‘Dick’s Dispatch’

Columns 326 through 366

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

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#326: A DEEP WELL AND A CRAZY CRASH

When Colonel Conley took over the property more than 75 years ago that would become his beloved Outpost Farm, there was a nice little old house on the place. It had been the home of the previous owner, Isaac Selleck, and stood near where the Colonel wanted to build his mansion.

So this house was moved down the hill and northwest, and became the home of the groom, who cared for some very fine horses. Later it was moved southeast, to the brink of the hill, where it was remodeled for W. Bingham Cox and his family, by Franklin Pierce and Primo Baldaserini. Mrs. Cox is the Colonel’s daughter, Elise.

Still later, this venerable, old house was the home of the Colonel’s brother, Edwin. Eventually, like the mansion itself, this innocent and historic building was destroyed by IBM.

For many years, Harry Menzie was Edwin Conley’s chauffeur. Along the way, Harry met a local girl, Vera Carboni, and they were married. Later on the Menzies moved to California, and though Harry has since passed on, Vera still lives in the Golden State. Mr. and Mrs. Henry Erklauer then came to take care of Edwin in his later years.

The Sutherland Construction Company from Danbury did the actual construction of the mansion that was designed by the noted architect Charles O’Keefe. After a few days on the job it became apparent that they needed a greater supply of water, so a well drilling company was engaged. The location of the new deep well was left to the discretion of the foreman of the well drilling crew.

The superintendent on the estate at that time was William Creagh, and he had some very definite ideas on where and how the well drilling should be done. Bill was a very knowledgeable gentleman, who never hesitated to voice his opinion on any matter great or small. He was a veteran of the Spanish American War, and an officer who never lost his military bearing. His friends often referred to him as “General Creagh,” and he sure knew how to give out orders and see that they were carried out.

From the very start of the well drilling, Mr. Creagh was critical of the area that was selected for drilling. He lost no time in informing the foreman of the crew that he had a much better location for the well and warned that they would never get a good supply of water in the area in which they were drilling. Bill never made clear how he knew where to drill, but it seems fairly certain that he must have been a dowser.

At any rate, after drilling for several days, no water was found, and Bill repeated his warnings. Days turned into weeks and still the drillers were not successful. They drilled all the way down through that little mountain until they reached the level of the Danbury Road, but the water supply was still not sufficient.

When the foreman heard Bill again being critical of the operation, he spoke to Colonel Conley about the matter. The Colonel very quietly suggested to Bill that he should let the well drillers do their job, no matter how deep they had to drill.

Bill promptly, and on the spot, quit his position as superintendent. They continued to drill and finally did get a better supply, but it was never quite enough, and it was said that it was the second deepest artesian well in the world, though I never did learn where the deepest well was located. In later years, when the mansion became the famous Fox Hill Inn, the need for more water became so critical that it was necessary to pipe it from the land at the rear of where the Ridgefield Ice Cream stand is now.

We will never know whether the spot that Bill Creagh had selected for the well would have been more productive, but he sure was right in his prophecy that the well drillers were in the wrong place.

The mention of the ice cream stand reminds me of an incident that could have had tragic consequences for one of the several chauffeurs at Outpost Farm. He was the youngest of the group, and doubled as a mechanic as well as an errand boy. In performing his errands this young fellow usually drove a pick-up truck, or sometimes a suburban (station wagon).

For some time he had a hankering to drive one of the sleek automobiles that made up the fleet at Outpost. One in particular that appealed to him was a foreign roadster that was said to be capable of great speeds.

One morning George entered the garage and found that the other employees had left to perform whatever duties they had been assigned. There was a note on the bulletin board and it directed George to go into town for certain supplies. This presented an opportunity for him to drive the low slung speedster that he had become enamored with.

However, to avoid detection, George felt that he must not use the main driveway. There was a back driveway that descended from the garage to Danbury Road, joining it just across the road from where the ice cream stand is now. This seemed like the safe way to go, so George took off.

At the lower end of the driveway there were two stone pillars that stood right near where Dr. Dann now has his Ridgefield Veterinary Hospital. On the opposite side of the highway, there was a stone wall that was less than three feet in height. The wall and the pillars have long since disappeared.

George was a happy young fellow as he came barreling down the rather steep hill. The exhilaration he was enjoying was about to come to an abrupt end. As he roared along and approached the stone pillars, he suddenly noticed that someone had put up the huge chain that was used to block off the driveway.

He was traveling too fast to stop, so he just laid over on the seat and as the car passed under the chain, the canvas roof of the car was shorn off, as with a giant knife. The car continued across the main highway and struck the stone wall with such force that it actually did a half somersault that ended with the rear wheels of the car pointing straight up at the sky.

There were no seat belts in those days, and George was catapulted through the air, landing several yards out into some small shrubbery. The young man was fortunate to receive

only a few minor injuries, but explaining how the accident occurred must have been rather painful.

#327: WHEN OUTPOST FARM BECAME FAMOUS FOX HILL INN

Colonel Conley had a great love for trees, shrubs and flowers, and you can be sure that his Outpost Farm had all three in abundance.

The sunken Italian garden that graced the front of the mansion was a thing of great beauty, and was much admired by all who had the opportunity to view it. When the landscape around the mansion was completed, it was dotted with very exotic shrubbery, some of which is still growing there today, though it has been sadly neglected by the present owners of what was once such a grand showplace.

Then at strategic locations, the Colonel planted stately elms, maples, oaks, and mountain ash trees. However, the most popular trees were those in the very productive orchards. They had a very special attraction to Gino Baldaserini, and the other young people who grew up on the estate. Those kids really enjoyed — and still remember — the luscious apples, peaches, pears and cherries that were grown on the place, and this was true not just during the harvest season. These fruits were available all year round, as they were well-preserved in the enormous root cellar (dirt cellar), whose stone face is still quite visible as you drive along Bennett's Farm Road. They always seemed to taste their very best during the cold winter months.

The root cellar and some of the barns that have been converted into dwellings, and the house that is now the home of reporter Linette Burton are just about the only remaining structures that are mindful of the glory that once made up the great compound that was Outpost Farm. It is doubtful that we will ever see its like again.

The Colonel passed on in 1930, and the Conley children all married and moved into their own homes. After kindly old Uncle John followed his brother to his just reward, there was only Uncle Ed and Mrs. Conley left in the large mansion.

Though the size of the household went down, the same could not be said of the taxes, and they must have been enormous on such a large estate. Uncle Ed moved to the smaller house that was previously described, and Mrs. Conley came to the conclusion that the only sensible thing to do was to part with her beloved and magnificent mansion. It must have been a very sad and difficult decision to make.

At any rate, along came Frederick Merrill Barker, with the idea that he would make the mansion into this country's finest inn. So what had been Outpost Farm was transformed into the famous Fox Hill Inn.

What an inn it was. If you went there for dinner, you might prepare for the occasion by saving up your pennies for a few months. However, it was well worth the sacrifice, for the food and service were superlative, and the atmosphere was exquisite. Of course, people like myself went to Fox Hill only when there was some very special event.

The regular customers in such a grand place were sure to be among the rich and famous. I recall that on one anniversary, Marie and I went there for dinner and seated at the next table was Joan Bennett, when she was one of Hollywood's reigning queens. Errol Flynn also looked quite comfortable in the luxurious surroundings that Fox Hill Inn provided. There were several others who followed Fred Barker in the operation of the inn, and among them were Italo Montanari and Donald Davis.

The most successful of those who ran the place was John Yervant. He and his wife, Felice, had gained considerable fame as an international dance team. Perhaps it was the advent of today's undanceable music that caused them to become innkeepers.

During the Yervants' tenure at Fox Hill, the Ridgefield Kiwanis Club held their meetings at the inn and many were the delightful luncheons that we had there. Each year, when the club had its Ladies Night at Fox Hill, John and Felice would give an exhibition of their fine ballroom dancing.

Then came the sad day when IBM made John an offer that he felt he could not refuse. It looked like a deal that would be beneficial to all concerned. It was said that IBM would either establish its corporate headquarters at the inn, or it would use the place as a kind of country club, to be used by its employees for vacations. At any rate it seemed like the place was in good hands and its future would be secure.

However, when it became known that IBM was planning to construct a heliport right next to the mansion, objections were raised because of the terrible noise that the helicopters would make. It was pointed out that Danbury airport was only a couple of miles away, and helicopter service would save only a minute or two in travel time.

This did not sit very well with those who operated the huge corporation. They were not the kind of people who would brook any opposition, no matter how small.

It must have come as a surprise that anyone would take issue with their plans. It had become the custom for IBM to be accepted with open arms in other locations, especially in the the additional business [and tax income] it would bring.

So, like the little boy who owned the bat and ball, and who refused to let the game progress unless his wishes were adhered to, IBM decided to drop the matter. In the process, Fox Hill Inn was allowed to disintegrate, and eventually it was demolished.

I have the feeling that those who made that woeful decision will never escape the sin that they committed. It was indeed very unfortunate that this superlative structure was doomed to suffer the same fate as the Olcott mansion at Casagmo, the Conron mansion on West Mountain, the Frederick E. Lewis mansion on West Lane, the Chisolm mansion on Peaceable Street, and the Shelton mansion on West Lane. There were several other mansions that were destroyed by fire, some of questionable origin, but these were deliberately dismantled and all were possessed of such charming architecture they could never be replaced.

#328: THE GRAND 2,000-ACRE OUTPOST NURSERIES

In writing of how some of Ridgefield's great mansions have passed from the scene, it is worthy of note that none of the original owners were around to witness their demise. It is fitting that they were spared the agony of seeing the destruction of those beautiful structures.

I surely hope that the few mansions that are left will be protected from the wrecking ball of the demolition crew. It is regrettable that our young people did not see Ridgefield in the splendor of its Golden Years.

Before Colonel Conley passed on in 1930, he had devoted himself to establishing what he envisioned as the greatest nursery in the country. The records of the famous Outpost Nursery seem to support the idea that he was more than moderately successful in his endeavors.

Piece by piece, and acre by acre, he purchased all the land that was available along both sides of Danbury Road. Eventually his holdings extended north into the Ridgefield Lakes area and east into the Farmingville area. Starting at Farmingville Road, the nursery ran for several miles on both sides of the highway, and crossed over the Danbury town line.

In amassing all that property, the Colonel wisely decided to keep the operation of Outpost Farm separate from the Outpost Nursery. Julius Tulipani was engaged as superintendent of the farm and John Hoffer became the superintendent of the vast nursery business.

For some years Colonel Conley was Ridgefield's largest employer, and with over 2,000 acres, he must have been Ridgefield's largest payer of taxes.

Then, to keep such a large enterprise in operation required a great many salesmen, and they were spread all along the Eastern Seaboard. Some, but by no means all, of. those salesmen were: Harvey Tanton, who would later become Ridgefield's first selectman, and after whom Tanton Hill Road was named; Harry Custance, Fred Buckley, George Tuoti, Donald Archer, William Rodier, LeRoy Duford, Paul Case, and, of course, Joseph Mortimer Woodcock, better known as "Woody."

In later years, when the Conley family decided to get out of the nursery business, Woody was chosen to take over the operation and the name was changed to Woodcock Nursery. Woody was a leading spirit, and one of the organizers of the Ridgefield Rotary Club, an organization that he served so well for many years. Woody was active in many civic affairs and politics seemed to have a strong attraction for him.

After retiring from the nursery business, he fulfilled a longstanding ambition and became one of Ridgefield's very popular first selectmen, and Woodcock Lane was named for him. Woody and his wife, Anne, still live on Huckleberry Lane and he still keeps abreast of what is going on in town.

The salesmen must have done a real fine job of selling the services and the products of the nursery. Through their efforts, the name of The Outpost Nursery became known far and wide. The men at Outpost became noted for the great job they did in landscaping some of the country's magnificent estates and public buildings.

The nursery was especially active in Washington, D.C., where its talents were put to use in enhancing the beauty of several government buildings in our nation's capital. The beauty of many municipal parks in New York, and other large cities, is a result of plantings made by Outpost Nursery. In the late 1930's, the nursery was busily engaged in preparing the grounds at Flushing Meadows for the New York World's Fair. No job was too big or too small for the men at Outpost. They were capable of safely moving the very largest of trees.

The bigger the tree, the bigger the ball of earth that was required to insure the success of a transplanted tree, and some of them were just tremendous. I well remember seeing these enormous trees being transported on a flatbed trailer along Main Street.

One in particular was a 60-foot American elm that I believe came from the Doubleday estate as it was being moved to another locality. This giant of a tree was so large that even when lying flat down on the trailer, it was necessary to raise the utility wires along the way, so that it could safely pass under them. Just the ball of this tree must have been close to 20 feet across. It weighed many tons and only the most rugged of trailers could have handled all that weight.

During those years, the Outpost Nursery was under the guidance of Richard E. Conley. "Dick," as he was known to his friends, took over the operation after his father passed on.

Like the rest of that great family, Dick was very well liked and a popular figure in Ridgefield. The nursery continued to grow, and despite the many acres it encompassed, there came a time when no more tillable land was available, so it was decided to look elsewhere. A great many acres were purchased in South Carolina, where help was available and a longer growing season would be of some benefit.

Now, the Outpost Nursery became a real far-flung enterprise, and transportation could have been a problem, except that Dick Conley was a very experienced pilot and flew his own plane. His talent as a pilot was a real asset to the growing business.

It is interesting to note that the growth of the nursery took place, for the most part, during the years of the Great Depression. Toward the end of the Depression, war clouds were gathering in Europe, and world peace was about to come to an end.

Soon after World War II started, our country became engaged in furnishing food and armaments to our allies in Europe. This created a need for a great number of ships, and the men at Outpost moved quickly to be of assistance.

A large saw mill was constructed on the corner of Copp's Hill Road, where Pamby Motors is now located. The mill was equipped with the very largest circular saw that I have ever seen. It was here that they sawed out the huge timbers for the "Liberty Ships" that were being built at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. Outpost trucks were sent scurry- ing around the countryside in search of the large trees from which the timbers were cut. Many of the trees that were used came from the Hyde Park estate of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

#329: SOME PEOPLE & PLACES OF OUTPOST NURSERIES

Outpost Nursery made a significant contribution to the war effort by furnishing the great timbers that were used in building the Liberty Ships.

One could only guess at the number of timbers that rolled out of the Outpost Saw Mill on Danbury Road. However, great trailer loads, pulled by Outpost trucks, could be seen each day, passing along Main Street on their way to the Navy Yard. The whirring sound of the gigantic buzz saw could be heard at a great distance as it sliced through the huge logs.

At one time there was a pile of sawdust at the mill that was about the size of the Town Hall. It was decided that the best way of getting rid of the sawdust was to give it away for the taking, and many local people came with trucks to haul it away.

Most of those who came were local farmers, who found that it made nice warm bedding for their livestock. Someone coined a rather corny joke that one farmer fed the sawdust to his cows and they produced shaving cream.

When the attack on Pearl Harbor caused our country to enter the great conflict, Richard Conley decided that his skills as an aviator would be best put to use as a member of the military. So Dick enlisted in the United States Navy Air Force, and served his tour of duty in the South Pacific Theatre of Operations. He achieved the rank of captain and I am sure that Colonel Louis D. Conley would have been justly proud of his son.

The Colonel was a stickler for physical fitness and kept himself in fine condition. His sons were encouraged to do likewise, and at regular intervals the Colonel would bring a boxing instructor from the New York Athletic Club to Outpost Farm to ensure that the boys were properly trained in the manly art of self-defense.

Colonel Conley took an active interest in the underprivileged, and for many years he maintained a boys camp in the wooded areas around Buck Hill and Great Hill Roads. Each summer a number of boys were brought to the Outpost Camp from the city for two weeks of wholesome country living.

A very religious man himself, the Colonel made sure that the boys attended a church service on Sunday. Each Sunday morning, a bus would transport the boys into town and drop

them off at the church of their choice, after which they were treated to an ice cream soda, or whatever appealed to the sweet tooth of a growing boy.

Hundreds of boys who may not have ever had the privilege of enjoying Ridgefield's healthful environment returned to the city after experiencing the generosity of this fine man. Colonel Conley was also a strong supporter of the local Boy Scout troops.

As you traveled south on Danbury Road, from where it intersects with Bennett's Farm Road (Maplewood Road), there were only two houses for a considerable distance back in the 30's. One is still standing and until recently was used as a retail electrical lamp store called "Yellow Shutters," but it now appears to be closed [it was torn down years ago]. The other house stood almost directly opposite the store, but a number of years ago, for some reason or other, it just disappeared from the landscape.

A little farther on, and just opposite where European Motors is now, there was a little building that was maintained by the State of Connecticut. This was one of a number of weighing stations that were placed at strategic intervals along major state highways. In those days the State Police were kept busy, intercepting overloaded trucks. This little building also dis- appeared a number of years ago.

A few weighing stations can still be found along state highways, but most of them have a sign out front that reads "Weigh Station Closed." Just can't help but wonder if the owners of those huge trailer trucks we see on the roads today are more honest in loading their trucks, or if some large lobbyist group flexed their very ample muscles. Just beyond the weigh station in the late 40's, there suddenly appeared a hot dog stand, where The Candle Shop is now. It had a large sign over it that proclaimed this place to be "Poor Old Cliff's," and Clifford Hayes was the proprietor.

You can be sure that this would never have happened when Colonel Conley was around. The Colonel was his own Zoning Commissioner, and commercial ventures of this type were strictly taboo along his stretch of Danbury Road.

Cliff Hayes was engaged in several operations, and Hayes Lane, just off Olmstead Lane, was the result of his activities as a developer. If Cliff was ever poor, he did not remain so for very long.

For some reason, Cliff suddenly disappeared and it was said that he went to Florida. Unlike so many others who left this town, he exhibited no desire to return. [Hayes operated a Poor Old Cliff's in Florida.]

There were no other buildings along Danbury Road back in the 30's until you came to the magnificent stone structure that is now the home of Anthony B. Cassedy Associates [now Stonehouse Common]. Anyone who has even a little appreciation of fine architecture is bound to slow up and look at this fine building. It was built in the 20's by Colonel Conley as an office building for his many enterprises.

It was here that Fred Merklin, as the head accountant, guarded the financial interests of the Outpost enterprises, with a zeal that was remarkable. He was some kind of genius.

Charles Herzog was entrusted with the care of this beautiful office building and its exquisitely landscaped grounds. He was equal to the task and kept the place as the unique showplace that it still is today. Mrs. Herzog kept the interior of the building in spotless condition, as well as serving up gourmet meals for the lucky office workers.

The Herzogs and their pretty daughter, Marion, lived upstairs in a lovely apartment. Marion is now Mrs. John Freer, and is one of our school nurses. Edwin Conley was in the habit

of giving presents to the children of the Outpost families. Marion recalls how he gave her a charm bracelet when she was a little girl, and then added a charm each year on her birthday.

Alex Ross, the renowned artist, painted a fine picture of this great office building some years ago. The picture was used for commercial purposes and Alex, knowing how I admired the place, made me a present of the original. That picture is one of my prized possessions.

#330:THE KENNELS AND KERRIES OF OUTPOST FARM

Despite a large estate to maintain, and a rapidly growing nursery to operate, Colonel Louis: D. Conley seemed to always have his eye out for some new enterprise.

On a trip to Europe in the early 20's, he came upon a kennel that specialized in breeding Kerry blue terriers. The Colonel had always been a dog lover, and he took a strong liking for the Kerries, which up to that time were not well-known in this country.

The Colonel decided that he too would like to raise some of these fine little dogs, and proceeded to buy the very best Kerries he could find. Just a couple of years later, the dog population at Outpost Farm had increased to a point where he felt that a much larger kennel was needed. The result was that he built the very attractive building that until recently was a front for the Red Lion restaurant.

Like everything else that the Colonel did, he built his new kennel to be the best in every way. It even included a hospital to provide care for a dog with just about any kind of ailment. It also had a very complete kitchen, in which food for the dogs was prepared by one of the three dog handlers, who was an expert in canine cuisine.

The fine building that became Outpost Kennels was 175 feet in length, making it the largest kennel in New England, and one of the largest in the whole United States.

While the Kerry blues, which the Colonel imported from Europe, made up the foundation stock, other breeds were soon added to round out this very successful operation. At one time there were 60 English setters, 40 cocker spaniels, 20 Kerry blue terriers and 10 Sealyham terriers in the kennel.

To oversee such a large enterprise, Colonel Conley engaged William E. Bennison as the manager. Mr. Bennison was a noted trainer of show dogs, and under his guidance, the Outpost Kennels became well-known all across the country, and overseas as well.

The foundation stock at Outpost was made up primarily of dogs that were imported, and they carried such names as Duplicator of Ware, Princeton Blue Demon, Rowcliffe Dawn, and Pequannoc Musketeer. Of course, their offspring were given names that were more befitting their origin, such as Outpost Cleo and Outpost Joie. Like their sires, these dogs and many others whose names began with the word Outpost, they went on to become champions.

The Colonel was a pioneer in raising Kerries in this country, and he was especially proud of Outpost Sheila, who became the first American bred Kerry to be champion of the breed.

The fine Outpost Kennel building was so picturesque that it became an attraction to the many travelers as they drove along Danbury Road. Literally thousands of these people visited the kennel, and they were given a tour of the operation. They left with a thorough knowledge of how dogs can be kept in tip-top condition.

Colonel Conley was a stickler for keeping things in good shape and his dogs were no exception. He believed that dogs should have good wholesome food, as well as plenty of healthful exercise.

To ensure that they got their exercise, the Colonel had huge runs built for the dogs. Some of the runs went right up the steep hill that rises at the rear of the kennels. Though the dogs received the very best of care, they were not coddled.

They all had to take their turn in living in the runs outside the kennel. Here the dogs could romp and play in a rough terrain that made up a natural and healthful environment. They were not pampered pets.

Then there came a time, as World War Il heated up, that the activities at Outpost Farm, the nursery and the kennel began to wind down, and the kennel was the first to feel the effect.

The Gaines Food Company had been doing business with the Outpost Kennel for some years, and decided that it would be a fine place to establish a research laboratory. So many lucky people were able to acquire Outpost dogs at bargain prices.

The Gaines people brought in many different breeds of dogs, but the operation lasted only a few years and then the building was vacant for a while.

The place was then turned into a restaurant. It was called The Steak House and the kitchen that once provided food for the dogs began to furnish food for humans. It was rather a unique eating place and seemed to do a good business, but eventually it closed and remained so for some time.

It was almost 20 years ago that Dana Riggs took over the place and the noted Red Lion Restaurant came into being. Additions were made to the building, though the face of it remained the same. Then more additions were made until it became one of the largest restaurants in the area.

Perhaps it got too big, but for whatever reason, the former kennel has been vacant for a couple of years and the once very attractive building has taken on a very forlorn appearance.

Meanwhile, the Outpost Nursery was still operating, though at a much lesser scale. It took an awful lot of men to keep that large enterprise going, and help was getting very hard to find.

Then too, a great deal of attention was being given to the operation of the Outpost Saw Mill, which had become an important part of the war effort. People were not buying the large trees, or other nursery products, or having landscaping done, as they had before the start of the war. However, the very numerous plantings at the nursery still had to be cared for.

Some of the employees were seasonal as activities at the nursery were greatest during the spring and fall. There were of course a number of men who were employed year around, and just some of the regulars were Jerry Ratchin, Aldo Girolmetti, Joseph Hall, Norman Matthews, Franklin Shaw, Gunnar Almgren, Robert Bell, Richard Young, Stanley Piasta, Jerry Bryers, Richard Hoffer, John Hoffer the “Boss,” Ralph Fraser, and, of course “The Great Dane,” Otto Jesperson.

Otto was very active in civic affairs and became town chairman of the Democratic Town Committee. In later years he operated an upholstering business in the old Power House on Ivy Hill Road.

#331: WHAT SHOULD THEY DO WITH 30,000 POSTCARDS?

Before continuing our journey south on Danbury Road (Route 35), we will, with your permission, turn left at the traffic circle, and proceed for just a short distance on Route 7. One of the first buildings on the right side is now the home of The Ridgefield Publishing and Printing Company at 346 Ethan Allen Highway. [This highway in the 1950s and 60s was commonly called the Danbury-Norwalk Road.]

