

'Dick's Dispatch'

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.

The following people worked on the photocopied compilation of Dick's Dispatches from which the following was scanned: Helen Lewis, Bob Pokorak, Syd Kelley, Pam Lowell, Kathleen Terkelsen, Jeanne Timpanelli, and Dick Venus himself.

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These have been slightly edited and annotated [shown in brackets] by Jack Sanders.

#1: JOE'S AND JIMMY JOE'S STORE

For some time now, I have been intending to write an occasional column for The Press. It would, of course, be about Ridgefield and some of the interesting people that I have known.

It never occurred to me that there would be any difficulty in getting started. However, it was soon discovered that the subject to be covered should be of interest to as many readers as possible.

After a great deal of thought, it became clear to me that my confidence that I could write a column of broad appeal was not nearly as great as anticipated. After all, if one cannot find a suitable subject for the first column, like a car that is out of gasoline, one just cannot start.

Suddenly, a subject appeared in a rather unusual way. It was presented by an old friend, Aaron Gilbert. Aaron, like so many other young fellows back in the 20's, got his start in the workforce by clerking at Joe's Store. The store is now known as Country Corners, but for more than half a century was Joe's to the people of Ridgefield.

Michael C. (Mustapha) Joseph started the business toward the end of World War I, in a small (20-foot square) building. At first it was just a neighborhood store that specialized in fruits and vegetables. Business increased rapidly and Joe, as he was affectionately known, proceeded to add groceries and kerosene to the goods he offered for sale.

Joe first acquired the kerosene from a local oil dealer, Matt Nesbitt. I believe it was Socony, which stood for Standard Oil Company of New York. As he was a rather astute businessman, Joe soon learned the advantage of buying his oil directly from the local Socony plant, which was being established on the corner of Grove Street and Sunset Lane. In a hop, skip, and jump, a gasoline pump was added, also Socony. Today the store sells Texaco.

Some of the young men who, like Aaron, started their business careers at Joe's Store, were Lynce Carboni, Paul Venus, Chick Ciuccioli, Dan Robinson. Jack Leary, Allen Miller, Pete Carboni, and Alton Claus, to name just a few.

None of the boys got very rich on the payscale of those days. However, they did gain some valuable experience.

They were all loyal to Joe, who was a very likable person. Some of the boys were very enterprising and two of them (I'm not saying which ones) learned how to use the pay phone at the store without having to pay for the call.

Their method was quite simple. Those days you needed only to pick up the receiver to have the operator ask “number please.” After hearing the number (then only two digits or possibly three), she would ask for the coin. Local calls were five cents.

There was always a stalk of bananas right next to the phone. Hanging on the stalk would be a large knife with a hooked-blade with which the bananas were cut from the stalk. The telephone operator would say “five cents please” and the boys would take the banana knife and strike the phone sharply. It sounded exactly like a coin being deposited and the operator would say “thank you” as the call was put through.

The phone company sent a man around to the various pay phones each week to collect the coins. The collector always registered surprise at finding so few coins and soon started to make collections at Joe’s on a monthly basis.

Business at the store continued to increase and in the early 20’s, Joe found it necessary to double the size of the building by putting an addition on the rear of the store.

I believe that Joe was Lebanese. However, he mastered the English language very well, though some words gave him difficulty. Eskimo Pies were a new product at the time. This delicious chocolate-covered ice cream, produced by the Huber Ice Cream Company, came with a tin-foil wrapping. To Joe, they were always “ice creemo pies.”

Aaron lived directly across the street from Joe’s (present location of Nina’s) with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Roland L. Gilbert and his two brothers, Harry and Percy. This made him readily available when business became too brisk for Joe to handle. It was always fun to hear Joe put in a call to the Gilbert home for help. He would always say, “Hey, is Arn uppadae?”

In those days it was customary in football to use what was called the dropkick, rather than the placement kick that is used today. It took considerable skill to carry out this maneuver. Charley Brinkley was the noted dropkicker of the day. Aaron studied his style and became very proficient in the art of dropkicking.

On a certain Sunday afternoon in the little store, he was demonstrating his ability, with such enthusiasm that he put his foot right through the large plate glass front of one of the display cases. From then on, Aaron was known as “Kick” Gilbert. It should be added that he was one of the better big pin bowlers that Ridgefield produced.

Joe’s Store continued to prosper and by the beginning of the 30’s, Joe had moved the little building out back and erected the present store.

About the time that World War II was starting, Joe died. His brother Jim came from Georgetown to take over. Jim was known as Jimmy Joe, to distinguish him from his brother. The favorite clerk at this time was Gino Polverari, who later died a hero in the war.

Jimmy was not quite the businessman that Joe was. However, the business was very well-established and was commonly referred to as a “gold mine.” So now it is Country Corners, but to me it will always be Joe’s Store.

When I think of Aaron, it is natural to think of Joe’s Store so it seemed natural that we tie all this together.

We should also include a word about Abbie Gilbert, Aaron’s lovely wife. She is one of those loyal people, from one of the real old Ridgefield families. For all those many years, Abbie was custodian of the books at George Tator’s garage. Those days the roads in northern Westchester County did not receive the snow plowing that they get today. It was not uncommon

to find just two wheel tracks, sometimes four to six inches deep. When once in these tracks, it was not necessary to steer your vehicle for considerable distances.

Of course, a major problem developed when you met another car. Abbie was determined to get to work and being a very resourceful lady, always carried a hatchet in her little Model T Ford runabout. When she met another car, she would stop and chip the ice and snow away and climb out of the wheel tracks so that the other vehicle could pass.

We have fond memories of her parents who lived on Governor Street in a large house about where the entrance to the large parking area is now. Her father, the late Willis S. Gilbert, was also a former postmaster and served from Jan. 18, 1916, to July 1, 1924.

How Aaron gave me the idea for this column must be explained. A few weeks ago, one of Joe Hartmann's pictures appeared in The Press. It showed a horse drinking water from the old watering trough at the bottom of Saw Mill Hill.

The question was posed as to who the people were in the wagon. It also noted that I thought they might be the Bill Caseys.

The following week in "News Notes," Aaron stated that "Dick Venus was mistaken."

Aaron went on to say that the people in the wagon were his grandfather and grandmother. I would gladly have accepted Aaron's claim except that he went on to say that "Bill Casey never had a horse." That statement caused me to do a little thinking and a lot of research.

I remembered going to the Casey home on the corner of Casey Lane and Ramapoo Road as a little kid, to ride one of their horses. They not only had horses, but both Bill and his son, Charley, had reputations as being exceptionally good horse traders.

The picture in question hung in the Casey living room and when asked who the person driving the horse was, Bill said, "That's me."

He could have been mistaken, of course, but then my research brought me to the History of Ridgefield, written by the late George L. Rockwell, another former postmaster.

After spending considerable time with this splendid book, I discovered that very picture on page 427. Sure enough, under the picture it states clearly that the people in the wagon were Mr. and Mrs. William Casey.

So ends my first — I hope not my last — column.

#2: A GOOD DENTIST & HIS LOST WEEKEND

We started out with a story about Joe's store and will stay in the area for this one. That's where it all started, at least for me, for I was born in that neighborhood. No one is quite sure of the exact day but we have seemed to settle on Friday the 13th.

The reason for the uncertainty is the fact that the doctor did not make it on time. He was an awful good doctor when you could get him. However, he did have the unfortunate habit of going on periodic binges and chose that weekend to celebrate something or other. Perhaps he was prepping for St. Patrick's Day.

At any rate I was three days old when old Dr. Mansfield arrived on Monday night. There were rumors to the effect that I was trying to walk by that time. No doubt they were started by the two fine women who had replaced the doctor. They were Alice Rowland and Margaret McGlynn. Both were great politicians and Alice became town chairman of the Republican Party

and Margaret, town chairman of the Democratic Party. What they would not do to sign up a future voter!

The event was further complicated by the fact that when the good old doctor finally got around to recording it at the town clerk's office, he simply wrote "another son born to Mrs. Charles A. Venus, on or about March 13th, at 181 Main Street" (it is now 612 Main Street and an interesting story on that house will follow sometime).

No name was listed. As I was a seventh son, they may have been running out of names. The omissions were not discovered until some 20 years later when it was necessary to obtain a birth certificate.

Mine was a happy childhood; in fact, I have been fortunate enough to have had a very happy life, for the most part. Early happiness was due to a great extent to the many very nice and interesting people in the neighborhood.

It is felt that the neighborhood started at 563 Main Street where Mrs. George H. Newton lived at the time, directly across the street from Casagmo. Mrs. Newton was a very nice person and drove a Franklin car — with a right-hand drive. The special design of the steering apparatus was made necessary because Mrs. Newton was born with a deformed right arm and could not use it to shift gears, then in the middle of the front seat floor.

A dear friend, from an old-time Ridgefield family, Robert A. Lee had been born in this house. For a short period, this house was leased to a Harding family. It was said that Mr. Harding was a brother of the president, Warren G. Harding. I am not sure about that, but do know that they were a very wealthy family. They had two sons who always wore elegant clothing and were the envy of the boys in the neighborhood. As a further mark of distinction, they had a liveried chauffeur.

There are those who believe that Benedict Arnold's horse was shot from under him during the Battle of Ridgefield at the driveway entrance to this lovely old home (now owned by the Joseph Coffeys).

Just north of the Newton house was a vacant lot which the boys used on occasion for a ball game. On this lot now stands the residence of Mrs. Gerald R. Skillen.

Next was the large house where the Harry Bennetts live at 599 Main. At one time the Lee family also lived here. It once belonged to James H. Perry and later to the Clarence Shean family. During the early 20's, a Mr. Nace lived in this house. He was a big man and very handsome. He was an ardent golfer and played at the old Ridgefield Country Club on Peaceable Street (now Ward Acres). Mr. Nace was an inveterate pipe smoker and wore balloon-like knickers, made popular by Bobby Jones who was the great golfer of the day.

Miss Annie Durant was the housekeeper for Mr. Nace. She was a very nice person, full of fun, yet very refined. Annie not only did the house work but also planted and cared for a sizable vegetable and flower garden.

Mr. Nace had a beautiful little dog named Sandy. He was the first Sheltie that I remember seeing. He was a friendly dog and reflected the good nature of his master and Annie.

Later on Annie was involved with the operation of the Lorna Doone with the Hutchinson sisters. This popular little restaurant was located on the corner of Main and Catoonah Street, where Harry Neumann now has his real estate office.

Mr. and Mrs. Lon Stevens lived at the Corner of Main and Pound Street. They were old-time Ridgefielders and it seems I once heard that Lon was part Indian. He loved to hunt and was an expert shot. I once saw him shoot a rat that was near his barn, from his back porch. The distance was at least 150 feet. He used a 22 caliber rifle and needless to say I was much impressed by accuracy. Lon was a mason by trade and a very good one.

Dr. Edwin Van Saun was a boarder at the Stevens home. He was an excellent dentist and one of the most distinguished-looking gentlemen I have ever seen. He did not extract teeth but was a wizard at filling them.

During this period most men worked six days each week which made it difficult for them to get time to have their teeth cared for. Dr. Van Saun was very obliging and took care of many of his patients on Sunday at his office over the D.F. Bedient Store. He was so good at his profession that many Ridgefielders still carry some of his fillings. I have a couple myself.

Like our family M.D., he had a love affair with John Barleycorn. When he would develop the urge to partake in a rip-roaring binge, he had the good common sense to hire someone to drive his car.

One such chauffeur was Altero "Chick" Ciuccoli. On one excursion, their first stop was Tator's garage in South Salem.

George T. Tator was one of the biggest Dodge dealers on the eastern seaboard. He always treated his customers very well and in his office he had two little spigots coming through the office wall. One spigot was attached to a small keg of rye whiskey and the other to a keg of Scotch whiskey. It became a very popular place and Dr. Van Saun availed himself of the liquid gratuities. What was to have been a 10-minute stop turned out to be a three-hour session, with Chick waiting patiently in the doctor's car.

It was about this time that the Chrysler came out with a new complicated transmission that was called "fluid drive." Before the excursion continued, Dr. Van Saun became the owner of a new and very classy Dodge coupe. Chick readily adapted himself to the new car and the rest of the weekend was spent in visits to numerous places of merriment.

On Monday morning I met the doctor walking to his office and inquired, as to why he was not driving. His reply was that there was a strange car in his garage and he could not figure out how to operate it, or even how it got there.

This column is intended to inform new Ridgefielders of life in our town in years past and remind those who have been here a long time, as well as providing an occasional chuckle for both. Therefore, we do not like to end this on a sad note. However, it must be said that Dr. Van Saun was an avid sportsman and possessed many fine rifles and shotguns. One day in his office, he turned a shotgun on himself and ended his life. It was a great loss.

Other dentists, while caring for his former patients, always marveled at the fillings he had done. They were works of art.

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Since our last column which featured Joe's store we talked with some of the young men who were employed at the little store. We only mentioned a few. Some of the others (not all) were Gene Lavatori, Romeo Petroni, John Lavatori, Ed and John Freer, and Jack Morrisroe, Jr. Jack said that I should have mentioned Jimmie Joe's age the time he died. I had heard rumors about Jimmie's age but never could substantiate them. Jack claims that after Jimmie died, a

nephew produced a document which indicated quite clearly that Jimmie had lived 117 years. This would probably make him the oldest ever in Ridgefield. We never knew how old Mary Steele was but speculation had her age over 100 when she died. More about Mary later but first we will continue our trip north on Main Street.

#3: A NEWLYWED APARTMENT AND NINA LAVATORI'S KITCHEN

Next to Lon Stevens lived his son Will. Will's house is probably the newest of the homes in the area. This very well constructed house was built about 1918 and now houses the Paris Hair Stylists at 609 Main.

Both Lon and Will Stevens were masons and were experts at their trade. My father worked with them for many years. Along with Roy Davis and Percy Humphrey, they made up a team that did the plastered walls and ceilings in many of the fine Ridgefield homes.

My father kept a diary in which he recorded the daily activities of these fine craftsmen. An interesting recording in 1927 notes that the group had finished the interior of the Main Street home of the new Ridgefield doctor, Francis B. Woodford.

It should be noted that Will Stevens, Roy Davis, and Percy Humphrey all played in the old Ridgefield Band. They were as adept with their musical instruments as with their trowels and mortar boards. This fine musical organization later became known as the Oreneca Band, and was much sought after in this area of Connecticut. They also played several engagements in New York City.

Next door and still going north was a fine two-family house (now 613 Main) owned by Charles "Putty" Stevens. Both the upstairs and the downstairs apartments were excellent.

It seemed that those who lived downstairs stayed longer than those who lived upstairs. Perhaps that was because the downstairs people were generally a bit older whereas the upstairs families were for the most part newlyweds.

I would not hesitate to say that more newly married couples started married life in that fine upstairs apartment than any other in Ridgefield. However, I would not try to name them all as they were just too numerous to mention. Some that come quickly to mind are the Joseph Zwierleins, the Thomas Clarks, the Levio Zandris, the Dick Venuses, the Frank Warners, the Daniel Landons, and the Richard Hoyts.

It was the kind of apartment so sorely needed by young newly married couples in Ridgefield today, and not only because of the rental charges. I know that in 1940 the monthly rent was \$27.50 and that included a garage for my car, a table for my saddle horse, and a chicken house, as well as a fine place for a vegetable garden.

Some years later when my daughter and her husband started their married life in this same comfortable apartment, the rent was more than 10 times as much, with no garage, no stable, and no chicken house.

Downstairs, in the ground floor apartment, lived David W. Workman. a former editor of The Ridgefield Press. He later became some kind of a policeman, perhaps more like a night watchman, for the town.

Mrs. Workman was a peppy little woman who worked very hard for the Red Cross. Mrs. Frederick E. Lewis was the local head of the Red Cross for many years. It was necessary for Mrs. Lewis to visit Mrs. Workman on many occasions. Sometimes when she made these visits

she drove a beautiful team of four little black ponies pulling a little black wagon with bright red wheels. As I lived directly across the street as a little boy, my day was made complete when this lovely lady came down the street driving her spirited little black ponies.

When the Workmans moved to Catoonah Street, John and Teresa Gunn moved in and lived there for many years. The Gunns must have outlasted 10 or a dozen of the upstairs newlyweds.

Next door lived the Rowland Gilbert family. Rollie also played (trombone) in the old Ridgefield Band. He was the cashier and I think, the trust officer, for many years in the Ridgefield Savings Bank.

At one time they had a cow in the barn at the rear of the property and this was a real attraction to a young boy with an interest in farm animals. The Gilberts were an old Ridgefield family. Mrs. Gilbert was a friendly, motherly type person. They were all very nice and very good citizens, typical of the so-called "Connecticut Yankees."

In the mid-30's the Lavatori family moved from Danbury Road to the Gilbert house. Nazzareno (Nany) and Nina and their six children were about as fine a bunch of neighbors as you could find. John, Angelena, Ponziano, Gloria, Margaret, and Gene were the kind of kids you did not mind having next door.

It is interesting to note that all except Margaret and Ponzy have remained in Ridgefield. This does not happen often today.

Nany was a pretty rugged looking man, but his rather rough exterior and deep voice concealed a very kind heart. He was always willing to do someone a favor.

His large, gnarled hands indicated many years of very hard work and when you played cards with him you learned very quickly that he was pretty smart, too. He had been in the ice business with Mario Girolmetti for many years. Now, with the advent of the electric refrigerators, the old ice boxes started to disappear, so Nany had to shift gears, and he became involved in construction with the Vincent Bedini Company.

Nina did not have to shift gears, she had an automatic transmission that was generally in its highest speed. This was a beautiful and most remarkable woman. One would have to see her operate in a kitchen with the traditional large coal stove. The lids would be red hot, the temperature at least 125 degrees and the delightful aroma of her excellent Italian cooking was assurance that all this tremendous effort was worthwhile.

Nina was not the least secretive about her culinary skills as long as one was willing to work hard and endure the unbelievable heat in that kitchen. She quickly took my Marie under her wing and patiently explained the mysteries of raviolis, the chicken cacciatore, and the very finest spaghetti sauce made in America.

Marie was a good pupil and soon became very adept at preparing these fine meals. So now, all these years later, we are still enjoying the best in Italian cooking because of this lovely human being. It is a tribute to her that the restaurant that she and Nany built in front of their home 40 years ago, still carries her name.

Next door lived the George G. Scott family. Mr. and Mrs. Scott had five children, George Jr., Edward, David, Faustina, and Hiram. The only one left in Ridgefield at this time is Hiram and he will soon be moving to Florida.

George G. Scott had operated a painting business and an automobile agency. He was Ridgefield's town clerk for many years and became judge of probate. Somehow he managed to handle both jobs very well. Some felt that this was testimony to the contention that a legal background was not a requirement to hold the office of judge of probate.

We had no lawyer in Ridgefield at the time. It was necessary to hire a Norwalk lawyer, Judge Light, to fill the office of town counsel. Judge Scott's ability to run his office was considered well above average.

We recall that in the mid-20's a fire broke out on the second floor of the Scott residence. Although the fire was very intense, the ever reliable Ridgefield Fire Department arrived very quickly and brought it under control.

During the height of the fire, two men appeared on the porch roof. Achille Bacchiochi and Charles Venus (my father) were holding a hose that appeared rather limp because of a lack of water, as the hydrant had not been fully turned on.

It should be pointed out that water pressure was really not a problem. If this sounds like an "Our Gang Comedy," it is not my intention. However, someone turned the water on full blast—it was thought to be Frank I. Gilbert. The water came through with such force that both men were knocked completely off the roof. Fortunately they landed on the ground without being injured.

Sam Nicholas lived next to the Scotts. He was also an excellent mason as well as a prominent member of the Oreneca Band. By now one must feel that a primary requisite for living on north Main Street would be that you be a mason by trade and also play in the Band. More than likely it was just a matter of "Birds of a Feather Flocking Together."

#4: 'UNCLE DICK' CONTINUES WITH NORTH MAIN STREET

Next to the Nicholas family, in a cute little stucco house, lived Thomas W. Ryan. The house no longer has a stucco exterior as wooden siding was put on in recent years.

