel at its top — actually it was a pulley — over which a rope was threaded and attached to a large wooden bucket. The bucket was then loaded with stones and gravel that had been poured into the old well, and that material was brought to the surface.

Once the well was cleared of all debris, it proved to be a well-functioning water supply. I dare say that it is still in operation 56 years later.

It is too bad that more people are not willing to share their talent, as Jim Hackert did. I once knew a man who was particularly adept at grafting fruit trees. He enjoyed exhibiting his handiwork and showed me an apple tree, on which he had grafted four different kinds of apples. There were McIntosh, Greenings, Fall Pippins and Russets, all growing on the same tree.

Naturally, I was very impressed, but when he explained how it was done, the man made it sound so mysterious and so difficult to do, that I was afraid to try it.

Sometime later, it became necessary for me to graft a fruit tree and to be on the safe side, I asked our Tree Warden, Tom Shaughnessy, to do it for me.

Tom did better than that. First he gave me a set of grafting tools and then explained in simple terms how to do the grafting. Because of Tom's kindness, I was soon able to do it.

To get back to Mr. Bailey, it should be noted that on the south side of his home at 221 Ramapoo Road, he had a barn where he kept his old horse "Joshua." He also had a little wagon shed across the street from his house, where he kept his buckboard.

One Halloween night, some mischievous boys got the little wagon out and somehow pulled it part way up a nearby telephone pole. They were not motivated by any animosity, for Mr. Bailey was well liked and had no enemies.

He was very upset when morning came and he saw his buckboard dangling from the pole. I am happy to report that another group of boys came along and got the wagon down, without damaging it.

Mr. Bailey lived a long and useful life and remained active right to the end. He passed on in his home on Ramapoo Road, in June of 1940 at the age of 89.

The place then became the home of Charles H. Baxter and his wife, the former Mary Senese. Charley was a lineman for the electric light company. Way back in Dispatch #5, I told of how he was almost electrocuted while repairing the electric wires on Gilbert Street during a bad storm. Fortunately he was rescued by Jack Cranston and Jack Nalley.

The Baxters are an old Ridgefield family and Charley's father, D. Crosby Baxter, was the founder of this newspaper [The Ridgefield Press]

The Baxter family lived at 221 Ramapoo Road for a number of years and then moved the barn, in which Mr. Bailey had kept Joshua across the road, to what is now 224 Ramapoo Road. The barn was enlarged and remodeled and became the new home of the Baxter family. This very cute little house is now the home of the Kevin Quinn family.

Charley, who was very handy with tools, did most of the work himself. He was a very hard working man and wasted very little time in talking. It would be safe to say that he was a man of few words, and if asked a question that could be answered with either a "yes" or a "no," those were the words that he would use.

Ridgefield, with all its beautiful trees, has been prone to electrical outages during severe storms. Because of that fact, the electric company takes particular pains to keep the lines clear in that area vital to the welfare of our town, such as the town water supply. Therefore, when Charley was wiring his home, he had the presence of mind to connect with the line serving the water company, with the result that he experienced very few power failures.

Charley passed on at age 83 and his contribution to the matrimonial fruit basket was seven children, 34 grandchildren and 18 great-grandchildren.

#269: SAM CARPENTER, THE ACTRESS, & THE BEACON MANSION

Just above the intersection of West Mountain Road and Ramapoo Road, there is a relatively new development. This large tract of land was once a private estate, as are so many developments in Ridgefield.

At the turn of the century, this property was owned by Samuel Emlen Carpenter and his wife, the former Nellie J. Crouse. Sam had purchased the property, piece by piece, from several neighbors until he had amassed well over 50 acres. This is the same Sam Carpenter mentioned on the History Page of *The Press* (July 30th [1987] edition) along with the picture of the house that he built at 145 High Ridge Avenue that is now the home of Frances Cleaners.

Sam Carpenter was a retired real estate tycoon when he came here from Philadelphia at the dawn of the 1900's. He was still a young man when he retired and had become very wealthy. My father, who was a friend and admirer of Sam, told me of how Sam had been a star athlete at Harvard. He was also quite handsome and attracted considerable attention whenever he walked down Main Street, with Nellie at his side.

While there is little doubt that most of the admiring glances came from the distaff side, Sam Carpenter was very popular with the menfolk. Sam was a man of the world and lived his life to the hilt. If notoriety came his way, he would make no visible effort to duck it.

Divorce was not nearly as common 60 years ago as it is today. Yet, in the early 20's Sam divorced Nellie, and within a couple of weeks he was married to the celebrated actress, Katherine LaSalle. Aside from being Sam's second wife, Katherine will be best remembered as John Barrymore's leading lady.

Katherine's name has a decidedly French flavor, so it came as no surprise when she induced Sam to move to Paris, where he died after just a few years, while still in middle age.