During the late 50's and early 60's, this place housed a firm that was named Marketing Management. It was a rather unusual operation and I just thought you might like to know about it.

Two very enterprising young gentlemen, John Higgins and Daniel Graham, were employed at Pitney Bowes in Stamford and were interested in establishing a little side business for themselves. The opportunity came about when some of the large publishing houses developed a problem.

It was at a time when several publications, especially the trade magazines, carried among their pages some tear-out postcards. One side of the card carried an address to which the card could be mailed without postage being paid. The other side of the card carried a list of items of which the reader could indicate his interest by checking one or more of the items. Post- age would be paid by the firm to which the card was mailed and an answer would be forthcoming.

The idea struck a very responsive chord and soon the processing of the cards became a real chore, and the publishers began to look around for someone to take the matter off their hands.

When Dan and John heard of this, they applied for the franchise, and their offer was quickly accepted. The young men rented a little store in Norwalk, and Marketing Management was born.

The volume of cards received increased to a point where the men had to devote their full time to the operation. When the store was no longer large enough to handle the operation, the firm moved to 346 Ethan Allen Highway. After a short time, the new quarters were found to be inadequate, and the building next door was added to the operation. The business was no longer a two-man operation and additional employees were hired.

Still, like so many of Ridgefield's business ventures, this one grew by leaps and bounds and the postcards received at the Ridgefield Post Office each day went from 100 to 1,000.

The work force went from two to 30, and when additional space was needed, they added the building at 659 Danbury Road that now houses an antiques shop and H & R Block.

There was one big hitch to the operation: the cards had to be redeemed at the post office for cash, and there was just not enough money up front to take care of the situation. Therefore, the new firm would use what cash it had on hand to pick up what cards it could pay for, and a backlog began to develop.

This caused a real problem, where the workroom floor at the post office was already overcrowded. No one seemed to know what to do with the unclaimed cards but to hold them and hope that Marketing Management would somehow get the cash to lake them for processing.

It was about this time that I became postmaster, and the first thing that I saw on the workroom floor was this huge pile of postcards. It was obvious that the cards were taking up some very valuable space and the postal workers were having a difficult time in performing their duties.

However, no one had a solution to the problem. There was no way they could be returned to the senders, and they could not be destroyed. I called our Regional Post Office, which was then in Boston, and they sent a trouble shooter, who could provide no solution.

The Postal Inspection Service was notified, and they also failed to have an answer.

It should be noted that this was probably the first business of this type that had ever been established, and no one in the Postal Service had ever encountered this problem before. Meanwhile, the cards kept on coming and the pile mounted until it was in excess of 30,000. This

is a graphic example of what happens when a business just grows too fast, with results that can be disastrous.

The solution to this perplexing situation came about when Dan and John decided to quit their thriving business. A few days later, executives from Curtiss Publishing in Philadelphia and McGraw Hill in New York came to my office. They almost broke into tears when they saw that avalanche of postcards.

Up to this point they had no idea of what was happening. These gentlemen all said that they would have been happy to make an advance that would have kept Marketing Management in business, so it was a case of one hand not knowing what the other was doing.

The men paid the postage due on the cards and the next day a truck appeared, the cards were loaded, and the workroom floor at the post office gained some space.

I have lost track of the whereabouts of John Higgins and Daniel Graham, but certainly wish them well, for they were fine gentlemen.

This is not the only case con- cerning a business that grew too fast. This can happen quite easily, especially in a mail order business where the person conducting the business has no idea of the appeal of his or her product.

One in particular was started by a lady in Ridgefield. She started by renting a post office box and then placed ads in various newspapers and trade journals. I never knew what her product actually did, but she informed me that she intended to supply liquor stores with some kind of card that was essential in operating that kind of a business.

The lady intended to carry on the business as a one-person operation. However, the response to her advertising was so overwhelming that it became necessary to hire an assistant.

When the orders for the cards continued to increase, the lady decided that she would give up her thriving business rather than hire any more people.

So nothing ventured, nothing gained, but you never know when you start a mail-order business whether it will mushroom or just go flat.

#332: THE CASE OF THE VANISHING WATCHES

Just a little farther down the road, at 901 Ethan Allen Highway, is one of the many buildings that make up the Perkin-Elmer Instrument Group. It was built almost 30 years ago, by the Morganti Construction Company, for the Benrus Watch Company.

Benrus was a well-established name in the watch business. It had carried on its operations for many years in New York City, with a subsidiary in a plant at Waterbury. Then came a time when the Benrus people decided to leave the confinement of the bustling city and locate in the friendly and healthy environment that Ridgefield had to offer.

The firm employed a number of Ridgefield people, as well as many who came with the firm from the city, and some who transferred from the Waterbury plant. It was a large operation and seemed quite successful.

The move to Ridgefield by this firm posed a real problem for the local post office. When the post office moved in 1960 from where the Addessi Jewelry Store is now to the north side of the Grand Union Store, the overcrowded conditions at the old post office were supposedly eliminated. Postal authorities were of the opinion that the new facility would be adequate for Ridgefield's needs, for many years.

Little did they know of how Ridgefield would continue to grow. In just a couple of years, the population had increased to such a point that the new post office was already too small to handle the burgeoning mail volumes.

The large amount of mail that was generated to and from the Benrus plant just added to the aggravation. Pleas to the Regional Post Office for relief from an intolerable situation seemed to fall on deaf cars.

A solution was finally forthcoming when I requested and received permission to establish what amounted to a branch post office, right at the Benrus plant. Once a mail room was prepared at Benrus, a postal clerk was assigned each day to go there and prepare the outgoing mail for dispatch. The large truck that hauled the mail from the Danbury and Ridgefield post offices to the Stamford Sectional Center then stopped at Benrus to pick up this mail.

This modus operandi had a mutual benefit for all concerned. It was especially of great benefit to the postal service, for to have all that mail bypass the local post office was a real blessing.

It should be mentioned that the great amount of postage that was derived from the Benrus operations put the revenue at the Ridgefield office well over the million dollar mark for the first time.

Everything worked out well on this end, but unfortunately most of the Benrus mail had to pass through the main New York Post Office. If you ever have the opportunity of touring that enormous postal facility, you will wonder how any mail ever gets through it. Much of it did not, as far as Benrus was concerned.

Benrus insured all of their outgoing mail and claims for lost watches began to reach astronomical proportions. It soon became a full-time job for a clerk to handle all these claims.

The Postal Inspection Service was notified about the large amount of money that was being paid out in claims and a team of inspectors was assigned to the case.

They visited the New York office and soon found the cause of the missing watches. Parcels travel through the New York facility on conveyor belts along which perhaps 20 clerks may be employed. The first employee on the line was a karate expert, with a talent that allowed him to strike a box with an open hand making a slit that was as fine as if it had been done with a razor. If the box had originally contained 25. watches, by the time it reached the end of the conveyor belt, it contained only 5, as the others had made their way up under the sleeves of the clerks.

Our local Postal Inspector Bob DeLong noticed that the tape that Benrus used in sealing the boxes had a very large “B” printed on it. He reasoned that this made it easy for it to be identified by those interested in watches. Plain tape was substituted for the marked tape and the thefts diminished somewhat, but the arrests that followed were the greatest deterrent.

One New York inspector assigned to the case told me of the dangers incurred with policing the New York office. He said that any inspector who turned his back on an employee was inviting real trouble.

Postal inspectors are very well respected, and rightfully so. They are quite similar to F.B.I. agents and go through the same rigorous training. They are tough, for they have to be, but the many that I got to know were all perfectly fine gentlemen.

Inspectors were not very well respected by the employees at the New York facility. More than one unwary inspector has been hit in the head by a pipe when he inadvertently turned his back. You can just bet that the other employees would never tell who the culprit was.

For whatever reason, the Benrus people abruptly decided to sell what had been a very successful family-owned business. The new owner was Victor Kiam and soon there was a noticeable drop in the number of watches that were shipped out. There also followed a decline in the number of employees, a sure sign that something was happening at the plant.

The repair division of the company was still in New York City and it was composed of mostly handicapped people. An effort was made to relocate the repair operation in the Ridgefield facility along with the employees.

As a means of encouraging the employees to agree to the move, a barbecue was planned. It was held at the spacious grounds of the plant and buses transported the handicapped from the city to Ridgefield.

It was a fine day and a nice picnic but the employees decided that they would stay where they could easily find public transportation. So Kiam sold out and bought the Remington Shaver Company. You probably have seen him on TV, saying "Shaves closer than a blade or your money back."

Now he is being mentioned as a buyer of the New England Patriots football team. The watches ran better than some of those football players.

#333: BOWERY BOYS CULTIVATING, OLD PIERCE ON 3 WHEELS

Long before the Benrus Watch Company, or the Perkin-Elmer Corporation, came to locate at 901 Ethan Allen Highway, all of that property was a part of the great Outpost Nursery. In fact, right near the little lake on this place there were buildings that were used as barracks for the many nursery employees who performed seasonal work.

One of the buildings was moved a number of years ago to just north of where the Ridgefield Ice Cream Store [Flobees] is now. In its new location, this building served as a branch of The Ridgefield Savings Bank.

During the winter months, the regular nursery employees were kept busy, repairing machinery and preparing for the spring planting. As soon as the weather moderated, the nursery became a beehive of activity, and many additional employees were needed.

This proved to be somewhat of a problem at times, for there were not so many men who were interested in seasonal employment. For that matter, there were not so many who relished the arduous duties of nursery work.

One of the many tasks associated with nursery work was that of cultivating the many acres on which were planted small trees and shrubs. For the uninitiated, the cultivator was an implement that aerated the soil, while at the same time discouraging the growth of weeds.

The cultivator resembled a land plow somewhat, but instead of making one large furrow, it made several smaller ones. It had wooden handles and anywhere from six to 10 shoes that were pointed and about three inches wide. The width of the cultivator could be adjusted from two to four feet, and the shoes penetrated the soil to various depths. It was drawn through the rows by either a horse or a mule.

I would guess that the only place a horse-drawn cultivator would be used today would be in the Amish country of Pennsylvania, as they have long since been replaced by farm tractors. On occasion you might see one standing in front of an antiques shop as a means of advertising its wares, or on a front lawn, as a reminder of bygone days.

At any rate, it took an awful lot of horses and a lot of drivers to cultivate all those acres. Horses, being creatures of habit, soon became accustomed to pulling the cultivator the entire length of a row, and then turning around to come back through the next row. All that was really necessary was for the driver to place the reins over his shoulder and then grasp the handles of the cultivator, for the horse knew just what to do.

I guess by now you have the idea that a degree from Yale or Harvard was not required to handle a cultivator, and you would be quite right in that assumption.

During one of those periods, when it was difficult to find men to do the cultivating, one of the foremen at the nursery came up with what proved to be a rather novel idea for getting the needed help. On a certain Friday evening, one of the large flat bodied nursery trucks took off for New York City. Its destination was that part of the Big Apple that is known as The Bowery. There were the usual number of human derelicts lying about on the sidewalks. They were too far gone to understand what was happening to them as they were loaded onto the truck for the long ride to Ridgefield. In fact they all slept peacefully during the trip.

When these men came to on Monday morning, they discovered that they were walking behind a horse, with the reins around their backs while grasping the handles of a cultivator for dear life. This must have been quite an experience for them, for up to this time they had probably never been closer to a horse than the wooden variety that they had seen on the carousel at Coney Island.

I suppose that these fellows felt that they had been "Shanghaied." However, the action did serve some useful purposes. The men had no finances with which to pay for the return to the squalor that they had been accustomed to, so they had to wait two weeks to be paid their wages. During that time their lungs were treated to Ridgefield's abundance of clean fresh air. They were served plenty of good healthful food, and they actually made some honest money.

Some became so enamored with their new lifestyle that they decided to stay beyond the two-week period, and a few were rehabilitated. One other thing, the cultivating was well taken care of. These things were all pluses and had a mutual benefit. Mayor Ed Koch, are you listening?

Sad to relate, there was one negative. When the men received their pay, some of them could just not stand all that prosperity. These unfortunates made a beeline for the Fife and Drum [a restaurant on Danbury Road], or one of the liquor stores. The problem then arose as to how to get back to friendly confines of the barracks, and it was not unusual to read that one of them had been struck by an auto as they weaved their course "home."

So let's return on Ethan Allen Highway to the traffic circle and then continue our journey south on Danbury Road (Route 35). There were no more houses or structures for a considerable distance. In fact, the next house was that of the Franklin Pierce family. It was on the left just after you descended the little hill that has come to be known as Buck Hill.

In recent years Frank's driveway has been aptly named "Old Pierce Road." If Frank Pierce was to be described in one word, it would be "crusty." He was a good man and an excellent carpenter, but he had his own way of doing things and he was not about to change them.

He always rode a motorcycle, but you would never link him with the young motorcyclists of today, especially those who ride in gangs. First, Frank was not young when I knew him and second, he never traveled with other cyclists. His motorcycle was at onc time an Indian and at another time a Henderson.

Both had one thing in common, they were never without a sidecar. The sidecar furnished not only a place to carry his carpenter tools, but some degree of safety as well. When buying gas. for his cycle, he always insisted on filling the tank himself, lest a drop might be spilled. It was 15 cents per gallon at that time.

#334: LIMESTONE SCHOOL, & A MAN WHO'D CARRY 400 LBS.

Still heading south on Danbury Road from Old Pierce Road, there are now a number of new homes that were not there in the 20's and 30's. Just across the highway from Old Pierce Road, there is now a neat white paddock fence that encircles the property at 491 Danbury Road.

Inside that fence, until recently, there were two miniature horses, and it was a real treat to see them cavorting around the enclosure. These little horses belonged to Edward and Marilyn Gilchrist, and during the past year the stable was increased by one when the little mare gave birth to a colt that I believe they called "Jelly Bean."

These miniature horses are smaller than ponies, and they are perfectly proportioned. In fact my pony "Maggie" is more than twice their size, and Jelly Bean when foaled was the size of a real small terrier. They were palominos in color, with light manes and tails and were possessed of very spirited dispositions.

The little horses have gone south now, with the Gilchrist family [who moved to Florida], and we miss them all. I have a feeling that they will return to Ridgefield someday, just as so many other families have done.

During the time of which we are writing, there were no more homes until you reach the top of the next hill. There at 411 Danbury Road is the home of the Andrew Moore family.

This building was at one lime The Limestone Schoolhouse. At one time this was one of Ridgefield's 14 schoolhouses. They were all small buildings and most of them had only one room. They were not equipped with the modern conveniences that today's students enjoy, and most of them were without indoor plumbing.

Limestone School had 23 students in 1915, when the large elementary school (Benjamin Franklin) that is now Boehringer Ingelheim Inc. [Venus Office Building] was built on East Ridge. The mood of the school board at that time was to centralize school operations. Years later there was a turnaround and the school board decided it was best to decentralize.

With the opening of the new school, the little schoolhouses began to disappear, but Limestone continued to operate for a while. When it finally was closed, the building remained vacant for some time. Then along came Louis "Bub" Finch and his lovely wife, the former Patricia Newman.

Bub could see great possibilities for the little old schoolhouse and set about to transform it into a very comfortable dwelling for his new family.

Right next door at 401 Danbury Road, perched on a small embankment, is a nice little brown shingled house. It was built in 1910 by the Honorable George Pratt Ingersoll. As previously mentioned, Mr. Ingersoll was one of Ridgefield's prominent citizens. He was appointed in 1917 as envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary to the Kingdom of Siam by President Woodrow Wilson. The Ingersoll family lived for many years on West Lane, in the large building that is now The Inn at Ridgefield [The Benjamin].

Apparently Mr. Ingersoll built the Danbury Road house for speculation purposes. The present owner of the house, Francis Casey, has found evidence that the construction of this house was actually done by the late Theodore Haight, who we told about in our trip down West Lane.

Francis Casey's mother married Raymond McLean Sr., and they came to live in this house about 70 years ago. It has remained in the family ever since.

Raymond McLean was an unforgettable character. He was a large, handsome man, standing well over six feet, and he was very strong.

His great strength apparently did not come from hard work, for he never did anything laborious that I know of. Yet, on one occasion, just to demonstrate his ability to carry great

weights, I saw him put a bag of horse feed under each arm and one in each hand, and walk right off with that load. Feed in those days came in 100 pound bags, so that makes a total of 400 pounds, and that is no mean feat.

Perhaps he just inherited that great strength, for Francis Cascy said that he once saw Ray's mother pick up and carry four 40-quart cans of milk. At 85 pounds per can, that makes 340 pounds and it would be safe to say that not many ladies today could lift that much weight.

Ray McLean had a habit of wearing rubber boots just about every day, unless he was going to make a trip into town. Whether it was the continuous wearing of the rubber boots that was the cause, I can't help but feel that he would have been a huge success today as a used car salesman. If Ray had a real old Volkswagen to sell, he would extol the little car's virtues to such an extent that the would-be purchaser would believe that he was getting a bright new Cadillac.

By the same token, when selling a horse, he would describe an old broken down hack in such a manner that you would think that you were looking at the famous Alysheba himself. I once heard Ray selling a horse whose ability to break into a trot was questionable. He told the buyer that old Dobbin could "go so fast that your shirttail would come flying out and remain on such an even keel that you could play a game of checkers on it. He failed to say how many years ago that was."

Ray's father, John McClean, had a farm that extended from Great Hill Road to Danbury Road. John had a half dozen cows and delivered milk around the town in a horse drawn wagon. Colonel Conley tried to buy that farm to add to his Outpost Nursery, but John refused to sell.

#335: LIMESTONE SERVICE AND ITS OLD NEIGHBORHOOD

At 399 Danbury Road, right next door to the Casey home, is the Limestone Service Station. It has been owned and operated for many years by Dino Giardini. In recent ycars, Dino has been joined by his son, making it once again a family venture.

The place was once known as Venus Brothers, as it was built by my brothers John and Joseph 58 years ago on land that they bought from John McLean. For the first couple of summers that the station was in operation, as soon as school was out, it was my job to run it.

After delivering milk for the Conklin Dairy early in the morning, I would walk the two and one-half miles to the station' and stay until evening. On the way home, I would run the entire distance, as I had to carry home the cash box.

There were not so many cars on the road in those days, so the chance of getting a ride was rather slim. In the morning, if my timing was right, I might get a ride with Harold E. Finch. Harold would be on his way to the Danbury Traffic Court, where he was an officer. However, Harold drove a real sporty Auburn, and he went so fast it scared the daylights out of mc.

In Dispatch #267 I told of how Mr. Theodore Bailey used a divining rod to locate an old abandoned well at the station. In order to reclaim the old well, it was necessary to remove a great many large stones that had been dumped into the well to seal it off.

So a big tripod was set up over the spot. At the top of the tripod there was a large iron wheel, over which was run a very strong rope. The rope was attached to a wooden bucket, about the size of a washing machine. The bucket was lowered into the well and when filled with the stones, it was hauled to the surface by my brother Jack's old Dodge touring car.

Onc day as I was engaged in this activity, Ray McLean came over and offered to pull up the loaded bucket. I thought he was kidding, but agreed to let him try. There is no way of knowing how much that loaded bucket weighed, but it used to make the wheels spin on the old Dodge.

In a remarkable display of strength, Ray just put that rope over his shoulder and pulled that heavy bucket to the surface, without drawing a long breath. He was a very powerful man.

Running a service station was a new experience for me, and at first it was quite exciting. However, after a while I grew tired of it, although it did give me the opportunity of meeting some interesting people.

Incidentally, at that time gasoline was 15 cents per gallon [equal to $2.87 in 2025 dollars], seven gallons for a dollar [$19.15] and motor oil was 25 cents [$4.80] per quart.

Directly across the highway from the service station, there is a short stretch of road, called Old Danbury Road. It was once part of the regular road to Danbury, and was one of several pieces of real estate that was traded off by the state in the mid 20's. At that time Danbury Road was being rebuilt as a concrete highway and an effort was being made to eliminate some of the curves.

The new highway was a vast improvement over that rough old road to Danbury, especially where it ran through Sugar Hollow, where a car could easily get stuck in that swampy area in the spring of the year.

At the time about which I am writing there was only one house on Old Danbury Road and it sat (still does) on the corner of Old Danbury Road and Haviland Road. It was then the home of Harold and Alice Finch and their children, Alice, Louis, Winifred and Katherine. This place is now #2 Old Danbury Road and is the home of Gary Bertalovitz and his family. The house is larger now as additions were made in ensuing years.

Almost across the street, there is a real old house, at #2 Haviland Road. It has been renovated several times in the past 60 years, most recently by the present owners, Andre and Pat Iacurci.

At one time this was the home of Elizabeth Lockwood. Elizabeth was known as "Lil Lib" in deference to another Elizabeth Lockwood who was called "Big Lib." The two ladies were close neighbors, as Big Lib lived in the house that sits on the corner of Danbury Road and Limestone Road. This similarity of names must have caused a real problem for a new mailman, back in the days when many streets did not have house numbers.

In fact, many times a letter might be addressed to just Ridgefield, without mention of a street. Of course that was a time when postal employees not only knew everyone in town, but where they lived as well.

After Lil Lib passed on, the house remained vacant for a long time, and some people even thought that it might be haunted. I guess Gordon Walsh Sr. had never heard that story. At any rate, Gordon bought the place and proceeded to put it back in tiptop shape for his family.

Then came a time when Big Lib also moved on, and her house also remained vacant for some time.

In the late 30s, this house became the home of the Lester Rotherforth family. Lester was a master mechanic, and he had a reputation of being able to fix just about anything. He was the head mechanic for the Conley family and took good care of their automobiles. He also had the additional responsibility of keeping the Outpost Nursery trucks and tractors in tiptop condition. There was an awful lot of machinery to keep in shape, but Lester and his assistants were equal to the task.

Lester had a very keen mind, and if he were around today he would probably be an electronics expert. He sure would have had a field day with the computers that are so popular today.

Lestcr was a sportsman and loved to hunt and fish. I remember how, on one occasion, he came to a turkey shoot at Big Jim Smith's and displayed a beautiful otter that he had caught at Ridgefield Lakes. Everyone was surprised that there was an otter in the area, but there have been reports that others have been sighted in recent years.

The Rotherforth's daughter Annc is now Mrs. William Roy and they live on Boulder Hill Road.

#336: HARRY HULL SERVED NATION AND TOWN

At 362 Danbury Road, just across from where Big Lib Lockwood lived, is the present home of the Clifton Connor family. This fine house was built in the early part of this century for John S. Sturges and his family. John bought land for his home from Lil Lib Lockwood, who owned considerable acreage in this area.

John and his wife, the former Ella G. Hull, had two sons, Ernest and Earl. The boys followed in their father's footsteps, as he was a painting contractor, and so were Ernie and Earl in later years, and they were good ones, you can be sure.

I told about Ernie and Earl in an earlier column, but feel it worthy of mention that Ernie's son John II still lives in Ridgefield and carries on his own building business. Not only that, but his sons James and Donald have followed their father in that line of work. So we have four generations of the Sturges family that were engaged in the building trades. This all adds up to more than 80 years of continuous service on the local scene, a truly remarkable record.

John S. Sturges passed on quite early in his life and Ella later married John F. Coughlin. Jack, as he was called, was a veteran of World War I, and a member of the local Everett Ray Seymour Post 78, of the American Legion. He had served with the 301st Engineers, Company C of the 76th division.

When the Legion took over the operation of the silent movies in the old town hall from Arthur Ferry, Jack Coughlin was put in charge. Arthur Ferry was an excellent pianist, and he used to accompany the pictures as they were flashed on the screen, with appropriate music. He could improvise so well that when William S. Hart or Tom Mix was shown racing their horses across the plains, you could actually imagine that you could hear the sound of hoofbeats.

Ella Coughlin was also an accomplished pianist, and when she was joined by Willis Boyce and his trombone and my brother Joe and his drums, there were sound effects galore. A railroad train might be shown approaching a crossing and Willis would make his horn sound like the whistle of The Twentieth Century Limited. By the same token if the movie actors were shown struggling through a storm, Joe would provide the thunder so effectively you might start looking around for an umbrella.