Tom Ryan was one of my favorite persons. He was a very peppy and good-natured man, a jolly fellow who did a lot of laughing and that is my favorite exercise. His laugh was not robust, it was not a giggle or a cackle, but it was different from any other I have ever heard. It might be compared to the very unique laugh of our late and very popular Town Clerk Ruth Hurzeler. He could find humor in so many things.

Tom worked for his brother in the James E. Ryan Store. It was a general store where you could find just about anything that you could use in or out of your home. They sold hay and grain, groceries, and clothing, as well as sewing material.

Tom and Jimmie Ryan were two very fine and well-respected gentlemen. They also had some very nice people working in that very homey and very pleasant store. It was located where Trendsetters now has its business.

Louise Pehrson Pettit was a clerk in the store as was Louise Holt, Helen McGlynn Cummings, and Minnie Murphy Pehrson. Edgar Masten Sr. and Arthur Pehrson also worked in the store and made the deliveries.

People did a lot of walking those days. Art Pehrson lived on Ramapoo Road near Mulberry Street and always walked to work. He rarely wore a jacket even in real cold weather. When he walked by our house wearing a sheepskin coat, we always knew it was zero or below.

Tom Ryan also walked to work and when we lived on Main Street he used to pass our house on the way. He would come by with that peppy walk and if I was out in the front yard, he always took the time to smile and say, "Good morning, Dick."

I must have been about five when the first of many nieces and nephews arrived. My sister Frances had cute little twin girls, Jean and Joan. I must have been very impressed by this important event and the next morning when Tom came by with his usual salutation, I quickly informed him that from then on, it would be Uncle Dick. Tom roared laughing and never let me forget this exhibition of self importance. For the rest of his life, he never failed to call me Uncle Dick.

Many of the local farmers brought their produce to the store. Sometimes the produce was sold to the storekeepers and sometimes was used to pay a bill that the farmer may have incurred before the produce was ready for market. It was said that when a farmer brought in a pail full of eggs, Tom could pour the eggs from the pail into a basket without cracking one egg. I never actually saw him perform this feat. However, knowing Tom, I'm sure he could do it.

One of the mysteries of potato farming is the speed with which potato bugs find the young potato plants. It seems as though as soon as the plants come through the soil, the bugs are right there to eat them. I once heard Tom, with a serious expression on his face, tell a farmer that the bugs had a scout stationed on his desk, early each spring, in order to find out who was ordering the seed potatoes.

Those days, people bought flour by the barrel. One time when Tom was taking inventory, he discovered that one barrel was missing. When he was asked what he did about that, Tom explained that he had 16 families who would buy flour by the barrel from him, so he added one barrel of flour to the bill for each of the families and only one complained. We know that he was only joking for he was noted for his honesty.

I often thought that it was a great shame that neither Tom nor Jimmie had any children. They certainly would have made wonderful parents. People like the Ryans are very difficult to replace.

There was an empty lot between Tom Ryan's and his other brother William's. In later years, Will Ryan moved his rather large barn onto this lot and the barn was transformed into a nice little house for Miss Eleanor Burdick.

Miss Burdick was one of our beloved high school teachers for so many years. Besides the many hours that she devoted to the classroom, she found time to direct the many class plays that were staged in the old town hall. It was my good fortune to have the opportunity to appear in several of her plays, especially "Penrod," for the class of 1930.

Will Ryan married Ethel McGlynn and they had three fine daughters, Margaret, Mary, and Katherine. Margaret became Mrs. Peter Carboni, Mary married Robert Wilcox, and Kate is now Mrs. John P. Moore.

Will was the Ryan of the McGlynn & Ryan plumbing business. At one time their store was where DeLuca's Footwear now does business. Will also did picture framing and had very elaborate machinery and tools for making the frames. He loved to pitch pennies or match pennies with me when I was a little kid delivering newspapers. I won quite often and it was quite obvious that he was letting me win.

Later on Will became superintendent of the Ridgefield segment of the Connecticut State Highway Department. It should be said that the state highways in Ridgefield were serviced a whole lot better when we had the road crew domiciled right here in town. Some years ago the crews and the equipment for all the surrounding towns were moved to New Milford. Since that time the service has never been quite the same.

Next to Will Ryan lived George G. Knapp. George was at one time the town clerk for Ridgefield. He also was the proprietor of the old Corner Store at the corner of West Lane and Main Street.

Most important was his ability to play the baritone horn in (you guessed it) the old Ridgefield Band. If you have been keeping track of the musicians along this street you must be aware that in less than one-tenth of a mile, we had the nucleus of a pretty good band.

George was married to Josephine Nicholas. Josie was another well-loved school teacher who is fondly remembered by her former pupils. She moved back up the street to live with her parents when, unfortunately, George died in middle age. One can easily imagine that local boys and girls (mostly girls at that time) who became school teachers, were greatly influenced by their fine teachers, such as Josie and Eleanor, Grace White, Miss Wills, the Boland girls, Ralph and Mary Kasper, and Mr. Holleran, just to name a few.

North Main Street used to end at Will Ryan's house (now Eppoliti's). Some commission or committee, arbitrarily, and without consulting any of the residents in the area, decided to make some changes. People living north of Nina's and north of Joe's Store to the intersection of North Street, suddenly found out, a few years ago, that they no longer lived on Main Street. They had been moved without their knowledge. It would be nice to see this action reversed.

Right after the George Knapp house was another empty lot. The neighborhood kids used it for a playground when it was not being used as a vegetable garden. In the late 30's, Otto and Hilda Kuhlman built a nice little house there. Then there were the Roy Chamberlains and when they moved, the Edward Scotts with their children, Eddie, Jr., Dorothy, and Sidney lived there for several years. Dr. Walter T. Dolan lives there now. He is, of course, a respected and well-known dentist and a 50-year resident of Ridgefield.

Next door were the Charles Birdsalls. Their daughter, Gladys, married Howard Light. Ralph became a pharmacist and worked for George Mignerey in George's drug store where the Yardage Shop is now located.

Ralph moved to Bridgeport and I believe opened his own drug store. He gave me a ride home one day, on the crossbar of his bicycle. As we went down Olcott's hill on Main Street, my foot or pants leg got caught in the front wheel of the bike. The results were disastrous. I wound up with a badly skinned nose and the knees of my pants were shredded.

Ralph's condition was even worse and I think he lost a tooth.

Charley Birdsall was a carpenter par excellence. Like so many of the fine craftsmen that Ridgefield boasted during these years, he probably would be thought of today as being some kind of "fussbudget." However, it is a fact that Ridgefield's tradesmen of this time — the carpenters, plumbers, masons, electricians, painters and general contractors, were for the most part, strictly top grade.

They had to be, as the many wealthy people in our little town demanded the very best. The fine homes that were built in Ridgefield from 1890 to 1940 are a tribute to these excellent mechanics.

This is not to say that houses built before 1890 or after 1940 are inferior. It is just my feeling that they were the best and I'm confident that history will bear out this theory.

Ernest Haight lived next to the Birdsalls. They were another very fine family. Their son, Alden, was an accomplished tinsmith. Their daughter, Dorothy, was a tall and lovely, willowy blonde who was well-liked by all who knew her.

Ernest Jr. was also tall and slender. I would guess that he became an electrician. If so, he no doubt was a real good one.

Ernest Sr. was for many years a member of Ridgefield's Board of Assessors. He was the head assessor for several years. He could be counted on to be very fair in putting an assessed value on your property.

In the middle 20's, Joseph A. Roach built the house next to the Haight's. Joe married May Keefe and they had a cute, little, red-headed daughter, Rose Mary.

Joe was an authentic hero of World War I. While serving in the United States Army, he was blown up by the German Army in a raid at Seicheprey. He received four bullet wounds and eight shrapnel wounds. He was captured while unconscious and imprisoned at Minister, in Westphalia.

Somehow, Joe managed to escape and make it to Holland, 43 miles away. He then crossed over to safety in England.

He was very strong physically and an excellent boxer. His father, Ned, was engaged in the gravestone business and when he died, Joe took over the business. The square, flat-roofed building where he cut and polished the gravestones still stands close to the North Salem Road.

Joe came from a large family, most of whom were plagued by what was commonly called consumption. Today we refer to it as tuberculosis of the lungs. As I was aware of the history of this 'family' problem, I always felt a twinge of sadness when I saw Joe inhaling the dust as he made the engravings on the pieces of granite.

Later, a mask was developed as protection against the dust.

Joe died a relatively young man but is fondly remembered by those who knew him and his fine family.

#5: THE MANY LEARYS OF TITICUS HILL; SHORT-LEGGED ORVILLE SPRAGUE

Just north of Joe Roach's monument works, there was a vacant lot that had a little grove of trees. In the early 30's, Jack Nalley built a very nice stucco house on the lot that is now 53 North Salem Road.

Jack was a very rugged fellow and worked for many years for what is now called The Connecticut Light & Power Co. Like the Connecticut Highway Department, each town had its own crew to maintain the town's service needs. The local crew for electric service consisted of Jack Cranston, the foreman, and Jack Nalley and Charley Baxter, the linemen. (Mr. Baxter's father, D. Crosby Baxter, was the founder of The Ridgefield Press.)

The duties of these men caused them to leave their homes, many times during the night, when a storm disrupted the flow of electricity. It was real dangerous work, but this fine crew was equal to any eventuality.

I seem to remember an instance on the corner of Gilbert Street and Abbott Avenue when on such an occasion, Charley had climbed to the top of a utility pole. While he was making a splice in a broken wire, a second wire made contact. There was a brilliant flash of light and the two Jacks quickly shut off the power and climbed the pole and cut the leather belt that was holding Charley to the pole. He could have been electrocuted and was in real bad shape when they got him down to ground level.

We all thought it was very dramatic but the men made it seem as if it was just part of their work.

Those days the linemen used a metal rod strapped to the inside of each leg. At about their ankle, a large spur protruded. With this device they were able to clamber up the pole to the trouble spot. It seemed that every pole that had seen much service was dotted with little holes from the spikes.

Examination of poles today will not reveal spike marks. Today, in the name of progress, repair work is accomplished either with a power extension ladder or from a cherry-picker type bucket that raises the lineman easily.

One other change is notable. At that time, utility poles were almost exclusively made from chestnut trees. When a pole was replaced, the family living nearest the pole was always happy to have the old pole left behind for use as kindling wood. No other wood split as easily as chestnut. The grain was always perfectly straight and it could be shaved almost paperthin. The crew was always very cooperative and would leave the pole for those who wanted it. Unfortunately, the beautiful chestnut trees are now long gone, although it is said that a new strain of chestnuts has been perfected that are resistant to the disease that once destroyed them.

In the next house lived the Lawrence D. Leary family. Larry was a house painter by trade. His talents were not limited, however. He could paint a portrait and I can recall a beautiful mural that he did of a sunken Italian garden as a backdrop for the stage in the old town hall. He also did a mural at St. Mary's Parish House, now the K of C Home. Somehow through the years this fine work was rather foolishly painted over. We noticed recently that the outline of this mural is beginning to show through the paint.

Larry had an excellent bass voice and he sang in St. Mary's choir and did solo work in many shows, including a minstrel show in which I had a part in 1926. He also did fine work with a quartet.

For many years, Larry was the chancellor of Marquette Council, K of C. This office required one to have the ability to remember, and recite, several extensive charges during degree work. Because of his fine diction, excellent voice, and good memory, Larry was particularly well adapted to this office. He soon became noted for his performances and was much sought after to execute these duties throughout Connecticut.

In the late 20's, the Rev. Michael Brannigan, C.S.Sp., wrote and directed a play, "Bringing Up Father," based on the cartoon of that name. It starred Larry, Mary Creagh, and Fred Claus. They were exceptionally well cast, with Larry as "Jiggs," Mary as "Maggie," and Fred as "Dinty Moore." It was a thoroughly enjoyed, hilarious production.

Larry had a marvelous sense of humor that stood him in good stead when later in life, it was necessary to have one leg amputated near the knee.

One time he was asked how he liked the Titicus neighborhood. Without hesitation he replied, "I have fine neighbors. On one side I have an empty lot. On the other side I have my sister and her family, and the ones across the street give me no trouble at all." He was, of course, directly across the street from the Ridgefield Cemetery.

Whereas many go through a complete personality change after a drink or two (and he sometimes had one or two), Larry always remained good natured. He was always a gentleman.

Lou Barrett and his wife, Agnes Leary Barrett, lived next door. It was the former home of Mr. and Mrs. Patrick Leary, who had come here from England before the turn of the century. They were the parents of Larry, Fred, John, Philip, and Agnes. Pat was an accomplished cornetist and was for several years the bandmaster of (you guessed right again) the old Ridgefield Band. My father once told me that Pat was considered one of the very finest bandmasters in the state. His son Philip was noted for his singing ability, and was as well a fine cornetist. Phil played with the 69th Regiment Band during World War I.

Lou Barrett came from the fine Barrett family in Georgetown. He was a lineman with the local contingent of the telephone company. I believe he was put in charge of the unit when Frank P. Baxter (Charley's brother) was promoted to some other office.

Unfortunately, Lou's lovely wife, Agnes, died at an early age, and Lou and his children moved back to Georgetown.

Fred Leary and his wife, Elizabeth, and their children, Jack, Fred, Jr., Betty, and Winnie, then moved into the old Leary homestead. Fred had been with the 42nd (Rainbow Division) in the war. He saw action in six major operations during more than 18 months in France, and was gassed twice. Pat Leary's fourth son, John, served with the Canadian Army in the war.

Next to the Learys, Orville Sprague lived and operated a machine shop. I guess you could call Orville a midget. He was about four feet, six inches tall, with short arms and very short legs. His legs were quite useless to him for some reason.

He always wore overalls and a little black machinist's cap. I never saw him dressed in a business suit. He wore glasses and had a neatly trimmed mustache.

Orville was definitely not very outgoing and perhaps might be considered unfriendly. This may have been because of his handicaps and appearance. Perhaps it was because some of the kids would occasionally poke fun at him. However, once you made friends with him and gained his confidence, you would find that he was really a very nice little person and quite intelligent.

After many trips to the open door of his shop as a little kid on my way to and from Titicus School, I was finally allowed to come in and watch Orville at work. This was a rare treat and well worth the patience used in gaining access.

Orville had an abundance of agility which he used to its utmost in overcoming his handicaps. His entire shop was designed in such a manner as to afford him a chance to overcome his disadvantages. His machines and a forge, similar to one that a blacksmith would use, were located close to the floor. He had devised a board with four small wheels (similar to that which is used by auto mechanics today). I often wonder if Orville should have patented his little crash board. He would throw himself onto the board and scoot around the shop very quickly.

He was a master mechanic and while the income was from repairing and sharpening lawn mowers, he was adept at all kinds of iron and steel work. He could repair just about any kind of machine. It was an education to watch him put his ingenuity to work.

Because of his inability to walk, he made himself a car that he used to go into town to get his supplies. It was an open buckboard probably no more than six inches off the ground. This would facilitate his getting on and off. It had a small gasoline engine and probably had a top speed of 15 or 16 miles an hour. He built it without any outside assistance and was fiercely proud of his accomplishment. He was allowed to drive his little car on the sidewalk, in deference to his problems. There, of course, was no sidewalk until he got up the hill to Will Ryan's house, and it did not take him very long to reach the top of the hill. He was always careful to give other pedestrians the right of way on the sidewalk.

Orville's living quarters were in the basement of that little brown building that still stands, just before the intersection of New Street with North Salem Road. The stairway posed a real problem, so again using his talents, he cut a large hole in the floor of the shop and installed a large brass pipe such as could be found in the firehouse of the day. It was really something to see him go sailing across the shop on his crash board, fling himself onto the pipe, and disappear in a flash.

For me, probably one of the great attractions in the shop was an old fashioned phonograph. It had a large, funnel-shaped speaker like the one used in the RCA Victor ad with the little white dog. Once you had gained Orville's confidence, he would allow you to listen to some of his precious old records, such as the "Two Black Crows" with Moran and Mack, or an Al Jolson record.

My favorite was "The Little Old Ford Rambled Right Along." The words went something like this:

*The little old Ford rambled right along.
It went around a corner and bumped in a mule.
And the gol darned mule began to kick like a fool,
But the little old Ford rambled right along.
We went down the highway and got a flat tire,
So we stopped right there and bound it up with wire,
And the little old Ford rambled right along.*

Fortified with such melodious gems as that, we were now ready to proceed to the next building, Titicus School. Here we would tackle the monumental problems that all second graders must face.

If nothing else, one could learn from Orville Sprague that most problems can be overcome, if one will only put one's mind to it.

#6: TITICUS SCHOOL IN THE 20'S

Titicus School, now the American Legion Hall, is a place that I will always look on with affection. This little old schoolhouse filled the educational needs of a very nice section of Ridgefield for many years.

It has three rooms and could handle first, second and third grades very nicely. However, there were occasions when, because of classroom shortages, it was necessary to accommodate a

fourth grade. When such a problem arose, first and second grades remained as is and third and fourth grades were combined. Such an occasion occurred in 1924. For that reason I was able to spend four pleasant years in this friendly little institution.

Remember your first day of school? For me, as with most kids, it was an excruciating experience. I had been to kindergarten and mostly because of the kindness of Miss Mabel Cleves and her able assistant, Miss Mabel Nickerson, I made it through. Kindergarten was somewhat new in the land and Ridgefield had been a pioneer in this field. Probably no one else in my family had been fortunate enough to experience this luxurious preparation for formal schooling.

However, Sept. 7, 1920, arrived, and now the real thing must be encountered. As the youngest of nine children, I had been adequately informed of the terrors that awaited me in first grade. After such preparation, to say that I was reluctant to make my first appearance would be an understatement.

To my dear sister Mary fell the dubious honor of escorting me on that fateful day. That she was successful in delivering me to the first grade teacher was, in a great measure, due to the fact that it was downhill most of the way to school. I must have been an awful drag, but Mary was determined.

My first teacher was Elizabeth (Bess) Boland. Bess taught first grade, Miss Mildred Kane taught second grade and Mary (McGlynn) Kasper taught third grade and fourth grade when called upon to do so. I'm not sure about Miss Kane, but Bess still lives at 65 West Lane with her brother Bill. Mary lives in Florida with her husband, Ralph Kasper, who is also a former and very fine teacher.

These teachers took their chosen profession very seriously. They really felt that they must drill some knowledge into their pupils' heads. If the pupils did not appreciate the zeal which these fine ladies applied to the task of teaching young people — some of whom really did not have any interest in learning — they must have had second thoughts about it later in life.

Somehow the teachers who were a little tough, those who were insistent on getting their points across and their meanings understood, seem to be the best remembered, and with considerable gratitude.

Whereas the teachers mentioned taught at Titicus during the early 20's, there were many others, before and after, who labored in the vineyards of this little seat of learning. Some, but by no means all, of these dedicated women were Anna (Claus) Riley, Elizabeth (O'Shea) Lown, Agnes (Fisher) Peatt, Mary (Moylan) Mulvaney, Lucille Nicholas, Katherine O'Hearn, and Mary Regan. It is interesting to note that Mary Regan's Aunt Helena taught at Titicus back before the turn of the century. She also taught at Limestone (now the home of the Andrew Moore family), and at West Mountain. The West Mountain School still stands. It has been altered in many ways and has served as a laundry as well as a dog kennel.

Helena's parents came from Ireland in 1860, as a result of the potato famine and settled in Ridgebury on the site of the present firehouse. It was this Regan family after whom Regan Road was named. My good wife, Marie, is a descendant of this fine family.

I have heard the story of how Helena, at age 16, walked all the way from her Ridgebury home to the Peter Parley House on High Ridge. In this wonderful old house, now the home of Preston R. Bassett, lived William O. Seymour. Mr. Seymour, a much-respected teacher, conducted a school at his home. He interviewed those who aspired to the teaching profession and

decided whether or not they possessed the necessary talents to conduct their classroom duties. Apparently Helena received his approval.