In the meantime, Joseph Conron, his wife Cecelia, and their children Dorothy and Raymond, had been living for several years at "Vita Semplice," the beautiful estates on Saint John's Road that later would become "Hillscroft Farm" and is now another development.

The Conron family leased this fine estate from Charles T. Root, as a summer home, but naturally they fell in love with Ridgefield and became year around residents.

Mr. Conron was the head of a giant meat packing company that had headquarters in Chicago and offices in New York City. He was kept busy, traveling between the two largest cities in the country, but managed to spend weekends with his family in his favorite town.

As retirement time drew nearer, Joseph Conron had made up his mind to spend his later years in the town that he had become so fond of. He wanted to build his home in weekends were spent traveling along the country roads, looking for the right spot to build. When he arrived at what is now 4 West Mountain Road, he knew at once that this craggy bluff, with its spectacular view, was made to order for him and his family.

When the Carpenters put the place on the market, Joseph Conron was right there with the money to buy it.

Building a mansion at the very top of the bluff was no easy matter, and it was not accomplished in only a day or two. So the Conrons continued to live at Vita Semplice while their new home was being constructed.

Joseph Conron's timing is worth mentioning. No sooner was his new mansion completed than the mansion at Vita Semplice was struck by lightning. The grand house was completely destroyed in the fire that followed. Edward Simons became the new owner of Vita Semplice and built the present beautiful mansion at 133 St. Johns Road, that is now the home of Robert Soloff and his family. Simons changed the name of his new estate from Vita Semplice to Hillscroft Farm.

Someone informed Mr. Simons that the fire that destroyed the previous mansion was the second one which had been caused by a lightning bolt. This caused Simons to take the added precaution of installing lightning rods, not only on the mansion, but on the many tall pine trees that were, and still are, quite numerous around the place. I once witnessed lightning being conducted harmlessly down the side of a huge pine and into the ground near the superintendent's cottage at Hillscroft.

In the meantime, Joseph Conron and his family were safely settled in their new home on West Mountain. Because of its lofty perch, the estate was named "Hillaire."

The bright white mansion, with its red tile roof, was visible to most any area of the town and served as a guide to airplane pilots, as pointed out in an earlier column.

There was a garage with stables attached where Raymond and his sister Dorothy kept their riding horses. Dorothy called her mare "Goldie" and Raymond called his horse "Chocolate Soldier." They could properly be called members of the horsey set.

Raymond remained unmarried while the family lived in Ridgefield, but Dorothy married James Butler Jr., whose father owned a chain of grocery stores. The Butler stores were easily recognized by their green fronts. One of them operated in Ridgefield for a time where Homestead Realty [Sammy + Nat] is now at 414 Main Street.

Unfortunately, the younger Butler was killed in a tragic accident, similar to the one which recently befell Secretary of Commerce Malcolm Baldrige. It happened at a horse show in Mt. Kisco, when his horse fell on him when failing to negotiate a jump.

James Doubleday bought Hillaire in the mid 50's and proceeded to tear down the very attractive mansion. Jimmy was noted for purchasing and then demolishing old mansions. He would then replace them with more modern structures.

There must have been a number of frustrated pilots, as there were no air traffic controllers in those days at Danbury airport.

#270: MORE MOUNTAIN FOLK, LIGHTNING AND A STOVE

James and Elizabeth Doubleday had formed a pattern, which called for them to buy an old mansion, tear down the existing building and then replace it with a more modern structure. Therefore, it came as no surprise when a few years after replacing the Conron mansion at 4 West Mountain Road, Jim and Betty began to look for new worlds to conquer.

Incidentally, this house can still be seen from the highway, if you look real quick. Just as you turn the corner, traveling west on Barry Avenue where it intersects with Woodcock Lane, a little white dot, high on the mountain before you, is clearly visible. It is not as prominent as the red roofed Conron house that preceded it. The trees in the area have grown to a point where they almost hide the newer structure.

The Doubledays had their estate on the market only a short time when along came David and Florence Graham. The Grahams had lived for a few years on Shadow Lane and quickly fell in love with this place and the majestic view that it offered.

My good friend and neighbor, Jack O’Keeffe, had, with tender loving care, kept the place in tip-top shape for the Doubledays. Jack agreed to stay on and look after the place for the Grahams and this fact alone must have been an inducement for them to purchase it.

David Graham had been a very successful investment banker and now in retirement, he was looking for a place that afforded some peace and quiet. He was a native of northern Ireland and this place on the mountain top must have reminded him of his native land.

The driveway leading to the mansion was very long and it was also very steep, but once you reached the top, you were assured of complete privacy.

A more recent owner of this beautiful estate was Dr. Henry G. Minot. After a time, Dr. Minot decided to share the place with others and the surrounding acreage was developed by Carl Lecher. Soon, two roads were built, leading into the estate, Doubleday Lane and Sharp Hill Road. Once the roads were roughed in, a number of new homes began to dot the landscape. Among the new homes was one that was built for Dr. Minot, where he now lives after selling the former Doubleday mansion to Scott Tenney. The Tenneys had previously lived at Twixt Hills.