A popular young couple, Harry E. Hull and Elsie Rux, were married in the 20's and started their married life on High Ridge Avenue. In 1930 Harry acquired some land from his father Harry D. Hull, and built a real nice home for his family at 320 Danbury Road. This place is presently the home of the W. Barry Raven family.

It was another father and son story. Harry D. Hull was a painting contractor and young Harry E. worked for him. When his father retired, Harry E. took over the reins and continued the business.

Harry E. Hull was also a veteran of World War I, and when the Home Guard was established in Ridgefield in May of 1917, he was one of the original members. Two months later, Harry enlisted in the regular army. He served with Company H of the 9th Infantry Corps.

In another two months, Harry was on a ship bound for France. In March of 1918, he was transported by train to the Western Front. His first engagement with the enemy occurred shortly thereafter, in the Marie Louise sector.

Just as Casablanca, Iwo Jima and Normandy became household names in World War II, Chateau-Thierry, Soissons, and St. Mihiel were the familiar ones in World War I. They were the scenes of some very important battles, and Harry Hull saw action in all of them. He was injured at Chateau-Thierry and hospitalized, fortunately he recovered, to live a long and fruitful life.

Harry became very active in the American Legion and served several terms as commander of the local Post #78. He also served the Legion in positions at the state level.

It just seemed natural that Harry would become involved in politics for he sure had the right temperament for the grueling life of a politician. He accepted appointments to several minor positions and then was elected to the school board.

Harry had paid his dues and then was ready for advancement to bigger things. In the mid 30's, Uncle Jack Walker, who had been serving as the minority member of the Board of Selectmen, was appointed postmaster, and Harry was appointed by the town committee to the unexpired term. In 1935 he was elected to a full term as the minority member of the Board of Selectmen. He won that election by three votes over his running mate, Willis S. Gilbert.

At that time, Winthrop E. Rockwell was the first selectman, and he was a good one. Charles Palmer, from the Ridgebury area, was the other member of the Board of Selectmen.

Win and Charlie were first elected to the board in 1926. Being Republicans, they were secure in their jobs, and remained so for 21 years. The ratio of Republicans over Democrats in those years was about 4 to l.

The reason that the number of years that Win and Charlie were in office was uneven rather than even was because in the early days of that era, town elections were held every year instead of every two years, as they are now.

There was much to learn as a member of the Board of Selectmen, and Harry was an apt pupil. He was also fortunate in having a good teacher, in the person of Win Rockwell. So for the next 10 years, Harry learned a lot about our local government and how to make the wheels turn.

About the only thing Harry did not learn from Win was Win's favorite expression "Judas Priest," or sometimes just plain "Judas." I guess the strongest exclamation that I ever heard Harry utter was "Pshaw," and that was used only in a most provocative situation.

#337: BIG SNOW TESTS NEW LEADER, LEADS TO MOLLY

As Winthrop Rockwell and Charles Palmer advanced in years, it was only natural that their activities on the Board of Selectmen diminished to some degree. At that time, the third member of the board was a young and very energetic Harry E. Hull. Therefore, it was not very surprising that more and more of the work was assigned to Harry.

It was good experience for him and he made the most of it. Our country was midway through the Great Depression when Harry Hull became a member of the Board of Selectmen.

Road building and road maintenance had been the main duties of the board for many years. Of course, the first selectman also doubled as the chief of police and the selectmen did, on occasion, become involved in matters that are today handled by the Planning and Zoning Commission. However, the care of the town's highways took up most of their time.

When the Depression came along, it added new responsibilities, such as the distribution of foodstuffs to the needy. The town hall was stocked with food that was supplied by the federal government.

Up to that time, the selectmen themselves handled much of the secretarial work. In the very early 30's, it became necessary for the board to have a full-time secretary. My sister Mary was the first to be appointed to that position.

One of Mary's duties was to dole out cereals, flour, etc., to those who had no money to buy food. Ridgefield did not have bread lines, or soup kitchens as the large cities did, but a number of unfortunate families were sustained through those years by daily visits to the town hall, where they obtained the basic foods.

Win Rockwell had the reputation of being a very honest man, and Mary once told me of how she might have a dozen letters to mail and if one of them was a personal letter of Win's, he would walk across the street to the post office (where Addessi's store is now) to buy a stamp for his letter. First class postage, at that time, was three cents.

Mary Venus resigned as the selectmen's secretary in 1938, when she married the late Edmund S. Flanagan. Many will remember Ed, who was a popular young state policeman at the time.

There have been several secretaries for the board in the ensuing years. Among them were Dorothy Alice Dougherty and Dora Cassavechia. Dora, of course ,is our present town clerk.

Then along came Nancy Servadio. Nancy had been working in the assessor's office, before taking over her duties as secretary to the Board of Selectmen, more than 40 years ago.

That fine lady has been a fixture in the town hall for almost 50 years. There can be no doubt that Nancy was a huge success, and many are the first selectmen who have benefited from her expert knowledge of the operation of the selectman's office.

In Win Rockwell's last term, the more than two decades in office had begun to take their toll. This meant that more and more responsibilities were shifted to the very able shoulders of Harry Hull. In the final months of the Rockwell administration, Harry was actually running the selectman's office.

So, in 1947, Win Rockwell's health had deteriorated to a point where he decided not to seek re-election, Charlie Palmer was too old to take over the operation, and that year Harry E. Hull became the first Democrat elected first selectman in 37 years.

Apparently the voters were aware of the valiant work he had performed as the minority member of the board over the past dozen years. It is very doubtful that anyone ever entered the office of first selectman with the experience that Harry had acquired as a member of the board. He had served during the final years of the Depression, and through the lean years of World War II.

Harry had the perfect disposition for the office he was about to enter. I guess you could call him unflappable, for he had the ability to remain cool during many a trying situation.

At that time the selectman's office was in the first room on your right as you entered the town hall. When some irate taxpayer would appear with a complaint, no matter how vociferous he or she might be, Harry always listened attentively, and they were assured that they had his attention. He never interrupted, and when the complainant had gotten everything off his or her chest, Harry would lean back in his chair, take a long puff on his ever present corn-cob pipe, and agree to appoint a committee to look into the matter. He was a master at pouring oil on the troubled waters and nine limes out of 10, the person was satisfied.

Harry would prove his mettle in just a couple of months after being elected. The day before Christmas in 1947, a very heavy snowstorm started, and it closed down just about every highway in town. Ridgefield did not have the equipment to cope with such a storm. So the local

contractors were mobilized, and their snow plows were utilized to augment the meager equipment that the town had at that time.

The Hull administration weathered (no pun intended) its baptism under fire, and emerged with a first selectman who was very determined that Ridgefield would not suffer again for lack of snow removing equipment. Harry did not wait for the big storm to be forgotten, he got busy right away, with more than moderate success.

Though Harry was basically a conservative by nature, he was considered by some to be quite liberal in his approach to the problem. Harry was well aware that it would take more than his unquestioned popularity to be a good first selectman. He was a born leader, and he spoke with eloquence. He also had a good voice that could reach the far corners of any auditorium.

That winter, Harry convinced a very tough Board of Finance, and then a well-attended Town Meeting, with the result that two large trucks and a huge grader (Molly) were purchased, and the town came, kicking and screaming, into the 20th Century.

#338: THE GREAT FLOOD OF 1955

field's first selectman in 1947, Harry E. Hull did such an admirable job that he was re-elected in 1949 by a wide margin. His popularity and performance encouraged more people to join his party, and the scales became just a little bit more balanced.

However, in his quest for a third term, Harry was edged out of the office of first selectman, but remained as a member of the board. There followed some quite noticeable mistakes by the new administration and in 1953 Harry was swept back into the top job.

I happened to be his running mate in that election, and I guess it was the first time that both Democrats actually won over their opponents.

For the next two years, the Board of Selectmen consisted of Harry and I, and Paul J. Morganti. We got along and worked very well together, and Paul — because of his experience as a contractor — proved to be a valuable member of this board. In fact, some have been kind enough to say that this was one of the best Boards of Selectmen. I trust that I will be pardoned, if in all modesty, I share in this opinion.

Up to this time, the office of first selectman was considered to be a part-time position, and Harry Hull continued to operate his business as a painting contractor. However, the town was growing rapidly, and it became necessary to devote more and more time to its operation.

I believe that Harry became the first full-time first selectman. His yearly salary was $3,500, and Paul and I each received $1,500. In recent years the salaries of the board members have been eliminated, and I feel that this was a big mistake. The members should receive some recompense for the responsibilities that go with the office and the time one must devote to it. [The compensation for selectpersons was reinstated about 20 years ago.]

I also feel that a three-member board is preferable to the present five-member board. It is always nice to read in the newspapers how the board members vote on every issue, large or small. Only in this way can a voter cast an intelligent vote for an officeholder who is seeking re-election.

In 1955, Harry Hull was elected first selectman for the fourth time. However, in that election I missed becoming a member of the board by eight votes, and there was no recount. I guess that no one felt any worse than Harry, for it meant that while he was the first selectman, he would be a minority member of the board.

It was to be the very last time that Harry Hull ever ran for public office, though I am sure he could have been elected over and over again. Within the next two weeks following the

election, Harry had to face what was no doubt his greatest challenge. Once again the problem was posed by the elements, rather than a political opponent. This time, Harry had to contend with one of the most devastating floods in the history of our town.

During the summer months, the New England states had suffered flooding conditions and Ridgefield was just one of the many towns affected. One flood, in August 1955, had caused considerable damage, but it was nothing when compared to the one that erupted two months later.

The town had just about finished cleaning up after the first flood when it was visited by another that was even more crippling. Because of Ridgefield's lofty elevation, high above sea level, it was not expected to have to worry about floods, but 1955 was to prove otherwise.

The ground was still thoroughly saturated when it started to rain on Thursday, Oct. 13. The rain continued through the night and on Friday it was accompanied by high winds, almost of hurricane force. The heavily soaked soil offered little resistance to tree roots as the trees were bent by the winds. Some of our very large and very beautiful trees were just about blown out of the ground.

It was hard to believe that the storm could worsen, but it did just that on Saturday, the 15th. It had rained hard before, but now it became a deluge.

In that three-day period, the rainfall was measured at 13.88 inches. The heaviest of the rain occurred late Saturday afternoon and evening while Harry was preparing for the worst.

Many were the stories of that terrible night, especially for some of the venturesome people who tried to carry on as if the huge storm could just not be that bad. Some who had gone out for the evening did not make it back home that night.

Then there was Mr. and Mrs. Edward Phoenix of nearby Redding, who never did make it home. Their car was washed over a collapsing bridge, and they were drowned in the raging waters of the Saugatuck River, near the Mark Twain Library.

This tragedy might have been repeated several times but for the valiant work of rescuers who worked all through the night. Ridgefield supplied boats that were commandeered from the shores of Lake Mamanasco to Wilton and the other towns south of us that were hit even harder than we were. The whole thing was a real disaster.

Just about every bridge in Ridgefield was either wiped out or seriously damaged by the flood. One of the bridges that gave way during the storm was the one at the top of Saw Mill Hill. Just after the bridge collapsed, a car driven by Charles T. Miller came down the hill. Passengers in the car were Chuck's wife Marty and Mr. and Mrs. Charles C. Dayton.

There was no way to warn them of the impending danger. The Press carried a picture of Chuck's car, with the radiator submerged in the water and the rear wheels pointing skyward. There were many bruises, but fortunately no one was seriously injured. Still, memories of that incident must make them shudder even now.

All of these things must have taken their toll on Harry Hull, and before the next election in 1957 he advised me that he had had a physical and his doctor warned him against running again. There were those who tried to pressure him into seeking another term then, and again two years later, but I was sure that he would not.

So Harry Hull retired to a well-deserved rest, and he sure went out a winner.

#339: A SLIGHTLY DELAYED CHRISTMAS PRESENT

It was on Dec. 26, 1871, that a slightly delayed Christmas present arrived in a little thatched-roof cottage on the farm of Patrick and Bridget Fahey. It was on that day that a pretty little baby girl was born at the Fahey homestead.

She was promptly named Mary Elizabeth and she would be the first of 10 children that Patrick and Bridget would have. Then along came Johanna, Katherine. William, Bridget, Abby, Nora, Julia, Margaret, and James.

It must have been a real festive occasion during that Christmas season on that beautiful little farm, perched high on the bluffs in a section of Dungarvan called Kilnafrehan that affords a breathtaking view of the Atlantic, St. George's Channel and the Irish Sea. There is no pollution here.

Through the many invasions of Ireland, the Fahey's Farm was confiscated several times. On many occasions the oppressors drove the family from their land, but they always came back. They are still there today and have recorded history that goes back more than 500 years.

By the time Elizabeth had reached the age of 13, the Fahey family had grown to a point where it was necessary for someone to move on. Mary, being the oldest, and already proficient as a seamstress, was selected to make the voyage to this country.

Her Aunt Mary Flavin, Bridget Fahey's sister, had already established a business in New York as a dressmaker, or a modiste, as they were called. So in 1884, at the tender age of 13, Mary set sail from Queenstown (now called Cobh).

No doubt the trip was made in steerage, though a lady on board was assigned to look after Mary's interest on the way. The Immigration Service was not to open on Ellis Island for another eight years, so the ship tied up in New York at what is now Battery Park.

It must have been a harrowing experience for that courageous little girl, but she arrived safe and sound and her Aunt Mary was right there at the dock to greet her. They were to remain together for almost half a century, until Miss Flavin passed on in her mid-80's.

The two Marys did not have to travel far to reach the Flavin apartment. It was located on 12th Street, which 104 years ago was a center of activity for the big city.

Mary Flavin had already earned a fine reputation as a modiste and numbered among her customers were some of New York's fashionable ladies. Little Mary Fahey proved to be an apt pupil and soon was recognized for her skill with needle and thread.

One of their customers was the beautiful and very wealthy Jenny Jerome. Yes, the same one about whom two bestsellers have been written [by Ralph G. Martin]. She was a rather free spirit and with her great beauty probably could have been considered as the Liz Taylor of her day. Jenny was held in awe by the young Mary Fahcy, but they soon became good friends.

Mary loved to tell of the time when the horse ran away with Jenny in Central Park. Jenny stood up in the carriage and shouted "Save me, save me, l am Jenny Jerome." Mary would smile and end the story by saying, "Just as if it made any difference who she was."

After Jenny married Randolph Churchill (Winston's father), she used to come back to this country to have the Marys make her dresses.

During the Blizzard of '88, a young man delivering a parcel for the Austin Nichols Company knocked at the door of the 12th Street apartment, and Mary Fahey answered the door. She noticed that on the delivery slip, his name was listed as Charles.

They would meet again when they both sang in the choir at the old St. Patrick's Church in lower Manhattan. In just a couple of years, Charles and Mary were married in that same church.

Nine children were to bless this marriage. By the time that Frances, John, Charles and William had arrived, their father was an employee of the Adams Express Company, which was the forerunner of the American Railway Express.

It was at the turn of the century that Charles had the opportunity to transfer to Ridgeficld to run the local express office. The two Marys had heard from some of their customers of how beautiful it was in Ridgefield, and readily agreed to move to 214 High Ridge Avenue. Their dressmaking business continued to flourish.

A short time later, the family moved to 612 Main Street. This house has a most interesting history, but that is another story. Mary found time to mother five more children, and James, Joseph, Paul, Mary, and Richard were all born in this house.

In the meantime, William Fahey had taken over the operation of the family farm, while his sisters and the youngest brother all came to this country. Abby stayed only a short time and then returned to Ireland, and Julia married Daniel Mahoney and lived in Yonkers. The rest of the family all came to make their homes in Ridgefield.

Johanna married John L. Walker, Katherine married William Sullivan, Bridget married Richard Lynch, Nora married Patrick Whelan, and Margaret married Frank Moylan.

Their brother Jimmy also came to Ridgefield and worked as a houseman for the Lucius Biglow family, where Ballard Park is now. Unfortunately, Jimmy lost his life at the age of 20 when the safety strap broke as he was washing the windows at the Biglows' New York apartment.

The sisters were a close-knit family and they really had great times together. They were full of fun and loved to sing and dance.

Sunday evenings were reserved for playing pinochle, but not until the Rosary had been said. The most fun was when they cranked up the Victrola and played the Irish reels. My favorite was The Stack of Barley and the sisters were like happy little nymphs, as they danced across the floor.

No one enjoyed these activities more than Mary, who by now I am sure you have recognized as my own dear mother.

#340: FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE AT THE POST OFFICE

After a detour of a great many miles, we are now back on Danbury Road, where Harry and Elsie Hull lived with their daughters, Marcia and Vivian.

After Elsie passed on, Harry moved to Bear Mountain Road to live with Vivian, who took real good care of him in his declining years. Vivian Heim still lives at Bear Mountain Road, and is the music teacher at Farmingville School.

Harry and Elsie also had a son, Daniel Albert, who lost his life in a tragic accident at age 10, when he was struck by an auto while riding his bicycle on Danbury Road.

Harry's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Harry D. Hull, lived right next door, at 316 Danbury Road. The senior Hull had been a painting contractor for many years and the business flourished during the Golden Days of Ridgefield. It just seemed natural that young Harry, who had followed in his father's footsteps, would take over the business when Harry D. retired.

Harry D. had also been very active in civic affairs and served several terms as a member of the school board.

I must correct a previous column, in which I stated that the neighboring Sturges boys followed their father in the painting business. Earl Sturges has informed me that his father was a carpenter and builder. So we will skip past a generation, and find that John Sturges' grandson,

also named John, is now a carpenter and builder, as are his two sons, James and Donald. The boys have earned a fine reputation as builders, and so in the Sturges family we have one generation of painters and three that are carpenters. I would say that the legacy of the Sturges family in the building trades has been left in very capable hands.

The Hull family homestead at 316 Danbury Road is no longer there. It was a fine old brown shingled house with a long porch across its front, but apparently it sat a little too close to the highway.

The elder Hulls also had a daughter Luella, who with her husband Allen W.H. Sterry, lived with them and cared for them for many years. When the elder Hulls passed on, the Sterrys dismantled the old homestead and built the house that now stands at 316 Danbury Road.

Allen and Luella had two daughters, Helen and Lois. Helen married Bud Collischonn and they now live in Danbury. Lois married David Clapp and they still live at the Danbury Road address.

Lois is a fountain of information about her family's history. She has made a thorough search of the records in the Ridgefield Town Clerk's office, and has traveled to Danbury and to Hartford in search of the records pertaining to her ancestors.

The research by Lois has brought her to some interesting conclusions. It is her considered opinion that her forebears came to Ridgefield from the Redding area in 1709. That was just one year after Ridgefield was incorporated, making the family one of the very earliest settlers.

The early records are a bit sketchy, but from the late 1700's on, are quite clear and they are liberally sprinkled with the well-known names of our early settlers, such as Seeley, McLean, Dann and Dauchy, as well as Hull.

It is felt that the Seeleys were the first of the ancestors of the venerable Hull family to come to Ridgefield. One member of the Seeley family, Sylvanus, was a member of Captain David Olmstead's Company during the War of Independence. One thing is sure, many years ago these families acquired a great many acres along Danbury Road. Much of that land has been sold off in the ensuing years, as more people arrived to make their homes here.

Certainly, it would be fair to say that the Hulls and Sterrys and their ancestors make up a very important part of the history of our very beautiful and historic town.

Lois Sterry's father, Allen, was a veteran of World War I. Allen had been a school teacher in New London before coming to Ridgefield. At that time there were no openings in Ridgefield for those of the teaching profession, so Allen turned his attention to the United States Postal Service. It was an association that would allow him to accumulate more than 40 years of government service.

Allen's experience as a teacher was put to good use in the postal service. When a new clerk was hired, he was likely to learn his new trade under Allen's expert tutelage. Allen's teaching was done not only by instruction, but by example as well. He was such a fine man that a young clerk, put under his guidance, was sure to acquire the proper attitude and manner in serving the public.

A window clerk is considered the first line of defense in the postal service, and Allen was a master in that position. I know that I always felt quite secure when Allen was on duty. No matter how irate a postal customer might become, he always knew how to soothe their feelings and never lost his calm and kind composure.

When a customer required assistance or advice on mailing practices, Allen was always sure to provide the correct information in a manner that pleased the person. One of Allen's duties at the service window was the registration of aliens, which took place about this time each year.

There were more aliens than you might imagine, and some of them could not speak English very well. Allen understood the frustrations of these people, and handled them with the smoothness of a diplomat.

When a postal carrier is unable to make delivery of a parcel, for one reason or another, the parcel is held at the post office for the addressee to pick up. The parcels are held on steel racks and it always seemed that the heavier parcels found their way to the very top shelf. Retrieving such a parcel should be done by a younger clerk, but Allen never hesitated to climb to the top of the rack.

I was always afraid that he might fall and one day when I saw him up on the rack, I asked him why he would do such a thing. His answer was typical, "Because that is where the parcel was."

When he retired, Allen was sorely missed.

#341: OLD OUTPOST LAND BECOMES HOMESITES & A POND

The land across the highway from the Hull homestead was all a part of the great Outpost Nursery. In the 50's, when the Nursery was winding down its operations, much of this property was sold off. It provided some very nice homes, as well as Tanton Hill Road and Cherry Lane.

It seems like just a few years ago when a neat brick building was built at 325 Danbury Road. This was to be the new Ridgefield Baptist Church. The present pastor of this church is the Rev. James E. Clynes. He was preceded by the Rev. Leonard P. Waterman, and the Rev. Harold E. Wheeler. Mr. Waterman stayed only long enough to establish the new parish.

Those who knew Mr. Waterman will recall how he was a large handsome man and greatly resembled Superman. He had a very engaging personality, and it was his job to travel from town to town to set up a congregation.

Some, but not all, of those who were fortunate enough to acquire homesites on this very desirable land were Louis and Lillian Zandri, Enzo and Elsie Bartolucci, Richard and Dorothy Freivogel, Alcino and Norma Diniz, Dino and Florence Bellagamba, Emerson and Irma Benjamin, Armando and Ann Buccitti (Ann is Romeo's assistant in the Probate Office), Harvey and Clare Tanton, and David and Mary Belin. Dave was employed at the nursery for many years, so he was well aware of this nice area.

These families found that the place where they would build their homes was already landscaped. Many of the beautiful trees that still grace these fine homes were a part of the great nursery when it was flourishing more than half a century ago.

Just across the street, at 300 Danbury Road, is the new home of Joseph and Mary Ellen Pacific. At the rear of their property is another new and very large house. Both of these houses were built by Edward Zandri, and are best described as little short of palatial.

Right next door, at 290 Danbury Road, stands the very neat home of Louis and Helen Feduzi. Lou has retired from his Lou's Package Store, but Helen is still keeping track of things for the Ridgefield Water Supply Company, as she has done for so many years.

I seem to remember a fellow that I only knew as Nick, who lived in this house many years ago. He delivered vegetables door to door. Clem Pasquerella and his family also lived here at one time. There was also a Brush family that raised chickens at the rear of the place.

The Brush family had an idea about turning the house into a restaurant. A fire started in the kitchen of the house and it spread to the chicken houses and caused considerable damage.

There was also a retired Army officer and his family who lived here. He was called Colonel Earle, but I am not sure that he actually attained that rank. At any rate the house was completely renovated and the place shows no scars of any kind today.

Then we come to more Outpost Nursery land and it used to extend south and east, all the way back to, and along Farmingville and Lee Roads. The latter road is well named, as many years ago the Lee family. owned very much of what we now call Farmingville.

In the later 20's, Richard E. Conley built a beautiful house at 236 Danbury Road. It is the highest point of land in this immediate area, and Dick and his wife, the former Grace Sturges, raised their family in this superlative setting.

It was in the late 50's that this Conley family moved to Patagonia, Ariz., where Mrs. Conley still lives at their Rocking Chair Ranch. Grace's friends will remember her as being very active in civic affairs, especially during the war years, when she was a valued member of The American Women's Voluntary Services and The Red Cross. It just seemed natural that when something good was being done, the Conleys would be involved in it.

Dick Conley's house was of stone construction, and though it can not be seen from the highway, you can be sure that it is very impressive.