The Regans had a cousin in Ridgebury named Jeremiah Desmond. He had purchased a house from Col. Nehemiah Keeler. Col. Keeler had built the house which still stands and is considered one of the oldest homes in Ridgefield.

There were very few modern conveniences at Titicus School. It did have running water. Not hot, just cold.

There was no central heating system. Each room had a rather large pot-bellied stove. Later on a hot-air furnace was installed, but still no hot running water.

On real cold winter days, the old pot-bellied stoves would turn red hot, as they were filled to capacity with wood. They could have burned coal but for some reason, perhaps the economy, only wood was used. This meant that the first one to arrive in the morning must start the wood fire. One can only speculate on the temperature on cold winter mornings, in rooms that had not had the benefit of any heat during the night.

During the day, the fire was fed by pupils who made numerous trips to the cellar where the wood was stored. There was considerable competition among the boys in class for the privilege of making the descent to the wood pile.

I can recall an instance when Lawrence Leary and I were going down the old rickety cellar stairs when he lost his footing. He really had a very bad fall and struck the back of his head on a sharp stone in the cellar wall. It left a scar more than an inch long on which the hair never grew again. More than 50 years later, as I was walking behind Lawrence, I noticed the little spot and asked if he remembered how he got it. His reply was that since it was not visible to him, he had actually forgotten it. However, after having it brought to his attention, he quickly recalled the incident.

Among the missing modern conveniences were the inside boys and girls rooms. They were substituted for by two little outhouses, strategically located on the southerly border of the tiny playground. Permission for their use, during class, almost required an act of Congress. Because of this fact several embarrassing happenings occurred. As some of the victims are still around, they will not be described.

Somehow we learned to look forward to going to school. This was perhaps promoted by the friendships made with the other students. Another motivating factor could have been the mothers who made sure their little darlings made it to school, come hell or high water. The reason for missing school had better be a real good one.

My dear mother happened to be one who believed in some of the homespun remedies for minor ailments. An infected finger, the result of a pulled quick or whatever, called for a poultice of bread and milk. The wondrous drawing power of this concoction was somewhat offset by the less than delightful aroma of the milk as it soured. If you were unfortunate enough to have the croup, a tiny drop of kerosene was deposited in the throat with a feather.

I was prone to a malady called swollen glands. This called for a piece of salt pork, applied to each side of the neck and tied in place by string, and off to school I went. To be sure this remedy reduced the swelling and the soreness. However, as the schoolroom warmed up, or if your seat was near the pot-bellied stove, the result was a terrible itching. The cure was worse than the ailment.

#7: SWEET LORRAINE'S WATCH AND GAMES KIDS PLAYED

The Ridgefield school system of the 1920's embraced the noble aims of the League of Nations. Students were accepted from Georgetown, Redding, Wilton, and even South Salem.

At Titicus School I was strongly attracted to a girl from Redding. When I was in first grade, she was in second. She must have been my first girlfriend. Of course, she did not know this. If you were going to be one of the boys, you'd better not be caught looking at any of the girls.

Aside from being very pretty, Lorraine Goeppler had several other attributes. She was very smart. Her father owned and operated a cider mill on the corner of Topstone Road and Simpaug Turnpike. She also had a wrist watch, which was probably the envy of the entire student body. It must have been the very first wrist watch that I had ever seen. I would have to say that it probably was the only wrist watch in the whole school. It is very doubtful that even the teachers had one.

At age five, her beauty may not have attracted me. At that age the cider mill would not have been a factor. Neither would her fine intellect. Therefore, it must have been the wrist watch. I have not seen Lorraine since Titicus School, but I will bet that when they wrote the song, "Sweet Lorraine," it must have been about her. [Editor's note: Lorraine Nina Goeppler lived in Redding many years and, in 1974 at the age of 59, she married Carl A. Carlson, who was 76. They lived in Westport for a while. She died in 2005 at the age of 90.)

At Titicus we did not have a gymnasium. The little school yard was not even large enough for a softball game, let alone regular baseball. We settled for games for which we had the room. These would be Keeley-Over, where a soft rubber ball would be thrown over the roof of the school house, caught by one of the opposing team before he could cross by the front door of the school. We also enjoyed Statue and the traditional games of Tag and Hopscotch.

The big favorite, at least among the boys, was Duck on the Rock. A large rock protruded from the ground on the south side of the school near the two outhouses. The rock was probably two feet high and six or seven feet long, above ground. A smaller stone (duck) was placed on the large rock. A line was made on the ground some 10 to 15 feet in front of the rock and the contestants then from the line attempted to knock off the duck with another stone at the agreed distance.

This was a rather dangerous game and I still have some scars to prove it. Whereas the legs of the participants took a real beating, the nearby outhouses were not overlooked especially when they were occupied at the time. At such a time, the accuracy, even of the better players, became very erratic and certainly highly questionable.

It should be revealed that back in those days, if you did not earn a passing mark, you stayed in that particular grade until you did. This caused a rather conspicuous gap in the ages of some of the students. We had one fellow, who will be unnamed, who must have been at least 13 or 14 and still in the third grade. He always wore overalls to school and they were generally held up by one strap. Many times he made his appearance without shoes. The younger kids were fascinated by the fact that he chewed tobacco in class.

There was a large knot-hole in the floor at about the center of the classroom. He was pretty good at ridding himself of the tobacco juice and with unerring accuracy he would hit the knot-hole plumb center, time after time.

Each year class pictures were taken. At the time we did not notice it or give it any thought, but in first and second grades, the boys were grouped in one picture and the girls in another. When we got all grown up and entered third grade the school authorities must have felt that we were sufficiently advanced in the ways of the world to have the girls and boys grouped together in the class pictures.

I will always have a feeling of gratitude toward the little school and its fine teachers. There was a closeness among the students that was easily recognized. It was with considerable reluctance that we had to leave to attend fifth grade at what was referred to as the Big School, or Center School, or Benjamin Franklin Elementary School, which later became Ridgefield High School and is now Boehringer-Ingelheim.

The Titicus neighborhood was always quite active and in the late 20's a Parent Teacher Association was organized. It remained a forceful, lively group for several years after the little school closed its door for the last time. In fact in the late 30's, when I had finished my formal schooling, it was my privilege to play the lead in a play, "The Clay Is The Thing," for the benefit of the Titicus P.T.A.

Speaking of P.T.A.'s, Ann Landers recently published a letter from a woman who complained about the fact that at age 41, she was the oldest member of the P.T.A. I'm not sure if my mother ever belonged to a P.T.A. If she did, no doubt she would have been the oldest as she was 45 when I was born.

Additions had been made to the Big School and consolidation was the name of the game at the time, so little old Titicus School was closed in 1939 along with other little schools. As a result, a lot of young people missed some great experiences and a pretty good foundation in education. I am looking forward to seeing some of my first grade classmates at the 50th reunion of the 1932 graduating class of Ridgefield High School later this year.

#8: CARETAKER CURLEY AND CONSTABLE JAP

It took us two columns to cover the little old Titicus School and we will not do any more on it at this time. However, since reference was made to the many fine teachers who taught there, I asked my sister Frances, a teacher for many years, why she had never taught at Titicus. Her answer was that she had been fortunate enough to get a teaching job at the big school on East Ridge, which had just been completed at the time.

Frances had graduated from Norwalk High School as Ridgefield did not have a high school at that time. Like so many other students from Ridgefield, she made the trip to Norwalk each day by railroad train. She then proceeded to graduate from Danbury Normal School, now WestConn. This would have been in the middle teens, as World War I was starting.

It was the custom at the time to allow normal school students to act as substitute teachers during emergency periods. It was great training for the student teachers and provided much needed assistance to a very limited teaching force.

At one time, while still a student, Frances was assigned as a substitute teacher for several weeks at the West Mountain School. People have asked where this was located. It still

stands near the highway on Dr. Patrick Neligan's property, just south of the Congregation of Notre Dame.

Frances told me that her assignment happened to be during the winter months. It turned out to be one of those winters when we had a lot of snow. She had to walk to school and when the snow was deep, it was necessary for her to hire a taxi. The taxi appeared in the form of a horse and wagon from Whitlock's livery stable, which was located on Danbury Road where Ridge Bowl now operates.

The horse was driven by Arthur Whitlock and the charge, one way, was one dollar. Since the pay for the teacher was only \$1.75 per day, a ride both ways would be a losing proposition. Therefore, though it was dark night many times when she arrived home, the return trip was made on foot. As Frances said, "At least the return trip was all down hill."

Now, back to North Salem Road.

Just north of Titicus School was a cute little house which in the 20's was known as the "little red onion." The reason for the name is not very clear but I do believe that at one time it was painted red. At any rate, it was the home of Thomas Curley and still stands next to what is now the American Legion Hall.

Tom was one of the strongest men I have ever known. Some of the others would be my own father, Charlie Venus, and Harry Thomas and Edgar Masten. Unfortunately, Tom was involved in a railroad accident in which his right leg was severed at the knee. He was fitted with a wooden leg, which was kept in place by a series of leather straps.

Tom's powerful build was accented by his massive shoulders. Thankfully, he was a very good natured man, except after imbibing spirits, but that is part of another story. He enjoyed having kids around and delighted in inviting them to pinch him on the leg (the wooden one of course). Their futile attempts always caused him to roar with laughter.

This man's strong physical appearance was topped with an equally strong countenance that possessed a striking resemblance to that of President Ulysses S. Grant. As he grew older and more limited in his activities, Tom took a job with the Village Improvement Society. This fine group of citizens were very interested in the appearance of Ridgefield and worked diligently in keeping it beautiful.

Tom's duties were to mow and keep presentable, the little triangles at the entrance of various streets. He also picked up papers and other trash that may have been "accidentally" deposited on the streets.

He had a horse which he called "Sparky." No doubt he was named after "Spark Plug," the old race horse that belonged to "Barney Google" of comic strip fame. Tom and Sparky made a wonderful team and apparently understood each other very well.

Tom provided himself with a long pole that had a spike protruding from the business end. Armed with this simple, but unique tool, he could spear the papers as he drove along, without ever leaving his wagon.

The question most asked of Tom was, "How's business?" His stock answer, always given with a big smile, was, "Picking up."

Next to the "Little Red Onion" and moving north is a little, very old building which was at one time used in the manufacture of soft hats. It is now the home of Grace Cypher but in the period we are covering, it was the home of Jasper Walker.

Now, I have been accused of saying only nice things about the people of whom I write. Actually it is really much easier to say something nice and then these were very nice people. However, to tell it like it really was, requires some restraint, and still be charitable.

Jasper, or Jap, as he was usually called, was somewhat different and he was not noted for being good natured. To be sure, Jap did suffer considerable torment from the boys in the neighborhood. They delighted in annoying him by throwing stones at a bell that hung at the entrance to the cemetery, near Settlers Rock, across the street. The sound of the bell never failed to bring Jap, sailing out his front door with a shotgun in his hand. Either he was a very poor shot, or else he never really took careful aim, as no one was ever injured. That bell has been missing from the little archway where it hung for many years.

Jap was a constable at a time when this office carried with it some responsibility for keeping the peace. He even wore a uniform, which he provided for himself. It was always referred to as a Charles Williams uniform. Charles Williams was a mail order firm that was similar to Sears, Roebuck store. At any rate, it looked rather authentic to the young people of the day.

Lake Mamanasco, or Birch Pond, as we called it, was a very popular place to swim. The Dixon side (east side) was owned by C.P. Dixon and drew the most swimmers at the time. As the number of swimmers increased, the Dixons felt it necessary to provide some protection for their property and hired Jap to take care of this matter.

On one occasion when Jap was making his presence felt in a matter that some of the young people did not appreciate, they picked him up and threw him, Charles Williams uniform and all, into the lake. For some time thereafter, Jap was considerably more tolerant of the young swimmers.

As the west side of the lake began to develop and the Peatt enterprises grew, interest in the Dixon side seemed to decline and Jap devoted more time to his painting trade. He painted wagons in the barn at the rear of his home and was good at striping. That is applying the little stripes to the vehicles that gave them a dressed-up appearance.

Jap had a mahogany bay driving horse. The horse's name will have to go unmentioned as the only name that Jap ever called him has been ruled unprintable by my editor. We have long been of the opinion that horses and dogs generally reflect a disposition that is closely related to their masters. Jap's horse would strike with his front legs and kick with his back legs. If anyone came close enough for him to reach with his mouth, his bite was a serious attempt to dismember that individual.

Occasionally, the horse would be seen hitched to the wagon and standing in front of the house. When Jap was ready he would come out, climb into the wagon, crack the horse with a whip and they would go tearing up Titicus Hill. On one such occasion, one of the boys who had a thorough knowledge of horses and their harness, gave a demonstration of his ability. He quietly crossed the street from the cemetery and proceeded to unhook the traces and the hold-back straps of the harness. The horse was now entirely free of the wagon. However, to all appearances, he was still hitched to the wagon. Jap came out and went through his usual ritual. He cracked the horse who then charged ahead, pulling Jap right over the dashboard, much to the delight of several boys who were viewing the proceedings safely from their vantage points behind the gravestones.

Jap finally got rid of the horse and bought himself an auto. It was a real flashy, tan-colored Pontiac coupe and had a rumble seat. Like several of the older drivers at the time, he never learned the complete operation of the vehicle and was content with the fact that the car was moving, whether in the proper gear or not. It seemed that he never actually got out of first gear and while the motor roared at a speed that would normally have propelled the car at 60 miles per hour, he probably never exceeded 15 or 20. He drove with a very rigid grip on the steering wheel, looking neither to the right nor the left, and people soon learned to keep out of his way as he drove into town.

Grace Cypher's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Fred Williams, took care of Jap in his later years. They must have had considerable patience. Mrs. probably learned that as is a school teacher. She taught at the original Scotland School.

#9: THE TITICUS FLOOD

In September 1868 [see note at end], a flood occurred in Titicus. It did not have an effect on the town as a whole, but was a very serious matter to those that were involved.

The Searles brothers had built a dam for the Gilbert brothers and it created New Pond. The purpose of the dam was to store water for the Gilberts' mill farther north in Titicus.

New Pond was just west of New Street, high above Titicus center. It was not very deep except near the dam, but it covered a considerable area. It was fed mostly by rain water and some springs along the way from Peaceable Street, and then north through Bryon Park. The water finally formed a little stream that flowed under Barry Avenue, and then north to Ramapoo Road, under which it traveled, and thence to the pond itself.

At the time in question, rain had been falling for several days and the Gilberts were worried about the strength of their dam. Residents had predicted that the pond would never fill with water. Perhaps because of this feeling, the builders may not have concentrated on making it extra strong.

At any rate, the rains caused the water to spill over the dam to a considerable degree. William Gilbert visited the dam to see how it was standing the pressure from the rain water. He must have had a premonition of things to come.

Rockwell's "History of Ridgefield" states that there was a tremendous rock on the west side of the dam. The Searles brothers had used oxen to draw the rock in and place it in the dam. This, they felt, would be the strongest part of the dam.

After completing his inspection, William was standing on this rock when he felt it teeter. He jumped off to safety, just as the rock dislodged itself and then the whole dam disintegrated. That he was fortunate can be determined from the devastation caused by the wall of water four or five-feet high that inundated the valley.

A barn at the rear of the Edmonds home (now the residence of Grace Cypher), and D.H. Valden's office were swept away. It is interesting to note that no mention of any damage to the Titicus bridge is made in Rockwell's account of the flood. We would have to assume that the bridge was able to withstand the onslaught of the raging waters. The bridge was one of several that were to be destroyed 87 years later in the great flood of 1955.

Many interesting incidents were described, such as how Mrs. Charles Smith was in her basement kitchen, doing her baking. She was saved when her daughter called her to come

upstairs. As she reached the very top step, the steps were washed away. When the flood had subsided, the Smiths' basement was a shambles. However, a basket of eggs that had been raised by the waters, sought a haven on the top step and whereas the rest of the stairs were gone, the basket of eggs was intact. Not one egg was broken.

One of the Smith boys saved a horse that was tied to a hitching post. He saw the flood coming, raced out and untied the horse just in time to prevent him from drowning.

These happenings may have a slightly humorous tinge, 114 years later, but at the time they must have been terrifying.

We have departed the 20's briefly, in order to inform those who may not have known of the great Titicus flood. It should be noted that some years ago, New Pond disappeared. Someone opened the dam and drained the pond that we had fun swimming in and skating on. There is now just a little brook flowing through where the pond used to be. It did have some fish, mostly carp, and many bullfrogs which seemed to thrive in its very muddy waters.

The pond did serve as a place to harvest ice in the cold winters. Joseph Hibbart used to cut ice there. This was quite an operation. The ice was scored into blocks with a gasoline powered saw drawn by one of Hibbart's mules.

If a mule went through the ice, a lasso was thrown around his neck and he was pulled out by another mule. It was said that a mule or two was lost there and left in the water. We never could confirm this and felt it was told in an effort to keep us from swimming there.

As far as the kids were concerned, the pond's greatest contribution was in providing an excellent place to skate. Many real, good hockey games were played on the old pond. In the evenings, great crowds of people came and skated by the light of huge bonfires that were fed, on occasion, by old automobile tires. This, of course, was before the era of environmental controls.

Back to the 20's, and the house just north of Jasper Walker, on the corner of North Salem Road and Saw Mill Hill Road, where lived Ernest Stash and his family. Between these two houses is where the water from New Pond joined that of the little tributary that carried water down from Upper Pond and Robert's Pond. The waters from this gentle brook had at one time powered the saw mill, at the top of the hill, from which the road got its name. Together, they formed the Titicus river that flowed north to the Croton, in New York State, after crossing North Salem Road at this point.

Ernie Stash was a chauffeur for Robert P. Scripps (of the newspaper family), who had purchased the Reggie Lewis estate and farm on South Salem Road. The main house on this estate is now the home of the Harry Neumann family.

Ernie was a very energetic person. He was also very athletic and was considered an excellent amateur wrestler. The K of C, during this period, sponsored amateur boxing and wrestling bouts, first in the old Town Hall auditorium and then in the new Italian-American Hall on Prospect Street. Ernie Stash appeared in several of these contests and always gave a good account of himself.

Ernie was also an avid hunter and I enjoyed many excursions into the woods at night, coon hunting with him and my brother Jack. He was always fun to be with and had an excellent sense of humor. He was a man of many talents, one of which was his ability to perform with the violin.

During this period, the fire departments in the area engaged in pinochle tournaments. For additional entertainment, I appeared as a little kid, many times, with my harmonica. The Danbury Fire Department had a little old fellow named Moxie Hahn who played terrific piano, in the style of Fats Waller. We were always happy when Ernie would join us with his violin. When he knocked at the door for admission, he always announced that the “musikan” had arrived.

Together we had loads of fun. Apparently the Danbury firemen appreciated the entertainment and on one such occasion presented me with a huge harmonica. It was actually eight different harmonicas joined together, with four on each side. This great musical piece was made by the M. Hohner Co. and came in a case like a violin. I’m sure their intentions were of the best and I was most grateful for this fine gift, which must have cost a small fortune. However, I was just a little fellow and could hardly lift the instrument, let alone play it.

There was never a dull moment when Ernie Stash was around and people always seemed to enjoy his company. Coon hunting is not really a very exciting sport, yet when Ernie was along, something of interest was bound to happen.

Some of the young ladies from the wealthy families used to like to go coon hunting with us. I can remember several occasions when Joan Lusk or Alice Doubleday would go along. It must have been Ernie’s charisma that attracted them.

One morning Mrs. Stash called me and asked me to find some kittens that had been born under her kitchen floor. For some reason there was no cellar under the kitchen, perhaps because of the proximity of the Titicus River.

At any rate it was necessary to take up a few boards in the kitchen floor. I crawled in and located the kittens, but could not back out. Ernie came home for lunch and Mrs. Stash explained to Ernie that I was stuck under the floor.

In typical fashion he allowed me to languish in the confines of the crawl space while he asked me how many kittens there were, their color, how big they were, the color of their eyes, etc. Finally after having his fun he grabbed me by the heels and pulled me, and the kittens, out. He roared with laughter, but it was some time before I could join him in enjoying the humor of the situation.