It should be mentioned that there is a pond just before you get to Sharp Hill Road, and it is still known as Conron’s Pond. In days gone by, this pond was a favorite place to skate for those who lived nearby.

The pond is not very deep and through the years, it became clogged with weeds. A few years ago, someone opened the dam that formed the pond and cleared out the weeds. The dam was then closed and the pond reappeared. It requires another quick look to see the pond, as the trees are quite dense between the pond and the highway.

Incidentally, the highway was rebuilt in the 30’s all the way to the New York State line. It is a state highway and I believe the work was done as part of a W.P.A. project. This was a common practice during the days of the great Depression.

While the road was being rebuilt, the great retaining wall, directly opposite the entrance to Conron’s Hillaire estate, was built by the Bacchiochi construction company. I guess the word Hillaire is no longer used when referring to the new development.

A little farther along the highway at 55 West Mountain Road is the very attractive home of Fred and Meredith Stahl. Fred, who was a professor at Sacred Heart University, has now become a consultant in the computer business. This place was built as a summer home for Alvin and Eva Rosencrans about the time of World War II. Alvin was a very prominent importer and did extensive traveling in foreign countries. He was also a very good violinist and was well known in musical circles.

Like so many others who started out as summer residents, the Rosencrans soon became enamored with Ridgefield and stayed the year around.

Just past the intersection of Oscaleta Road with West Mountain Road, we come to a house that is partly hidden by trees and shrubbery. It is 81 West Mountain Road, and is the home of David and Jacqueline Nichols. I seem to remember that in years past the house was shielded by a huge boulder.

This house was built in the mid 30s, for a pair of newlyweds, Judge Joseph H. and Ellen Donnelly. Joe and Ellen started married life with a fine new home. Of course, they also had new furnishings, among which was a very nice, flat-top Westinghouse electric kitchen range.

For some time I have harbored the conviction that large stone formations have a tendency to attract lightning. This belief was kindled by observing bolts of atmospheric electricity that seemed to concentrate in the rocky areas of town.

There may have been some reason, other than the previously mentioned boulder, that caused the numerous flashes of lightning around 81 West Mountain Road. However, it seemed that when the sound that is credited to Thor was heard, it was always preceded by a nearby flash of light.

After one particularly bad storm, Ellen Donnelly began to prepare the evening meal and discovered that her stove would not work. It was then discovered that the wiring of the stove had been destroyed by lightning. Joe was not about to let a little thing like lightning interfere with family life, so he had the stove rewired and put back into service. The rewired stove worked to perfection and life at the Donnelly residence returned to normal.

However, the violent side of nature refused to subside and it was not long before it challenged the Donnellys again. During a very bad storm a bolt of lightning struck the ground near the boulder. When the stove again refused to work, no one had to tell Ellen what caused the trouble. So the stove was banished to the basement and a new one took its place in the kitchen.

When I learned that the burned out stove was to be transported to the trash heap, I offered to take it off their hands. Joe and Ellen quickly agreed and the stove was on its way to Earl Roberts, who rewired it for the second time. Marie and I enjoyed the stove for several years, until we moved to Hillscroft, where there was already a stove.

Then along came newly married Enzo Bartolucci and he and Elsie enjoyed it for many more years. Maybe they disconnected the stove during electrical storms.

#271: THE ARNOLDS AND OTHERS OF ELEVEN LEVELS

The house at 84 West Mountain Road is now the home of the T.M. Scott family. During the period of which we are writing, it was the home of Margery Storey. Marge moved away after attending local schools, and I never heard about her again.

A little further on, and on the other side of the street, at 111 West Mountain Road, there is the former home of Stephen Blumenthal. This cute little house was built in the 20's by William Wascher. Bill was a good carpenter and did the actual work on the house himself, so you just know that this house is well built.

The Waschers moved from Ridgefield in the 30's, and the place became the scene of a real tragedy, when the next owner committed suicide, as reported back in Dispatch #99. Almost across the street, there is the attractive entrance to a very pretty scene. The driveway leads to the homes of Syn N. Heaton and Robert Tuccio.

Bob and his wife, the former Barbara Branchini, live in a beautiful chateau on the shore of what used to be called Fraser's Pond, a very serene body of water. This is a setting that many an artist would love to capture on canvas, especially in the fall when the leaves are turning.

Bob's father is the well-known Jerry Tuccio, who put together the largest of Ridgefield's developments. When Jerry retired a few years ago, Bob took over the management of these extensive enterprises.

This particular development was once the large, private estate of Arthur C. Fraser and his wife, the former Rose McLane. Mr. Fraser was a famous patent attorney, and considered one of the very best in this country. He was the senior member of the well-known law firm, Fraser, Myers and Manley.