After the Conley family moved, Robert and Mary Engler lived here for several years. It seemed that both Bob and Mary were quite partial towards houses that were built of stone.

This fine estate is now the home of John and Dorothy Girolmetti and their family. The Girolmettis are a success story, equal to any that comes quickly to mind.

Both John and "Dort" are native Ridgefielders, and it is safe to say that they prospered as a team by some very hard work. As most people know, they are the proprietors of the very popular restaurant that is known as The Old Ice House. If you have never sampled their culinary delights, you have really missed something.

Just to the west of this place is an old portion of Danbury Road that is now used as an exit from the Fox Hill complex. It was another "trade-off" that occurred when Danbury Road was being converted from a macadamized surface to a concrete highway in the mid 20's.

As the transition was being made, the state of Connecticut attempted to eliminate some of the many curves that existed on this highway. The state traded off this curved portion of the old road to Colonel Conley, and in return received the land that once was a swamp and over which the highway now runs.

It was a trade that benefited all concerned. The Colonel acquired a quarter of a mile of private road, the state was able to straighten out the highway, and it was a boon to the motorist.

Colonel Conley set to work and drained the swampy area, replacing it with the attractive little lake that was known for many years as Outpost Pond.

The lake proved to be a very popular place to skate for many years. I guess that skating here is not allowed anymore, or perhaps our rigors of skating in the open air. The area around the lake was beautifully landscaped and the pines and willow trees that were planted still give a serene look to the place.

#342: THE WONDERFUL OUTPOST INN

In the 20's when Colonel Conley drained the swampy area in front of what is now the Fox Hill complex, he then built the very attractive little lake that we came to know as Outpost Pond.

In the process a small island was left in the middle of the lake. The island was reached by a rustic bridge, and the land around the lake was beautifully landscaped.

At the end of the bridge near the Island, a couple of coops were constructed to house some swans. It was nice to see the swans as they paddled around the lake in all their majesty. The Colonel made sure that the swans were fed each day, and during the winter months the keeper always carried with him a hatchel, with which he would chop a large hole in the ice so the swans could enjoy their daily swim, even in freezing weather.

Land and the roadway were not the only things that were a part of the trade-off with the state. A large, old house went with the property that the Colonel acquired. It might have once been a fine home, but fallen into a sad state of repair.

One man whose family had lived there years before once told me of how the place was terribly cold during the winter, because of the many doors and windows that did not fit properly. He said that it was almost impossible to heat the place. On real cold nights he and his three brothers used to work in shifts feeding the wood into the fireplace and two pot-bellied stoves, just to keep the pipes from freezing.

Harry Terpeny also lived in the old house in the early 20's, before the new highway was built. Harry had a pair of mules and they were allowed to pasture in the area where the lake is now. During one particular wet season, one of the mules ventured too far out into the swamp and it became bogged down.

This was rather unusual as mules have a great sense of self-preservation. They are about the most cautious of all animals, and are much smarter than you might think. The sound of a mule in distress is somewhat different from the shrill neigh of a horse. However, the bray of a mule is equally effective, and can be heard for a considerable distance.

By the time Harry discovered the plight of his mule, the poor animal had sunk to a point where the entire length of his legs and a part of his body was covered by the mire. Harry quickly produced a long rope and made a lasso. The loop of the lasso was deftly thrown over the head of the sinking mule, who had the good sense not to struggle. The other end of the rope was attached to the mule's mate, who had remained on solid ground. So, one mule was used to save the other, but when the mule that had been mired down reached the safety of higher ground, his neck must have been more like that of a giraffe.

Colonel Conley turned his attention to renovating the old house and soon Frank Pierce and Tom Clark were busy replacing windows and doors and rotted timbers. Yes, Tom learned the carpenter's trade more than 60 years ago, and he had a very good teacher, as did so many others who were "pupils" of Franklin Pierce.

Several additions were made to the house and a guest house was constructed.

The interior of the main house was done with very fine taste, and the walls were papered with enlarged pictures that depicted scenes that were actually murals of activities that look place at the Outpost Nurseries, such as the planting of trees, etc.

One of the additions was a large dining room and another was a great kitchen, from which some very fine meals were served, when the place became nationally known as the famous Outpost Inn.

The inn was an instant hit, and people came from many miles to enjoy its excellent food and warm hospitality. It was listed by Gourmet magazine as one of the 10 top eating places in the country.

Even the Great Depression, which closely followed the opening of The Outpost Inn, did not have a real serious effect on its operation. This was due, in part, to Joseph Gibney who the Colonel had engaged to manage the inn.

Of equal importance was Joe's good sense in placing John Scala in charge of that big kitchen. John had been the chef on one of the large luxury ocean liners and he came to Ridgefield with the very best of credentials. He built up a following that included many of the rich and famous, some of whom took advantage of the fine rooms that made up the hostelry, and stayed for several days in its luxurious atmosphere.

John Scala was not only a master chef, he was also an excellent sculptor. I remember vividly how he chipped away at a large cake of ice, until it became a frozen statue of a lion, and then wheeled it into the dining room at a Lions Club Ladies Night. It made a tremendous hit with the assembled guests.

The inn was also very popular with the local gentry and it seemed that anything of great importance would have to be held at Outpost. When planning a political event, or a service club's Ladies Night, or even a communion breakfast, it just seemed natural for the committee to gravitate towards the inn. Couples who could afford it did not really feel married unless the reception was held at the beautiful inn.

I had the pleasure of playing at the Outpost Inn on many occasions with the Mayflower Swing Band. There were four of us for such a job: Paul Waldarke, Russ DiFranco, Bill Keane and myself and it was always great fun to perform in such a grand setting. If the late Henry Chapin was in attendance at these affairs, he would never forget to ask us to play "The St. James Infirmary Blues." That was a long time ago.

Sad to say that with the demise of the many enterprises that operated under the Outpost Banner, this great inn was one of the first casualties. However, one thing is sure, it left us with some very fond memories.

#343: AFTER THE INN'S DECLINE, A SCHOOL FOR RICH KIDS

After the closing of the famous Outpost Inn, its manager, Joseph Gibney, bought another restaurant, just over the state line in South Salem. This place had operated in the 20's and 30's as May Brooks Log Cabin, a rather glorified hot dog stand.

The Log Cabin became quite popular because of other goodies that it had to offer, to those in the know. During the Prohibition period there were rumors to the effect that a traveler who spoke softly, and knew the right words, would be able to obtain something that was considerably stronger than lemon soda.

It was even said that there were other activities at the Cabin that were of a clandestine nature, and many of the customers were young people from Ridgefield.

With the repeal of Prohibition, the business tapered off, and as a result the place was sold to Quinto Carboni. Quint had been engaged in the meat business for several years and knew a good steak when he saw one. Steak dinners at the Log Cabin became very popular and soon the place was doing a fine — and legitimate — business.

However, after a few years Quint tired of the business and sold it to Joe Gibney. The Log Cabin continued to do a good business, but it did not have the grandeur in which Joe was accustomed to operate.

After a short time, Joe sold the business to Matthew Rooney, and I believe that the place was torn down some years ago.

John Scala, the master chef, on the other hand, took over the Elms Inn from James Perry. That very renowned eating place is still owned by John's family. The Elms, as you probably are aware, has continued to flourish, under the direction of John's son Robert.

In the meantime, the old Outpost Inn was reopened under the management of a lady named Margaret B. Maneck. Mrs. Maneck was the president of The Hearthstone Corporation, an organization that owned and operated restaurants in New York City and several other localities. The name of the place was changed to The Hearthstone [Outpost] Inn, and though Mrs. Maneck was well versed in the proper manner of managing a first-class inn, the place had lost much of its glamour, and was never able to regain it.

As they say, when you reach the top there is no place else to go but down. That is just about what happened to the great old inn. When the Hearthstone people were unable to make a go of it, the inn was taken over by a New York corporation that was called Meals on Wheels. This organization continued to serve meals at the inn, but also furnished its customers with menus that they could take with them and order meals to be delivered at home. People called in and gave their orders and a time at which delivery was expected. It was a cash business and the customers were expected to pay for the food on delivery.

I do not believe that the idea ever really caught on, and soon the place was back on the market again. This time Albert O. Tramer and his wife Gloria took over the operation. It was renamed The Outpost Inn, in the hope that it would attract those who remembered its glory days. The Tramers worked very hard to regain the popularity that the inn had once enjoyed, but their efforts were to no avail. Something was missing and the inn continued to go downhill.

After several years of struggling, the Tramers found it necessary to rent a couple of their buildings to Carl Shapley. Mr. Shapley was president of Shapley Schools International, and had intentions of opening a school in Ridgefield for "gifted" children. As the name of the organization implies, Shapley Schools were already operating in other areas and in Europe as well.

Somehow, I always felt that all children are gifted, or are at least gifts to their parents, and should be treated as such. In this case the gifts, for the most part, turned out to be something that was farmed out, while the parents pursued their careers or other interests. Some of these young people rarely ever saw their parents, except for holidays, or other special events.

This private school was coed, and while the term "above average in intelligence" was applied to these young people, the label "problem" was used to describe some who could not make it in the public schools.

Most of the students had parents who furnished them with expense accounts that caused them to be held in awe by our local teenagers.

Shapley Schools International had been founded a number of years ago by Carl Shapley's father, Dr. Harlow Shapley, a noted astronomer. This organization came to Ridgefield with an excellent reputation, and after renting for a year, it decided to buy the entire complex that had once been the Outpost Inn.

Enrollment at the school continued to increase, and at one point there were some 53 students and 15 teachers. The students, with their great expense accounts, were welcomed with open arms by local merchants.

Everything appeared to be clear sailing for the Shapley School, and for the first four years there was no hint of the trouble ahead. Then rumors started to circulate to the effect that illegal narcotics and considerable amounts of alcohol were being distributed on the campus. An

investigation by local police in December 1966 revealed that what was being said was much more than a rumor.

Carl Shapley issued a statement that he was cooperating with the police in an effort to eliminate the drug problem. A thorough search of the school was made and in the process a considerable amount of marijuana was confiscated. The investigation resulted in nine arrests for drug and alcohol abuse.

If all this activity did not create a sensation in staid little old Ridgefield, it sure did cause something more than just a ripple. There was much speculation concerning the future of the school amidst predictions that the school would close. Carl Shapley was steadfast in his denial that this would happen. However, he was more than a little optimistic, for enrollment was sure to suffer.

#344: SCHOOL BECAME CONDOS; LOGGING THE SWAMP

In 1966, the use of narcotics had not quite reached the epidemic proportions that we suffer with today. However, the fiasco at Shapley School was startling enough to cause even the most liberal of parents to have second thoughts about sending their teenagers to that school.

The falling enrollment contributed to the many financial problems that the school had to face. Creditors began to clamor for payments and a number of liens were placed on the property. The situation finally reached a point where the future of the school was rather bleak.

The school graduated 14 students in June 1967 and as late as July of that year Mr. Shapley was insisting that the school would reopen in the fall. He proved to be overly optimistic.

The adverse publicity that resulted from the disruption at the school had done its damage, and in August Judge John E. Dowling was ordered by the court to hold a public auction of the property. Enter David L. Paul, who bid $146,500 [$1.4 million in today's dollars] for the buildings and 26 acres of land.

Mr. Paul was president of Vista Vestra [Latin for "your view"], a New York realty firm. Carl Shapley petitioned the court to set aside the sale of the place. He was unsuccessful, and Mr. Paul had made the very best real estate deal of that year, and many other years for that matter.

The outfit that David Paul headed had only recently completed the transformation of the beautiful Main Street estate that George M. Olcott had built just before the turn of the century. Mr. Olcott had named his place "Casagmo," combining the word "casa" (Italian for house or home) with his initials. You probably already knew that.

The Olcott property was certainly as famous as any of the many historic spots in Ridgefield. It was here on Main Street that the fiercest of the fighting took place during the Battle of Ridgefield.

By the time that Mr. Paul moved on to other pursuits, the great Olcott mansion had been destroyed, as well as several other outbuildings. The only reminders of the glory days of Casagmo that remain today are the great old horse barn with its tall water tower, and the monument that Mr. Olcott's daughter Mary, had set in the stone wall. This monument commemorates the fact that eight Patriots and 16 British soldiers are buried on the property.

Mr. Paul seemed able to cast a spell over some of our town officials, and the proverbial red carpet was rolled out for him, and his plan to remake the image of our historic Main Street. What we used to believe was almost sacred ground was sacrificed in the name of progress.

Soon after Mr. Paul acquired the Danbury Road property, the old Outpost Inn disappeared. New buildings were constructed and new roads would lead to, and around them. The place was renamed "Fox Hill" and this complex became a community in itself.

The change was not gradual, as it generally is in developments that contain single family homes on individual lots, with lawns etc. It seemed like overnight, the Outpost was gone and Fox Hill replaced it. The change was rather dramatic and the great increase in population made a very definite impact on the town.

Danbury Road had been sparsely populated for many years, mostly because of the many acres that made up the Outpost Nursery. In fact, in the early 40's, there were only three structures on the northwest side of the highway between Copps Hill Road and the intersection of Routes 35 and 7 at the traffic circle. They were Francis Casey's home, the Limestone Schoolhouse (now the home of Andrew Moore) and Venus Bros. Service Station (now the Limestone Service Station).

There also was no Dogwood Drive, or Buck Hill Road, or Old Pierce Road, or Hulda Lane, or Cherry Lane, or Tanton Hill Road, or Woodstone Road.

The great expanse of land directly across the highway from the Fox Hill complex was actually the northern extension of Great Swamp. This area, while not impenetrable, certainly was not a place that you would select to take your daily walk.

This property was, again, a part of the great Outpost holdings and through it flowed what we used to call The Great River. The swamp and the river froze over solidly only in real cold winters, but when it did we had great fun skating north from where the swamp touched Ivy Hill Road, under the bridge on Danbury Road, and into the Limestone area.

The woodsmen were always happy to have the swamp freeze over, for only then was it safe to drive their teams over the frozen surface to haul out the wood that had been previously cut. They used woodshod sleds for this purpose.

The sleds, as the name implies, had runners that were made of wood. The runners were made by splitting a tree in half lengthwise. The tree would generally be about 20 inches in circumference, and when carefully split, would make two runners, each with a flat surface of 6 to 7 inches, and they would be about 12 feet in length.

The flat surface was attached to the bottom of the sled with wooden pegs, leaving the rounded surface to act as a runner. The sled would be some 12 feet in length and some four feet in width.

This may appear to be a rather archaic method of constructing a sled that would have to carry an immense load of logs. However, you would be surprised at how easily the sled would move over snow and ice.

It had one drawback: If the sled was stopped for any length of time, the runners would stick to the frozen surface. When this happened a crowbar was used to break the sled loose, although sometimes it could be done by having the team pull to one side or the other. Once loosened, the sled moved quite easily.

I have seen many loads of logs being drawn out of Great Swamp by Tom Kehoe and his big horses. They had to climb that steep hill that now leads to Prospect Street through Quail Ridge. The very toughest part was reaching the railroad tracks that ran through the area.

#345: TWO WATER MEN AND THEIR LAND

What used to be a swamp directly across the highway from the Fox Hill complex went through a dramatic transformation several years ago.

This area was once filled with bogs and mire, and served as a haven for several varieties of game birds, as well as muskrats and other fur-bearing animals. It now looks more like a placid little park.

The change in appearance was due, to a great extent, to the efforts of the late Jordan Asketh. Mr. Asketh bought this land with the idea of improving it, and making it usable. Many men have such dreams, but few are able to attack such a project with the vigor and tenacity that was displayed by Mr. Asketh.

There was much speculation as to what his plans were, as he worked to beautify the property. One thing was sure — he put an awful lot of effort, time and money into it.

After clearing the land, Mr. Asketh brought in the machinery to drain off the water into a channel, and in the process he established a couple of nice little ponds. The channel that was dug is really a part of the "Great River," or "Ridgefield Brook,"" as some call it. At this point the water flows north from the Great Swamp, and continues on into the Limestone area.

The place is still a shelter for wildlife, and just the other day I saw a number of wild ducks paddling around in the channel.

Mr. Asketh was a rather unusual man. He was called a well designer, which means that he located, designed and dug artesian wells. That he was a master of his trade, there could be very little doubt, and his name was very well known in the well-drilling business. He was the owner of a firm that he organized and it was called Caisson Wells.

Some time ago, I wrote about the great artesian well that Colonel Conley had established for his Outpost. Farm. I told of how after drilling down through the mountain and below Danbury Road, the Conley well was called the second deepest well in the world. That was back before World War I, and I often wondered where the deepest well could be.

However, in the ensuing years, hundreds of thousands of wells have been dug, and no doubt many of them were said to have been the deepest at that particular time. One thing is sure, in 1948 Mr. Asketh and his Caisson Wells firm designed and built a gigantic well at Endicott, N.Y. In well drilling circles this well was considered to be "the biggest well in the history of mankind." [Thirty years later, the well was later found to have been polluted by a nearby landfill.]

A short time later the Asketh family moved to Ridgefield, where Mr. Asketh continued to carry on his business from his home, at 367 Wilton Road West.

It was about this time that Ridgefield was being rediscovered by people who were not enamored with life in the cities. As the population began to escalate, the Ridgefield Water Supply Company encountered difficulties in providing enough water for its growing number of customers. Caisson Wells was engaged to help solve the problem.

The result was that Mr. Asketh designed and installed a large pump for the water company on Pumping Station Road. He also gained a reputation as an inventor, and many of his ideas were incorporated in the pumping stations that he constructed.

When the work at his Danbury Road project was completed, Mr. Asketh let it be known that he would like to use the property for industrial purposes. As might be expected, his plans ran contrary to the local zoning restrictions.

Numerous meetings were held on the matter, but Mr. Asketh was unable to convince the zoning authorities that his land was suitable for such a use. He was a very disappointed man, and it began to look as though, despite the fine work he had done in draining the swamp, he had actually created a white elephant.

As it became apparent that his plans had been thwarted, Mr. Asketh began to look around for other uses for his land. He did not have to look very long, or very far. David Paul was completing the Fox Hill complex and when he looked across the highway he saw the possibility of establishing many more housing units on the sprawling 50 acres owned by Mr. Asketh.

It was said that a possible agreement was in the offing, and the selling price would be well over $1 million. This probably was just a rumor, for it was more than 10 times what Mr. Paul had paid for the former Outpost Inn property, though he had acquired that land at an auction.

At any rate, the deal was never consummated, as when feelers were put out it was discovered that despite the charm he was able to wield, more of Mr. Paul's condos would be no more welcome than the industrial complex, which Mr. Asketh had proposed.

The present owner of the property is Edgardo Ippoliti, a very successful local contractor. I do not know what Eddie's plans are, but he has acquired an excellent reputation for improving his properties so this place appears to be in very good hands. [Most of the land is today the Ridgefield Recreation Center and Founders Hall.]

The well drilling business brings a person in close contact with the soil, and seems to imbue in them a great love for land. An example is the late Otto Lippolt, a well driller who lived in the Ridgebury area and dug an awful lot of wells in his long and illustrious career.

Otto was a rugged individual, who by the very nature of his work, spent most of his waking hours in the outdoors. I have seen Otto many times as he stood with his hand on the cable, while the huge bit on his drilling machine crashed into the ground. It must have been that the reverberations were transmitted from the cable to his hand to let him know of the progress he was making.

Otto's face was deeply lined from the elements through the years, and it was crowned by a large shock of unruly gray hair. Some fine artist should have captured on canvas that unforgettable countenance. He was a very fine man, and enjoyed an excellent reputation for his honesty.

Otto dreamed of developing the many acres that he owned and called "Hemlock Hills." He spent a lot of his own money in rebuilding historic old Bogus Road. Unfortunately, like Jordan Asketh, Otto did not live to see his dreams come true completely, but he sure put a great deal of effort into their realization. [In 1967, 570 acres of Lippolt's Hemlock Hills and Pine Mountain land was purchased by the town as a giant preserve.]

#346: THE PAIR WHO FOUND BLACK GOLD

Further evidence of the many changes that take place in a rapidly growing town was the establishment just a few years ago of Ridgefield's own Radio Station WREF. This very successful enterprise is located at 165 Danbury Road, on what was formerly Outpost property. It really makes one wonder how we ever got along without it.

Just across the street there is a large new office building that no doubt will soon be full of a number of bustling office workers.

Beyond this building, on the corner of Farmingville Road, there was once a large and very ornate house that has long since disappeared. This house was built in 1854 by Peter P. Cornen. You just know that I was not around at that time, although Peter and I share one thing in common — he was born exactly 100 years to the day before I was.

These columns have been devoted for the most part to the early part of this century and up to the 60's, a period with which I am quite familiar. The people mentioned in these columns were well known to me, and were portrayed to the best of my ability. However, on those occasions when I felt it necessary to go back in time to the early history of Ridgefield to tell of some interesting person, I often have depended on the excellent histories of George L. Rockwell

and Silvio A. Bedini, or stories that my father told me many years ago. The story of this great old house is one of those in- stances.

The Cornen family and the Beers family were composed of some people that I have always been interested in. They were a very definite part of the town's history. The only member of these families that I ever knew was Peter's grandson, Cyrus Cornen Jr., and he left town when I was just a little boy.

David was the first of the Beers clan to make his home in Ridgefield, and he fought against the invaders in the Battle of Ridgefield. So that gives you some idea of the length of time that this family has been associated with our town. It is interesting to note that despite the many descendants of these two illustrious families, there is not even one Beers or Cornen listed in our current telephone directory.

The Beers and the Comen families were so intertwined by both marriage and business interests that to mention one you would automatically think of the other. To say that they were adventurous people would be quite descriptive, and you could couple that with the fact that they seemed to possess a great deal of business acumen.

The union of the two families began when Cyrus Beers' daughter Lydia Ann married Peter P. Cornen in the early 1800's. Peter had a store in New York City where he sold supplies to mariners as well as to the general public. Lydia Ann had a younger brother Henry I. Beers, who at the tender age of 15 joined Peter in the operation of his store.

Peter had an eye open for opportunities, and when late in 1848, news reached New York that John Augustus Sutter and his partner James W. Marshall had discovered gold on their property in Sacramento, Calif., he became very interested. As you know, 140 years ago there was an epidemic called "Gold Fever" and Peter was one of those affected.

Peter became the first of Ridgefield's "49ers," and soon was on a ship that would take him around the Horn and up to San Francisco.

Ever the merchant, it was not his intent to actually dig for gold, but rather to sell food and supplies to the prospectors. This he did with great success and even started a restaurant, "The City Hall Lunch."

Business was so good that after only a few months, he summoned his clerk Henry Beers to join him. Henry went, as did three other Ridgefielders — Stephen Fry, Leander Brown and Tredwell Avery. These hardy souls went by way of the Isthmus of Panama. The ride by muleback and boat across this area was almost as dangerous as rounding the Horn and only a very hardy person could survive it.

If the trip was fraught with danger, the gold fields were even more so. There is a story that this group fortified themselves with several bottles of cider, which exploded from the heat near the equator.

When their fortunes were made, and the "glamor" of the gold fields had worn thin, many of these hardy pioneers returned to the East. However, they did not rest on their laurels, and soon they were looking for new worlds to conquer. They did not have to look long or very far.

The lure of yellow gold was being replaced at the time by "Black Gold," as oil had come to be known, and it was much sought after. Peter Cornen and Henry Beers pooled their resources and went into the oil business in McClintock, Pa.

At first they just bought oil and shipped it to Pittsburgh. Then they bought the nearby Smith Farm and began to search for their own oil supply. They were the first to discover oil on what was to become a famous and very profitable farm. The two men had bought the farm for a "song," but by the time it was producing 250 barrels each day it had become a beautiful melody.

They made more than $2 million from their flowing oil wells and turned down an offer of $4 million for their bonanza.

[A New York City native,] Peter settled in Ridgefield and built the house that used to stand on the corner of Farmingville Road [now the site of Fairfield County Bank's headquarters]. What made this large house unique was that Peter patterned it after the style of the many Spanish-type houses that he had seen in his extensive travels.