In the early 30’s the baby son of Charles A. Lindbergh was kidnapped. As so often happens, the publicity surrounding this tragic event put ideas in the minds of other people. The Scripps family received some kind of warning, packed some of their belongings and left for the West.

Of course the Stashes and their two little girls accompanied them and never returned. I never saw Ernie again, but often think of the great fun that we enjoyed together.

#10: THE SPY IN THE HOWE HOUSE; MUGSY’S FAMOUS NIGHTSTICK

Just across the Titicus Bridge, on the left going north, stands one of the older houses in Ridgefield. The outward appearance of this fine old house has changed somewhat through the years. The front porch was removed several years ago. However, the interior still retains the quiet charm that such old homes seem to exude in abundance.

Each of the inner doors swing on the original, extra large, hinges that must have been made to last forever. The great stone fireplace is original and repairs made since it was built were

done in such a fashion as not to change its character. The woodwork and the wide floor boards are a joy to those who love the old homes.

The present owners, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Dunleavy, purchased this lovely home some 20 years ago from the late Ernest Conti, who was Mrs. Dunleavy's father. Ernest had purchased the house from Ellsworth E. Russell in 1922, during the period this column has been covering. In a search of the attic, Ernest discovered two fine Revolutionary War muskets. Mrs. Dunleavy still has one of the muskets and it is in mint condition.

For many years it was believed that this house was built in the mid 1700's by Epenetus Howe. However, when writing his Ridgefield in Review, Silvio Bedini visited the house with a Mr. and Mrs. Nelson. Mrs. Nelson was a direct descendant of Epenetus Howe and had in her possession a hat, which she claimed had been made in this house.

This group made a tour of the house and after carefully examining the structure, expressed the feeling that it was actually built in 1725, which would have been before the arrival of the Howes.

At any rate, Rockwell's History of Ridgefield states that Epenetus Howe lived in the house during the Battle of Ridgefield. There is a story of how the British soldiers, retreating down North Salem Road after burning Danbury, had reason to suspect that a spy was hiding in the Howe residence.

One of the soldiers attempted to enter the house but found all of the doors were barricaded. He then attempted to gain entry through a window but someone inside used a butcher knife on the soldier's fingers with such effectiveness as to discourage further attempts at breaking in.

It was felt that the house would surely have been burned by the British except that at this point in the battle, the Americans were fighting with such intensity that General Tryon felt it best to move on as quickly as possible.

The old house had several owners during its long history. Jabez Mix Gilbert acquired it from the Howe family. Jabez was very active in the Methodist Church and held classes for the church, in his home from 1807 to 1826. He was known as "Uncle Mix" and was noted for his generosity. He founded the tannery and made it a very successful business.

He was known to share his success by loading his wagon with meats and groceries and delivering these foods to the less-fortunate people in the area. Therefore, it can be clearly seen that Ridgefield always had some very nice people, even from the beginning.

Back again to the 1920's. Just north of the Ernest Contis' was an open field on which Clifford Bassett built the house that now stands there. Next came the little house that stands close to the road and where Madelyn Moses lived and then Margaret Giddings and later the Robert Lincolns. Mrs. Lincoln was the former Margaret Nash, a sister of Karl and a classmate of mine.

The next house was a home for many different families. Some that we quickly remember were the Patrick Potters, the Otto Jespersens, the Archie Cogswells, and the Robert Bells. The Mario Frullas live there now and have lived there for some time. Mario, better known as "Mugsy," is a very well known personality.

Mugsy has been a member of the Ridgefield Fire Department for many years, serving both as a volunteer and as a paid fireman. He also built up many credits as a member of the Ridgefield Police Department.

During Mugsy's tenure as one of Ridgefield's finest, he was assigned for the most part to the foot patrol in the business area of the village. Without a car, or even a motorcycle, Mugsy made his rounds and vandalism was minimal and serious crime was practically non-existent.

Two theories have been put forth to explain his ability to keep the peace. One was that his engaging personality and his unusual rapport with the youth of the town was the cause for his success. The other places an even greater importance on Mugsy's ability to use with effectiveness, the rather large nightstick which he carried.

Whatever the reason, he is generally credited with doing a fine job. He now applies the same zeal to making Ridgefield's golf course the best in this area.

One family that lived in the Frulla house back in the 20's, provided us with many laughs. Before going to Titicus school in the morning, we would walk up to this house to hear Mrs. — getting Mr. — up to go to work.

She would call up the stairs, "Henry, it's time to get up."

He would answer with a question, "Is it raining?"

Mrs. — would say "no."

Henry would then say, "Well, then I am sick."

One way or another he was not going to work that day.

In the pretty yellow house lived the Charles Bennetts and next to them the Henry Crepets. As you can see, we are moving much faster along here. This is of course, because the houses were fewer at the time and much farther apart. In fact, there were no more houses until you passed Barrack Hill Road.

In the next house lived the George Hubers and their children, Clarence, George Jr., and Mary. Mary still lives in Ridgefield and she is one person who would not need to put a return address on a letter. Her beautiful hand writing is so distinctive that anyone would know at a glance who the sender was.

Mr. Huber had snow white hair and drove a pair of gray mares. When plowing or mowing a field, he really made a great picture. In the mid 20's he acquired an auto. Of course it was a Dodge and came from George Tator's. The story was that the first time he drove the car, he made out very well until he got back to the barn. As he had done for so many years, he drove in and then hollered "Whoa." The new Dodge paid no attention and just went right on.

Because of my great love for horses, I was strongly attracted to the blacksmith shop. My newspaper route brought me to the shop each afternoon. However, many times I was able to find an excuse to go there in the morning. The shop was located then where the Thrift Shop is now. I used to listen to the teamsters extolling the virtues or listing the faults of this horse or that mare and wondered about the difference.

On one occasion there were about a dozen horses in the shop waiting to be shod. As usual the drivers were sitting around reading the newspaper or swapping stories. I picked this particular time to ask Harry Thomas, the blacksmith, how to tell the difference between a horse and a mare.

I had great admiration for this very fine man and will write more about him later. On this day, Harry looked at me and apparently felt that I was not yet ready for a "Birds & Bees" lecture. He then told me how it was possible to tell a mare from a horse by examining their teeth. This

was at least partly true, providing one had a lot more knowledge about horses than I possessed at the time.

One thing I was sure of and that was that George Huber had a pair of mares. They happened to be with the other horses in the shop so I approached them first. I carefully examined the teeth of each mare for several minutes and then went down the entire line examining each horse in turn.

When my inspection was completed, I stood before the group and announced that they must all be mares as they looked the same. This proclamation must have had a sensational effect as two of the drivers fell out of their chairs and Harry dropped his hammer on his foot.

#11: 'SKELETON FARM' AND THE BONES IN THE SAND

Just north of the Huber homestead, on North Salem Road, and across from Wooster Street, was a farm, owned by Elijah E. Light. Its qualifications as a farm may be questioned, but Elijah did have some cows, horses, and chickens. By today's standards in Ridgefield, that would be considered a well-stocked farm.

There was a feeling that the principal product of this particular farm was the boarders that lived there. In the early twenties, there seemed to be a growing need for lodging for workers who were migrating to our rapidly developing town.

Katherine Wetfingfeld reminded me that during this time, the farm was known as "skeleton farm." This name seemed to relate to the appearance of the boarders who had to contend with the frugality of the operators and the meals they furnished.

In 1922 the Wetfingfelds bought the farm and lived there for many years. It was about this time that North Salem Road was being transformed from a plain, graveled roadway to the asphalt surface that it now has. The asphalt surface extended from the corner of North Salem Road and North Street to a point just north of Farrar Lane. A few years later, the asphalt surface was spread north to the New York State line.

There was a rather pretentious driveway to the front of the farm house. During the construction work, one half of the driveway was eliminated. Entrance and exit have since been made by the remaining half of the road bed.

The property changed hands several times after the Wetfingfeld family moved to Ridgefield Lakes. In recent years, roads such as Settler's Lane have appeared and one of the town's very nice developments came into being.

Just north of this farm on the corner of Tackora Trail, a monument marks the spot where General David Wooster was fatally wounded. As everyone knows, this unfortunate incident occurred on April 27, 1777, as General Wooster and his Continental troops were fighting a delaying action against a large body of British and Hessian troops under the command of British General William Tryon.

Just beyond Tackora Trail, and still on North Salem Road, in the 20's, was one of the few gas pumps to be located on a main highway in Ridgefield. Alongside was a tiny store where one could purchase a number of items, such as candy, cigarettes, etc. This little roadside business was operated by William Bouton.

We never knew how Bill ever got permission to locate a gas pump on this corner. However, we do know that once the business closed and the pump was removed, the property returned, to stay, in its former hallowed status.

The Bouton family lived in the house that is still located on a gentle rise to the left and rear of the little roadside stand and gas pump.

Bill was an accomplished machinist and upon the demise of Orville Sprague, he took over and operated the little machine shop on Titicus Hill. This business, which did various repairs, specialized in lawn mower sharpening and repairs. It changed hands several times and finally was moved to Joe Roberts' garage on Roberts Lane. Some of the owners were Alfred Mills, Paul Marconi, Joe McCabe, and Bernie Rogers.

Most people have some little idiosyncrasy and Bill Bouton was no exception. His favorite drink was gin with a milk chaser. It would seem doubtful that many bartenders would be inclined to stock a bottle of milk along with their other wares. However, those who knew Bill were always prepared. I guess if a bartender received an order for gin and milk today, he would call for the men in white coats.

The Bouton family later moved to the rather large house that stands close to the highway and just north of where the gas pump was located. This is another of the many much-lived-in houses in Ridgefield. At times this has been a two-family house. My mother-in-law told me that she lived in this house about the turn of the century.

We are going so fast now that we almost missed a small structure, located between the last two houses mentioned. This building has all the appearances of a chicken house. It was not more than 20 feet square. It was at least 200 feet back from the highway, on an elevated foundation that arose at least five and probably six feet above ground.

It had no porch. It had few windows. It had a very small front door. Entrance and exit were accomplished by the use of a plank which ran from ground level up to the front door. The plank was studded with little boards that ran across its surface. This was apparently for the purpose of preventing one from slipping on the steep incline. Someone, at some time, started to paint this building a reddish color, but never finished.

There was much speculation as to how the person who lived there negotiated the trip up, and down, the plank. People used to wait in vain for a glimpse of Harry ———'s dexterity in accomplishing this feat. Some felt that he crawled up and down this very unusual walkway, but to my knowledge, no one ever actually saw him do it. The little building disappeared many years ago.

There were no more houses on the left side of North Salem Road, going north, until Sidney Farrar's residence. Sid, of course, was Geraldine's father. He had been a first baseman for the Philadelphia Phillies, before the turn of the century.

One story has it that Miss Farrar, as a little girl, went through the stands at Baker Bowl, after the ball games, picking up tin foil from candy wrappers and cigarette packages. The revenue from the tin foil was said to have paid for the singing lessons that developed that superlative voice.

We asked Miss Farrar one time about the veracity of the story. She laughed heartily, but neither confirmed or denied it.

My own feeling is that though voice experts may have shaped and perfected that wondrous voice, the great strength of it certainly must have come from her father. Sid had a voice that could be heard from his home all the way to Main Street.

Andrew Brady was superintendent on the Farrar estate. Andy had a voice that almost matched Sid's in carrying power. They always came into town together to do their shopping and at times would wind up on the opposite sides of Main Street. It was a real treat to hear the two gentlemen carry on a conversation from either side of the street, just as though they were walking side by side.

Mrs. Mary Olcott bought the estate when Sid passed on. She was a great horsewoman and brought along four fine saddle horses. The barn that had housed a couple of cows was renovated into a beautiful horse stable. The horseman's name was Hobby and to the boys in town, he quickly became known as Hobby Horse.

An interesting sidelight on the Farrar estate comes from Rockwell's *History of Ridgefield*. The story goes that two Hessian soldiers, killed in the battle of Ridgefield, were buried in a sand bank, south of the main house. Dr. Archibald Y. Paddock was having sand removed from the bank sometime around 1874 when the diggers uncovered some bones.

There were two skeletons, lying near each other, side by side. One was almost perfect and was placed on exhibit at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876 by Dr. Paddock.

Someone offered Dr. Paddock \$200 for the skeleton but he refused the offer. Today it probably would be worth a fortune.

#12: TALES OF SCOTLAND AND MAMANASCO

There were open fields between Farrar Lane and the Vincent Bedini home at what is now 447 North Salem Road. Vincent, better known as Jimmie, had purchased this fine old house and the surrounding farmland from the Smith family in the early twenties. Before that the Bedini family lived at Mulford School where Jimmie had been grounds superintendent. He apparently anticipated the closing of the private boys school.

A very enterprising man, Jimmie ran the farm for a while and then decided to do outside work. Among the animals that came with the purchase of the farm were two black draft horses, Frank and Fritz. They were put to good use on the neighboring estates, plowing gardens and fields, mowing fields and hauling sand and gravel. In the winter they plowed snow from the driveways in the area.

Sand and gravel turned out to be important products of the farm. They were found in abundance, especially on the east side of North Salem Road.

Jimmie had a unique lumber-box wagon. The floor of the wagon was made of long, loose but tightly fitting poles. Upon reaching his destination with a load of sand or gravel, he needed only to remove one of the side boards and slide each pole to one side and the wagon was unloaded with a minimum of effort and no shoveling.

This little venture grew into the Vincent Bedini Contracting Co. Jimmie was aided and abetted by his two sons, who at an early age learned the rudiments of various phases of construction. The appeal for this kind of work was apparently stronger in Ferdinand, who later took over the business, than in Silvio. Silvio later became famous as the author of "Ridgefield in Review" and even more famous as a curator at the Smithsonian in Washington.

Trucks had replaced Frank and Fritz and bulldozers had replaced the small farm tractors. The business hummed along until recently when Ferdinand retired and another fine little family operation disappeared. It was all a part of the developing history of Ridgefield.

I would be remiss at this point, if I failed to report an item that is just one of many that are frustrating to postmasters.

The Bedinis had built a new home just south of where they had lived for so many years. The classic old farmhouse was then sold to the N. Donald Edwards family who were then living on Tanton Hill Road. Appropriate recordings were made in the post office delivery records and for several years things went along smoothly.

When the Edwards family bought the former home of Mrs. George Doubleday on Peaceable Street, the records were changed again to reflect this fact. Just a simple little routine change? Yes, except for a very complicating factor. The N. Donald Edwards family, now Peaceable Street, sold their former home to the Donald Edwards family, who had been living on Barrack Hill Road.

Now, if mail came addressed to Donald Edwards at Barrack Hill Road, it was a simple matter to transfer it to North Salem Road. However, if it was addressed to 447 North Salem Road, do you deliver it to that address, or forward it to Peaceable Street? Guessing did not work at all. The renting of post office boxes did help some but it took a concentrated effort by both families to correct this perplexing situation. This little interlude is offered as a change of pace and we will return to the 20's at once.

There were no more buildings on the west side of North Salem Road until you passed Tackora Trail. The most significant thing that happened along this stretch was a barbecue, held by the British troops in the fields on the corner opposite Barlow Mountain Road. The main course was supplied by cattle, which they had commandeered from farms along the way. This was, of course, on April 27, 1777.

Just past Tackora Trail was an important seat of learning. It was the original Scotland School. As in the other rural schools of the time, the population fluctuated. School population in 1849 for the Scotland District was listed as 52. During World War I, there were only a dozen students. However, some very fine people, including the late Joseph Young, matriculated at Scotland. One of the teachers at this little school was Mrs. Fred Williams, mother of Grace Cypher.

It does seem incredible that only 60 years ago, Ridgefield had so many little rural schools. They were staffed by very dedicated, but grossly underpaid teachers. Besides Center School there were a dozen others that turned out many first-class citizens.

Next to Scotland School lived the Robert Hutchinson family. Robert Sr. was superintendent for the Dixon family. The Hutchinson house is still standing on the corner of Pond Road. It is now the home of the Peter Grommes family. The Hutchinsons had two children, Bob Jr., a classmate of mine, and Estelle. The little school next door had closed so both attended Titicus.

Pond Road was our access to Lake Mamanasco on the Dixon side. The Dixon side being the southeast side of the lake and owned by the C.P. Dixon family as opposed to the Peatt side on the northwestern side of the lake. The Peatt side was owned for the most part by William Peatt Sr., who was at that time developing the property.

In the 20's, the Dixon side, which had a nice little beach and a sandbar, was the popular place to swim. The fact that it was considerably closer had some bearing on its popularity. Especially on the part of those who, like myself, had to walk the three miles from town.

The Dixon beach was very near and in sight of the old grist mill that was erected by Daniel Sherwood in 1716. The old mill was still standing in the 20's.

Further north on the lake were some high and rocky cliffs. It was great sport for the young swimmers, providing they were skilled enough and bold enough and daring enough, to dive off this great ledge. As the water was not very deep at this point, extreme care had to be exercised to avoid a broken neck. Swimmers also had to contend with a very thick growth of weeds just below the surface of the lake. My brother Bill got entangled in these weeds one time and except that Jim Smith happened to be nearby in a boat, he probably would have drowned. Despite the dangers, this place held a great attraction for the more adventurous swimmers.

Another impediment to the high diving sport at Mamanasco was the fact that a repeat performance was difficult because of the height that must be climbed to get back to the top of the ledge. This was solved by the appearance of a large rope, which was attached to one of the trees at the top of the ledge. The rope was allowed to dangle over the cliff and into the water. The boys who were already expert swimmers, soon became adept at the necessary gymnastics. It was really something to see them scale the sides of the ledge.

It should be mentioned that the Dixon family lived in the mansion on Tackora Trail, just south of the old Scotland School. In the late 30's it was sold to George Scalise. In Ridgefield a little later, on Old Stagecoach Road, at "Pork Hollow Farm," lived Westbrook Pegler.

Pegler was a syndicated columnist for several of the big daily newspapers at the time. His column started carrying stories to the effect that Scalise should be confined somewhere, behind bars. He told some pretty bad things about this person whom he had ticketed for a ride up the river.

It would seem that Pegler was successful in his efforts and Scalise was incarcerated.

Philip Hilsenrad, who was said to have had some connection with the owner of the estate, was able to acquire title to the place. He ran it for many years as a hotel. Phil got tired of running the hotel and decided to open an office downtown for the practice of law.

The great place was then purchased by the Jesuit Fathers for a retreat house and named "Manresa." During this period, a beautiful altar was installed in the basement chapel. It was a gift in memory of the father of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis.

Manresa was operated for several years and then faded. It was purchased only a few years ago by the Order of Saint Thomas Aquinas. That order is now operating it as a seminary.

#13: A SAD COW & MISS RICHARDSON AND HER 'FARM'

In the 20's, Pond Road had not been developed as it is today. In fact besides the old grist mill, there was only one house at the bottom of the hill. The house had been built by George Rockwell and stood about 200 feet back from the lake.

There had been a second house, much smaller and much closer to the lake. This one, also built by Mr. Rockwell, disappeared for some reason. There was also a boat house, which stood there for many years.

The first house, which was brown-shingled, is still standing and became the property of the Courtland P. Dixon family. From time to time, this house was unoccupied. When this happened we were allowed to use it for changing into our bathing suits. At other times we used the bushes, near the little beach with its sand bars.

It was said that there were occasions when swimming parties took place in the evening. After dark, it was said further that at some of these parties a place to change one's clothes was not a necessity as bathing suits were not considered a requirement.

About 100 feet south of the beach, there was a little dock, where 10 or 12 boats were tied up. One of the boats (I think it was Tom Ryan's) had a small tank that ran from one side of the boat to the other. It carried about a foot of water and its purpose was to hold fish after they were caught.

One of the boys used to put a bullhead into the holding tank, as it was moored at the dock. When a new kid was initiated into the swimming group, he was required to reach into the tank and take out the bullhead. Only those who have experienced the terrific jolt one could get from the sting of a bullhead, can thoroughly sympathize with the unsuspecting newcomer.