When the Frasers had their great mansion constructed early in this century, it was their intention to use the place as their summer home. It served that purpose only a few years, and then the Frasers, like so many others, had the mansion winterized and became year-round residents.

The mansion nestled among the trees on a high point above the aforementioned pond, and of course it provided a magnificent view of the surrounding countryside. Just to add to the colorful scene, all of the buildings on the estate had bright red roofs.

Mrs. Fraser maintained the estate for a few years after her husband passed on, in the spring of 1934. It was then purchased by Joseph Shapiro. The Shapiro family were horsey people, and the place, which consisted of several hundred acres and several miles of driveways and bridle paths, was just made to order for them. For some years, the Doubledays had the only polo field in Ridgefield, but the Shapiros constructed one, on a level acre of their new place, and it was of regulation size.

The new owners took title to the former Fraser estate just a couple of months before the attack on Pearl Harbor. World War II stymied the operations of the estate, as it did to the other large estates. However, when the war was over, a number of alterations were made, especially to the buildings that housed their valuable horses.

Mrs. Shapiro was active in several charitable organizations, and took a special interest in the restoration of toys for children of needy families. She was assisted in this venture by William Sturges, who did the repair work on hundreds of discarded toys at the Ridgefield firehouse.

After a dozen years, the place was again put on the market. This time the new owners were Paul D. and Elizabeth [better known as Dean and Betty Arnold]. They were the Arnolds of the well-known Arnold Bakers bread company, so there was little doubt that they could afford to maintain the estate.

The Arnolds took an active interest in local organizations, and as well as making cash donations, they could be counted on to furnish their bakery products to many of the charitable affairs that were held.

Finally there came a time when the Arnolds moved away and the great place was sold to Jerry Tuccio for developing. Along the way, someone had selected the name "Eleven Levels" for the place. No doubt this was because of the several level areas on the craggy mountainside. At any rate, the name stuck and became the name of the new development.

One of the several roads that serve the development is Eleven Levels Road. Part way up the next hill, at 128 West Mountain Road, is the very attractive home of the Walter Slavins. The house had the familiar concrete siding and red roof.

This house was the home of the many superintendents that ran the large estate through the years. Some, but not all of these families were the Patrick Potters, who we told about in a previous column, the Robert Currys, the Patrick McAleers, and the Clarence Fischers. Bob Curry

has passed on, but his wife Mary still lives in New Canaan. Mary is the former Mary Quinn and a sister of Mrs. Joseph (Margaret) Knoche.

Pat McAleer and his wife still live on Roberts Lane. Pat is now retired, after serving as foreman of our local road maintenance unit. Clarence Fischer may still be living, and if so, I believe he would be, along with Thomas Shaughnessy, one of the two remaining members of our local Last Man's Club.

Clarence used to raise bloodhounds, and became quite noted for training these fine dogs. As his fame spread around the state, Clarence began to receive many requests from police departments to assist in finding missing persons. On at least one occasion, the dogs were successful in finding a lost child here in Ridgefield.

The Fischers were also successful in raising a handsome son, Clarence Jr., and three beautiful daughters, Dorothy, Gloria and Mary.

At the top of the hill, and on the corner of West Mountain Road and Eleven Levels Road, there is a small house that has the usual Fraser colors. It housed the gardeners on the estate, and there were many of them. One of the gardeners was Robert Paris, who moved here with his family from northern Vermont. The Paris family consisted of three sons, Donald, Lloyd and Robert Jr. Bob's brother, Walter Paris, still lives in Ridgefield with his son Richard, the famed woodworker.

#272: WEST MOUNTAIN FOLK, ONE OF WHOM WAS HIGH-SPEED

As we approach the crest of the second hill on West Mountain Road, we come to a little white house that carries number 152. It gives the appearance of having been vacant for some time. The most recent occupants were Peter Schroeder and his family.

Peter was noted hereabouts for his talks to service clubs and other organizations about scuba diving. He was an acknowledged expert in this field and his talks were accompanied by excellent movies of his underwater explorations. Peter also taught scuba diving to those who were interested in this very popular sport.

Peter Schroeder described himself as a news analyst for the Dutch newspapers. It was his duty to read the large city newspapers and magazines, especially those that carried items of international significance.

According to Peter, the Dutch newspapers that he represented were a little wary of the veracity and accuracy of many of the printed items. Therefore, after digesting and analyzing them, he would report his own interpretation.

Peter's report was made by telephone between the hours of 2 a.m. and 6 a.m. Of course, the phone rates are lower during these hours. Still, he must have had an astronomical telephone bill each month.

During the 40's and 50's, this little place was the home of Ross and Mary Eaglesham. Ross was a very well known artist and a very nice gentleman. Mary was quite active in several local civic groups. She was a registered nurse and did a lot for the Red Cross, as well as our local District Nursing Association. Mary taught first aid on a regular basis to members of local organizations. We really missed the Eagleshams when they moved away.