Now that historic 1854 house is gone, as well as the equally historic 1816 Outpost Inn, which Peter Comen also owned. They can never be replaced and an awful lot of history went with them. Mr. Cornen left one thing to be remembered by. Perhaps in gratitude for the good fortune that he experienced, he planted the beautiful maples that line Danbury Road and the road through the Fox Hill complex.

Peter's interests were not limited to gold and oil. He also had a penchant for politics and served as our representative to Hartford as well as our state senator and as a member of our Board of Selectmen. His grandson, Cyrus Jr., was town treasurer in 1909 and town clerk and judge of probate. [He was later found to have pilfered money from St. Stephen's Church and possibly from town accounts. He left Ridgefield.]

[Peter's partner, Henry Beers, decided to settle in western Pennsylvania, where he died in 1917. Both Henry and Peter are buried near each other in the Scott's section of Ridgefield Cemetery, and both have lofty monuments.]

#347: BEFORE DANBURY ROAD GOT DEVELOPED

On the north corner of Copp's Hill and Danbury Road stood the great Outpost Saw Mill during World War II. It was described in an earlier column. In more recent years it became Rich Chrysler and is now the home of Pamby Motors.

Just a little farther up Copp's Hill Road, Dick and Lilly Howard were successful in draining another portion of the swamp, and there they built their very popular Ridgefield Tennis Club. The Howards showed considerable foresight in making this land usable.

This area is a very good example of how the many different soil textures in Ridgefield change from one to another. The north side of Copps Hill was swampy and boggy, right up to the edge of the road, whereas the south side, where all the stores are now, was full of some very good gravel.

In the 20's and 30's, Fred Peck and his family lived in a rather large white house on Danbury Road, just south of Copps Hill Road. This building later became a two-family house for Outpost employees.

Fred was a teamster and drove a fine team of bay draft horses. Sorry, I never knew their names.

It may be kind of hard to believe in this day and age that only a little more than 50 years ago, a man could make a living by performing various jobs with a team of horses. Today such things are done with bulldozers and tractors of all kinds. However, Fred Peck was kept busy, hauling wood in the winter months, plowing gardens in the spring, mowing hay in the summer and hauling gravel in the fall.

He did not have to go far for the gravel, for at the rear of his home it was quite plentiful. In those days gravel was loaded into a lumber box wagon by hand. The wagon had for its floor several long 2 by 4's, or poles, that were left lying loose across the length of the wagon. When the load had reached its destination, the poles were pulled from under it until the wagon was

empty. A rather simple maneuver you might say, but it was highly effective, and it saved an awful lot of shoveling.

Some teamsters also used what were called dump wagons that had two large doors for their floor. The doors were kept in place by two heavy chains that passed under them. When the teamster reached the spot where the load was to be dumped, he merely stepped on a foot lever that released the chains and the doors flew open, depositing the load. A long metal lever attached to a ratchet was then used to close the doors. Just thought you might like to know how things were done in bygone days.

So Fred Peck's house that stood about where City Trust Bank is now [1989] has disappeared to make room for the Copp's Hill Shopping Center. The date on which this house was built is unknown but it was a very old structure, and probably had considerable historic value.

There were no more buildings until you came to what is now the First Constitution Bank at 107 Danbury Road [about where Talbot's is]. During the period of which I am writing, this building served as a home for several families, including the Bayeux Morgans.

Bay was one of Ridgefield's assessors back in the turbulent days when the burning question was whether our town should change from a Board of Assessors to a single assessor. The move to a single assessor was accomplished, but not without some very stormy meetings on the subject. The question was hotly debated by the general public and simmered among the board members themselves. Then it escalated to the boiling point, and even physical violence was charged by one board member.

Bay Morgan's wife, Florence, was a newspaper reporter and columnist, and was associated with not only this paper [The Ridgefield Press], but the Danbury News-Times, Norwalk Hour, Bridgeport Post and Telegram. Florence wrote about many things, but it seemed that her favorite subject was politics and certain politicians.

The Morgans left Ridgefield about 25 years ago, and I received a letter from Florence last year that must have been one of the last she ever wrote.

The Nicholas Cugenes later lived in this house and Nick carried on his electrical business from here, for several years. Right next door, about where Friendly Ice Cream Shop is [105 Danbury Road now several businesses], there was a little tavern called "The Fife and Drum." The place was built, owned and operated by George and Marjorie Miller.

The Millers lived in a nice little house that sat right behind the tavern. When George let it be known that he planned to build the tavern, it caused quite a stir, for up to that time the gas stations had not yet arrived in the area, so it was considered to be residential.

George and his brother William Miller were both tall and slender gentlemen, and both were painters by trade. However, George made the transition from painter to tavern keeper very easily. George tended the bar and Marjorie took command of the small kitchen and could cook you up a very nice meal that did not cost very much.

The Fife and Drum turned out to be quite popular and business at the place was brisk. It did have one problem and that was that it sat too close to the highway. This posed a problem for anyone who used the front door after imbibing more than they should. Fortunately, the place was provided with a rear entrance; and you may be sure that it got a lot more use than the front entrance.

In later years The Fife and Drum was owned and operated by Johnny Ciccarone, and then Paul and Mary LaCava ran the place for several years.

A considerable distance back of the Millers' house, there was another little house that had once been the home of Mary Steele. This house was located about where Young's Feed Store is now.

Mary Steele was one of five or six African-Americans living in Ridgefield at the time. She was a wonderful little lady. She was a very pleasant and very cultured person, and was well liked by all who knew her.

Mary was born just 130 years ago and lived to a ripe old age. She was a great storyteller and a most interesting person to listen to.

#348: COMMUNITY FREEZER AND ELMER LEESON'S MULLEY

One of the very first buildings to appear on the southeast side of Danbury Road, between Farmingville Road and Grove Street, is still standing there at 100 Danbury Road [but is no longer there today]. It was about 50 years ago that this building was moved to this location.

Over the years it has served as Community Freezer, Bart Salerno's insurance business office, Gino Polverari and Alex Santini had their Town Spirit Shoppe here, it was an antiques shop, and now Carmine Argenio uses the building for his Buck Realty.

At the time that the building was moved to Danbury Road, people were still feeling the effects of the Great Depression. Home freezers had not yet become popular, but the idea of freezing foodstuffs was catching on quite rapidly.

Purchasing fresh food in large quantities and then freezing them had proven to be economical, as well as a safeguard against food shortages, during the war years. There were those who bought a half steer, or even a whole steer, and then had a local butcher cut it up and wrap it for storage in the community freezer. There were others who had their own chickens, sheep, hogs, steers and garden produce that they stored in this little building.

The freezer was provided with many lockers of various sizes, which were rented at a nominal fee. Each locker was enclosed in a network of wire that had a mesh large enough to allow the frigid air to pass through it. The lockers also had an individual lock, a key for which was provided to the renter of the compartment.

The lockers were quickly rented and the place became a beehive of activity. After they were all in use, it was necessary for those who wanted a locker to have their names placed on a waiting list.

One thing was sure, when a person appeared at the freezer to reclaim some of his frozen goodies, he did not stay in the building any longer than was absolutely necessary. Individual members of one of our local service clubs bought a number of young steers and pastured them in the fields directly behind the freezer. They then took turns feeding grain to the steers to fatten them up for butchering.

Fencing in the steers proved to be quite a problem, as a steer can jump a lot higher than you might think. They are also very strong and can easily push through anything but a really well-built fence.

Steers are naturally ornery critters, and on numerous occasions, one or more would break out of this enclosure. This caused a great deal of excitement, as a western type roundup was staged in order to corral the errant steers.

As well as their fence jumping ability, a steer can also run quite fast, and when they found out they were free, they did not stay around very long. If these animals broke out during the night, they would sometimes travel a considerable distance before the breakout was discovered.

Some of them would roam for days before being recaptured. On at least one occasion, a steer eluded his pursuers so successfully and for such a long period of time that it was necessary to shoot the unfortunate animal.

As previously stated, the freezer was the only building at that time on that side of the highway. However, there was a rather small structure on the corner of South Street and Danbury Road. Actually it was nothing more than an open shed, which served as a place for Elmer Leeson to milk his cows.

This small shelter also became a place for a couple of local boys to sleep, a la Grand Central Station. Why they chose this place I never knew, but they stayed there for several years, undisturbed by Mayor Koch or anyone else for that matter.

Elmer Leeson lived at 211 High Ridge Avenue, where he had a barn that housed his cows during the winter months. With the coming of warm weather, Elmer could be seen herding his six cows along the highway to their summer quarters. This was before the coming of the steers.

Elmer conducted a door-to-door milk and meat business. He had a 1919 Model T Ford, somewhat like today's panel trucks, that served as his traveling meat market. He had a large bell, which he rang when he reached the home of one of his customers.

Elmer kept a rigid schedule, so people knew when to expect him, and when the bell was sounded, "Mrs. Jones" would appear and select the cut of meat she desired, as well as the amount of milk she needed.

The Leeson herd consisted of six cows, only four of which were milking at any one time, so he did not have a great amount of milk to sell.

One of the cows was named Mabel, and she was a mulley. You probably have never heard that name so I will tell you that a mulley is a cow that never grew any homs. Mabel was of the Jersey breed and on the top of her head there was a little knob where the horns should be.

She was the first mulley that I had ever seen and was quite a curiosity. Today they have a salve, which when applied to a little calf's head, prevents the horns from growing.

Elmer Leeson's meat and milk business was a one-man operation, and it really was a lot of hard work, although Lloyd Humphreys used to help Elmer in his later years. However, between the sales of his two products, he seemed to make a good living.

Elmer also had a horse whose name was Tiger, which was a misnomer if I ever heard one. He was anything but a tiger, but was probably the most docile, the most placid animal you could possibly find.

This horse's outstanding characteristic was the fact that he did not lie down when inside a building. Elmer said that many years ago Tiger did lie down in his stall and one of his hoofs became wedged between two boards in the side of the stall. The poor horse struggled but he could not get up. Elmer said that he had cut the boards to free the animal.

That was it for Tiger and from then on he did his sleeping while standing up.

#349: THE HOT SEAT AND OTHER TALES FROM DANBURY RD.

A large building, housing several stores and offices, now stands at 99 Danbury Road. The house that stood on this spot during the period of which I am writing was the home of the James Mewald family.

Jim was an upholsterer, and plied his trade from the basement of this house. He was a serious type person and not really a very good-natured man. In fact I do not recall ever seeing him smile. However, he was very good at his trade, and did a fine business.

Word of the expert work that Jim performed spread rapidly and soon reached the point where the basement became overcrowded. To solve this problem he decided to use his front porch to do some of his work. The porch was all glassed in and it faced the south, so he was able to work there, even in the cold weather.

Being well aware of his expertise, I once asked Jim to make a chair for Marie. It was to be something special, for it was to be her Christmas present.

By the middle of December, the chair was almost finished and I could see that it would be a real beauty. It was about this time that Jim decided to move the chair to his front porch to give it the finishing touches.

It was agreed that I would pick the chair up on Christmas Eve. However, just a couple days before Christmas, in the early afternoon, the air was suddenly filled with the frightening sound of the fire siren. We were living at what is now 613 Main Street at the time, and 1 was just leaving the house as the fire engine raced by. It turned at "Joe's Corner" and continued down Danbury Road, as I decided to follow it. As the fire truck neared the Mewald house, I was possessed with a sudden feeling of impending disaster.

As you probably have already guessed, the fire was not only on the Mewald front porch, but right in the middle of the just completed chair. It was classed as a fire of undetermined origin, but one theory was that it was caused by the rays of the sun as they passed through the glass that enclosed the porch, and were then magnified as they also passed through a gallon jug of water that sat on the windowsill directly in front of the ruined chair.

At least the house and much of his other work was saved. Jim, in his usual stoic manner, shrugged it off and started to build another chair, although it was not ready for Christmas.

The large new building, where G. Daniels is now located at 77 Danbury Road, replaced a couple of houses that once belonged to Michael Scaglia. One was the home for many years of Jerry and Rose Franceschini. The other was the home of the Joseph Keeler family and long ago Edmund and Mary Flanagan lived there when Ed was a state trooper and stationed here in Ridgefield.

Michael Scaglia was an interesting little man. He and his wife Flora raised a large family. I seem to remember at least eight children. There was Lilian, Flora, Betty Ann, Kate, Rose, Michael Jr. and John. I believe that Michael Jr. still lives in New Canaan.

To raise all those children and own a couple of houses was no easy task, so you can bet that Mike worked hard and used his money wisely. He had a little green and black Model T Ford truck, with which he did hauling jobs. He took good care of that truck and it always looked as if it was brand new.

I remember the cab on this little truck had sliding doors that were kind of a forerunner to the sliding doors now seen on some panel trucks. You might say that Mike and his Model T bridged the gap between teamsters, such as Fred Peck, and the modern machinery that we see on the highways today.

As we proceed up the hill that we used to call Island Hill, we come to the Morganti homestead that sits on the corner of Island Hill Avenue and Danbury Road. It was built more than 50 years ago by John Morganti. It was here that John and his wife Elizabeth raised their children, Paul, John Jr, Gloria, Joseph and Robert. Mrs. Morganti still makes her home here after all those years, and Gloria lives right across the street, on the opposite corner.

The Morganti property also served at one time as a base for the fast growing construction firm that is now known as Morganti Inc. From a modest beginning this firm has

grown to a point where it is listed along with the very largest construction companies in the entire United States.

The truly remarkable success story of Morganti Inc., deserves more coverage than we can give it here. Perhaps Paul, who has recently retired after serving many years as president of the company, will take pen in hand and record what will be a most interesting history of this family-owned business.

The next house, as we continue up the hill, is at 55 Danbury Road, and is now the home of the Steven Spoldi family. This house was built in the 30's for John Moser and his family. John and Sara Moser had three children, Virginia, Ruth and Ralph. The girls were quite attractive, and very popular with their classmates at Ridgefield High School.

John was engaged in several local business enterprises and once oper- ated the service station at 31 Danbury Road that is now known as Ridgefield Mobil. The building at the station was very small at the time, and had an outside pit, where cars were serviced. There was a pipe rack and several chains surrounding the pit to prevent someone from falling into it.

John also served for a short time as one of the local policemen.

#350: PAMBYS' GARAGE & THE FAMOUS GOAT BARN

After the Moser family moved from 55 Danbury Road, this place became the home of Louis and Blanche DeVantery, and their daughter Dorothy. Louis had been the chauffeur for the B. Ogden Chisolm family at a time when chauffeurs were expected to have the ability to repair an automobile, as well as to drive it.

It had been the custom for Ridgefield's wealthy families to employ chauffeurs to drive and care for their cars. However, during the days of the Great Depression, many of these people started to do their own driving and have their repairs done at a garage.

Then with World War Il heating up, the ranks of the chauffeurs became less and less. It was about this time that Louis DeVantery decided that he would go into business for himself. There had been a garage for a number of years on the corner of Grove Street and Danbury Road, where Pamby Motors is now. It had been established back in the 20's by Gus Constantini, who operated the business with the help of his son, Walter.

When the Constantini family moved to Danbury, Louis De Vantery took over the garage and hired a young fellow named Charles Cain as his mechanic. Charlie later became a member of the family, when he married Dorothy De Vantery.

The old garage was torn down and the present building was erected, complete with pumps that dispensed Tydol gasoline. Louis named his new venture Central Garage and it operated under that name, until the Pambianchi brothers established Pamby Motors some ten years later.

I must remind them that they should soon be celebrating the 40th anniversary of what has grown to be what is probably Ridgefield's largest automotive business. Actually the Pambianchi brothers have been in the auto business much longer than 40 years. Leo sold the Nash auto from the store on Main Street where Brunetti's Market is now located. Later, in the 30's, he sold Pontiacs from the great building that stood right across from the Firehouse, and he was Ridgefield's first Cadillac dealer.

Harry started his career in auto repair in the late 20's, with Howard Freer, where Colonial Cleaners is now. Freer's garage sold the Essex and the Hudson Super Six. These cars, along with the Nash, went out of business many years ago. Harry, Otto and Matty also conducted a repair business from the garage right next to the Press office [on Bailey Avenue], before

moving to their present location. Matty's sons, John, Fred and Michael still carry on the family-owned business.

Directly across Grove Street from Pamby Motors, there was once a large iron gate that stood just about where T.D.R. Ltd. is now. It was the entrance to the large field where Peter Hornig pastured his cows.

That pasture lot was about as unproductive as a field could be, and the cows were hard put to find enough grass to keep them going. Not only was there a scarcity of grass, but there were so many stones that a cow would have difficulty in finding a place to lie down. The vegetation that grew best in this field were bushes of many varieties, the best of which were blackberries.

After the very unfortunate accident, which caused the death of Peter Hornig, as reported in Dispatch #33, the field remained unused for many years. During this period, the field became even more overrun with bushes and brambles.

This was all changed in the 30's, when the late Francis D. Martin purchased the property.

Marty had spent an awful lot of time in the hospital, recovering from a very serious fall which he suffered while skating at Outpost Pond. Marty was never a man who wasted any time, so his long stay in the hospital was used in planning the many activities that he would become involved in after his recovery.

Apparently Marty envisioned how that large piece of real estate would look, without all the stones and brambles. He lived right across the street on Mountain View Avenue at the time, so he saw the field every day and probably imagined how an A&P store would look there.

At any rate he bought what had been the clubhouse on the old Ridgefield Golf Course. This building had been abandoned after the nine-hole course gave way to the new 18-hole Silver Spring Country Club. The building was then dismantled and moved from where it stood on what is now Jack Ward's estate on Peaceable Street, to Marty's new project on Grove Street.

There was great speculation around the village as to what Marty intended to do with the land and the building, but he kept his plans to himself. One thing was sure, he was bound to make it interesting.

As soon as the building was back together, Edgar Masten was set to work building what resembled small stalls throughout the ground floor of the old club house. Then, one day a whole flock of goats appeared in the field that surrounded what would. come to be known as "Martin's goat barn."

The goats seemed to be well aware of what was expected of them and went right to work, clearing the land. Despite what you may have heard, goats do not eat stone, or even tin cans for that matter. However, they sure did take care of the unwanted vegetation.

The goats also produced milk, though that may have been considered a by-product. So Marty bottled the milk, and being an extraordinary salesman, he was able to convince many people of the superior quality of goat's milk, and had a number of customers for his product.

The stones were another matter, but Marty with Ed Masten's help and some heavy machinery, tackled the job of removing them. It was a project that took a lot of time, but there came a day when the great field was presentable and Marty was ready for phase two of his plan.

#351: MARTIN'S GOLD AND SILVER; ROCKELEIN'S OLD DIGS

There were many people who believed that Francis D. Martin actually possessed the Midas touch and it did seem that everything he touched turned to gold.

Marty used to love to call attention to the fact that his many successes were accomplished without benefit of a high school education. At the time when he graduated from elementary school, Ridgefield did not have a high school. Students who were interested in furthering their education used to travel by train from the Ridgefield railroad station to Norwalk High School.

This proved to be quite a chore, and after a year or so of commuting, Marty decided that this was not for him, and he became Ridgefield's most celebrated school dropout. However, he did go to a watchmaker's school.

By the late 40's, Marty's goats had completed their job of cleaning up his large field on the corner of Grove Street and Danbury Road He also landscaped the grounds, in preparation for the commercial buildings that now occupy the area, and turned to phase 2 of his plan.

For just once, Francis Martin was about to go off the gold standard as his interest was being strongly at- tracted to silver. The goats disappeared, and the large goat barn became the home of the Ridgefield Silversmiths. Edward San Giovanni and Robert Kittle bought the barn and conducted their business here for several years. Clare Moore, an experienced silversmith, did the silver plating, ably assisted by young John Lavatori.

John learned the trade from this master craftsman, and soon was able to do gold plating, as well as silver plating. When Mr. Kittle and Mr. San Giovanni decided to go out of business, they turned the operations over to Bob and John.

They carried on a thriving business for a time, but soon discovered that while they had no trouble in acquiring work to do, collecting money from their numerous customers was an entirely different matter. In just a few months, accounts receivable had grown to a point where John and Clare came to the conclusion that this business was not for them. They informed Mr. San Giovanni and Mr. Kittle, who still owned the property, of their intentions to close down the business.

Francis Martin, who had returned to the gold standard, was aware of the situation, and moved quickly to repurchase the property.

Marty was always at least one step ahead of most everyone, and already had plans for his old goat barn, and soon he had sold it again. This time the new owner was The New England Medical Research Laboratory.

Dr. John Heller headed this organization, which employed several doctors and scientists. The laboratory became quite well known in medical circles and was successful in obtaining not only private funding, but government grants as well.

There was considerable activity at the laboratory for a number of years and it seemed that the operation was progressing very well. However, there came a time when the organization apparently developed some financial problems and there was a curtailment of some of the many activities at the laboratory.

Then there was some talk to the effect that New England Medical Research might have to close down its operations. The talk turned to reality just a few years ago, and a very disastrous fire destroyed the building that had been a home to a silver business, a club house for a country club, a laboratory and home to a herd of goats.

The charred remains of the building were allowed to remain standing for several months. They were then removed and the present very modern building, known as The Executive Pavilion, was erected on the site.

In the meantime, a number of new stores had cropped up on the property, including an A&P Store, where C.V.S. Pharmacy is now and Orrin Beers had a Gulf Service Station where T.D.R. Limited is now [today, it's Bareburger].

Across the street, at what is now 43 Danbury Road, lived Mr. and Mrs. Conrad Rockelein in the early part of this century. This was a two-family dwelling and one of the families that lived here for many years was the T.C. Chandlers.

Mrs. Chandler, known to her friends as Dorothy or "Dotty," now lives at Ballard Green. Dorothy was a very good reporter and columnist for several of the area newspapers for a number of years. The well-known Mario "Muggsy" Frulla now makes his home in this house. [The building later became restaurants Mirabella, Toscana and until January 2025 The Red Rooster, which is planned to be razed to make way for multifamily housing.]

Perhaps it was the proximity of Conrad Rockelein to Francis D. Martin, who lived almost across the street from him, that caused Con to become interested in real estate. At any rate, Con bought up lot after lot until he owned most of what is now Mountain View Avenue, Hillsdale Avenue and Island Hill Avenue.

In later years he built a new house, where he and Mrs. Rockelein lived, right near the Martins'.

Con Rockelein was a very good barber and plied his trade from several locations. His first shop was upstairs in a building that stood where De Luca's Footwear is now, at 388 Main Street. That building was destroyed in the great fire of 1895. He also had a shop in the large building that stood where The Ridgefield Savings Bank is now, and then moved across the street over what is now Ridgefield Auto Parts.

He also had a shop in what we called The Telephone Building. This great Tudor style building was owned at the time by Francis Martin. It is now owned by the Amatuzzi brothers, who with their Roma Pizzeria have been a most welcome addition to Ridgefield.

Con finished out his career as a barber from a shop that he established in his own home.

Wherever he went, Con seemed to do very well. He was a likable person and his customers always followed him to his many businesses.

#352: THE DANCING MARTINS

It was just about 50 years ago that Con and Madeline Rockelein moved from 43 Danbury Road to their new home that they had built just across the street on Mountain View Avenue.

Con had a room in his new home that he reserved for cutting the hair of his numerous customers. He lived to the ripe old age of 90, and continued to work right up to the end. If in the great hereafter, there is need of a barber, you can bet that old Con is still clipping away.

Right next door to the Rockeleins, lived Francis D. Martin and his family. You have already heard and read much about Marty, and his many activities, so you should know that his wife Doris was just about as fine a person as you could find anywhere.

Doris Godfrey Martin was a school teacher, but had to relinquish her membership in that honorable profession when she married Marty. In those days, when a teacher got married, she was expected to stay at home and raise a family. This ruling, of course, resulted in a large number of marriageable ladies being denied the enjoyment of married bliss, so they spent their lives in teaching school.

Doris Martin's energies were funneled into work for her church, and in many social and civic activities. She was an accomplished singer and had a beautiful voice. I well remember her rendering a very well received solo in the great minstrel show of 1926.

Both Marty and Doris loved to dance, and it was always a treat to see them doing a graceful waltz. Of course, that was in the days before rock and roll, when ballroom dancing was in vogue.