Fishing, skating and boating were some of the things that were enjoyed as well as the swimming at Mamanasco. Francis Martin remembers rowing Isabelle Rockwell and Patricia Ryan Nixon (later to become First Lady) around the lake. Mrs. George L. Rockwell was Pat's father's sister.

One was not considered a first-class swimmer until he could swim non-stop from the Dixon beach to the little Peatt store on the west side. This was quite a swim as the points were not exactly opposite each other. Peatt's was a lot farther north. Some of the boys located some large stones about three or four feet below the surface of the lake, at about its middle. In order to negotiate the trip from one side to the other, the boys would get a breather by appearing to tread water while standing on the friendly stones.

Pond Road, at the time of the Battle of Ridgefield, must have been little more than a trail, or accessway to the old grist mill. One can only imagine it being used by a cow, on the famous day in history, in her frantic efforts to elude capture by some hungry British soldiers.

As the story goes, Tryon's troops were confiscating livestock from the farms in the area. All of this was taking place in the morning before the battle. One cow was so terrified by the Redcoats that she dashed down the hill and into the lake. The poor cow died rather than satisfy the appetites of the invaders.

Going north again from Pond Road and still on the west side of North Salem Road, there were open fields until you reached the corner, opposite the entrance to Sherwood Road. There was Doctor Solley's little farmhouse occupied by the late George Reynolds and his family. The house is still on this corner, as well as the large barn near the road.

There were no more houses until the next sharp corner at the bottom of the hill. There on a gentle slope was a very large and picturesque farmhouse. The setting could have been right out of a Norman Rockwell painting. It is now the home of Al Biagiotti and his family.

During the 20's and for some years later, the Leon Sauves lived in this gracious old farmhouse. Leon was the superintendent on the Anne S. Richardson estate.

Miss Richardson herself lived in this splendid old building while her mansion was being built about 1912. At the rear of the farmhouse was (and still is) a great barn that housed the many animals that were a part of what was known as Mamanasco Farm.

The mansion which overlooked Lake Mamanasco was torn down after Miss Richardson's death just a few years ago. She left that part of her property to Ridgefield for a park. However, like her friend Mrs. Ballard, she had a stipulation in her will that the beautiful mansion be removed. The very substantial and classic stone garage was left standing as a reminder of the elegance that was enjoyed by Miss Richardson and her devoted companion of many years, Miss Edna Schoyer.

Neither of these fine women ever married although Francis Martin says Miss Richardson once had a boyfriend. However, it apparently simmered out and so there were no children to enjoy her expansive and beautiful property.

It is doubtful that anyone would know Anne Richardson's exact height. It is safe to say that it was over six feet. Her great height was accented by the very large hats that she always wore. I would not describe her appearance as formidable, but certainly it was statuesque.

Miss Richardson may have been the original "poor little rich girl." According to Marty, her parents were extremely wealthy. We know that she worked as a girl in a Bridgeport corset factory. The opulence of the family was kept carefully hidden from this girl. Perhaps this was part of a plan to teach her the rudiments of economics.

Whatever the reason, when the facts of life were revealed on the death of her parents, the net result was continued frugality on the part of Miss Richardson.

This is not to say that she was not generous, just that she used her millions carefully. She is said to have made an unfortunate remark concerning the profits made in the munitions industry, at the close of World War I. This did not endear her to parents who had boys in the service.

Anne S. Richardson did many good things, other than her gift of the land to the town of Ridgefield. Almost on her arrival she became engaged in town affairs. She gave freely of time to the Village Improvement Society, the Garden Club and the Wild Flower Society. She was always active in Saint Stephen's Church societies. When the need for a Boys Club arose, she was right there with Mrs. John H. Lynch and Mrs. Edward L. Ballard to put up the cash to start it. She was fiercely proud of her membership on the Parks and Recreation Commission. When an attempt was made to remove her from that commission, she came to see me for assistance. I was sympathetic but carefully explained to her the political barriers that precluded my intervention in her behalf. [Dick was a Democrat, Richardson a Republican. Her 'enemies' were Republicans.—Ed.]

Miss Schoyer was always at her side in her endeavors — with one exception. Edna was a staunch Democrat and it was fun to hear them espouse their respective political philosophies. Both served at the same time in the 1940's on the Board of Education. Edna was a very cheerful person and once was president of the League of Women Voters.

In December 1926 a conference was held in Washington on the Cause and Cure of War. Both Anne and Edna traveled there as delegates to represent Ridgefield.

Anne S. Richardson's contribution to Ridgefield was recognized by the Rotary Club in 1964 and she received the Citizen of The Year Award. She truly was a part of the history of the town.

#14: CHAUFFEURS, THEIR BALL AND MISS RICHARDSON'S CARS

There were a number of wealthy people living in Ridgefield during the 20's. Some stayed the year round while others had apartments in New York City, and elsewhere, where they spent the cold winter months. It seems strange, now, to realize that so many of the great mansions of those days were not winterized and were used simply as summer homes.

At any rate, marks of distinction for those people were the fine limousines they rode in and the liveried chauffeurs they employed to drive them. Perhaps they never learned to drive. It is felt that more often the use of a chauffeur was deemed to be recognition of social standing.

It naturally follows that because of the numerous wealthy families there were also a great many chauffeurs during the 20's and up until World War II. They formed their own organization and for years ran a Chauffeurs Ball. It was considered one of the big events of the year. My band played for the ball in 1938, '39 and '40, and I have the programs for those grand affairs.

In '38 and in '39, the Ball was in the old Town Hall and in 1940 they moved it to the first high school gymnasium. The gym was located on the far eastern side of the school, and later became the cafeteria, when the expensive new gym was built on the north side of the building [in 1959].

The first and the second Chauffeurs' Ball that we played for went off without a hitch. The affair always featured an outstanding floor show that included a real good singer, a tap dancer and a ballroom team. It was a must that the employers of the chauffeurs attend these functions.

They were treated in 1938 to a performance by the famous international dance team, Veloz and Yolanda, and in 1939 to the excellent ballroom team, Vance and O'Dell.

In 1940 we had a terrific tap dancer, Arthur Brooks, as well as other fine performers. Artie had been featured at the New York World's Fair with the great Bill (Bojangles) Robinson. He was a real nice fellow and a great crowd pleaser. As he nimbly floated across the floor, he would tell stories as his shoes clicked expertly with the music.

We had two shows, one at 9:30 and one at 11. The 9:30 show was well received by the crowd of wealthy and not so wealthy. Artie gave a great performance and the crowd insisted on an encore. He tapped gracefully around the large floor while spinning his funny stories.

However, when Artie came out for the second show, his act had changed drastically. His dancing remained the same, but his stories became considerably more colorful. That he remained alive at the end of his performance was due in a large measure to the fact that I had only a drum stick, rather than a gun.

Unbeknown to us, one of the chauffeurs had produced a bottle of gin between shows. Tom Salveson (Mrs. Lynch's chauffeur) thought it would be nice to share the gin with Artie. Artie thought that was a good idea, too.

Artie's very first story leapt from 1940 to 1982 in the short space of 90 minutes. His stories might have been considered mild by today's standards, but 42 years ago, they were a sensation.

The first story was met with deep silence, as was the second. Midway through the third story, I could see George Doubleday shifting uneasily in his seat. Mr. Doubleday, who was elderly at the time, had come to the affair dressed in formal evening clothes. He also wore bedroom slippers, so he apparently did not expect to dance. Miss Richardson and others hung their heads at the conclusion of the act.

One person in the crowd could hold out no longer. I will not mention his name, but he was called Irv. He started to laugh uncontrollably and was soon joined by the crowd as the tension was broken.

Sorry to have strayed again into the 30's, so we'll get right back to the 20's.

We have written about Miss Anne S. Richardson, so we must mention her long-time chauffeur, Tom Smith. Tom was the essence of the fine liveried chauffeurs. Like John McGrath, who was Mrs. Sword's chauffeur and Dan McKay, who drove for the Maynards, as well as many others, Tom had been a coachman, before the advent of autos. John, Tom and Dan recognized the demise of the horse-drawn vehicles, shifted gears and learned to pilot the despised horseless carriage. I guess that, had the choice been mine, I would have elected to go with Charlie Stannard and other old coachmen who flatly refused to learn the operation of the auto. Even now, Marie would say that I never really did learn.

Like the other chauffeurs, Tom was rarely seen out of uniform. The standard uniform consisted of real fine blue material, a round cap with a stiff shiny visor, and puttees that sparkled.

Tom always claimed that his entire fortune was in his mouth. With today's price of gold, this could be more truth than poetry. Every one of Tom's teeth was gold. When he smiled, the reflection could light up an ordinary-sized room. There can be no question but that Tom was one of Ridgefield's real characters and he should be listed with those of whom I will write at a later date. However, since we are still on North Salem Road, I could not resist telling about Tom.

Another mark of distinction, which set the wealthy apart, was ownership of what we now call station wagons.

Nowadays many families, especially those with children, own station wagons. During the 20's, they were known as suburbans. Unlike the station wagons of today, the body of these vehicles was composed of beautifully grained wood, rather than metal. Miss Richardson had a 1924 Model T Ford. This was Tom's to use for trips in to the village.

In fact, he was to use it any time his employer was not riding with him. Tom preferred to use one of the limousines when going out for the evening. The favorite spot for libation during the 20's, and even later on, was a place called Kohler's, just across the line in New York State. It ran all during Prohibition and never closed one day or night. Tom used to pick up two close friends, Mary and Mike, on Sunday evenings and travel over the line. He always used one of the big cars for the trip. Anne warned him about the use of the large vehicles for this purpose.

One Sunday night, about midnight, when Tom returned home and drove into the garage, he was surprised to find big Anne, standing there waiting for him. As Miss Richardson towered over him, she asked, "Tom, do you know what I should do with you?" Tom replied, "Sure and I

suppose you should fire me.” The grand lady, with a rare show of good humor, had a fit of laughing and walked off and left him.

We always walked to Mamanasco for a swim, but on occasion, Tom would come along and give us a ride. Top speed of the Model T was probably 45 miles per hour. Tom generally drove at top speed and it was just too fast for this road.

The Model T had a choke, the rod of which was exposed, from the floorboard to the dashboard. In order to slow him down, we would work the toes of our shoes up around the choke rod and lift it. The resulting coughing and bucking of the vehicle would cause Tom to complain that he must “get the domm thing to the garage for attention.”

It was a generally accepted practice for the chauffeurs to make the selection of the new cars that their employers would purchase. They would then share in the purchase price. In most instances, it was apparent that the employer condoned this ritual.

On one occasion Anne Richardson bought an enormous limousine without consulting with Tom. It was a gray Renault with an open front seat. In stormy weather, a sheet of canvas was used to cover the driver. The Renault of those days was vastly different in size from the ones they make today.

At any rate we saw Tom with this gigantic new car one Sunday morning in town. It was suggested that he christen the new vehicle. Tom’s retort was, “Christen it? I ought to drown the domm thing.”

#15: RIDGEFIELD’S PRIVATE BOYS’ SCHOOL

From Miss Richardson’s Mamanasco Farm north, there were no more buildings, until one came to the entrance to the Ridgefield School. This fine boys school had been formerly known as Mulford School.

The north entrance to Lake Mamanasco was, and is, about midway between the farm and the school. At this point, the lake almost reaches North Salem Road. Mamanasco Road, as it is now known, was on the west side of the lake.

In the 20’s, this road was hardly wide enough for an auto to travel. It was impossible for two cars to pass one another and the potholes were large enough to swallow one of today’s compact autos. Today, this road has a fine bituminous concrete surface and is wide enough for two cars.

At the northern tip of the lake, S.S. Denton maintained a dock for about a dozen row boats. These boats were rarely used and always seemed to float there idly. Several of the boats would be half full of water all summer.

Francis Martin once made a rather gruesome discovery. He found a body floating under the dock. It was determined that the body of the victim, who had lived in a small cottage on the west side of the lake, had been in the water for several days. We never learned exactly how old Levi met his end.

Near the entrance to the boys school was one of the real old Ridgefield houses. Vincent Bedini and his family lived there during the early 20’s, when Vincent was grounds superintendent at the school. In the mid-20’s, the Bedini family moved south a mile or so on North Salem Road. Vincent then started his construction business, as related in an earlier column. Vincent’s brother, Alexander, took over his duties and he and his family lived in this house for

several years. They later moved to New Street. The house was vacant for some time and deteriorated rapidly.

A member of a family that lived in the house in later years said that the clapboard siding had separated in several places. He said that one morning the family came downstairs to find that the furniture had all been rearranged. No one admitted to moving the furniture. There had been a rather bad wind storm during the night, so it was decided that the wind had done a rather remarkable job and let it go at that.

Another family who lived in this house neglected to pay the rent for several months. Eventually the landlord said either pay or move. The following day, a fire was discovered at the top of the cellar stairs. It had apparently been set, either as a show of defiance or to indicate annoyance, or possibly to draw attention.

Whatever the reason, once it had started, the efforts of the family to put out the fire were futile. By the time the fire department was notified, the building was beyond saving. Damage was so extensive that it was decided to allow the firemen to use the remains, on several occasions, for practice. This fine, old, and probably historic house was destroyed because of a senseless act.

Mulford School was established by Dr. Roland Jessup Mulford in 1907. It was located originally on the eastern side of Main Street at its south end. By 1911, the school had grown to the point where considerably more room was needed. Dr. Mulford, with great foresight, purchased the very picturesque 115 acres [at the north end of Mamasasco], most of which Francis D. Martin has distributed to worthy causes.

A large main building of four stories, with more than 100 rooms, was built, along with several smaller buildings for the professors. The school continued to grow and at one time had more than 70 students. It was a very successful venture and early was named Ridgefield School.

Theodore C. Jessup succeeded Dr. Mulford as headmaster in 1922. Unfortunately, Mr. Jessup fell victim to an ailment which incapacitated him and 11 years later resigned in favor of Philip M. Gray.

The setting for the Ridgefield School must have been considered for an institution of this type. Few large tracts of land provide such a commanding and panoramic view of the surrounding, elegant countryside.

The school organization was replete with everything that such a fine private school could possibly need. Those who instructed the boys carried the finest of credentials. The land itself was rich in the various minerals that would produce the food for the staff and the students. Milk, vegetables, butter, eggs, etc., all came from the fine farmland. One could hardly imagine a finer

place to locate a school that would ultimately produce future titans in the fields of government, international relations, human relations, and the business world.

There seems no question that the school was highly successful. That it fielded those characterized above can be documented by the list of the many fine men who matriculated at the Ridgefield School. Without mentioning their names (which are available), we had a judge of the World Court, a United Nations ambassador, a governor, an ambassador to the Court of Saint James, and an ambassador to Sudan.

Registration at the school was not limited to the wealthy of other localities. Through the years, several Ridgefield boys attended. Among them were the late Ralph Crouchley, Charles Crouchley, Jr., Frank Baxter, Paul Morganti, Reed Shields, and Paul Hampden.

A lively topic of discussion at the supper table could be whether the acknowledged excellence of the instructors was responsible for the lofty positions achieved by the students. Could it have been their own natural abilities, or the already established standings of their families in the various categories? Whatever the reason, the school has left its mark on the history of Ridgefield and was a real credit to the town.

Dr. Mulford was a strict disciplinarian, as were his successors. It is doubtful that any boy was sent to Ridgefield School because of this fact. It was just incidental that the students benefited from the fine characters of their headmasters.

It must be considered that, though the boys were watched over with considerable diligence, they were normal and healthy youngsters and subject to all the escapades of youth.

Enrollment dwindled in the 30's. This was probably due to the Great Depression. Operation of the school required a staff of 28. When in the late 30's, the number of students dropped to 20, it was obvious that the school could not survive. Sadly, the doors closed for the last time in 1938.

Fortunately, Francis Martin acquired this beautiful part of Ridgefield. He tastefully retained the serene atmosphere of the countryside. That no attempt was made by him to create a complex, similar to that which has disfigured our Main Street, is to his undying credit. Several houses have been built on the property and they all blend with the fine character of this splendid estate.

We have always felt that Marty's purchase of this baronial estate was motivated somewhat by the fact that it faces to the east. This is ideal for his mode of living. He was never a night person, although his day has always started about 4 a.m. To be sure, this would be for most people, the middle of the night. It would be safe to say that few places, in Ridgefield, or any place else, can match the spectacular sunrises that can be seen from this magnificent vantage point. Marty and Doris must have enjoyed many of them.

I will resist the temptation, at this time to write about Francis D. Martin. There has already been a great deal written about Marty and there will be a great deal more to come. However, we feel that a news column, or even several of them, would not be sufficient to properly cover the very extraordinary Mr. Martin.

#16: FAREWELL TO MARTY, DAIRIES, AND EUGENE O'NEILL

Since our last column went to press, we have lost our friend, Francis D. Martin. He was a subject of that column and as we stated in it, we will resist the temptation to do any extensive writing about him at this time. For the present we will merely state that in our humble opinion, few, if any, residents of Ridgefield have had such a positive effect on the overall good of this community. Marty worked tirelessly for what he felt would benefit his town.

Because of the tremendous effort put forth by this man, both in time and money, our town is a better place in which to live. He richly deserves the heartfelt thanks and prayers of all the citizens of Ridgefield.

Marty called me just a few days before his passing. He wanted to talk about his favorite subject, Ridgefield. He told me how much he enjoyed my columns and encouraged me to continue writing. His appearance belied the fact that he was nearing the end. Bright and cheerful, despite his physical problems, one got the feeling that he could go on forever.

When it was time for me to depart, he reached for my hand with his own left hand. We learned that the pain in his right hand prevented the traditional hand shake. A broad smile creased his ever handsome features, as he admonished me to come back again real soon.

So it is so long, Marty, you certainly will be greatly missed by all.

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We will continue north on the west side of North Salem Road. In the early 20's, the famed author and playwright, Eugene O'Neill, lived on the next estate [Brook Farm] beyond the Ridgefield Boys School. It was here that the prolific writer did some of his finest work, including "Desire Under the Elms." That same year, 1924, O'Neill wrote another drama, "All God's Chillun Got Wings."

His "Beyond the Horizon" earned him the Pulitzer Prize in 1920 and the very next year he won this coveted prize again for "Anna Christie." He was recognized as the leading American dramatist and received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1936.

O'Neill's father was an actor and took Eugene along with him on his theatrical tours. No doubt these trips indoctrinated the youth in the ways of the theatre, though his first job was as a clerk and he even prospected for gold in Honduras before returning to his first love. He at one time worked as a newspaper reporter in New London.

He contracted a mild case of tuberculosis at age 24 and wrote his first plays while a patient in a sanatorium. They were of the one-act variety. It is probable that his rather delicate physical condition caused to turn from his arduous activities to the writing which made him famous. For the last 20 years of his life, he suffered from poor health and died in 1953 at age 65. Several of his finest works, including "Long Day's Journey Into Night," were produced posthumously.

Ferdinand Bedini, as a boy, mowed the lawn and did other various jobs for the O'Neill family. He describes the dramatist as a very tall, handsome man with a large but very well kept mustache. Ferd said that when O'Neill was deeply involved in his writing, it was best not to approach him on any subject. When he walked around his estate, he was generally accompanied by Mrs. O'Neill, and referred any questions that might be asked to her.

The O'Neills' daughter, Oona, married Charles Chaplin. Marty told me of his visit to her residence in Switzerland.

Several families have enjoyed this fine estate since the O'Neills. It is worthy of note, that the present owner, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Dawes, are both engaged in writing and in publishing music. The beauty and tranquility of the area is ideal for such endeavors.

The John Hunt family owned a large farm just to the north of the O'Neills. The Hunts had considerable acreage that produced more hay than their livestock could consume. In the mid-twenties, the late Irving B. Conklin bought some of the excess hay. He was at that time superintendent on the estate of Dr. George G. Shelton. The two places were about as far apart as they could be and still be in Ridgefield.

The Hunt farm was the last place on this side of the New York line, going north, whereas the Shelton estate was the very last place on West Lane, going south, before entering New York. As a matter of fact, both of these places extended for a considerable distance into New York State.