Dr. Bache McEvers Emmet and his wife, Anne, came to Ridgefield in the early 1890's, and like just about everyone who came here, they were entranced by our beautiful town. Soon the Emmetts were buying up land on West Mountain, and then they started to build the great mansion [called Greywacke] where the Neligans live today. Through all the years, and various

owners that followed, there have been several alterations and some additions, but basically the original structure has remained intact. [The house, in poor condition, was removed around 2017.]

After Dr. Emmet passed on, Mrs. Emmet kept the place going for a few years, However, in the late 20's, when the economy suffered the infamous nose dive, Mrs. Emmett felt that the estate was just too large for her to manage, so she put it on the market.

The house at 306 Main Street, on the north corner of Market Street, became Mrs. Emmett's new home. The house was a part of Governor Phineas Lounsbury's estate (now the Community Center) and the governor had used it as a guest house.

For years it was known as the Emmett house, but when the C. Park Hannaman family later lived there, the name changed and it is still referred to as the Hannaman House.

William Forbes Ingold became the new owner of the Emmett estate on West Mountain. He was reputed to be a very wealthy man, and had a very considerable amount of work done to the estate.

Ingold had a couple of chauffeurs and it was said that he had several standards that must be met before they were hired. One was that they must demonstrate their ability to handle an automobile while traveling at a speed of 100 miles per hour. He had several large limousines, two of which were Packard convertible touring cars that were well able to satisfy his desire to ride at high speeds over the highway.

One of the chauffeurs was the late Thomas Scott, whose son Thomas Jr., lives in Wilton, where he operates a taxi and limousine service. Tom Jr. is married to the former Sarah Wettingfeld, and was the subject of a recent article in *The Press* that told of the many famous people that use his services.

Some may remember that Tom Jr., when just a little boy, was the victim in a near tragic accident at Silver Spring Country Club. It all happened during the annual July 4th fireworks display, when a skyrocket went awry and entered the car where young Tom was sitting with his mother.

Thomas Scott Sr. told many hair- raising stories about driving for Mr. Ingold. One story concerned the transportation of a load of Scotch whisky from New York City to the West Mountain estate, with New York State Troopers in full pursuit. It was in the waning days of the Prohibition period, so perhaps the troopers may have been a little reluctant to risk their lives for a law that was about to be eliminated. At any rate they were a considerable distance behind Ingold's Packard, when they turned off at the state line.

West Mountain Road was rebuilt during the mid-30's, and in order to straighten a curve that is now a part of the driveway at the entrance to the estate, Ingold traded some land with the state. It involved the old West Mountain schoolhouse, which had ceased functioning as a school. The building became a kennel, then a laundry and now may be a dwelling.

Incidentally, I believe that Rita Potter and her sister Patricia Potter McManus both attended this school as little girls. A brochure that I have, listing the students in all of the Ridgefield schools in 1915, shows that West Mountain School had seven pupils, four from the same family. They were Charles, Foster, Rachel and Wallace Clark, David and William Dougherty and Helen Mansfield.

In spite of Ingold's wealth, he experienced some rough times during the Depression years, but he sure provided a lot of jobs for local tradesmen.

Edward J. Barber became the new owner of the estate in the late 1930s. Mr. Barber was the owner of a steamship line and was president of the Battery Place Security Corporation. He added more acreage to his already substantial holdings.

The Barbers stayed for some 20 years and then in 1960 the place was up for sale again. It was purchased by Phyllis Moffett who had lived in Wilton but had a keen desire to become a Ridgefielder. That is a desire that should be easy to understand.

#273: THE GREAT ESTATE OF THE LYNCHES

One of the most attractive homes on fabulous West Mountain is the residence of Joseph and Dolly Wittman. This fine structure has undergone numerous changes, through the years, and it is apparent that they were all for the better.

Dolly tells of how this house was once the centerpiece of a little compound of smaller houses. When Dolly's grandparents, John Hampton Lynch and Lucy Moffett Lynch, came to Ridgefield around the turn of the century, they lived in this house while their magnificent mansion was being constructed a little further on and across the highway.

The Wittman house at 206 West Mountain Road was later used as a guest house by the Lynch family. Later still, it became the home of Dolly's parents, John H. Lynch Jr., and his wife, the former Emilene Danforth Starr.

Dolly remembers growing up in the house that is now her home. Her parents then built their own mansion directly across the road at 211 West Mountain Road. This place is now the home of the Andrew W. Alkiewicz family.

World War II Aviator Joseph Wittman was a United States Navy aviator in World War II. While in the service, Joe became a friend of a fellow Navy flier, Richard E. Conley. After listening to the wondrous stories that Dick Conley had to tell about his hometown, it was no wonder that Joe readily accepted Dick's invitation to visit Ridgefield once the war was over. Joe, like everyone else, quickly fell in love with Ridgefield and its natural beauty. An important part of that beauty was a girl named Dolly Lynch, and it was not long before she and Joe were married.