In fact, the Martins enjoyed dancing so much that they used to run their own dances. The dances, which were by invitation only, were held at the old Odd Fellow's Hall on Main Street [now the Toy Chest building] and at the Bloomerside Pavilion at Peach Lake.

They were program dances and each one attending would receive a little program to which was attached a tiny pencil. There could be anywhere from 12 to 15 dance sets during the evening and they were listed on the program with a space provided for the name of your partner for each set. The name of the song that started each set was also listed, next to your partner's name.

Before the proceedings got under way, the program was filled out, so you always knew who you would be dancing with. The first dance set and the last dance set were reserved for the person that you came to the dance with. In between were the names of your other partners, and they could appear only once. This ensured that you would get to dance with most everyone at the affair.

The music, which was always top-notch, was generally provided by Charles Sterling and his orchestra. Long before the dancing started, Marty would provide Charlie with the names of the songs that would signal the start of each set. They would include such songs as Night and Day, Beautiful Ohio and Moon Over Miami.

The dancing started promptly at 8 and continued until near midnight. Everything went like clockwork and no pun is intended (Marty was a very good clock-maker). Everyone seemed to have a real, good time, especially as the evening ended, but Marty never would extend the dancing. He always used to say that it was time to go home, when you are having a good time — then you would want to come back.

It was at the Mountain View Avenue address that the Martins' son Philip spent his formative years. He was later to become Dr. Philip Martin, and he just might have been Ridgefield's very first optometrist.

Like his father before him, Phil was a fine athlete. He was a very good baseball pitcher, and again like Marty, he was an excellent skater, though Marty's talents on the ice were directed toward figure skating, while Phil just loved to play hockey.

Phil and his lovely wifé June recently moved from Ridgefield, but I am sure that like so many others, they will return someday.

There was a time when Ridgefield used to have its own annual beauty contest. A number of years ago, when June Martin was still June Pascoc, she won the title of Miss Ridgefield. This was no mean feat, for Ridgefield was noted then, as it is today, for having a large number of very pretty girls.

During the period that I am covering, the Edwin Myers family lived just to the north of the Martins. Ed was a mechanical engineer and was employed by a very large Bridgeport construction firm.

He was some kind of whiz when it came to machinery. It was said that he could tell what was wrong with an engine by just listening to it as he walked around it. I guess you could have

called him a mechanical diagnostician. We sure could use someone like Ed today, and wouldn't he have lots of fun with all the computers that we have come to depend on.

Edwin Myers, and his wife, Pauline, had two children, Pauline who we called "Polly," and Bob, who attended our local schools. Bob was among the 37 students who graduated in the class of 1937.

Mrs. Myers was a school teacher, and taught home economics in our local school system. Somehow she escaped the practice of causing married teachers to retire, or perhaps she returned to teaching after the unpopular ban had been lifted.

Next door to the Myers lived Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Rowland and their children, Francis and Mary Alice.

Joe Rowland was a carpenter and builder, and he built a considerable number of homes in Ridgefield back in the 20's and 30's. I guess he could also be called a developer, for he developed and built the complex of homes that make up what is known as West Terrace in neighboring Danbury.

Joe was also a sportsman and liked to hunt in the wooded areas of town. I well remember how on one occasion, while delivering this newspaper to the Rowland home, I was invited to dine with the family. When I discovered that the menu for dinner was a delicacy known as squirrel pie, I suddenly remembered that I had just finished a large meal, and gracefully declined the kind invitation.

#353: THE BUSY LIFE OF ALICE ROWLAND

Alice McSherry was a school teacher when she married Joseph Rowland, and I would bet that she was a real good one. Of course, her marriage to Joe signalled the end of her career as a teacher. So we had a teacher and two former teachers. Mrs. Ed Myers, Mrs. Francis Martin and Mrs. Joseph Rowland, all living next door to one another.

The Rowlands had two children, Francis and Mary Alice, and as soon as they were old enough to attend school, Alice Rowland joined the Ridgefield Parent Teacher Association. Her talents as an organizer were quickly established and soon she was the president of that organization, which had started in 1897, as the National Congress of Mothers.

The present name was adopted in 1924, so Alice was one of the early leaders of the Ridgefield P.T.A.

One thing was sure, Alice Rowland lived a very busy life. She was involved in many civic and social activities, and yet always found time to perform many individual acts of assistance to others.

In an earlier column I told of how she rendered much needed help at my birth, when Dr. Mansfield was unable to preside over that "blessed" event. Alice always seemed to be around when she was needed.

It would be fair to say that Alice Rowland was a born politician, in the very best sense of that word. Besides being quite intelligent, she had a very pleasant disposition and a real good sense of humor. She could be steadfast, and even a little tough, in her political views, and yet be tolerant with those who presented an opposite opinion.

Her ability to use good reasoning was her forte, and in most instances she should soon have the other person agreeing with her.

Membership in the P.T.A. was probably a good way to launch a political career, for Alice would go on to become a real power in the Republican Party. Before that happened however, Alice paid her dues. During World War I she performed yeoman service in the local branch of the

American Red Cross. She was a tireless worker in St. Mary's Ladies Aid Society and became its president.

She was also very active in the Ridgefield Grange, in which she served in several offices and became the Matron of that fine organization.

Come to think of it, I wonder what ever happened to the Grange. Years ago there was news of its activities in this newspaper just about every week. They even had a Juvenile Grange, of which I was once a member. Both of those worthwhile organizations seemed to have just disappeared. Perhaps that is because there are no longer any farms in Ridgefield. The primary interest of the Grange was agriculture. However, it also had its social aspects and the Juvenile Grange provided young people with a healthy outlet for their energies.

We even had our own little orchestra, in which Elizabeth Thomas played piano, Paul Waldarke played sax, Seymour Thomas played trumpet, Ken Northrop played violin and I played drums.

At any rate, Alice Rowland built a fine reputation in the many organizations that she belonged to. Because of that fact it was not surprising that when she became immersed in the political arena, her rise up the ladder was very rapid.

She was elected to the local Board of Education and after serving with distinction, Alice became a member of the state Board of Education. She served two terms as representative to the State House and was in the forefront of those who advocated the building of the Merritt Parkway. More than 50 years later, the parkway is still one of Connecticut's finest highways. and our state can be justly proud of it,

Then came the day when Alice was elected to the State Senate. She was the first Ridgefield woman to be a state senator and was only the third woman in the history of the state to be elected to that post.

Alice Rowland's reputation as a good campaigner had spread across the boundaries of Ridgefield and into the surrounding towns that made up this senatorial district. The first time that she ran for the Senate, she carried every town in the district, with the exception of Danbury. That was the only time she failed to win over the voters of Danbury and Alice went on to win four terms in the Senate. The last three times she was elected, she carried every town in the district.

When Alice decided to retire from politics, they had a really big party for her at Fox Hill Inn. Politicians and friends from all over the state attended as a tribute to a very fine person.

In the meantime the Rowland children had grown, and Francis, who had become a successful architect, married Dorothy Waldarke. He also became engaged in developing and created a little colony on the west side of East Ridge, between Market Street and Branchville Road. The road that served this area is aptly named Rowland Lane.

Francis and his family later moved to Florida, where his parents had maintained a winter home in Fort Lauderdale for many years. He is credited with designing several of the buildings in that fast growing

I believe that Francis attended the Ridgefield Boys School, and was in one of the last classes to graduate from that school on North Salem Road. The Ridgefield Boys School later became the home of the Fran cis D. Martin family. See how Marty's name keeps cropping up.

Francis Rowland continued his career as an architect, but un- fortunately his wife Dorothy passed on at a rather young age. Dot will be remembered as a very popular member of my 1932 RHS graduating class.

Francis, who is also now deceased, then married Leah Brunetti, another local girl. Leah now lives in Florida, but still comes back here to visit.

Mary Alice Rowland married Fred Brown, who was a harbor pilot at Nassau in the Bahamas. It is nice to report that Mary Alice is now spending more and more time in the family home in Ridgefield.

#354: MORE WELL-KNOWN FAMILIES FROM MOUNTAIN VIEW

In the early 30's, Joseph Rowland built a nice little bungalow right next door to the house in which his family lived. It sits on the south corner of Mountain View Avenue and Hillsdale Avenue.

After moving his family into the new house, Joe rented out the older house. I believe that George Bailey and his family lived there for a time. When the Bailey family moved to Long Island, it became the home of Louis and Lena Waldarke and their children Dorothy and Paul.

Louis had been the major-domo for the Frederick E. Lewis family for many years, and their home on that great estate was at 240 West Lane. In the 30's, the famous Lewis estate was in the process of closing down, and the many employees had to find other places to live. Earlier Dispatches told of the demise of the estate, and its resurrection as what we know today as Manor Estates.

In later years, the Rowland family moved to a new house that Joe had built on Creamery Lane and is now the home of their daughter, Mary Alice. The bungalow then became the home of Harry and Hazel Goodwin and their sons Frank and Abbott. Harry had come to Ridgefield back in the 20's and was the bookkeeper for Charles Riedinger. He later performed the same service for Charles D. Crouchley and later still for Young's Feed Store. The Goodwins' son Frank lives at Stonecrest with his daughter, Kathleen, and sons John and Geoffrey, and Frank is still associated with Young's.

Entering Mountain View Avenue from Danbury Road, we come to number 5 on the west side of the street. This two-family house is one of the original buildings in this neighborhood. More than 60 years ago it was the home of Edwin Muir Allan and his wife, the former Jean Blair, and it was here that they reared their sons, Edwin B. and Donald G.

Eddy Sr. was a veteran of the U.S. Navy, and served in World War I, aboard the U.S.S. South Carolina. Eddy and Jean were a well-liked and very popular young couple. He was a carpenter by trade, but later in life he turned to horticulture and then became superintendent on the Biddle estate at 306 Branchville Road. This fine place is now the home of Ralph Ablon and his family.

When the Biddle sisters moved to Peaceable Street, as related in Dispatch #206, Eddy made them a mailbox that was an exact replica of the Biddle mansion. It proved to be a great attraction to passersby.

The two Allan boys were very industrious, and over the past 40 years they have been a definite part of Ridgefield's history. They purchased a men's clothing store that I think had previously been owned by Dante Brunetti. Just a few years ago, they built the large building at 440 Main Street that houses several stores.

Both boys have remained in their native town — Ed and his wife Joan (Smith) live at Stonecrest and Don and his wife Betty (Matthews) make their home on Wilton Road East.

It is interesting to note that the Allan homestead at 5 Mountain View is still in the family after all those years. Mark Allan (Don's son) and his wife Barbara (Stabe) now live at 5 Mountain View. Mark is one of Ridgefield's rising young attorneys.

Next door to the Allan house Lived Arthur and Minni Ferry, and their children, Lyndon and Christine. Both Arthur and Lyndon were longtime employees of the United States Postal

Service. Arthur served a number of years as a clerk at the local post office, and Lyndon spread his 35 years of service as a mail carrier, a clerk, and finally as superintendent of mails at the Ridgefield Post Office. Lyndon has been retired for some 20 years, and still plays a good game of golf.

In an earlier Dispatch, I told of how Arthur Ferry used to run the silent movies in the Town Hall back in the 20's. He was also an accomplished pianist and played the background music for the films.

There is a cute little bungalow just north of the Ferry house. It was built in the early 20's by William Miller. Bill and his wife, the former Edith Terpeny, had a daughter, Gertrude, and a son, William Jr., and they both had very pleasant dispositions.

Gertrude was a classmate of mine at the old Titicus School, and we graduated together from R.H.S. in 1932. She married the late Jack Duncan and now lives in Sherman. Billy, who passed on several years ago, used to work with me at Conklin's Dairy. Bill Miller Sr., and his brother George, were painters by trade. They were both tall and slender, and it was said that they could paint almost any ceiling without the use of a ladder.

The Miller house has been the home of Geno "Jinks" and Joan Baldaserini and their daughter, Nancy, for more than 30 years. Jinks is a veteran of the U.S. Army and served in World War II. He has used his retirement years to sharpen his skills on the golf course and is considered to be one of Ridgefield's premier golfers. Nancy always has a pleasant smile when you visit the Ridgefield Savings Bank.

The next house is probably the last one to be built on Mountain View. It is now the home of the recently married James and Colleen Baker. Jim and his new bride picked a good neighborhood in which to start their married life, for they sure have real good neighbors.

John Morrisroe built the house at 19 Mountain View more than 40 years ago. His wife, the former Margaret Brown and daughter, Ann, still live there. The Morrisroes also had two sons, John Jr. (Jack) and Francis (Bud). Jack and his wife, Mary, live at Stonecrest and Bud moved to North Haven some years ago. Jack is now retired but still lives a very busy life.

Bud is known far and wide for his prowess with the violin. He is an acknowledged expert in the field of country music and is kept busy, playing for square dances or barn dances as we called them.

Their parents, John Sr. and Margaret, were great dancers, and it was always enjoyable to see them perform the intricate steps that go along with the various folk dances. This was particularly true when the music had an Irish flavor, for John was right from the old sod.

I well remember how, in the long ago, he would team up with his friend Jack Jones Sr. on St. Patrick's night to do the Irish jigs. These men could really shake their feet, and the sounds of their shoes tapping the floor was always in perfect unison.

John Sr. was a carpenter, and worked with William Creagh. John may have learned the carpenter trade with Bill as his teacher. This seems quite likely for he was good at his chosen profession and Bill was an excellent teacher.

#355: A CONTROVERSIAL RAVINE; MUSICIAN'S TRAGIC DEATH

The last house on Mountain View Avenue carries house number 27. It was built more than 50 years ago for August and Adele Poshadel. August appeared to be a man of considerable means, though I never knew what kind of work that he was engaged in.

Because of that there was speculation as to where his money came from. There were those who thought that August had made his fortune before coming to Ridgefield, while others

felt that he was a very successful investor in the stock market. One thing was sure, he kept a very low profile and only close friends like Jimmy Mewald and Paul Laszig ever knew much about him. [According to his 1969 obituary, Poshadel, a native of Germany, had been a stockbroker with Fahnestock and Company in New York City for many years.]

The Poshadel house is now the home of Edward and Karen Carroll. Edward is a grandson of the noted Charles Elliott, who did much to shape this nice neighborhood. The story about Charley Elliott was featured in Dispatch #83.

Just beyond and below where the Carrolls live, there is a little strip of land that was the subject of a controversy a number of years ago. William Peatt had developed what had been a large apple orchard into what became known as Peatt Park. The park was served by three streets: Lafayette Avenue, Washington Avenue and Rochambeau Avenue.

Peatt Park is located just north of the area we have been covering and Rochambeau Avenue lines up perfectly with Mountain View Avenue. However, there is a rather deep ravine that separates the two streets, and at the bottom of the ravine rests the little strip of land that caused a dispute.

Bill Peatt felt that the two streets should be connected to make it easier to pass from one neighborhood to the other. It was at this point that Conrad Rockelein entered the picture.

Con claimed ownership of the dividing strip that was just a few feet wide, and he was unalterably opposed to joining the two streets. Con feared that such a move would create a race track for some of the cowboy drivers. It sure would have made a great roller coaster, unless the ravine was filled in.

At any rate, after all these years, the little strip of land still remains as the dividing line between the two neighborhoods.

On the north corner of Mountain View and Hillsdale Avenue sits a house that was built in 1929 by the aforementioned Charley Elliott. When it is said that a person built a house, it could mean one of two things. It could mean that the per son actually took hammer and saw in hand and created the building, or it could mean that he engaged someone else to do the work.

There is no question but that Joc Rowland, Bill Miller and Jack Morrisroe did the building of their homes, and the same could be said of Charley Elliott. No doubt Charley had the electrical work done by an electrician, and the plumbing was done by a plumber. However, as far as cutting the lumber and putting the boards together, Charley did this himself, aided and abetted by his good friend Emest Sturges. Those two fellows could do just about anything, and do it well.

This house later became the home of the Elliotts' daughter, Lois, and her husband Edward Carroll Sr. The house still remains in the family, and is now owned by Charley's granddaughter, Marlene Carroll Darling. After three generations it can properly be called the family homestead, as is the nearby Allan homestead.

Next to the Elliott house, on Hillsdale Avenue, is another house that was built by Joe Rowland. It is now the home of John and Mary Rose Pierandri. It is nice to see a native son remain in Ridgefield.

This house was built for Louis Waldarke while he and his family lived around the corner on Mountain View. It was while the Waldarkes lived in their new home that the family suffered a great tragedy when they lost their son, Paul, in a very unfortunate accident.

Paul Waldarke was a lifelong friend of mine, and in all the years that I knew him, we never had the slightest disagreement. We started out together, even before we were teenagers,

when his uncle, Aldo Casagrande, formed the Ridgefield Boys Band. Paul played the saxophone in the band, and I was the drummer.

That was in 1927 and we would stay together for 20 years. We made the transition from the Boys Band to the Oreneca Band, and then switched from marching music to dance music as members of The Mayflower Swing Band.

Paul was not one to improvise with his sax, but he could handle the most difficult orchestration with ease. I always felt that Paul could have gone on to play with one of the "Big Bands."

He was also very athletic and we had some great hockey games on the ice of that little lake that we called Lewis's Pond. He was also a fine baseball and basketball player at Ridgefield High School.

Paul served in the U.S. Navy in World War II. After the war he returned home, and like so many others, he tried to get accustomed to civilian life again. It was about this time that Harold Goldsmith was in the process of developing the area near Ridgebury School known as Lakeland Hills. Harold hired Paul as a chauffeur, and in a job like that one must learn to wait patiently while the boss does his business.

Once, on a visit to the new development Paul found himself waiting while Harold inspected the progress being made. A large John Deere tractor, with a disk harrow attached, stood idly by and Paul decided he would help with the harrowing, for he did not like to sit around.

Driving this tractor was unlike driving an auto, as it had no foot brake. Instead it had a lever that was similar to a gear shift and was operated by hand.

A large root protruded from the ground, just about where Sky Top Drive now intersects with Douglas Lane. The large rear wheel of the tractor hit the root and started to spin. Before Paul could apply the brake, the machine reared and came over backward, crushing this fine young man on the sharp disks of the harrow.

It was a very sad day for this un- fortunate man and all who knew him.

#356: HILLSDALE FOLK AND LOCKE MOWERS

Looking north from Danbury Road, there are three rather short little streets — Mountain View Avenue, Hillsdale Avenue and Island Hill Avenue. They lie in the shape of a large horseshoe, with Mountain View on the left of the shoe, Island Hill on the right side of the shoe, and Hillsdale making up the toe of the shoe.

Mountain View Avenue is the oldest of these streets, and was followed by Island Hill, while most of the homes on Hillsdale Avenue were the last to be built.

During the period of which I am writing, there were no houses on Hillsdale, except the one on the corner of Mountain View and Hillsdale that Charles Elliott built in 1929. Much later came the house at 3 Hillsdale, which I have already told about, and then Gene Willenbring built two houses at number 9 and number 11.

Number 9 is now the home of George and Dawn Besse, who are native Ridgefielders. It is always nice to know that people who were born in Ridgefield were able to survive the rapid growth of the town and remain here. It is also nice to know that Dawn actually grew up in this neighborhood and spent her formative years on this little street, while George lived with his family on Gilbert Street.

George Besse's mother was Alice Besse, who was Ridgefield's tax collector for a number of years. It is not easy to be a tax collector and still be popular, but Alice was able to do

just that. Perhaps she passed the secret of being popular along to our present tax collector, for Mary is valid proof that it can be done.

It should be said that George also enjoys justly deserved popularity for his activity in church, fraternal and civic affairs.

The Willenbring family lived for a time at 11 Hillsdale, but it has been for many years the home of Louise Feduzi and her family. Louise, of course, is very well known for her many activities as a member of St. Mary's Church and the Italian-American Club Auxiliary. She and her son Louis were longtime proprietors of Lou's Spirit Shop.

In the neat little house at 13 Hillsdale live Primo and Elina Baldaserini. Just two doors away is their daughter, Dawn, so as they say, "the apple does not fall far from the tree." I told about "Preem"' in an earlier column, and since he is a fine carpenter, I would have to believe that he is another who had the satisfaction of building this house for his family.

On the south side of the street, at 6 Hillsdale Avenue, is the home of Reno and Laura Carboni. They are another native Ridgefield couple, and both attended Titicus School with me, back in the 20's. Laura was then Laura Bellagamba, and she was just about the prettiest girl in the school.

Like all the Carbonis, "Rinz," as we called him, was very sports minded, and he went on to become a stellar athlete at Ridgefield High. I have already covered the Carboni family in earlier columns, so I will not run the risk of repeating myself concerning the many stories of that family's athletic prowess.

Most of the houses on Hillsdale Avenue are of rather recent vintage. However, there is one that carries the number 10 Hillsdale that was originally listed as an Island Hill Avenue home. This very attractive house stands on the corner of Island Hill and Hillsdale, and is now the home of Donald and Yolanda Torcellini.

Don is a retired contractor who grew up just over the line in North Salem, while Yolanda (Frulla) lived a number of years in South Salem. Being very sensible people, they both had a real desire to live in Ridgefield, and moved here at the first opportunity.

The house was built in the very early 30's by Earl Roberts. It was here that Earl and his wife, the former Alice May Stevens, raised their three children, Everett, Betty and Marion. Everett may have been the first Ridgefielder to graduate from Annapolis. At any rate he is a veteran of World War II, and rose to the rank of commander in the U.S. Navy.

Betty married and moved to Stratford where, I am sorry to say, she passed away at much too early an age.

Marion, who somehow earned the nickname "Ski," married John Haight, who as everyone knows was our former chief of police. The Haights moved to Cape Cod just a few years ago, and we are now waiting for them to come back to Ridgefield.

Earl and Alice Roberts came to Ridgefield in the early 20's. He was an electrician and was associated for a time with Charles Reidinger. Charley operated an electrical shop on Bailey Avenue in a building long since removed that stood just about where Scrimshaw's [5 Bailey Avenue] is now. Charley not only performed electrical work but also sold appliances of all kinds. He also had the franchise for the Ideal lawnmower, at a time when power-driven lawnmowers were beginning to replace the kind that had to be pushed by hand.

The Ideal was a very large machine and very cumbersome to operate. This mower had a very heavy gasoline motor that was quite powerful and it drove the mower by means of a heavy leather belt. In a short time, Earl Roberts went into business for himself and to augment his operation he also sold appliances.

Somehow Earl was able to get the local franchise for the Locke mower, which was made in nearby Bridgeport. The Locke was also a large machine, but it was very easy to operate due to a small, rear wheel that allowed it to be turned one way or the other with very little effort.

The Locke became known as the Cadillac of the lawnmowers, and its inventor was wise enough to secure a patent for that little rear wheel. Thus, the design of the mower was protected for many years.

In recent years the rotary mowers have become very popular, but none can do the job as neatly as the old reel mowers.

I am told that the Locke company has gone out of business. If so it is probably because, like the old Hudson automobile, the mower just did not wear out quickly enough. I have one that is 50 years old and still going very well.

#357: WHEN EVERY HOUSE GOT A NEW NUMBER

Perhaps I should explain how the address of the Roberts house was changed from Island Hill Avenue to Hillsdale Avenue. The change was due to a new method employed by the town in determining your correct address.

For many years the deciding factor in determining the street on which you lived was the street on which it faced. Now this is determined by the street to which your driveway is connected. If you do not have a driveway, I guess it is up for grabs as to what your legal address is.

This all came about, some 15 years ago [1969], when numbers were assigned to every house, and every vacant lot in Ridgefield. At that time there were a number of streets in town that did not have house numbers.

Most people were under the impression that the assignment of house numbers was done by the U.S. Postal Service. However, state law places this responsibility on the local Planning and Zoning Commission.

The town was growing by leaps and bounds at the time, and I, as postmaster, was confronted with the difficulty of delivering mail to many new residents, who had not been identified, in the many developments that cropped up.

To add to the confusion, was the fact that mailboxes were subject to considerable vandalism, and many people were reluctant to put their names on the boxes. Some of these people said that they did not mind putting a number on the box, but would refrain from having their name exposed.

So several attempts were made to have the Planning and Zoning Commission take on the rather arduous task of assigning street numbers.