In those days, a large scale was located close by the south side of the D.F. Bedient store. It was a busy place, for hay, coal, grain and other commodities all had to be weighed before delivery was made.

The hay purchased by Mr. Conklin was loose. The baling of hay was rarely done at the time. To build a good-sized load of loose hay required a thorough knowledge of the business. To build a very large load of hay, capable of traveling safely, from one border of the town to the other, was a real task. It was all done by hand and one had to be proficient in the use of a pitch fork.

On one occasion, the Conklin load was so large the utility wires had to be raised along Main Street to afford safe passage. When the hay wagon finally reached Bedient's, a goodly number of townspeople were on hand to witness its arrival.

Jack Walker, who later became postmaster, said that it was the largest load of hay he had ever seen. It weighed in at 4,750 pounds.

It was interesting that this tremendous load of hay was drawn by two little black horses, Lady and Jim. Lady weighed 1,200 pounds and Jim weighed 1,250. Therefore, their combined weight was only about half the weight of the load they pulled. It was a long haul, but they made it.

They were probably the finest team that I ever saw. We always thought they were mother and son, and they worked as a unit. It was beautiful to see them pull together. It was perfect teamwork.

A few years ago, a picture of a coach and four, appeared in The Press. They had participated in the parade in 1932 that marked the 200th anniversary of George Washington's birth. Lady and Jim were the lead team and Duke and Diamond were the pole team. This year is the 250th of Washington's birth.

Stewart Scofield bought the Hunt farm and conducted a retail milk business for some 15 years from that location. He called it Stone Hill Dairy.

This dairy was the second largest in Ridgefield at the time. The largest Ridgefield dairy was the Conklin Dairy. It was established by Irving B. Conklin, on July 1, 1928, on the former Ernest O. Wilson farm on Ramapoo Road. This farm was developed in the 1950's and was later divided into Farm Hill Road, Overlook Drive and Nutmeg Court.

The competition between these two dairies was tremendous. There were many smaller dairies earlier and later, such as David L. Jones's Walnut Grove, later Carl Stolle's, Irving Keeler's and Elmer Leeson's. The smaller dairies disappeared one by one until only Conklin Dairy and Stone Hill were left.

Stewart Scofield was a retired army officer. He studied for the ministry and became a clergyman as well as a dairy farmer. One Sunday morning when Mr. Scofield observed one of Mr. Conklin's customers paying him for the milk delivery, he admonished Irving for not keeping the day holy. Mr. Conklin, who was never at a loss for words, calmly replied, "I have always believed that the better the day, the better the deed."

Finally, Conklin bought out Scofield and for some years controlled all the milk delivered in Ridgefield. Mr. Scofield later sold this northernmost Ridgefield farm and moved to Millerton, N .Y., where he devoted more time to the ministry.

So we have completed our journey to the New York State line. Perhaps we will come back on the east side of North Salem Road. We shall see.

#17: A LOOK AT THE OTHER SIDE OF NORTH SALEM ROAD

So, we will start south, on North Salem Road, from the New York State line.

In the 20's, the first house was owned by the Hennion family. It was not very large at the time and your attention was attracted, not by the house, but by a hand-operated gasoline pump at the side of the highway.

It is doubtful, with the limited amount of auto traffic at the time, that the little pump was a financial bonanza. However, it served its purpose, providing the family with additional income and convenience for the travelers.

Some years later, the property was purchased by Donald Torcellini. Don kept the pump going for a while, as well as his many other activities. A very popular movie was called "A Horn Blows At Midnight." This may have been inspired by gas pump owners who had to deal with the rigors of providing service at all hours. At any rate, Don and Yolonda tired of the gas business and had the pump removed. Once it was gone, it was gone forever.

Don put an addition on the little house and it became a haven for newly married couples, that is so sorely needed in our town today. Too many young Ridgefield people have to start life anew in other localities because of the lack of an affordable apartment.

For example, Quinto and Dora Cassavechia lived in this house when they were first married. So did Nano and Lena Marconi. We just do not like to think of what Ridgefield would be without them.

Next door lived the Tarbell family and then no one for a considerable distance. Then just before the very dangerous corner that many called "Dead Man's Curve," was the Louis G. Smith family.

There was justification for the name of this corner. Young people, returning from a night of revelry "over the line," found the long straight stretch leading to the curve a speedway that was hard to resist. The result was a large number of accidents, many of a very serious nature.

The Smiths had a chicken farm at this location and they called it Indian Rock Farm. The reason for the name is unknown, but it had nothing to do with the breed of chickens that they raised. They were white leghorns.

White leghorns are great for laying eggs. Big ones. Lots of them. They have never been considered ideal for eating. It is difficult to keep them confined. No fence is high enough, as they can fly like a pheasant. Their specialty is eggs and they were the best in the business of supplying them.

Energy-conscious people would be interested in this little bundle of energy. Some years ago, a science professor did a study on the energy expended in the production of an egg by a leghorn. His findings led him to the conclusion that this very slender little chicken generated as much energy in the manufacture of one egg as a large cow in producing 14 quarts of milk.

In later years, after the chickens disappeared, Mrs. Ada Phair conducted a riding school. This was about the time of the Chekhov Theatre Studio that had taken over the former boys school across the road. This studio caused considerable stir in town. It was operated by Michael Chekhov, a nephew of Anton, the famous playwright.

Success of the riding school may have depended to some extent on the studio. At any rate neither lasted very long. However, the studio harbored such as Yul Brynner and Beatrice Straight, both of whom are still performing, as well as Hurd Hatfield, best remembered for *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

Some 35 years ago the Leeman family purchased the former riding school and Evelyn still lives there. George, unfortunately, has passed on. He was a very noted figure in the music world. Though he himself was a top-flight musician, he was probably best known as an arranger of music. He worked for such musical stalwarts as Paul Whiteman, Archie Bleyer and Andre Kostelanetz, and did the Arthur Godfrey Show for many years.

Now that we have successfully negotiated “Deadman’s Curve,” we come to the Ridgefield High School. It seemed nicer, to me, back in the 20’s when these great fields raised corn, wheat, rye, and oats rather than Cain.

The grain from these farm products was separated from the stalks and chaff by the great threshing machines of Tom Kehoe. Later on this work was done by the late Joe Young. First the corn had to be cut by a corn harvester and the other grains were gathered by an enormous reaper and binder. The fodder and meal that resulted from all of this activity was then put in winter storage and later fed to the livestock of Ann Richardson’s Mamanasco Farm.

We have always felt that it was too bad that young people today never had the opportunity of viewing first hand, the basic principles of sustaining the life of domesticated animals.

There were no more houses until just past the intersection with Ridgebury Road. There, in 1924, Leon Sauve built a nice little house. Much of the construction of this attractive house was of stone. In the late 20’s, the Kilcoyne family lived here, prior to moving to Barry Avenue, where Margaret and Marie still live.

In the next house lived Columbo Franceschini and his family, in a house that Miss Richardson had built for them in 1920. The Andrew Principi family also lived here until the next little stone house was built for them on the sharp corner.

Columbo was the cowman for Mamanasco Farm. Andrew was the chickenman and George Bickers took care of the gardening. When Bickers left the farm, Columbo took over for him and later on succeeded Leon Sauve as superintendent. They along with the chauffeur, Tom Smith, and several women who worked in the kitchen and as maids in the mansion, made up a sizable workforce, that kept the place in first class condition.

The Franceschinis had three sons, Lindo, Bruno, and Siero. All of the boys worked at the farm and benefited from the valuable experience that life on the farm has to offer.

Lindo succeeded Tom Smith and served as Ann’s chauffeur until his untimely passing at age 46. Bruno — “Prunes” as we always called him — did so many different things, but is probably best known for his culinary expertise and his proven ability to recite poetry.

Siero — “Si,” as he was nicknamed — keeps Ridgefield Town Hall looking its best. I’m sure that he keeps all the people inside the hall on their toes. He is so well versed in so many

fields that he probably could be used as a replacement for any town employee that might be unable to perform their assigned duties, for whatever reason.

Si has always exhibited a willingness to be helpful. This trait has contributed to his popularity, especially among the town hall people.

We think it is of interest to know that Mrs. Franceschini is still living in the same little house, 62 years later. It would seem that, since World War II, we have become a nation of people with nomadic tendencies. Because of that, we cannot help but wonder how many have lived so many years in one house.

Between the Principi house and the one in which Mrs. Fred W. Solley lives, is one of the most dangerous curves on any highway in Ridgefield. There have been almost as many accidents on this curve as the one previously mentioned, just a half mile north.

Perhaps the reason that accidents on this corner were generally not as serious as those on "Dead Man's Curve" is the absence of the long straightaway in the approach to it. Could be that some of the victims of this corner are those who find themselves in the middle of it, while still congratulating themselves on their success with the previous curve.

The next house, just around the corner, was a part of the Solley estate. In the early thirties this house was remodeled and Doctor Fred W. and Mrs. Solley moved in to make it their home. It would be safe to say that the Solley family was certainly medically oriented. Mrs. Solley was a fine nurse. Fred's younger brother, Robert, was also a doctor. Their father, Dr. Fred P., also was renowned in the medical field. It is fitting that this closely knit family all served at St. Luke's Hospital in New York City, where the younger Dr. Fred was chief surgeon for many years.

#18: THE TURKEY SHOOTS AND THE RUSTY PARKER

Halfway up the hill, between the home of Mrs. F. W. Solley and the old Solley family homestead, is a large, brown, shingled house. In the 20's this was the home of the James Smith family. In fact, Jim and Mrs. Smith were married in this house.

Big Jim, as he was known, earned this moniker with his expansive six and one half foot frame. He was a great sportsman and loved fishing and hunting. Hunting the red fox was his favorite.

Mrs. Smith was a great worker and when the family later moved to Barry Avenue and operated a turkey farm, she did the work of several people.

The Smiths had three children, James Jr., William (Bunky) and Myrna (Minnie). These youngsters all helped with the work and quickly learned the rigors, as well as the benefits of farm life. More will be told about the interesting Smith family, after they moved to Barry Avenue in the 30's.

During the Depression years many families benefited from the pheasants, partridge, woodcock, and rabbits taken from the wooded areas of town. Meager family incomes were in some instances supplemented by cash received from the hides of small game, such as muskrat, skunk, and raccoon, as well as fox.

Big Jim acted as the middleman between the hunters, the trappers, and the buyers of pelts. He would buy the pelts or take the animals and do the skinning himself. Then, once a

week, a truck would come from a large furrier outfit in Peekskill and take the skins for processing.

Bowling was a sport that flourished during these years and Big Jim had a team that was one of the best. This team bowled for large stakes at a time when cash was very hard to come by. Some of those who bowled on the team were George T. Tator, Nick Romeo, and Walter Scott. They bowled on the alleys, then located on the third floor over the J. C. Penney Store in Danbury, against such opponents as Eddie Cahill and Mort Lindsay. Mort was the world champion at the time. The contests created considerable interest and drew onlookers from all the area towns.

On one occasion, one of Jim's bowlers became injured the night before a big match. The next morning, Jim was having his coffee in the Ridgefield Bakery, where the Roma [Planet] Pizzeria is now located. He was having a hard time to find a replacement for the injured bowler.

The owner of the establishment overheard Jim discussing his problem. This man was a great talker and was constantly boasting and trying to impress anyone who would listen. The fellow, who had been in Ridgefield only a short time, chose this time to announce that he had bowled 300 on several occasions.

Big Jim spilled his coffee and almost choked on his sugar bun. He was elated when the newcomer agreed to make his appearance with the team that night.

It turned out that the braggart was not only a very poor bowler, he could not even keep the ball on the alley. Jim and the rest of the team were so angry with the fellow that they drove home without him. Shortly, thereafter he left town.

Turkey shoots were a popular "sport," in the 20's and the 30's. The first one that I attended was held in the open fields on Tackora Trail, on the west side about 400 feet north of the intersection of North Salem Road.

At first the old-fashioned shoots were in vogue. A live turkey was placed in a box with only his head protruding from a small hole in the top. "Sportsmen" then shot at the head of the turkey with a rifle. We will grant that it took considerable skill to hit a bobbing turkey head, with a single shot from a rifle. However, something about this kind of activity was repulsive to a real sportsman.

In due course, the method of winning a turkey was changed to where one shot at a paper target, rather than a turkey's head. Then they changed from using a rifle to a 12 gauge shotgun. The system boiled down to where the winner was decided by the most shot in the center of the target.

Irving Conklin used to borrow an old Parker shotgun from Howland Adams. The old gun had belonged to Howland's father, Joe Adams. Its true value was carefully concealed beneath a large accumulation of rust and numerous scars. Somewhere through the years, it had lost its front sight. The lack of a front sight would in no way prevent this marvelous old gun from playing an important role in the winning of turkeys. Someone dropped a small hot piece of solder in the area of where the original sight had been.

Despite its dilapidated appearance, this marvelous old fowling piece won more turkeys than any of the others. Irv Conklin, Lewis Courtney, and myself, as well as others, all benefited from the fine pattern that flew from the muzzle of this fantastic gun. The trick was to aim at the

lower right hand corner of the target. If your aim was good, there would be 8 to 10 pellet marks in the center of the target.

Dr. Van Saun had a new Ithaca shotgun that he had recently paid \$375 for. Pinky Gillum had one of equal value. When one considers the value of the dollar in those days, you can only imagine what such guns would cost today. Yet, the old, borrowed shotgun outclassed them all.

At one shoot, after Courtney had won 3 turkeys, Conklin two, and myself one, Van Saun threw his beautiful shotgun against a stone wall fence. His example was quickly followed by Pinky Gillum and “Woodcock” John Richardson. It should be noted that these fine guns were not left there to rust away. Others, mindful of their value, retrieved them, had them repaired, and enjoyed them for years to come. The old Parker eventually disappeared and was replaced by another famous gun when the turkey shoots moved to Barry Avenue.

I guess I should say that the turkeys offered for prizes at the Tackora Trail Shoots were alive. On one occasion, John Richardson finally won a turkey after many attempts. He was known as “Woodcock John” because of the fact that woodcock were his favorite game bird. One had to be a real good shot to hit a woodcock, as they took off and flew like a jet.

At any rate, John was so elated over winning his turkey that he offered the live bird to anyone who could hit it. With that remark, he threw the live bird into the air and a dozen guns exploded. That no one was killed, or seriously injured, was a miracle.

From then on no live turkeys were offered as prizes. They were all dressed for the oven and later still they were of the frozen variety.

I’m afraid that we have strayed from our story of North Salem Road, Just thought you might be interested in the old-time turkey shoots.

Dr. Fred P. Solley lived in the large house on the corner at the intersection of Sherwood Road. He had already made his mark in the field of medicine. Not only was he the top man at St. Luke’s Hospital in New York City but enjoyed what must have been the tremendous satisfaction of seeing his two sons, Fred W. and Robert, follow in his footsteps. Both boys became very successful doctors at St. Luke’s and Fred was chief of surgery there for several years.

Like many other doctors who became tired of the hurly burly life of New York City, Dr. Solley longed for peace and solitude of his Ridgefield farm. The farm consisted of many acres on both sides of North Salem Road. He was particularly proud of his orchard on the west side of the road.

The orchard was quite successful and served a dual purpose as a fine place for church picnics etc.

For some reason, Ridgefield has never been really noted for its orchards. The high altitude of the town should be ideal for this type of venture. We once cared for eleven acres of orchard at Hillscroft Farm with only moderate success. Arthur Faubel’s orchards in the Ridgebury area are probably the most successful Ridgefield has ever had.

Up to now, we have been dealing with people of moderate means and some with considerable wealth. As we move further south on the eastern side of North Salem Road, we will find some people who are poor, and I do mean poor. Perhaps the word destitute would be more descriptive.

#19: THE POOR HOUSE AND OLD HAM’S PARROT

There were no houses, south of Sherwood Road, until you reached the top of the hill. The land on the eastern side of North Salem Road had been the James Scott farm for many years. In 1882, the Town of Ridgefield had purchased this farm. To all intents and purposes, it was to be the Poor House. We always called it the "Town Farm."

The farm consisted of a real old, and very large, farm house that is still standing today, several barns and some 40 acres of farmland. The barns have long since disappeared. One large barn stood just to the north of the farm house and housed the cows and the horses. There were several smaller structures for the pigs and the sheep.

One of the buildings that stood just behind the farm house, looked more than a little out of place, and it was. This building had been moved to this location from where it originally stood, 300 feet south and on the opposite side of the road. It had served for many years as the Scotland School and now had become a chicken house. It was later moved farther south and was remodeled into a family home.

The Town Farm was a place for those who were without any means of support and unable to provide for themselves. We knew some of the inmates personally. They were pretty much hopeless, although some were people who had been able to provide for themselves quite well in their younger years. A few were local tradesmen, who had been highly respected in their fields.

Now they were relegated to living out their lives on this farm. Their room and board were provided and any contribution they could make to the operation of the farm would be appreciated.

During the 20's and 30's, Mr. and Mrs. Fred Young were the operators of the Town Farm. They were the parents of Joe Young, who ran the store across from the fire house, that still bears his name [the old Young's Feed Store].

Fred was a tough old fellow, who had very little mirth in his makeup. For me, his attraction was his real fine driving horse, named Billy. We have it on good authority that Billy, as a young horse, had been an excellent trotter. He had raced at the Danbury Fair and had won several races. Billy was a white horse. Not gray. He was pure white and had a wonderful disposition that complemented his natural beauty.

We knew the days on which old Fred would come into town to do his shopping and used our best approach in requesting a ride on his trip home. It took some time but eventually he mellowed to the extent that he would on occasion give us a ride. For me, a ride behind Billy was much preferred over a ride with Tom Smith in his Model T, even though few words were spoken during the three mile ride. On most of our trips to Mamasasco, we walked.

Old Fred was probably nicer to Billy than to any other living thing. He seemed to have a kind of reverence where this horse was concerned. Probably this was because of Billy's fine record as a racehorse. At any rate, he never pushed Billy. He just let him set his own pace, which was a stolid 8 to 10 mile-an-hour trot. It was surprising how quickly he traveled the distance between town and the farm. The ride always ended too quickly for me.

There were two other horses on the farm. They were a team of draft horses named Frank and Dan. Frank was jet black and Dan was a mahogany bay. They had been overseas with the army in World War I and each had U.S.A. branded on his rump.

The farm had a very large vegetable garden and, with the livestock that it raised, was pretty much self-sufficient. It cost the town very little to operate this little institution. The inmates — perhaps they should be called inhabitants — participated in the operation of the farm, to the best of their physical abilities.

A large bell hung on a pest, just outside the kitchen door. When the meals were ready, Mrs. Young, who was a real motherly type, would ring the bell, to call everyone in from whatever they were working at.

Altogether, it was a real well organized and worthwhile effort on the part of the town to take care of those who could not make it on their own.

In the 40's the town decided to end the project and the property was sold. The result was the development which gave us Circle Drive. Hobby Drive. etc.

Just south of the Town Farm, on the very next corner opposite the north entrance to Tackora Trail, was a very old house. During the 20's, and for many years before, this was the home of Hamilton B. Scott. It probably witnessed the march of the Redcoats in 1777, and no doubt had historic value.

However, in the interests of progress, the old house was torn down in the 40's and newer homes replaced it. We remember "Ham," as he was known, as a very old man. He had a long flowing beard and steely eyes. He must have owned an awful lot of land in the area; the land records show numerous sales, which must have kept Ham in comfort, as we do not ever remember him working.

Ham's house was located very near the highway. He always seemed to be sitting in a large rocking chair on the small front porch. I think we called it a stoop. He presented a rather formidable appearance and we were just a little afraid of him. However, if we were walking by, having missed a ride with Tom Smith or Fred Young, we always stopped to talk with him. Despite his gruff mannerism, Ham was a very interesting person, and once started, he had some real good stories.

The main attraction was a very large and colorful parrot that sat on a perch, iust to the left of Ham's right shoulder. Ham claimed that this wondrous bird was given to him by a sea captain, who had acquired him in Africa.