Joe Wittman and Dick Conley went into business, operating Conn-Air, an air taxi business from Danbury Airport. They were just a little ahead of their time, as the service was not as popular as it is today.

Dolly's grandfather, John H. Lynch Sr., was the president of The Terminal Warehouse Company and The Lincoln Safe Deposit Box Companies and was connected with several other ventures in New York City. His wife, the former Lucy Moffett, was a sister of Mrs. George Doubleday, who lived where the Temple Shearith Israel is now on Peaceable Street.

To say that these fine ladies were active in local affairs would be a gross understatement. They belonged to several organizations and any civic movement that would benefit Ridgefield was certain to have their vigorous support.

The great Lynch estate is now the home of the Congregation of Notre Dame [in 2024, it's Ridgefield Academy]. Its very imposing mansion has had a large addition, which more than doubled its already expansive proportions.

A school [Notre Dame Academy, 1972-76] was built on the property by this order, but it closed after a few years due to the difficulty of recruiting teachers, rather than from a lack of pupils.

The view from the mansion can only be described as spectacular. It allows one to see for many miles to the west. The foothills of the Catskills actually appear to be nearby, and it is easy to imagine the mighty Hudson, as it winds its way down to the sea. It is a real treat to see the sun go down as you gaze from the west side of the mansion over South Salem, the lakes at Waccabuc and on past Katonah.

Mrs. Lynch kept the large estate going for many years after her husband passed on. During the fuel shortage caused by the war, she used the Wittman house for the winter months. The estate stretched along both sides of West Mountain Road and extended for a considerable distance along Old West Mountain Road.

It was along this road that the Lynch family had their farm, and the grand barn that is now the home of Leonard and Madeleine Corbin.

There were also three houses on Old West Mountain Road that served as homes for some of those employed on the estate. Two of those houses, in which the Paul Marconi and Patrick Culhane families once lived, have now disappeared. The one that still stands, at 221 Old West Mountain Road, was the one in which the herdsmen lived. The Hamilton family lived in this house as did the Roy Nortons and the Irving Keelers.

The superintendent's cottage still sits, high on the hill, just south of the school, and just beyond that is the garage, with the nice apartment where chauffeur Thomas Salvesson lived with his family.

The superintendent's house, where the David Dougherty family lived for so many years, always looked rather tiny to me — the reason being that the Doughertys were very large people. Those who knew this family will remember David Sr. as a tall man well over six feet in height. His well-tanned features and large handlebar moustache greatly resembled those of the great motion picture star, Ward Bond.

Mrs. Dougherty was not tiny, and her children David Jr., William and Alice were all over six feet tall. In recent years, additions have been made to this little cottage.

We hear a lot about graft today, and it is not a new word. When the large mansions were being constructed years ago, there were superintendents who were not averse to accepting “gratuities” from contractors, who did work on the estates.

David Dougherty refused to participate in transactions of this kind. Mr. Lynch was aware of this fact and it explains why David, aside from his proven abilities, remained the super until he died.

When David Sr. passed on, the reins were handed to David Jr., and he continued to handle the operations until Mrs. Lynch passed on.

I guess that Mrs. Lynch could be described as traditional, especially as far as farming was concerned. If a job could be done with horses, that is how it was done. I do not believe that she ever had a tractor on the place.

There were so many fine hay fields on the estate that there was generally a large surplus of hay. Once the large barn was full, the hay that was still standing was sold off to local farmers. One of those who bought the hay was Irving Conklin and that is how I got to mow the hay there. On one occasion, we mowed a huge field of some 20 acres that extended north from Old West Mountain Road to Round Pond. At one time there were four teams pulling their mowers around the field. Irv Conklin drove his gray team, Major and Dick, I drove my blacks, Kit and Lady, Harry Terpeny had a team of roans, Duke and Diamond, and Dave Dougherty had a pair of dappled grays. I don't know what Dave called them except when they misbehaved, and even if I did write those words, my editor would not print them.

#274: ROUND POND'S PURE WATER AND ORENECA'S MANSION

It seems that in any discussion concerning the large estates on West Mountain, the name Henry B. Anderson is sure to crop up. This man owned so many acres of land that when he

abandoned the idea of building a second Tuxedo Park on the mountain, many of the adjoining estates acquired pieces of his gigantic holdings.

It was like the crowd circling the table at a wedding, on which the wedding cake had been placed.

The large 20-acre field that stretched from Old West Mountain Road to Round Pond, was once a part of Anderson's property, as was the land surrounding the pond itself. It is probably difficult to picture this field as ever having been open space. Many years have passed since the hay on this field has been cut.

Since that time, the field has become overrun with trees, and it now looks more like a forest than a hay field. I wish that I had a photograph of the hay being mowed by the four teams of horses previously mentioned. It would have made a picture that could never again be reproduced in Ridgefield.