After a number of years of prompting, my efforts were successful, but the results created even more chaos. Whereas I was only interested in having numbers assigned to streets that did not have numbers, the commission decided to take the bull by the horns, and came to the conclusion that the entire town should be renumbered.

No doubt the commission was correct in arriving at this momentous decision, but I am sure the members were unaware of its far-reaching effects.

In many instances the streets that were already numbered were numbered from north to south, but those doing the renumbering decided to number these streets from south to north. Therefore, when “Mr. Jones” was notified that she no longer lived at 1 Soundview Road, but now resided at 116 Soundview Road, the announcement was met with considerable opposition.

I am sure that it was not readily accepted that the Roberts house went from 15 Island Hill Avenue to 10 Hillsdale Avenue. My own number went from 7 Olmstead Lane to 84 Olmstead Lane, and that took a little time to get used to.

If all this sounds confusing, that is putting it mildly, and adding to it was the fact that some people just refused to use the new numbers. One lady that we know, actually refused to accept any mail addressed to her new house number.

This was just one of our town's many growing pains that could not be eased by the use of any known liniment. Because of the rapid growth, Ridgefield was a far cry from earlier years, when a letter would be promptly delivered, even without a number or the name of the street.

I still have an envelope, mailed 50 years ago from New Haven on a Tuesday, delivered to my home on the following day, and it was addressed to Richard Venus, "Singing Drummer," Ridgefield, Conn. No number, no street and no ZIP code.

We had some excellent mail carriers at the time when the entire town was renumbered. They knew most of their customers and soon adjusted to the change in numbers. However, it was a different story when a substitute had to cover for them. However, by now all the turmoil caused by the number change has subsided.

The roads in Mountain View, Hillsdale and Island Hill Avenues were not paved until the 30's, and they posed a problem for anyone passing through. Mountain View was a good dirt road, but Hillsdale, before receiving a coat of bituminous material (tar), was something else.

In the spring of the year, after the other roads had dried up, Hillsdale still had pockets of mud. There must have many springs under that road.

Looking at that fine road today, you would never realize how difficult it was to pass over it without getting stuck in the mud. I well remember how on one occasion Conklin's milk truck got stuck on the corner of Island Hill and Hillsdale. The truck sank to its wheel hubs and we had to go back to the farm and get a team of horses to pull it out. So you can see how progress has been made.

Next to the Roberts house lived George and Alice Camp and their children Peter, George, Charles, and Mary. They were about the smartest young people that I ever knew. Every one of them turned out to be very successful. George passed on sadly, at a very early age and Alice did a great job of bringing up her children.

This house was later the home of the Edward P. Scott Jr. family, for a number of years. It is now owned by Fred Frulla, whose sister Yolanda is next door in the Roberts house.

Again, traveling south on Island Hill is a house that was built in 1933 by Armando Belbusti, whose name appears many times in the land records of Ridgefield.

This house was later owned by Julius Tulipani and became the home of the Dominic Fossi family. Dominic and Ida Fossi were the parents of a number of very fine children, not the least of whom was Lou, our popular real estate broker and former first selectman.

This is where Bob and Georgienne Tulipani started their married life. Bob is also a popular real estate broker and former local school teacher.

At 9 Island Hill lived the Joseph Baldaserini family, who I have covered in an earlier column.

Across the street at 4 Island Hill, lived the Paul Morganti family. Paul, as you already know, headed the noted Morganti Construction firm and was also a member of the Board of Selectmen.

At 6 Island Hill, lived the Nazzereno Torcellini family that included Elsie, who is now Mrs. Enzo Bartolucci, Louise, now Mrs. Douglas Main, who presides over the activities at

Ballard Green, and Ann, now Mrs. Armando Buccitti, who is Romeo's assistant in the operation of the Judge of Probate Office.

At 12 Island Hill there is now a rather large house that is the home of Thomas and Celia Cesca. This house was not here at the time of which we are covering. In its place was a tiny building that was the home of Louis Falcinelli.

The Arduino Manna family has lived at 18 Island Hill for many Arduino, better known as "Jack," was a longtime employee of the Morganti Construction firm. His son Richard operates his own home maintenance business that will perform a multitude of tasks.

Charley Elliott built the house at 24 Island Hill and moved there from the other end of the street, where he had lived for many years.

I guess this little area takes on the hue of a small colony because of the interrelationship of so many of the families. It also has a decided political tinge, with names such as Rossi, Morganti and Tulipani.

#358: WHEN THE CHANDELIER WAS LOWERED AT THE OLD 'Y'

So we are back on Danbury Road and as we pass Mountain View Avenue again, there is a little house that sets back some distance from the highway. It is number 39 Danbury Road, and in the period of which I am writing, it was the home of Peter Franceschini and his family.

I believe that this house is still owned by members of his family, though they have moved on to other locations.

Peter was for many years the superintendent for the Hitchcock sisters, when they lived at 69 Main Street. He must have had a lot of patience, as well as a good sense of humor, for those two ladies could be more than just a little bit difficult.

When I was a little kid, I delivered newspapers to the Hitchcock residence. Many times it was necessary to walk by wherever Peter was working, and each time Peter would never fail to call me "Testa Roucha." I never knew why he called me that, for though my hair was very light — it certainly never was red.

The Franceschini homestead later became, for a number of years, the home of Edward and Jane Keeler and their family. I believe that Ed started his career as a painter, but later became a top-flight chauffeur. The cars that he drove never had a speck of dust on them, and he sure knew how to keep them shining, so they always looked like they had just come out of the showroom. They used to say that a black car was the hardest to keep clean, but Ed did it with ease.

Back in the 20's there was a rambling old wooden building that stood next door to the Franceschinis, just about where Genoa Imports [currently Pilates Barre] stands now. In Dispatch #75, I told of how during this period, this building housed Henry Messer's automobile repair shop. Henry placed a large sign over the door to the garage that read, "Limp In and Leap Out." The inscription was quite prophetic, as Henry was a good mechanic.

When Henry moved his operation to Danbury, the building became the home of the fledgling Ridgefield Athletic Club. Our town had no such thing as a gymnasium at that time, so you can bet that the new athletic club became an instant hit. It was popular with both young and old, and muscles that had lain dormant for some time were suddenly reactivated.

This soon caused the sign over the entrance to the gym to be changed to read "Leap In and Limp Out."

Next door, at 35 Danbury Road, is Mark's Auto Parts Store. Mark, as you no doubt already know, is a member of the well-known McManus family. During the early part of this

century, this building was the home of the Fred Bates family. Fred and Jennie Bates had at least nine children that I know of. There was Fred Jr., Carlton, Julia, Camilla, Harry, Percy, Natalie, Marion, and Thornton. You can just bet that the last one listed was quickly nicknamed "Thorny."

In those days there was a wooden porch (or stoop) that extended across the front of this building, bringing it very close to the highway. The porch had an overhanging roof that was supported by four, round, metal columns.

In their advanced years, Fred and Jenny used to spend a lot of time sitting on this porch in the afternoon sun. They both had silvery hair and made a picture of tranquility as they moved back and forth in their rocking chairs. After raising nine children, they had earned the right to relax, and from their vantage point they had an excellent view of those who passed by — 99% of whom they knew well.

Fred Bates was a charter member of the Y. No, I am not referring to the Ridgefield Family Y, nor am I sure of how the place where Fred met with his friends became known as the Y. At any rate, it was a little red building that had a yellow Y painted on its door. It was supposed to be a garage, but as you will see, it served another purpose.

As a garage, it housed a little truck, somewhat like a pickup, and it was called a "Vim," which they stopped making more than 50 years ago. This little red building sat on Grove Street, just about where the entrance to the Gaddis Restaurant [most recently, Red Rooster Pub] is now.

Both the building and the Vim were owned by my uncle, Jack Walker, who operated Walker's Moving and Storage business at the time. Uncle Jack was a big man and he liked the Vim for it had a steering column that came up straight from the floor board and afforded him plenty of room. The Vim was used in small moving jobs and also was used to transport young men to Danbury, who had been ordered there for induction into the armed services during World War I.

Quite frequently, the little truck was rolled out of the garage and was quickly replaced by a large, round card table and six chairs. Then, as if by magic, a large and very ornate chandelier descended over the card table.

In cold weather, a wisp of smoke curling out of the chimney would indicate that a game was in progress. The smoke emanated from a small pot-bellied stove that kept the card players warm on a winter night.

All this took place about 5 o'clock in the afternoon, and in a matter of minutes, Uncle Jack would be greeting Mr. McAllister, who was in charge of the state highway crew for many years. He was always called Captain, for some reason that I am not aware of.

Then would come the aforementioned Fred Bates, who was the deputy sheriff for Fairfield County. Before long Bill Creagh would appear and then Jim Brady, known affectionately as "Diamond Jim," and who later became a deputy sheriff, and later still our [first] chief of police.

Then would come Marshall Ralston, our freight and ticket agent. The sixth player was generally Arthur LaBarr, but they had plenty of spares if Art did not show up.

The games would continue through the night and many times until dawn. Refreshments during the Prohibition era came in the form of good hard cider.

Sheriff Bates had a case one time in Bridgeport's Superior Court. He fell asleep during the proceedings and was admonished by the judge, who banged his gavel and said, "Fred, I know that you had a tough night at the Y, but you will have to stay awake a little longer, until we finish this case."

So that is how these gentlemen became charter members of the Y.

#359: STINKY STOGIES AND UBIQUITOUS GAS

In telling about Uncle Jack Walker's "Y," I noted that in cold weather, you could tell when a card game was in progress by the smoke that curled up and out of the chimney. It should be said that there was also plenty of smoke during the warmer weather, but this smoke came from the cigars that were constantly smoked by the card players.

Jack Walker, Sheriff Bates, Capt. McAllister, and Art LaBarr were all inveterate cigar smokers, and when they lit up their stogies in that little building, it must have been difficult for them to see what cards they were playing.

They all smoked Connecticut cigars and shunned the very fancy Havana Perfectos. At one time our state was noted for the fine tobacco that was grown here. The great tobacco farms started just above Danbury and extended right up to the Massachusetts border.

Today many of those fields have been developed into golf courses. However, as you travel north on Route 7, there are still a few open fields where the tobacco was grown. Once in a while you will pass an old unpainted barn where the tobacco leaves were hung to cure. They serve as constant reminders of what was once one of Connecticut's leading industries.

In the Hartford area, shade-grown tobacco is still being raised and soon the tobacco farmers will be spreading their great nets over the plants to protect them from storms that could ruin the crop. The plants are of the broadleaf variety and are considered the very best for the outside wrapper of a cigar.

Just as many foreign countries are buying up our great industries today, the Dutch were doing this with Connecticut tobacco land some 50 years ago. The Dutch at one time owned most of these tobacco farms and Dutch Master cigars became one of the most popular brands. There are still a few Connecticut cigars available, such as Topper, Judge's Cave, Money Maker, Evermore and Topstone.

The favorite among the card players at the "Y" was a cigar called Seal of Connecticut. I have an idea that the popularity of this cigar, with this group, stemmed from the fact that they were furnished free by Uncle Jack to his cronies.

I remember that what distinguished the Seal from other cigars was the many white dots that appeared on the wrapper. These cigars looked as though they had the measles, but they smelled as though they had something much worse than that.

So like all "good" things, the activities on the corner of Grove and Prospect Streets finally came to an end. The little "Y" is no more, and Jack Walker's home has become Gaddi's Restaurant, and his great storage building has been trans- formed into the American House of Charm.

We had been traveling along Danbury Road, but got detoured to Grove Street, as I thought you might like to know how Sheriff Bates got to be a charter member of the "Y." So, back to Danbury Road.

Next door to the Bates homestead now stands the Ridgefield Mobil Service Station. This was probably Ridgefield's first real service station, for back in the 20s, pits for servicing an auto were relegated to garages where repairs were made.

When John Moser took over the operation of this place, the first thing he did was to have a pit dug, for the purpose of changing the oil and lubricating an auto. A recent picture in The Press showed that pit and the tiny building from which the business was conducted.

In those days, this station was known as the SOCONY station (Standard Oil Company of New York), which was the forerunner of Mobil. Years before high-test, special, unleaded, and

high-octane gasoline came on the market, there was only one grade of gasoline, so only one pump was needed. There were several one-pump stations in town at the time. There was also a pump right in the sidewalk where Liberta's Spirit Shoppe is now [J. McLaughlin in 2025]. It was owned by Charles (Pop) Crouchley, who also operated a plumbing shop from that store.

When you drove up to Crouchley's pump, your gas tank would be filled by Uncle Frank Moylan, who managed the store for Mr. Crouchley. This pump produced "Good Gulf" gasoline, and like the others it had a long handle that was turned by hand, for this was several years before the pumps were electrified.

I remember there was one near Brunetti's Store [The Lantern restaurant], when it was Scott's automobile agency. This took over the operation and had his auto repair shop in a long building that has long since been removed for parking space. This garage was later operated by Nick Romeo and John Keough.

Howard Freer also had a pump on the side of the driveway next to where Cappiello's Jewelry Store [Botanika Cafe] is now. This pump also was later moved to the rear of the building, where Howard had a garage, just about where Morelli's Home Appliance Store [850 Wood Fired Restaurant] is now. Bert Sperry also had another Socony pump, in front of his wonderful old livery stable, in the great building that used to stand directly across the street from the firehouse.

Mustafa C. Joseph offered Texaco gasoline at his little store on what used to be called "Joe's Corner," but is now called Country Corners [Corner Cafe]. Bill Bouton had yet another Socony pump, at his little store that used to sit on the corner of Tackora Trail and North Salem Road, and further up the road, right on the North Salem line, the Hennion family had a pump. After the Hennions, Donald Torcellini kept this pump operating for a number of years.

On the other end of town, near the Wilton town line, a man who I only knew as Nick had still another pump. This one was later owned and operated by Chris and Elsie Jensen, and later still by Walter Gengarelly [closed for many years].

When Venus Brothers opened what is now Limestone Service Station in 1930, high-test gas was being produced so we had two pumps, but they still had to be operated by hand, as I well remember from pumping them many times.

Imagine nine places to purchase your gas more than 50 years ago in a little town like Ridgefield, and gas was 15 cents per gallon, seven gallons for a dollar. How times have changed.

[Note, however, that 15 cents in 1930 was the equivalent of $2.91 in 2025 dollars and that on Oct. 24, 2025, 10 service stations in Danbury were selling regular gas at less than $2.91 a gallon. Several stations in central Connecticut were selling gas for less than $2.45 a gallon.]

#360: KEB GOES ELECTRIC; OLD DANBURY ROAD FAMILIES

When Charles Elliott, Francis Brown and Warren Keeler took over the operation of the service station on Danbury Road that is now called Ridgefield Mobil, they needed a name for their new enterprise. This matter was solved when they decided to use the first letter in each of their surnames.

That was some 50 years ago and the name KEB became very well known, for these men were very popular and their business flourished for many years.

One of the first moves made by the new owners was to replace the old hand-operated gasoline pumps with ones that were powered by electricity. This worked out fine, except when we had a power outage, which happened quite often in those days. This was before the handy

little emergency generators had become popular, and each time the power went off, there was no way to pump the gasoline.

During one particularly bad storm, the electric power remained off for several days, and there were a lot of thirsty gas tanks. At this time the genius of the men at KEB was revealed. A generator was acquired but it needed a gasoline engine to operate it. So they jacked up the rear of an auto, lifting the wheels off the ground. A heavy leather belt was placed on the pulley of the generator and around one of the rear wheels of the auto. It was a real "Rube Goldberg" contraption but it supplied the necessary power to put the pumps back in operation.

Until just a few years ago, there were two houses across the street from the Mobil station. They sat just about where Pamby Motors now has its showroom and office complex. One house was where Peter and Peg Carboni started their married life, and later it became the home of Francis and Pauline Moylan and their family.

I seem to remember that the other house was once the home of Ed Minnerly and his family. Then it became the home of "Tabby" and Katherine Carboni and their family. It was also the home of the Marcus Fischer family for a number of years.

Mark, as he was called by his friends, will be kindly remembered for many things, not the least of which was his fine work as a teacher in the music department at Ridgefield High School. Even before coming to Ridgefield, Mark had compiled an impressive list of accomplishments. During World War II he had served at Okinawa, Iwo Jima and in the Philippines.

Mark was recognized as a top-flight musician, and for 16 years he had performed with the New York Philharmonic. His favorite instrument was the trumpet, though he excelled with all of the brass horns. When the Ridgefield Symphonette was organized, some 25 years ago, Mark was among the founders of that fine musical group.

The Fischers were a musical family, for as well as Mark with his trumpet, there was Mrs. Fischer who was an excellent violinist. In fact Mrs. Fischer was, for a number of years, the assistant concertmaster with the National Symphony, in Washington, D.C.

So the two houses I have been telling about have given way to the ever expanding operations of Pamby Motors, and the Pambianchi brothers did not stop there.

About a year ago they acquired the very next house that had once been the Benvenuto Carboni family homestead, at 24 Danbury Road. This house was built more than 70 years ago by Benvenuto and Assunta Carboni, and it was here that they raised their six children. I have already described the accomplishments of this pioneer Italian family in a previous dispatch. However, you can bet that this is a very well-built house, and since it has recently received a fresh coat of paint, it would appear that it will be around for some years to come.

After the Carbonis, this house became the home of the Eugenio Fischialetti family. Janey, as he was fondly called, was a long-time employee on the great Frederic E. Lewis estate, when it was in its heyday. The house is now the home of Victor and Ethel Thompson.

The next house is a very pretty red brick building, and it was built some 30 years ago by Mary Girolmetti. Mary decided to spend most of her time in Italy, and recently sold her house to the Pambianchi brothers. However, she still makes periodic visits to dear old Ridgefield.

This house replaced a large white house that had been moved here at the turn of the century, from where it had stood on Main Street, just south of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church. Actually this was only half of the original house, and the reason that it was cut in half, as well as the reason for it being moved, will be the subject of another Dispatch. However, in its new loca-

tion, this half became a two-family house, so it gives some idea of how large the original house was.

A great number of families occupied this old house through the years, and I will not attempt to name them all. One I remember was a man named Mack, and he was a coffee salesman for either Yuban or Bokar coffee. He was short and very stout, and continually smoked Judges Cave cigars. Despite the considerable cigar smoke that surrounded him, whenever he was around there was always the pleasant aroma of freshly ground coffee.

The Santi Carini family, with their children, John, Mary and Dominic, also lived here for a while before moving next door in 1926, when the Percy Humphrey family moved to Ramapoo Road. John had a dog that he called "Sausage." The dog was probably a basset hound, so I guess that you could say that there was a resemblance.

I seem to remember that the John Haight Sr. family lived in this house for a short time, and I am sure that the Joseph Bellagamba family lived here for a number of years.

Another family was that of the senior Charles Coe and his wife Mary. They bought a goat for their son Charles Jr., better known as "Buster." They called the goat "Billy," but when two baby kids were found in the stall with Billy, there was a question as to the suitability of that name.

#361: LITTLE CHARLIE, LOCKED IN A DARK CLOSET

In telling about the two-family house that used to stand right across the street from The Old Ice House Restaurant, it should be noted that all of the houses going up the hill from Carboni's on the south side of Danbury Road and on Main Street to the stone wall that surrounds Casagmo were at one time owned by Samuel S. Denton.

Sam was one of Ridgefield's largest property owners. He did not specialize in just open land. Sam was mostly interested in land that had buildings from which he could collect rents, and he had a lot of them.

He was called a landlord, but may have been more properly called a buildinglord. If land that he owned did not have a building on it, he would either construct a house, or move one to the empty lot.

In the next house going up the hill in the early '20s lived Percival and Edith Humphreys, and their children, Percy Jr., Lloyd and Gertrude. Percy Sr. was an excellent mason, and worked with a group that included Willian Stevens, Lon Stevens, Roy Davis, and my father, Charles Venus. When it came to plastering walls and ceilings, you could not find finer craftsmen. Of course, that was in the days before anyone ever heard of dry walls, or plasterboard.

I always marveled at how these men could plaster a ceiling and make it come out so smooth. Just making the plaster stick to the ceiling was a trick in itself, but giving it that smooth finish was an art. Plastered walls and ceilings were much thicker than the plasterboard that is used today.

Many of the ceilings that these men did more than 70 years ago are still in excellent condition today. If there are any cracks, they are no doubt due to a leaky roof, of the settling of the building, or misuse of some kind or another.

To properly plaster a wall or ceiling, they first applied what they called a scratch coat, which is much darker than the finish coat. The scratch coat was also rather rough, in order to make the finish coat adhere better.

After the scratch, or brown coat had thoroughly dried, the finish coat was applied and smoothed to perfection. It gave off a peculiar, though not unpleasant odor. As a little kid, I used

to take my father's lunch to him, if they were working nearby, and I always enjoyed the tangy smell of the fresh plaster.

Those who were adept at plastering also made the molding, and could make fancy designs in the ceiling. All that is done today with either wood or paper.

The art of plastering has been lost to the quicker and cheaper method of using the large sheets of plaster board. I would guess that the last person in Ridgefield to ply the trade of a plasterer would be Primo Polverari. Primo learned his trade with the group that I have listed, and as he says "I have the scars to prove it." With teachers like Primo had he was sure to be an expert plasterer.

I should mention that Percy Humphreys also played clarinet in the old Ridgefield Band.

His house and the next two above it look very similar and I would say that they were built about 1905 or 1906.

My reason for selecting those years comes about in this fashion. My brother Charles, like the other Venus children, attended Titicus School and during those years, he was in either first or second grade. At that time Ethel (McGlynn) Ryan was teaching those grades, and she had a reputation as being a very strict disciplinarian.

One day Charles was accused (rightly or wrongly) of some minor infraction of the rules. The penalty imposed, over his strong objections, was that he be placed in a very small and very dark closet, until his sentence was served. No appeal was allowed and there was no plea bargaining in those days.

After about two hours of confinement, little Charles heard the unmistakable sounds of his classmates leaving at the end of the school day. It was not over for Charlie, who apparently had been forgotten.

After waiting for another half hour, Charlie began to get the idea that he might be spending the night in that dark closet. He tried the door several times, but it remained locked. There was a very small window in the closet, which had been covered by a heavy curtain. Charlie drew back the curtain, and after a struggle he was able to lift the window enough to allow himself to squeeze through to freedom.

Then he made a mistake. Had he chosen to complete his escape by going around to the rear of the little schoolhouse, he probably would not have been detected. However, he went the other way and as he passed the front door of the building he was observed by his teacher as he headed for home.

Her demands that he return to school were ignored, as little Charlie ran up Titicus Hill, with the teacher in hot pursuit. He thought about taking refuge behind one of the large monuments in the cemetery, but discarded that idea for he was more than a little squeamish about cemeteries, after hearing stories of how the goblins held meetings there.

As the little boy reached Joe's Corner, a decision had to be made, for though he was almost home, he knew that if he went there he no doubt would be extradited, and have to finish serving the incarceration for a crime that he was sure he did not commit.

So Charlie turned left at the comer and raced down Danbury Road as fast as his little legs would carry him. As he was about to pass the Humphreys house, which was under construction, he noted that his pursuer was closing the gap between them.

The new house seemed to offer at least a temporary respite from a return to that dark closet, so Charlie crawled under the front porch. No amount of coaxing, or threatening, could induce the boy to leave the safety of his haven. However, when the threats were directed towards his mother, who had been called to the scene, Charlie capitulated. A cease fire was declared and

then under the terms of the armistice it was agreed that any time remaining on Charlie's sentence would not be served in the dark and solitary confinement of a locked closet. I guess this is a complicated way to find the age of the Humphreys house, but it works.

#362: LITTLE ITALY ON A LITTLE LANE

The little street off Danbury Road and next to the Ridgefield Mobil Service Station is called Roberts Lane. This was all vacant land back in the 1920s, but after the Great Depression had set in, the first of the houses on the street was constructed.

The many Italian families that came to this country in the early part of this century were headed in most instances by men who were skilled in the construction trades, especially masonry. After the town sewerage system was constructed, the pipes for the public water supply were installed and the roads that led to the Port of Missing Men were completed, these men had to find other employment.

Some went to work on the many great private estates that were such an important part of Ridgefield during its "Golden Years." Others were employed by local contractors, and there were those who chose to be a part of the business community.