Conversation with Ham was generally about the parrot and seemed always to run about the same. Time after time we would ask if the parrot could talk. Ham would growl and then answer in the negative. We would then ask if the parrot could do anything unusual and Ham would say that the damn bird was stupid. When we would turn to go, "Polly," which name seemed to be given to all parrots, male and female, proceeded to talk, or perhaps screech, would be a better word. The air was vented with words that, while very clear, are unprintable, according to our editor.

What with Ham, James, Hiram, Hezekiah, Nathan, Sam, and George Scott to name just a few, we can readily understand why this was called Scotland District.

Leaving Ham's and again traveling south, we pass our present first selectman's [Elizabeth Leonard] home. There were no houses along here during the 20's, until the little old, picturesque, saltbox on the corner of Barlow Mountain Road.

The Richard Jacksons lived here and Dick taught at the old Ridgefield Boys School. He was also the athletic coach at the school. He had a crippled right foot which prevented his active

participation in sporting events. However, he got around well enough to gain an excellent reputation as a referee at basketball games and as an umpire at baseball and football games. Mrs. Jackson was very active in town affairs. The little saltbox still stands. At the time, it was part of the Pierrepont estate.

The next house was the tall, three-story Thaddeus Crane home. Thad operated a real estate and insurance firm in what we called the telephone building. This large tudor type building later became known as the Martin Block [today home of Planet Pizza and AmatuZZi optometry]. Thad's secretary was Ruth Miller. Ruth was voted the most popular girl in Ridgefield, at the time. This was understandable, as she had a most engaging personality. Ruth still lives in her Bryon Avenue home.

Thad one time ran a race with a locomotive in Wilton and came off second best. Ruth married Harry Perregaux, a budding electrical contractor, moved across the street to the north part of Bedient's store and continued Crane's business as well as Harry's, from that vantage point.

Many years ago, a number of Ridgefield families were involved in the traveling circuses. There were the Hunt family, the Titus family, the Turner family and the June family. Lewis June at one time owned the Crane home where the John Scott family now lives. He used to winter his circus horses on this property.

#20:THE MAN WITH THE WALLS OF FOOD

South of Thaddeus Crane's homestead were more open fields. The first structure was an old barn that is still standing. It had been a part of Mary Smith's farm. Now in the 20's, it served Vincent Bedini as a place to store his machinery.

South of the old barn were more open fields. Then, just beyond where Altero (Chick) and Minnie Ciuccoli now live, was a long driveway that provided access to Achille Bacchiochi's sand.

I guess the ordinary man would never look in this area for a sand bank. However, Achille was no ordinary man. He used to spend a lot of time each Sunday, just riding around Ridgefield, acquainting himself with various areas of the town. He got to know it real well.

Achille must have done considerable tramping to find this sand bank as it sets well back from North Salem Road. There were swampy areas and the Titicus River flowed nearby. To all appearances, it would be an unlikely place to mine sand and gravel. As it turned out, the bank produced well for many years.

The next house, traveling south, on the eastern side of the road, set back more than 100 yards from the highway. A long semi-circular driveway made the house appear much larger than it actually was. As you neared the house, it seemed to shrink a little. This may have been because of the expanse of land, some 20 acres, that the house sat on.

Munson and Lizzie Wade built this house and lived there for many years with their daughter Edith. Munson drove a bay horse, whose name I never heard. I do remember that the horse had a rather unusual ailment that was called "string halt." The problem was caused by a strain of the ligaments in one of the hind legs. The result was that the poor horse as he walked would pick up the affected member considerably higher than was actually necessary. He would

then slam the hoof of that leg down, with great force, on the pavement. It made a loud and sharp noise and you would wonder why the leg did not break.

Munson Wade also had leg trouble and walked with a decided limp. However, since Munson's malady and that of his horse were not of a contagious variety, it was felt that there was no connection between the two.

This place was once known as "Buffalo Creek Acres" and in the ensuing years it was owned by several other families. Some of these families were the Winfield Scotts, the Frank DeLucas, the John J. Kiemans, and the Jan H. Hutons. With your kind permission, we will leave the 20's for what may be an interesting incident.

Jan H. Huton had owned and operated a store in New York City. It was called Foremost Sportswear Company. At the time that this family arrived at "Buffalo Creek" in the late 30's, war clouds were gathering over much of Europe. It is reasonable to say that the rest of the world was uneasy, to say the least.

In this country, great efforts were put forth to provide supplies to our allies in Europe. These efforts had the effect of causing shortages in many commodities. After Pearl Harbor, the supply situation became more acute and rationing was tightened considerably. Shortages in gasoline and automobile tires created anxiety and the effect of food shortages was frightening to many people. Hoarding of these essential items was considered unpatriotic and in some cases, illegal.

On Wednesday morning, Oct. 28, 1942, the Ridgefield Fire Department responded to an alarm concerning a fire at Buffalo Creek Acres. The fire seemed to be most intense in the kitchen area. Access to this area was hampered by the extreme heat. An order was issued to break through the wall so that the firemen could get to the source.

Joe Carboni, with a mighty swing, put his axe right through the wall. Joe instantly jumped back as a red liquid spurted out at him from the wall.

Mugsy Frulla thought that Joe had hit some person with his axe.

Joe thought that he had been stabbed by something that was concealed in the wall. He was covered with the red liquid that looked like blood.

After the two men determined that Joe had not been injured, they moved to the wall to examine it. The hole in the wall revealed that this wall, and others in the house, were loaded with canned goods of all kinds. What Joe had hit with his axe was a large can of tomato juice.

By this time the stored (hoarded?) merchandise was hot enough to pop. As the cans exploded they opened the walls to the firemen who were then better able to fight the fire.

At about this time a very sweet aroma wafted from the conflagration. This was attributed to the large quantity of sugar that was a part of the cache.

Back of the house a pile of tires was tipping from the intense heat. It looked like the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

A rather large crowd had assembled to witness this spectacular fire.

Firemen were hampered to some extent by the interested onlookers. At about this time someone noted several fill pipes from what were apparently underground storage tanks. When news of this discovery was circulated, the crowd dispersed as if by magic.

It was later revealed that there were actually several underground tanks full of gasoline and fuel oil. At least one of the tanks was of 3,000 gallon capacity.

It was indeed a miracle that these tanks did not explode. It would surely have been a catastrophe. The fire was brought under control about noontime. The firemen completed their job, made their final inspection, and returned to the firehouse.

Later in the day, Mr. Huton went into town to talk with his insurance people. Claims were prepared and reports of the fire were filed. While this activity was taking place at about 3:30 p.m., the fire whistle sounded again. The fire at Buffalo Creek Acres had started up again. This time, the loss was just about complete.

There was considerable speculation by the townspeople as to the consequences of what appeared to be several violations.

Mr. Huton's explanation for the large quantity of wall-to-wall foodstuffs was very simple and rather unique. He said that he had owned a rather large ship that had been outfitted and stocked for a cruise. Before the cruise could take place, the ship was sold, according to Mr. Huton.

He stated further that he had no place to store the articles and thought the walls at Buffalo Creek would be ideal for this purpose.

Two things come quickly to mind. First, the ship must have been the size of the Leviathan and second, a world cruise must have been contemplated.

It was not revealed whether or not the oil and gasoline had been pumped out of subject ship.

At any rate Huton's explanation must have been accepted as, to the best of our knowledge, no arrest was made.

So Buffalo Creek Acres has disappeared and in its place we now have a rather nice development on Hessian Drive.

#21: CYCLOPS, HOMER AND THE MAN WHO MADE TEDDY BEARS

Just south of Buffalo Creek Acres was an old and very picturesque house. This fine old, unpainted house must have had a real historic value. We do not know exactly when it was built, but it must have been about 200 years ago. It was the home of Zebulon S. Main and the property has remained in the Main family all these years.

We knew the Douglas Main family very well. They lived here at the time it was torn down some 35 years ago. It was the type of house that would have attracted city people who, in today's market, are looking for something that would generate a feeling of nostalgia. The old house must have had some defects that were not discernable to a kid walking by on his way to Mamasco. Perhaps this may be the reason it was torn down. We know that, for this boy, the old weatherbeaten boards and the smoke rising from the chimney created an aura like the old song "Home Sweet Home."

It is interesting to note that the old Scotland School building, which as previously reported was moved to the Town Farm, was later on moved again and now rests right across the road from the old Main homestead. It has been completely renovated and added to and now serves as a very nice dwelling.

Next along on our travels south on North Salem Road is another example of the type of old house that we just described. We knew it as the homestead of the Fred Waite family.

This house has had several additions and is quite large. It sits very close to the highway and has a tremendous stone foundation.

The Waites had seven children, five boys and two girls; all are now gone from Ridgefield except the youngest. Horace moved from the old homestead to a little house on left side of the south entrance to Tackora Trail. He lived there for several years and now resides at Ballard Green. Horace told me that this house is more than 200 years old, although he is not sure of the exact year it was built. The original part of the house was put together with wooden pegs rather than nails.

A number of years ago George W. Rhine purchased this property and set about the task of restoring it. He did a masterful job and did it in a very tasteful manner. George devoted a lot of time, effort, and money to the project, and did most of the work himself. The stonework is probably the first thing that catches your eye as you approach the building. The stones are large and are fitted perfectly.

There were no more houses on the eastern side of the highway, traveling south, until Wooster Street is reached. There on the corner stands a fine home that once was owned by Elijah Light and in the 20's it was purchased by Adolf Gund.

Adolf was a master toy maker and used the barn on this property for his shop. The barn has since been converted into a dwelling. He enjoyed such a reputation as a fine toy maker that people traveled great distances to purchase his handiwork. [A "Who Was Who" post of Facebook's Old Ridgefield group tells about the life of Adolf Gund, whose toy company still exists today.]

A few years ago the main house was gutted by fire. However, it has been restored and today presents its fine original appearance.

In the late 20's William Wellings moved to Ridgefield. He bought a lot on North Street, just north of the intersection of Wooster and North Streets, from the Cox estate. He was a mason by trade and apparently a good one. He built himself a very nice little stucco house on this newly purchased lot. Bill convinced a friend and former neighbor that Ridgefield was a great place. The friend, James Lucente, bought the lot on the south corner of Wooster Street and North Salem Road. Jim was an excellent cabinet maker. In the early 30's, during the dark days of the Depression, Jim and Bill combined their talents and the result was the very neat little stucco house with the Tudor effect. It is now the home of the Richard Serfilippi family.

Next and still going south was a very small house that burned some years ago. It was rebuilt and enlarged by the Andrew Frulla family who lived in the very next house. Alex Frulla still lives in the rebuilt house.

The Andrew Frullas like the Waite family, had seven children although the gender was the direct opposite, five girls and two boys. Andrew passed away several years ago, but Mrs. Frulla just celebrated her 94th birthday. Until recently she has been able to do her own housework. She and Andrew were bright people and this characteristic was passed on to their children.

Armando, the oldest son, was a paratrooper in World War II. He could have had a deferment, but was determined to do his part for his country. He gave his life at the Battle of Bastogne. His entire unit was wiped out in that fierce engagement.

Andrew was a very pleasant little man and always had a smile. He worked for some 40 years for the Holden family in South Salem. The Holdens, who were very wealthy, had an extensive estate, just over the state line. Andy drove his horse up Barrack Hill Road, over Old West Mountain Road to West Mountain Road, west to Oscaleta and then on Pumping Station, to get to his place of employment.

It should be understood that at one time a horse was considered a very important part of the family, and was treated as such. When a new horse was purchased, it might go nameless, until something the horse did would suggest a suitable name. One time, Andrew bought a horse from Charley Casey. The horse traveled the route outlined above without any problem. However, in the evening, on the return trip, the horse refused to turn right into the Frulla driveway. The still unnamed horse agreed to continue north on North Salem Road, but would turn only to the left. When the little turnaround at Tackora Trail was reached, the new horse willingly turned left, completely reversed course and headed south toward the Frulla home. This time, upon reaching the Frulla driveway, the horse did not hesitate but turned left and went down the driveway to the barn.

You may have guessed by now as to why the horse was reluctant to turn to the right. That's right — he was blind in the right eye. You may also have guessed his new name. One of the Frulla girls was studying Homer and Greek mythology, so the name of the horse was a foregone conclusion. When she learned of the plight of the new steed, she promptly labeled him Cyclops. Old Cyclops served the family well for several years, with allowances being made for his imperfect eyesight.

The next horse that the family owned was also a very interesting character. Andy, on his way home from work, retraced his way over Old West Mountain Road. Old Paul Marconi (Nan's grandfather) lived on this highway. Paul was noted for the excellent wine that he made. Grapes with which to make wine used to come into the old freight yards near the Ridgefield Supply Company during this Prohibition period. They came by the carload. Paul used to get his share of these grapes. He also made wine from elderberries and dandelions. The dandelion wine was especially good.

Paul used to invite Andy in for a little relaxation after a hard day's work. The visits were intended to be of short duration. However, as so often happens in sessions of this kind, minutes rapidly becomes an hour. When this occurred on the first trip with the new horse, the unnamed animal waited patiently for 30 minutes and then took off. Somehow he arrived safely at the Frulla homestead. As you may have guessed, his name automatically became Homer — and it had nothing to do with the Greek mythologist.

No one knows how Homer was able to keep track of the time. It is known that he made this trip on many occasions, only after faithfully waiting the 30-minute limit.

#22: THE HONESTY AND INTEGRITY OF 'BIG JIM' KENNEDY

As we leave the Andrew Frulla family and Cyclops and Homer, we are still heading south on North Salem Road. There was, and still is, a large field where the horses munched grass and cavorted to their hearts' delight. Then there were, and still are, two rather large stone monuments. They are round and have inscribed on them the words "Fort Hill."

We are unaware as to the reason for, or meaning of, the inscription. There was never a fort here that we knew of. [Editor's note: "Fort Hill," a name predating the Revolution, may have referred to an American Indian fort on Barrack Hill.]

The style and pattern of the stonework is recognized as that of the late James F. Kennedy. It is the same as that found in the building that now houses our Board of Education, or the foundation of Saint Mary's Church, or the large mansion, just north of "Altnacraig" on High Ridge. These are all samples of the fine handiwork of this excellent contractor. In the 80's and 90's of the last century, "Big Jim," as he was known, was considered a premier builder.

About 150 feet east of the stone monuments still stands the large white house that was the Kennedy homestead. It is now the home of Jimmy and Helen Bellagamba. Like everything that Big Jim built, this house is very substantially constructed.

Kennedy and his wife came here from Scotland more than 100 years ago. Like their neighbors, the Waites and the Frullas, the Kennedys had seven children: Thomas, Frank, Richard, Agnes, Elizabeth, Ann and Margaret. They were all big people in this family. Even the girls were close to six feet in height. Ann and Margaret are still living. Margaret has been a postmaster in California, retired several years ago and still makes her home there.

There are numerous stories about Big Jim. He was intelligent and very ambitious. He started out in the coal business in Ridgefield. He was quite successful but had a great desire to become a builder.

Kennedy worked hard all day at his coal business and then studied construction at night. He started with small construction projects and worked his way up to the big ones.

Kennedy's hallmark was his honesty, integrity, and his obvious desire to build the finest structures possible. The fine reputation that he earned quickly spread in a town that was getting ready to welcome some of the wealthiest families of the day. Soon the services of Big Jim were much in demand.

By the 1890's, Kennedy's business ventures had grown to a point where he was one of the largest employers in town. During that period, most everyone connected with the building trades worked for Big Jim at one time or another.

News of Kennedy's success soon reached across the ocean to his home town in Scotland. Along with this happy story went the news he had room for an architect in his organization. This message struck a responsive chord in the ear of a young man in Scotland.

The next ship coming this way carried among its passengers, a budding young architect. His name was Peter McManus. Peter not only took over the architectural chores for Big Jim, he also married Kennedy's favorite niece and a strong alliance was forged.

It would be very easy at this point to digress from the Kennedy story and become involved in the McManus story. However, we will resist that impulse at this time as that would be a story in itself.

As previously mentioned, Jim Kennedy made such a fine reputation in many of his smaller projects in construction that he was soon in demand for bigger things. Among the wealthy families seeking a haven in the most beautiful town that could be found anywhere was that of Edward Payson Dutton. Mr. Dutton had made his fortune as the foremost publisher of his time. He owned the large organization that bore his name and which is, even almost 100 years later, still in business and one of the biggest of the publishing houses.

Mr. Dutton bought a large tract of land on High Ridge of some 10 acres. It extended west to where Albert H. Wiggin later located. It had an entrance on both High Ridge and Peaceable Street. It was bounded on the south by what would later on be the Hamilton family property and on the north by the Gerard P. Herrick property.

Kennedy's fine reputation reached the attention of Mr. Dutton and he was awarded the contract to build this large mansion. The project took two years to complete and included two very large barns and a superintendent's cottage. The barns were in later years separated from the High Ridge property. They were converted into large dwellings with an entrance from Peaceable Street.

One story which we believe about the construction of the main house is an indication of Big Jim's determination to do a good job. It goes like this.

Mr. Dutton used to make a trip to Ridgefield each weekend while the house was under construction, to view the amount of progress made. When Mr. Dutton compared the blueprints with the actual construction, he noted that where the plans called for a two by four, very often a two by six was used. He was much impressed by Kennedy's determination to build a more than substantial structure.

One day on meeting with Big Jim, Mr. Dutton said, "Jim, I'm afraid that you are going to lose money on this job." Kennedy's answer was, "If I am, it's me own business."

Mr. Dutton was now even more impressed and according to my father, he gave Kennedy a bonus of several thousand dollars, on completion of the job. It is felt that this magnificent edifice is a tribute to both Kennedy and E.P. Dutton. Anyone who ever has an opportunity to visit this imposing structure, will be visibly impressed by it.

There is also a story that during the construction of the main house, Kennedy needed one of his carpenters for another job that he had in progress. They were in the process of shingling the mammoth roof.

Big Jim called up to the men and asked, "How many are ye up there?"

The reply came back indicating that there were three men on the roof.

Whereupon Kennedy is quoted as saying, "Well, half of you come down here."

This one I would take with a grain of salt.

Another story that seems to be well documented concerned George M. Olcott. He owned what is now Casagmo, the development on north Main Street. The name comes from casa (Italian for house) and the GMO from Mr. Olcott's initials. This story would be considered an illustration as to the lengths Big Jim would go to right what he felt was wrong.

Peter McManus had drawn plans for a formal and very exceptional sunken Italian garden to be constructed on the north side of the mansion. Big Jim was directing the work being done on this garden when Mr. Olcott engaged him in conversation. During the course of their talk, Kennedy informed Mr. Olcott that he had a feeling that the coal dealer from whom Mr. Olcott has just purchased his coal, had not delivered the amount for which he was charged.

Delivery should have been 40 tons as Mr. Olcott had purchased an entire railroad car load. Mr. Olcott was upset at the allegation and tended to disbelieve that such a thing could happen. Kennedy offered to have the entire amount of coal removed by hand, from the basement. He would then haul it with his horses, load by load, to Bedient's scales and weigh it. Kennedy asked that one of Mr. Olcott's most trusted employees accompany the wagons to verify the

weights. If Kennedy was wrong there would be no charge for all the work involved. If he turned out to be correct, Mr. Olcott would agree to make his future purchases of coal from him.

The results of the verification proved that there were several tons less than the amount charged. Needless to say Mr. Olcott was a very irate man and Big Jim had another customer for his coal business.

Jim Kennedy did not become a very wealthy man but he certainly is well remembered by all who knew him. Unfortunately the lure of Wall Street was a very strong attraction and in this game he was not quite so successful.

#23: TILIO'S TEAM, HOME FOR WRITERS & THE JOB THAT CURVED BACKS

The Kennedy family left Fort Hill during World War I. They moved to another very large house that was just north of the William Creagh house. That would be where the very first house on North Street is now.

Attilio Tarsi and his family moved to Fort Hill. Tilio, as he was called, was a contractor. At the time, he was just starting in business for himself. He drove a team of horses, whose names I was not familiar with. I do remember that one was a dappled gray and the other was jet black.