At 262 West Mountain Road, where it intersects with Oreneca Road, there is a house that is part of the property owned by the Ridgefield Water Supply Company. This house is now the home of Terrance Knoche Jr. Just one of Terry's many duties is keeping the machinery at the pumping station in shape. The water is pumped from Round Pond to the large standpipe on another section of West Mountain. The water pressure in town is subject to the height of the water in the standpipe. [*Note: Round Pond stopped being used as a reservoir around 2002 when Bridgeport Hydraulic was the owner; in 2004, new owner Aquarion transferred the pond and surrounding lane to the state. The standpipe on Peaceable Ridge Road is still used for maintaining pressure.*]

This house was once the home of Leo Waite, who was then the guardian of the pumping station. Many years ago, it was the home of Ray Mansfield, who also watched over the pumps. Ray had a very pretty daughter named Helen, who was one of the very first ladies to work as a clerk in the Ridgefield Post Office when it was located where Addressi's Jewelry is now.

The name Round Pond stems from the fact that the pond is quite round. The reason for its roundness was explained one time by Leland Glidden, who was then president of the Ridgefield Water Supply Company. Mr. Glidden's theory was that, many years ago when the glacier was passing over West Mountain, a huge chunk of ice broke away from the main block and settled in this spot. Then, as the ice melted, it caused an action similar to that which would happen if a little ice cube was placed on a little mound of sand. [*These geological formations are called kettles.*]

It all sounded very reasonable and Mr. Glidden went on to explain that because of Round Pond's lofty elevation, there are no streams of water entering the pond. He pointed out that this fact eliminates the possibility of any undesirable debris being washed into the pond. This guarantees the high quality of water derived from the many fine springs that feed Round Pond.

One afternoon back in the 30's, I was mowing with my team at the nearby Bulkley estate. Irving Conklin stopped by and asked me to stop on my way home and mow a very small field near the pumping station.

I was aware of the size of the field and felt that I could mow it in less than an hour. However, unbeknownst to me, the field was studded with small pipes that had been driven into the ground whereas the hay was at least three feet tall. It was about 5 in the afternoon when I arrived at the little field, confident that I would continue my way home by 6.

After mowing only a few feet there was a crackling of the knives in the cutting bar and I knew that I was in trouble. We always carried many spare knives and rivets, so that repairs could

be made right on the spot. The repair jobs were numerous and by 9 p.m. the knives and rivets had all been used.

The trip home was an unforgettable experience. My team of Belgians, Kit and Lady, were young at the time, and until the previous spring, had never even been harnessed.

It was a bright moonlit night, and the mares were not used to seeing their own shadows on the highway. All the way down the mountain, they jumped one way and then the other trying to avoid the outline that they saw on the pavement. It was a trip to remember.

One of the greatest of Ridgefield's numerous mansions is just a little farther on, at 50 Oreneca Road. It is now the home of the Harrison D. Horblits. The great stone mansion and matching superintendent's house and the matching classic entrance which we like to refer to as the Clydesdale gateway, were built in the 20's by Philip Dakin Wagoner. The property had once belonged to the Lounsbury family and they left it to Jennie Rockwell, from whom it was acquired by Mr. Wagoner.

Philip D. Wagoner, whose friends called him P.D., was a very successful businessman. He was one of those who put together the Underwood Corporation, and he served for many years as president and chairman of the board of that very large firm.

P.D. spared nothing in the construction of this elegant estate. It was said the stones for the building were imported from France.

He intended to use the place during the summer months and on weekends, but never really got to enjoy the mansion for very long. Mrs. Wagoner died only a few years after the mansion was completed and P.D. was so devastated that most of his visits to the place were spent in the super's house.

Mr. Wagoner was an exceptionally fine man and it was he who passed on stock market tips to his barber Paul Laszig, when Paul had his shop where J.R. Interiors is now at 3 1/2 Catoonah Street. Paul, like most barbers, was a good conversationalist, but more important, he was a good listener.

While cutting P.D.'s hair, Paul would start by talking of the news of the day but soon switched to financial matters and then listened to the words of wisdom. That his methods paid off is proved by the very generous sums of money that Paul's wife, Imgard Johanna Laszig, left in trust, for Meals on Wheels, the Thrift Shop and other worthy organizations.

It always annoyed P.D., on his visits to the town hall, to see that the typewriters used there were Royals and Remingtons, so he gave several Underwoods to the town. He also did considerable business with what is now Union Trust. The bank had only one Underwood and Gus Grennan said that when they saw P.D. coming, the other typewriters were pushed under the counters and the Underwood was put on display.

#275: HOW ICE WAS HARVESTED IN THE ERA OF THE ICEBOX

In telling about Harrison D. Horblit's beautiful estate, it should be noted that when P.D. Wagoner bought the property back in the 20's, there were two buildings on the place. Jenny Rockwell had a small house that sat where the mansion is now, and there was an ice house that sat right on the shore of Round Pond.