All of these people were affected to some degree by the stock market crash of 1929. The crash caused construction work to come to almost a complete standstill, and there was much unemployment. As you might expect, this made providing for their families a real challenge.

Ridgefield had no bread lines or soup kitchens, as did the larger communities and cities. However, we did have foodstuffs, such as cereals and flour, that were provided by the federal government. These things were stored in the town hall, and were made available to the most needy families, free of charge.

Of course, most of these people had fine vegetable gardens, and some had a flock of chickens, and perhaps a pig or two that would be butchered during the winter months. The important thing was that they knew how to survive during that rough period.

It was not unusual to see 20 to 25 men standing in front of the town hall, hoping that someone would come along and offer them some work, even if it was only for a few hours.

Most of those who were not seriously affected by the Depression had great compassion for those who could not find work, even at $1 lo $1.50 per hour. As might be expected, there were those who drove by the town hall in their limousines and were heard to make remarks such as "They would not work if it was offered them." However, they were a very select few and they were so very, very wrong.

Even before the Public Works Administration offered some employment on projects that we still enjoy today, some of these immigrants who had saved a little money took matters into their own hands and began to build their own homes. Roberts Lane is a very good example of what I am telling about.

I believe that the only building on the lane in the early 30s was a garage where the Connecticut State Highway Department kept its trucks and other road machinery. In those days the state maintained a separate highway department in each town. That system was phased out a number of years ago, in favor of a regionalized method of caring for the growing numbers of state highways.

Under this new system, Ridgefield's state highways and those of many of our surrounding towns were maintained from a large highway station in New Milford. That made a long drive for the highway crew each time a snowflake fell, so the system was again changed. I

believe that Ridgefield is now served by a large regional highway department that has been established in Danbury.

The site on Roberts Lane where the state garage had formerly stood is now graced with a large and very fine office building. This building is the result of the handiwork of Edgardo Eppoliti. As you must know, Eddy heads his own construction firm under the name Eppoliti, Inc., and maintains an office in his Roberts Lane complex.

At any rate, Roberts Lane actually came into being in the 30s when there was no steady work available for those in the construction business. The lane could have made a connection with North Street, at its northern end, but someone made the wise decision to make it a dead-end road. Thus the little street retained a rather tranquil atmosphere, and the possibility of establishing another raceway was avoided. It was a wise decision.

The Michael Polverari family lived on North Street, just about where a connection with Roberts Lane could have been made. I think that Mike, with the able assistance of his son Primo, was the first to build a home on the lane. It is the northernmost house on the lane and stands about 75 yards to the rear of where the family lived on North Street.

This house is now the home of Charles and Lena (Salvestrini) Frattini. They are a fine couple to know and Charlie will be remembered for his many years of service with the Ridgefield Supply Company.

Following the Polverari family there were others who decided not to just sit around and wait for things to get better. Soon Ciro Ciuccoli was building his new home, with the help of his son Amelkri. See how nice it is to have a son who is a carpenter?

Then came Charles Severini and his family, and the Marinellis and the Ligis, the Rossinis, and the Pancottis. Just like that, another little neighborhood was established.

I would guess that from the names of these early settlers of Roberts Lane, you can see that this area was indeed a little Italy. It still is today, though such names as Moeller, Falconer, Egan, and McAleer have been added to the list of inhabitants of the lane. Oh yes, Joe and Norma (Fossi) Contessa also started married life on this nice street.

Joseph Roberts once owned the land where these houses are and as you have already guessed, it was after him that the lane was named. Joe and Mrs. Roberts lived with their children Louise, Aldo and Arthur at 23 Danbury Road, on the corner of Roberts Lane. Joe was a general contractor and carried on his business from this location.

#363: WHEN 54 KIDS LIVED ON SOUTHERN DANBURY ROAD

It was in the 20's that Joseph Roberts and his family lived in the house at the corner of Roberts Lane and Danbury Road. During that period he built the garage at the rear of his home that housed some of the machinery that was used in the operation of his construction company.

The building trades were enjoying a boom at the time and the Roberts firm was very successful for a number of years. However, in the early 30's, like so many other enterprises, Joe Roberts and his business finally succumbed to the ravages of the Great Depression, as things came to almost a complete standstill.

During the good years Joe dealt in real estate and acquired a considerable amount of property. He maintained an office on Main Street in the store just south of where Cappiello's Jewelry is now.

The Roberts name is kept alive in the name of the lane that runs by his former home. It is also preserved for posterity in the name Roberts Pond, a small body of water at the top of Saw Mill Hill.

Joe Roberts built this little pond in the late 20's on land that he apparently planned to develop. The pond is fed by waters that flow east from Upper Pond, which is located just to the west of Pin Pack Road. It was just one of many projects that were abandoned at this time.

The Roberts house [23 Danbury Road] is now a part of Taylor-Williams Ltd., which is a gift shop that also operates from the garage at the rear of the house. The building also houses the realty firm of John F. Coyle Associates.

The house has been the home of a number of families through the years, including but not limited to Joe McCabe and his family and Paul and Dorothy (Fossi) Marconi and their family.

Joe and Paul were partners in a repair business that they operated in the garage. They specialized in sharpening and repairing lawn mowers, but actually they could fix just about anything. Orazio (Ratsy) Rossini also operated the repair shop at one time.

Some of these names may not be familiar to you, but one family that lived for a short time in the Roberts House was that of Louis J. and Ann (Sweeney) Fossi. That name should ring a bell, for Lou after serving several terms as a member of the Board of Selectmen, went on to become one of Ridgefield's most popular first selectmen, and then entered the field of real estate with Knoche Realty. But, of course, you knew all that.

The Roberts house will always bring fond memories back to me. When I was just a little kid, I somehow learned to play the harmonica. It was not unusual on a warm summer's evening for a group of other little kids in the neighborhood to accompany me on a walking tour in which several families would be serenaded.

On one such occasion, while performing outside the Roberts house, the family all came out on the porch. Mrs. Roberts, in an effort to offer a compliment, said, "Dick you should be on the stage." Little Arthur Roberts, who was then about 4 or 5 said, "That's right, Dick, you should be in a cage." My companions all got a big kick out of that, and to this day, whenever I meet Art, he repeats his prophecy.

It should be noted that the enthusiasm of my little companions was really not generated by the quality of the music that I played. No, I am sorry to say, their interest stemmed from the fact that some of the neighbors would throw out small coins, mostly pennies. I was never sure whether this was in appreciation for my efforts or if it was in hopes that we would go away. At any rate we were always sure to get a goodly number of coins, especially from Mr. and Mrs. Roberts.

When the evening's tour was completed, and the money collected, we would then retire and trot up the hill to Joe's Store that stood up on the corner. There the profits from the serenade would be squandered on penny candies, and a lot of little kids went home happy.

Next door to the Roberts house, there was a small vacant lot in those days. It had been used in years past as an exercise rink for the horses from the livery stable that stood at the rear of the lot. This great old building was known for many years as Whitlock's Livery. At that time it stood just about where the famous "Old Ice House Restaurant" [Mannen in 2025] stands now.

Looking at this fine establishment today [since expanded into Girolametti Court], with its many stores and offices, it may be hard to visualize that in years past, this was the site of one of Ridgefield's most prominent livery stables. The stable boasted of having a dozen or more fine horses, with wagons, coaches and buggies available.

It was a very busy place in the early part of this century, during an era when automobiles were first making their appearance on the country roads of Ridgefield. There were still many

families that enjoyed nothing more than a pleasant Sunday afternoon jaunt into the beautiful countryside, for which our town was so well noted.

The building was constructed before the turn of the century and lasted until some 30 years ago when it was demolished to make room for bowling alleys and other more modern enterprises.

There was also a large, two-family house that stood in front of the stable and near the highway. This house also has disappeared and in its place there are several stores and offices.

This house was once the home of the Nazareno (Nanny) Lavatori family and the Mario Girolmetti family. It was here that the children of Nanny and Gustanza (better known as Nina) Lavatori grew up. There was John, Aldo, Ponziano, Angelina, Gloria, Margaret and Gene, in this family. Then there were the children of Mario and Maria Girolmetti, Louis, Mary and John.

Come to think of it, there were a lot of children in our neighborhood. Starting with the Bates family of 9; the Carbonis, 6; Robinsons, 6; Roberts, 3; Carini, 3; Humphreys, 3, Claus, 3; Miller 2; Lavatori, 7; Girolmetti, 3, and Venus, 9. That is 54 young people in just about a tenth of a mile. That must have put some pressure on our school system, and I guess there are no children in that area today.

#364: RUNAWAY HORSES & POPULAR EATERIES

By the time World War I had finally come to an end, horses had been gradually phased out as a means of transportation. What horses were left found it difficult to become accustomed to the infernal automobile that had supplanted them.

Many were the tales of runaways that occurred when a horse and buggy were confronted with a noisy auto on one of our quiet little country roads. Most of these roads were quite narrow, as they had been built for horse-drawn vehicles. They did not require as much room to pass each other as did the automobiles.

If you were driving a horse and you met an auto, someone had to give ground. It was generally the horse that had to pull to the side of the road to make a safe passage.

Encounters of this kind were enjoyed by a certain few who drove autos. They seemed to take some kind of satanic delight in scaring the poor horse as they passed by.

To make matters worse, there were a number of cars that were equipped with what was called a “cutout.” This was especially true if the driver of the car happened to be a member of the younger set.

This very annoying gadget was operated by depressing a small round pedal that was conveniently located on the floorboard in front of the driver. This would disengage the muffler from the exhaust pipe, with the result that the unearthly noise emanating from the car's engine was like what you would hear from one of today’s jet airplanes.

If that did not frighten the horse enough to cause his driver to lose control, the motorist had yet another trick. There were those who learned that by turning off the ignition, and then quickly turning it back on, a terrific explosion would occur. This was due to the unburned gasoline that was built up in the exhaust system of the car.

The resulting backfire was as loud as the blast of a cannon, and never failed to cause a horse to rear on his hind legs, much to the disgust of the person who was trying his best to control the horse. If the driver was inexperienced, such an incident could cause a horse to run wild, and there were few more terrifying shouts of distress than when someone was heard to shout “runaway.” I have witnessed two runaways and I sure hope that 1 never see another.

The trick of making a car backfire can be duplicated with modern vehicles. However, those who are inclined to experiment with it should be cautioned that they should be prepared to replace their muffler and perhaps their exhaust and tailpipe as well.

The advent of the automobile spelled the end of the livery business and there came the day when the Whitlock Livery Stable closed its doors for the last time. The business had been established before the Civil War by Henry Whitlock, who was a noted horseman. His son, Morris B. Whitlock, followed him in the business and he was the owner when the stable on Danbury Road and the one on Catoonah Street closed down for good.

The great old building remained unused for some time. Then Nanny Lavatori and Mario Girolmetti and their families acquired the property. The two families lived in the large house that stood in front of the stable and quite near the highway.

Nanny and Mario were partners in the ice business and established their ice house in the western wing of the old livery stable. Here they stored the ice that they harvested from local ponds during the winter months. The ice business was still very good in the early 20s, but after a few years electric refrigerators started to become popular, and the days when the iceman would bring cakes of ice to your door were numbered.

As business tapered off, the two men began to look for other business interests. In the early 30s, when the Prohibition era came to a close, Nanny and Mario decided to open a bar in the old livery stable, much to the delight of a thirsty public. It proved to be a thriving business and before long a restaurant was added to the new enterprise.

The culinary expertise of Nina and Maria made this a real popular eating place. It was referred to by several different names — Nanny's, Mario's and Mary's — and at one time it was known as Jack Sullivan's.

Jack had come here from Danbury in the early 40s. He had been a popular football player and coach in this area and though he operated the place a relatively short time, Jack did very well.

It was during Jack's tenure that the bar became the favorite oasis for two brothers, Hup and Row. Of course, among the customers there was bound to be some practical jokers. One evening, when the brothers parked their little truck near the front door of the building, the pranksters jacked up the rear of the vehicle, so the rear wheels just cleared the ground. Then everyone waited to see Hup and Row attempt to drive home.

On this occasion, the brothers stayed longer than usual, but finally returned to the truck. Hup took the driver's seat while Row fell asleep as soon as he was seated.

Hup started the engine and it ran for several minutes while the truck stood still. Hup reached over and shook Row until he was awake.

Row asked "Are we home already?" and Hup replied "No, I guess we just got here."

With that, as the story goes, Hup and Row dismounted from the truck and returned to their favorite bar stools.

In the meantime, the Lavatori family moved to the former Roland Gilbert house, across from Joe's Store. There Nanny built a restaurant that is still known, half a century later, as Nina's [no longer standing].

Marie and I were next door neighbors and still have fond memories of Nina and her fine family.

By this time the Girolmetti boys, Louis and John, and their sister Mary had come of age, and were anxious to continue the family enterprise. So they took over the operation and later replaced the old stable with a modern building, replete with bowling alleys and a fine restaurant.

John and Mary took care of the restaurant and bar, while Lou ran the alleys. Lou unfortunately has passed on, but he will be well remembered as a very fine accordionist, who had his own dance band.

John and Dorothy still operate the very popular “Old Ice House Restaurant,” ably assisted by their children, John Jr., Diane, Stephen and Lynn. The food is excellent, as is the service, and when you go there, especially on a Saturday night, you are bound to meet someone you know.

The walls of the restaurant are decorated with ice tools that John's father must have used years ago.

#365: OF TRIUMPH AND TRAGEDY

In telling about the many changes that were made in the Old Ice House complex on Danbury Road, I should mention that at the rear of the large two-family home, there was a smaller house. It stood just to the left of the old livery stable and I think that the Fischialettis were the last family to live in this house.

At any rate, when the stable was demolished to make way for the bowling alleys, this little house was also removed from the scene. Then numerous stores and offices were built along the outer fringes of the large parking area, and the place took on the appearance that it presents today.

Right next door to the Old Ice House, at 5 Danbury Road, is a neat little house that was once the home of Alfred W. Stevens. Al was a popular young man and was a veteran of World War I, during which he served in the U.S. Navy. I have already told about Alfred’s father, Charles “Putty” Stevens, who lived just around the corner on North Salem Road when it was known as North Main Street.

Charles was one of my favorite people, and once operated the Ridgeheld Bakery when it was located where Roma Pizzeria [Planet Pizza] is now. He also owned the house in which Marie and I started married life, and you just could not find a nicer landlord.

It was in the mid-40s when Thomas W. Clark and his wife Ann Neil made this their home, and Tom and his daughter, Nancy, still live there. If you do not know Tom Clark, you have missed something.

Though he is now 85, Tom still maintains a vigorous lifestyle. He also has an excellent memory of Old Ridgefield and loves to talk about his favorite town, and how things were when he was growing up on Wilton Road West.

Tom still has an abiding interest in all sports, and when he was younger he was a fine baseball and basketball player. He does not play these sports anymore, but continues to bowl for a very good average and is no “duffer” when it comes to golf.

One thing that Tom thoroughly enjoys is his ability with a 7 iron as he nears the green. Recently, while golfing with three much younger friends, Tom made a rather spectacular shot to the green and the ball rolled very close to the pin.

One of his companions marveled that he was able to do it and expressed his admiration. Tom laughed and said, “You know, you are supposed to get better as you grow older.”

During his long lifetime, Tom Clark was engaged in many different occupations, and many years ago he learned the carpenter’s trade. However, most people will remember him as the manager of the First National Store, when it was located where the GranCentral Store [Ridgefield Thrift Shop] is now.

As no doubt you already know, the next building was once the store of Mustapha C. Joseph. It is now number 3 Danbury Road, and is the home of Bellagamba Floor Covering. B & B Floors When this business started out some 40 years ago, it was known as B & B Flooring Covering. The B's stood for Bloomer and Bellagamba or Andy Bloomer and Jim Bellagamba, and they operated from the basement of the Masonic building. This was a very successful business as Andy and Jim were both very skilled in applying linoleum or tile to your floor. The business is now conducted by Jim's son Steve and his young partner Al Costa.

Jim Bellagamba must have had a particular affinity for this neighborhood, for he grew up on the other side of the street, in the large two family house that stood across from the entrance to the Old Ice House. That house was torn down more than 20 years ago, but there is more to tell about it, as you will see.

Mustapha C. Joseph conducted his grocery store from this little building when it stood on the corner where Country Corners is now. He started the business during World War I, and a very successful enterprise it was.

Mustapha changed his name to Michael and then shortened it just to M.C. Joseph. His customers shortened it even more and he became known to one and all as just plain Joe. So the store came to be known to everyone as Joe's Store and the intersection of Danbury Road with Main Street was called Joe's Corner.

What may or may not be known was that Joe was more than just a groceryman. He was also a ladies' man, and was particularly enamored with a certain housewife in the neighborhood. The kids in the neighborhood were too young, or perhaps too naive, to place any significance on the fact that his "lady" would arrive at the store each Sunday afternoon at 2 o'clock.

Somehow, it did seem strange that the store was closed for business between the hours of 2 and 4, and that the shades in the store were always drawn during that period. However, as we look back on it now, we might wonder why it would take two hours to purchase a quart of milk and a pound of coffee.

The firm of Osborne and Barnes built the concrete highway along Main Street and all the way to Danbury in 1925. In the process, the house on the corner of Main Street and Danbury Road was moved back on an angle, as it is today, to these changes and before long [Joseph] moved his little store to the rear of his property and built what we now know as Country Corners.

I must get back to the story about the house across from the entrance to the Old Ice House, where Jimmy Bellagamba lived as a boy. Actually, although this was a large, two- family house, it was only half of the original structure. When these halves were joined together this great house stood at 351 Main Street, where South Hall stands today.

This place was the home of Dr. Archibald Paddock and his family. The doctor was a prominent dentist, and had bought the place from Elizabeth W. Lewis, on Jan. 5, 1874, with eight acres of land, for $6,050. The Paddocks had a handsome son named Harry, who had been carefully groomed to follow in his father's footsteps as a dentist.

Saturday Aug. 25, 1888, dawned as a typical August day in quiet little old Ridgefield, and gave no hint as to the extraordinary and tragic events that would occur as the day progressed.

It was about noon, when father and son decided to do some target practice with their rifles. The shooting range was located on the spacious lawn at the rear of their home.

Unfortunately, young Harry took this particular time to announce that he had changed his mind, and would not become a dentist. Upon hearing that, the father flew into a rage and shot Harry dead on the spot. In the throes of remorse over what he had done, Dr. Paddock turned the gun on himself and it now became a double tragedy.

The rest of the Paddock family moved away after a short time and the house remained vacant for several years. Finally, around the turn of the century the decision was made to either have the house torn down or moved.

A man who was known for moving buildings acquired the house and with the help of the noted building mover, Caro Northrop, they began the trek north along Main Street, to where Sam Denton, the new owner, had some vacant land.

All went well until they reached the corner at Casagmo. Here the large building would not make the corner because of Mr. Olcott's stone wall. Sam's request that he be allowed to remove some of the stones was denied, as Mr. Olcott was still smarting over a transaction in which he felt that Sam had taken advantage of him.

Sam, being a very practical man, left the great house blocking the traffic on Main Street for two days, while he cut the house in halves. One half was deposited across from the Old Ice House and has since been replaced. The other half still stands at 612 Main Street. It is now the home of Mrs. Nazzareno Bellagamba and for me this house is full of very fond memories. It was the Venus family home for many years and it is here that I was born.

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Since we are now back to where I started, it seems like a good place to stop — at least for a while [this was June 29, 1989]. You will kindly note that this is Dispatch #365, and that is one for each day of the year. So it has been a great experience for me and I am deeply grateful for the messages of encouragement that I have received over the past seven years, and I wish to thank my readers so very much. [In November of that year, Dick added a 366th column, which follows.]

#366: HOW GENERAL WILDER EARNED MEDAL OF HONOR

The Congressional Medal of Honor was established during the Civil War as the highest U.S. military decoration, awarded for acts of heroism on the battlefield "above and beyond the call of duty." It is a much sought after honor that has been reserved almost exclusively for men.

In fact, Dr. Mary Edwards Walker is the only woman ever to receive the medal. Dr. Walker served as the army's first female assistant surgeon during the Civil War. Congress voted to award her the Medal of Honor for bravery displayed on the field of battle.

The only Ridgefield resident to receive the Medal of Honor was a man we came to know as General Wilder [Wilder was one of three men who've lived in Ridgefield to earn the award].

Wilber E. Wilder graduated as a lieutenant from the United States Military Academy at West Point in the class of 1877. Five years later, Lt. Wilder was engaged in battle during the Indian Wars.

On April 23, 1882, a detachment of six men and six Indian scouts, commanded by Lieutenant McDonald, Fourth Cavalry, was attacked by a large band of Chiricahua Apaches, some 20 miles south of Stein's Pass, near the boundary line between Arizona and New Mexico.

The men put up a brave fight and held off the Indians with rare skill and courage. However, one by one the brave men of this little squad fell wounded. Escape was impossible. Annihilation was in sight unless reinforcements were brought up.

As a last resort one of the scouts slipped away from the detachment and succeeded in making his escape from this very desperate situation and rode 16 miles to notify Lieutenant-Colonel G.A. Forsyth of the plight his comrades were in. Colonel Forsyth immediately set out at a gallop with Troops C, F, G, H, and M, of the Fourth Cavalry.

One can easily imagine these men, with their horses racing over the desert and the bugler sounding the Charge as they hurried to the rescue of Lieutenant McDonald's little party.

When they arrived at the scene of action, they found McDonald's men still defending themselves against the onslaughts of the vast number of Indians. At the sight of the rescue party, the Indians turned and fled to strongly entrenched positions in Horseshoe Canyon, New Mexico, where they were pursued by Colonel Forsyth's troops.

The colonel ordered his men to dismount and then attacked the Indians among rocky ridges that varied from 400 to 1,600 feet in height. An Indian pony could be seen, standing some distance up the mountain and two soldiers, one of whom was Private Edward Leonard, asked permission to secure the pony, who was standing near a very large boulder. Permission was granted, but as they neared their quarry, they found themselves in an ambush and a volley was fired at them from the top of the boulder.

In taking cover, Private Leonard slipped as he fell partly behind a rock, which failed to shield him. He was immediately shot through both legs, as his partner safely rejoined the command.

First Lieutenant Wilder, upon seeing the plight of Leonard, quickly advanced to his assistance. During his climb up the mountainside, Lieutenant Wilder was subjected to severe fire from the Indian sharpshooters, but luckily arrived at Leonard's side in safety.

He then carried the wounded man down the side of the mountain to where Leonard's comrades assisted him in getting the wounded man to safety, though bullets from the guns of the Apaches were whistling all around them.

It was for this outstanding feat of bravery that Lieutenant Wilder was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

This was only the start of a very active career of service in the U.S. Army, that would span a half century. In another display of courage, while still a lieutenant, General Wilder rode all alone into the camp of the very fierce Indian Chief Geronimo and arranged for his surrender in 1886.

In 1895 he was appointed adjutant at West Point, but left in 1898 to command the 14th New York Volunteers in the Spanish War. In the Philippine Insurrection, as a lieutenant colonel, he commanded the 43rd U.S. Volunteer Infantry and later served on the staff of General Arthur MacArthur in Manila.

In 1916, as a full colonel, he was second in command of the 5th Cavalry during General John J. Pershing's expedition to Mexico.

He was not through yet; in 1917 as a brigadier general, he commanded the 126th Infantry Brigade, which he organized and took to France in World War I.

It was my great pleasure to know this wonderful gentleman for many years. After his retirement in 1927, he lived until his death in 1952, at age 95, at The Elms Inn.

He was a very modest man and did not talk about his great exploits. So we probably would have never known about his very interesting life had it not been for a young man from North Haven, Thomas Gurney.

Mr. Gurney has a great interest in those who had been awarded the Medal of Honor and has spent much of his spare time in seeing to it that their graves are suitably marked. In conjunction with the War Department he visited each town in Connecticut that had a medal winner to examine their grave sites. After visiting General Wilder's grave, Mr. Gurney got the War Department to furnish a stone with the Medal of Honor inscribed. It was dedicated on Veteran's Day with the V.F.W. and American Legion providing appropriate ceremonies.