Joseph W. Hibbart stored his ice here when he carried on an ice business as well as a meat and grocery store at 424 Main Street, where Capiello's Jewelry Store is now.

In the days before electric refrigeration, the harvesting of ice from our local ponds was quite a large operation. The winters seem to have been much colder and the ice much thicker in those days.

In cutting the ice into blocks, a gasoline powered engine was used and it was drawn back and forth across the pond by either a horse or a mule. Mr. Hibbart always used mules, as they were generally lighter than a horse and less likely to break through the ice.

The engine ran a circular saw, similar to the one now used to cut through the surface of a highway when an excavation is to be made. The saw was set to cut to within a couple of inches of the water beneath the ice. In other words, if the ice happened to be a foot in thickness, the saw would cut 10 inches deep. This was called scoring the ice into cakes, and they could weigh as much as 300 pounds.

The ice machine had handles for the driver to guide the saw and they were similar to those used on a plow. On one handle of the machine there was a rope that was attached to the whiffletree. If the mule should break through the ice, and this was not an unusual happening, the driver would yank on the rope and release the mule from the machine.

If the pond on which the ice was being harvested was fed by springs, the thickness of the ice could vary. If the ice was a foot thick where the scoring started, it could be only 10 inches thick where the spring was located. This was sure to provide a dunking in the icy water for the mule and sometimes the machine as well.

When this happened a second mule joined in the rescue operations. A lasso was thrown over the head of the unhappy mule and its partner then pulled him to safety.

There were times when the rescue operations were not successful, and the mule was lost. As far as I know, this never happened at Round Pond, but there were one or two accidents at New Pond, just off New Street, where the mules were lost.

When the saw also went into the water, of course, it sank to the bottom of the pond and had to be retrieved by using grappling hooks.

The disaster was complete when the mule, the saw and the driver all took an icy bath together. However, I am happy to report that no driver was ever lost.

After the scoring of the ice was completed, the remaining two inches of ice was cut with a very large and very long hand-saw, made especially for this purpose. The cakes of ice were sometimes separated by use of a very long iron rod that had a flat end, similar to a huge chisel.

As the cakes of ice were separated and floated freely, they were then guided toward the ice house by use of a long wooden pike. The pike had a metal hook on its end and this aided in pushing the cakes of ice up a chute that stretched from the shore of the pond to the door of the ice house.

The men working in the ice house then packed the ice away, using sawdust between the cakes to prevent them from sticking together.

The harvesting of the ice was very hard work, and the tools that were used were rather primitive.

Incidentally, there is an excellent collection of ice tools on display at John Girolmetti's Old Ice House Restaurant. Johnny's father, Mario, was one of the very last ice men to operate in Ridgefield, as were Nanny Lavatori and Charley Russell.

Charley is still around, at age 97, and he remembers me as a kid riding with him on his ice wagon.

Sixty years ago the old icebox was giving way to the electric refrigerator. There was even a refrigerator that ran by gas. I think it was a Philco, but it never became as popular as those that used electricity. Every once in a while, one of the old-fashioned iceboxes will show up at an auction or tag sale. People use them today, as storage chests, or as conversation pieces.

Old-timers still refer to the electric refrigerators as iceboxes. Those early refrigerators seemed to last much longer than their modern counterparts.

At any rate, the old ice house at Round Pond and the small dwelling that stood nearby were both removed to make room for the elegant mansion that now graces that beautiful estate.

I guess that there are no longer any ice houses standing in Ridgefield. One of the last to disappear was one that belonged on Dr. George G. Shelton's estate. It stood on West Lane, on the left just as you reach the New York state line.

Patrick and Alice Garrard now live at 50 Oreneca Road, in the fine cut stone house that was originally intended to be the superintendent's house on the P.D. Wagoner estate. I do not think it was ever used for that purpose, as Mr. Wagoner lived there himself for some time.

A little farther on, at 94 Oreneca Road, is the home of Orris and Betty Stark. This very nice house was home to the John Duncan family, when John Sr. was superintendent on the Wagoner estate. Later it became the home of another super, Andrew Brady, his wife Margaret and their children, Patricia and Andrew Jr.

The younger Andy is now in Portland, Maine, where he is employed by the U.S. Postal Service, and Pat, who is now Mrs. Franklin Shaw, is still performing her duties as a disciple of Florence Nightingale.

The senior Andrew Brady had been the superintendent for Sidney Farrar when Sidney had his estate on North Salem Road. Sid had been the first baseman for the Philadelphia Phillies, back in the 1890's. Of more importance was that he was the father of the famous Geraldine Farrar, who was best known as one of the very greatest of all the Metropolitan Opera stars.

From this point we enter the great Bulkley estate, better known today as the Randolph estate. This is perhaps the largest of all the great showplaces that Ridgefield had to offer. Its hundreds of acres extend well over into New York state and include the famous Sarah Bishop Cave and once had the equally famous "Swinging Bridge."