The Tarsis had three children. Lena was in my class in school and still lives on Bailey Avenue with her husband. Geno shared his father's love for construction work. He learned to operate all kinds of construction machinery and lives now on Overlook Drive. Silvio retired a few years ago after many years of service with the Ridgefield Fire Department. Si has lived a long time on Stonecrest Road.

In these days, in many instances, the children of Ridgefield families are forced, because of economic reasons, to locate elsewhere. We feel it is good that we can have a family like the Tarsis who were able to spend their entire lives in their hometown.

Tilio, like so many others, faded from the construction scene during the great depression.

Ridgefield always seemed to be a place where a celebration would take place on the slightest provocation. If the cause were of great import, the town would go all out. 1932 was the 200th anniversary of George Washington's birth. This reminds us that this year is the 250th and nothing has happened. This is too bad as we have always felt that Washington was the very greatest of the great.

At any rate the town marked his 200th anniversary with a very elaborate parade. Most every organization participated and many built fine floats to represent them in the parade. The Italian club entered a large and appropriate float. It was drawn by a team that belonged to Jonathan Bulkley and Tilio was selected to drive the very lively pair of dappled grays. Ahead of this marvelous float in the full uniform of a general in the continental army, rode Julius Tulipani. Julius was mounted on a very beautiful white horse. It should be said that Julius in his sparkling attire, with the three-pointed hat, bore a striking resemblance to our first president.

At any rate my part in the proceedings was that of a member of the Oreneca Band. I had a new deep street drum that was capable of generating a loud volume of sound. The volume was necessary as it was the only such drum in a contingent of some thirty boys.

As the parade was of considerable size, it was necessary for some units to meet and pass each other during the line of march. As Tilio and his large float were traveling north on Main Street, the Oreneca Band was marching south. We met at the corner of Governor and Main. As

the sound of the approaching band reached the ears of the steed on which Julius was riding, the horse began to act up. However, he was able to keep control and quiet the horse. As he safely passed the band, his horse gave the impression that he was walking on eggs.

The team that Tilio was driving was another matter. They were young horses and not very well trained. They had seldom been off the Bulkley estate and had never encountered such noise and excitement. As luck would have it, the band swung into a spirited march just as the team passed by. The horses stood stock still and refused to move. They were urged to continue and their response was to raise themselves on their hind legs. Further urging caused them to bolt to the right and charge into Governor Street. The last we saw of them it seemed as if they were going into the horizon as they raced past the crest of the hill near where the Toy Caboose [Bissell's Pharmacy today] is now located. We do not know where they actually stopped but one of the troopers at the State Police barracks said that they were exceeding the speed limit when they went by there.

Various articles were lost from the float along the way, as the horses rushed to put distance between themselves and the terrifying noises on Main Street. Tilio was an inveterate pipe smoker. It is to his undying credit that when the horses were finally stopped, his corn cob was still firmly clenched between his teeth, despite the hair-raising episode he had just been through.

We have been writing about the 20's with occasional excursions into other eras. To tell of the Kennedys it was necessary to go back before the 20's and now we have gone slightly into the 30's.

So, just south of Fort Hill, in the 20's, was more open land until you came to a rather large house that still sits close to the highway. At one time this house was quite square in architectural design. Subsequent additions have changed that somewhat. One of the most noticeable features is its flat roof. It is now the home of Barbara Wardenburg.

In the early 20s Joseph Roberts and his family lived in this house. Joe was another of Ridgefield's contractors and also owned a considerable amount of land. The Roberts had three children, Louise, Aldo and Arthur. Arthur is still employed in Ridgefield at Silver Spring Country Club.

We recall that the family had a very difficult time with leaks in that flat roof. In the mid-20's the house was sold to Robert Hosea. Hosea had no better luck with the roof than the Roberts family. The late Bill Oexle and his wife, Lee, lived in this house some years later. Knowing Bill, I am sure that he would find a way to correct the roof situation.

The next house belonged to Prof. Larmon W. Abbott many years ago. It then passed on to his daughter, Arletta. There is some interesting history in this house. When John D. Nash lived there, a hundred years ago, his son Howard P. Nash was born there. Howard was the father of Karl S. Nash, publisher of The Ridgefield Press.

In 1926, a well-known writer, Thomas Boyd, bought the place. He and his family had been moving all around the country, much to the displeasure of their little daughter, Betty Grace. It was she who decided that Ridgefield was the place to be and announced, in no uncertain terms, that the days of moving were over. Betty Grace is, of course, the former Betty Grace Boyd, now Mrs. Karl S. Nash and managing editor of The Press. Betty Grace had her way and grew up in this house.

Later still, another writer, Ted Shane, lived here as did the famous Duncan M. Smith who wrote the Bird's Eye View column in The Press for many years. We have one of Ted Shane's books, Soft Ball: So What. This book dealt with softball games that were played for charitable purposes by celebrities such as Ted, Lowell Thomas, Gene Tunney and many others. This was truly a house of writers as Betty Grace's mother, who was Duncan Smith's daughter, was also a successful writer.

Next was more open land and then the home of George S. Bennett who later sold his place to the Clinton Reynolds family. Clint was a rural carrier for the Ridgefield post office for many years. As you probably know, the most noticeable difference between a city carrier and a rural carrier is that the city carrier uses a government vehicle whereas the rural carrier uses his own car. At the time Clint was a carrier, the vehicles were all left-hand drive. This made it necessary for the carriers to sit somewhere near the middle of the driver's seat and then stretch to their utmost to reach the mailboxes. This put a severe strain on the backs of the mailmen. Clint walked with a decided curvature which we attributed to the many years that he reached across the seat to put mail in the boxes.

The next house, where the Carleton Dillons now live, was the home of Adam Wurtz family. Later the Hume family bought it and lived there for many years.

#24: THE BUSY BEAVERS AND VALDEN'S VICTORIAN

Just south of the Humes' property (now the Carleton Dillons') there was, and still is, a very nice little open meadow. We have never seen any particular use being made of this fine field. It would be easy to imagine a couple of ponies, or heifers, romping around on the lush carpet of grass. The field stretches back to the Titicus River. It was just a little north of this area that a beaver family established its Ridgefield residence. Its claim to this part of the river was based on Squatter's Rights.

The beavers really upset the neighborhood and their refusal to leave did cause a lot of trouble. A small pond appeared as a result of their expertise in dam building. The overflow from the pond did cause serious flooding of adjacent properties and raised particular havoc with the septic systems.

During the daytime, irate property owners tore the dam open and drained the pond. The following morning these people would awaken to find that the busy little rodents had rebuilt the dam and the pond had been recreated. This all happened just a few years ago.

The neighbors again set to work and removed the immense pile of sticks and tree limbs that had been woven into Bernie Beaver's idea of Boulder Dam. The beaver family entered into the spirit of the thing and again fashioned a barrier that successfully blocked Titicus River for some distance. The river had not seen such a flurry of activity since the days of the tannery shops and saw mills.

The beavers won the contest, hands down, or perhaps we should say flat tails down. In desperation the property owners turned to the town authorities for assistance. Elaborate traps were set to ensnare the beavers and soon they were captured.

No one knew where the beavers had come from although more than a few voiced their opinion as to where they should go. Some people even suggested that the beavers had migrated

all the way from Canada. They are not native to this area, but have occasionally been seen in the lands north of Ridgefield.

The big question now was what to do with the caged beavers. Eventually they were transported to the northernmost extremities of the town and released. Two days later, the dam was not only rebuilt, it was bigger and better constructed than it had been before.

Obviously it was time for drastic measures to be employed. The traps were reset, the beavers recaptured and this time they were taken far enough to the north to discourage even the most irrepressible beaver. I always felt that it was nice that they liked Ridgefield so much. The feeling was not shared by the people of Titicus.

The fine little meadow that we have described was a part of the Lewis L. Valden estate. David Harvey Valden, his father, owned some 20 acres that extended from North Salem Road, easterly and across the river to North Street. It was he who in 1857 built the grand old Victorian mansion that graces the property.

Lewis and his brother Charles had learned the tanning business from their father, David H. Valden. David had worked and learned the trade at the tannery that was owned by Jabez "Mix" Gilbert. "Uncle Mix," as he was known, passed away and David purchased the business.

The Valdens were industrious people and good businessmen. The little tannery along the river grew by leaps and bounds. At one time it had more than 100 vats in operation. To keep so many vats going must have taken an enormous amount of hides. One can envision numerous horse-drawn wagons loaded with hides approaching the tannery along Titicus River. The hides came from farmers who did their own butchering. There were not enough of such farmers in Ridgefield at the time so it must be assumed that the tannery served many farmers in the surrounding towns.

In his History of Ridgefield, George L. Rockwell tells of how the hair was separated from the hides and then sold for 60 cents a bushel. Local masons bought the hair and then mixed it with lime when plastering a house. The hair gave consistency to the plaster. Some have even suggested that it made the walls of the house seem warmer. Perhaps it did. It sure made the plaster stronger.

You just know that the walls and ceilings in Valden's great house contain hair that came through the old tannery. They are still in excellent shape today. Probably some people who have purchased homes in Ridgefield that were built before the advent of wallboard and plasterboard, have discovered that there is hair in their plaster. When making alterations or renovations this could easily happen. One wiseacre that we talked to said that he did not find any hair in the plaster but he did get some plaster in his hair.

One thing is sure, Lew Valden did not spare anything in the construction of his home. The very ornate woodwork on the exterior quickly catches your eye. The exceptionally long windows also summon your attention. The square little tower on the southwest corner of the building is a forerunner of the rounded turrets that are found in the large Victorians built around the turn of the century. The sturdy, stone foundation of this grand dwelling gives the impression that it was meant to last forever.

At the time the Valden house was built, all this exemplary construction was capped by a durable slate roof. This type of roof was a mark of distinction on the finer homes and its lasting

qualifications were unchallenged. For some reason however, in the ensuing years, the slate was replaced by more modern material.

Two equally well-constructed barns were built on this property. One is referred to as the shed, but it is considerably larger than most modern garages. The other building was referred to as the barn and it well earned the title. It was a very large building and capable of housing all of the livestock and it was also built to last. We keep using the word “was,” as unfortunately this fine structure burned to the ground and was later replaced.

Lew Valden had a son who was named after Lew’s father, David Harvey Valden. We knew him well and never heard him called David, it was always Harvey. Harvey passed away about four years ago and was in his 90’s at the time. He was Ridgefield’s assistant postmaster for more than 30 years and was much respected for his dedication to duty. He was an exceptionally fine man and in his younger days was considered an outstanding athlete.

Harvey had a great love for baseball and played on the same team with Francis Martin and Charles “Pop” Crouchley and other great players of the day. It is interesting to note that all three became bankers. Harvey and Pop with The Ridgefield Savings Bank and Marty with what is now known as The Union Trust Co. [Wells Fargo today].

Perhaps there is something about baseball that makes the players expert in money matters. The inflated salaries paid them today would allow several ball players to own their own banks.

Harvey was kind of a bank in himself and more than one Ridgefield family benefited from the personal mortgages which he granted. This was especially true during the depression years when Harvey’s compassion and kind understanding saved some families that we know from losing their homes.

After growing up in the old Victorian, Harvey married and lived on south Main Street for many years. His son, Donald, was one of the most handsome young men we have ever seen. More about that if and when we get to south Main.

#25: THE BEAUTIFUL EPPOLITI HOMESTEAD

Charles Birdsall was mentioned in our Dispatch No. 4. He and his family lived during the 20’s about midway down Titicus Hill. We noted that Charley was an exceptionally fine carpenter. He plied his trade with several of the local contractors, including among others, Big Jim Kennedy and Cleveland Bassett.

The Birdsall family had lived in Mount Vernon, N.Y., for some years and came to Ridgefield about the turn of the century. Charley was “a perfectionist and enjoyed the fine architecture and workmanship found in many great mansions in Ridgefield.

Lou Valden’s exceptionally fine Victorian appealed to Charley’s sense of value. When this place became available, after Lou passed on, Charley bought it. The house was probably much larger than he needed but it was the style that he liked most.

The Birdsalls enjoyed the place for several years but as the children moved on, it may have appeared even larger. Back in Mount Vernon, Charley had a good friend and neighbor named George Rief. The two families visited back and forth and in 1916, George, who also had a fine set of values, persuaded Charley to sell him the place.

George and his wife, Teresa, with their children, George Jr., Charles, Elizabeth, Louis, and Bertha, moved to Ridgefield in the spring of that year. This nice family used the place with reverence and owned it for more than 60 years. Bertha, the only remaining member of the family, still comes to Ridgefield to spend her summers.

In the fall of their first year, misfortune struck. One Sunday morning, George, who was an early riser, looked out the window and noticed smoke and then flames emanating from the large barn just north of the house. He calmly roused his family by suggesting that they get up as the barn was on fire.

Unfortunately, the fire had made such progress that the barn was beyond saving, and burned to the ground. It was soon replaced by the large barn now on the place. Though the barn is a fine structure, you can tell that it was built in a different period than was the house.

Migration to warmer climates during the winter months caused the place to be used less and less until just a couple of years ago when Bertha sold the place to Edgardo and Marcia Eppoliti.

What a break this was for people who have a genuine affection for Ridgefield. Generally, we have come to expect that when an old place with extensive acreage is sold, a development of some kind replaces it. Even worse, this lovely little estate might have become another condominium complex.

Eddie and Marcia, fortunately, had no such intentions. Instead they set to work to refurbish this gem that they had purchased. Eddie, with his excellent knowledge of construction, did what is in our opinion just about the finest job possible. Everything — the main house, the shed, the barn, and the landscape — all felt his touch. We are confident that Marcia, with her excellent taste, exerted a very positive influence on the overall proceedings.

We can easily surmise that these two people spent many hours at the kitchen table, poring over plans and exchanging ideas. The end result was probably more successful than they could have hoped for.

We feel it is safe to say that we can offer this fine operation as a superlative example of what can be done when people work to enhance, rather than detract from, the beauty of the most beautiful town in America.

The first thing that catches your eye is the very neatness of the place. Everything is in order. The entire exterior of all the buildings has been gone over, with tender loving care. The main house has been so tastefully done that it has been prominently featured in one of the better magazines that deals with the very best examples of fine Victorian architecture that our country has to offer.

The landscape has received the same kind of thoughtful attention. Grading and reseeding has given the whole place a luxuriant appearance. A beautiful little pond, fed by water from the placid little Titicus River, has appeared, to the rear of the barn. A few ducks and some domesticated geese are living a most happy existence in this area.

A road, or perhaps we should say an accessway, has been constructed just south of the pond. It stretches across a little swampy area and all the way to North Street. The fine meadow which we have previously mentioned will, we hope, someday be grazed by a nice horse for the Eppoliti's son, Mike, to ride. A pony should be added for Mike's new and cute little sister.

Altogether, I guess what I'm trying to convey is that we need more people like these in our town. People who will make our lovely town even more charming. They would make Ridgefield an ideal place for those who seek a serene, healthful and happy place to rear their families.

Eddie came from Italy with his parents and family just a few years ago. This family was not the kind who would seek out support from the welfare system. They were, and are, industrious, serious-minded, and hardworking people. They pulled their own oar and richly deserve whatever gains they have made.

Marcia is a descendant of one of the truly old Ridgefield families. Her mother is the former Esther Nash, now Mrs. Alfred Kelley. The Nashes go back way before the American Revolution. Her uncle is the editor of this paper but we will not hold that against her.

It is sufficient to say that Marcia is a remarkable young lady who knows what makes things go. We feel that everyone should be happy for the fine job that this young couple has done. Take a ride by their Titicus estate and we are confident that you will agree.

I would be remiss in not mentioning the interior of this lovely home. It has received the same careful attention that the exterior enjoys. On entering this edifice you turn the clock back 100 years. The elegance of years past is there before you.

The kitchen has been slightly modernized without spoiling it. Other than that, the decor is strictly of the period it represents. Several gramophones, not phonographs or Victrolas or record players, are strategically placed in various rooms. Along with each machine there is a collection of priceless old recordings.

They even have a radio of early 1920s vintage. It has the familiar three dials that must be synchronized in order to get WEAf in New York, or WJZ, Baltimore, or WRL, Cincinnati, or KDKA in Pittsburgh or possibly WBZ in Boston. A must for reception, of course, is an antenna stretched from the highest window to a tree or pole, some 100 to 200 feet away from the house.

We did not hear this marvelous old radio in operation. However, we are sure that it is in excellent working condition and it looks just like new.

We would offer our congratulations to this fine, industrious young couple for their adherence to qualities and niceties of life that so many will never have had the privilege to enjoy. We are sure that Lou Valden is happy that his 125-year-old home is being cared for by such capable people.

#26: TOM KEHOE'S BIG MACHINES; 'SNEAKY PETE' FROM THE SILO

Just south of the old Victorian is another large house and barn. This is now the home of George Schuster. Once the Otto Seemann family lived here. In the 20's, Grover and Mrs. Phelan and their children, Elsie, Marion, Harry, and Ray made their home here.

Harry was employed for many years as superintendent of the D.T. Bulkley estate, and passed on just a few years ago. Ray lived most of his life in Ridgefield and then headed for warmer climates about two or three years ago.

From the Phelans' house to the Titicus River Bridge, during the 20's, was just an empty lot. The very nice house that stands there now is owned by Rico Casavechias.

Just across the bridge and opposite Titicus Store is a large two-family house, and, at the time we are covering, it housed the Brennan and Clark families. At one time this house had a

North Salem Road address. Since then it has been changed to 2 Mapleshade Road, with some justification, I would say.

Next door and just east of this house, at the top of a little grade, was the home of the Thomas Kehoe family. It was the only house on Mapleshade at the time. Of course there were no houses on the south side of the road as this was the old cemetery. Mrs. Kehoe still lives in Ridgefield and this very pleasant little lady still gets around very well.

Tom Kehoe had a very large team of horses. He also had a lot of heavy machinery, and the horses were used to pull it from place to place. Tom always had a good reason for everything and when asked why he always bought such big horses, replied that he had found out many years before that big horses could do heavy work and light work, whereas the smaller horses could not do the real heavy work. He was a big man so perhaps his reply was making a second point that referred to himself.

Tom was very mechanically inclined and should be considered as a contractor of sorts. He was hired by many farmers and by wealthy people who had farms on their estates, whenever the use of heavy machinery was required. During the haying season, he mowed the hay and transported it to the barns and their haylofts, for storage. There were no hay balers in Ridgefield at the time so the work was all done by hand with pitchforks.

Later in the summer, Tom would reappear with a reaper and binder that he used to harvest cereal grains such as oats, wheat, etc. This wondrous machine would cut the crop and then tie it in bundles for easy handling.

He also had a huge threshing machine that separated the grain from the chaff. The grain came out of one side of the machine and was put into bags for storage. The chaff came out of the opposite side and was used for bedding the livestock.

In the fall, Tom was again available. This time it was with his corn harvester. This machine had a small wheel on one side and a large wheel with a heavy ribbed-tread on the other. It was so hard to pull that it generally took three horses to do the job. This machine had a chute, on either side of which was a sharply pointed nose. The noses straddled the row of corn with the chute directly over the row. In the middle of the chute was a large knife which rotated back and forth, cutting the stalk about six inches above the ground. The corn stalks then passed through the chute to the rear of the machine where they were tied into bundles and loaded onto the wagons.

The ears of corn remained on the stalks and the bundles, or sheafs as some might call them, were then transported to the silo. Here another of Tom's machines, an ensilage blower, would be waiting to devour the stalks and ears of corn. A conveyor belt carried the corn into the mouth of the blower where more knives cut the stalks in pieces an inch or two long. The knives were attached to large fans, which were whirling with tremendous speed and blowing the corn with centrifugal force, up a pipe and into the top of the silo.

This machine was the forerunner of today's leaf blower, or air rake, as some call it. In fact, leaves are blown today, from large areas such as on a golf course, by a machine exactly like the ensilage blower, except that it has no knives.

The most popular ensilage blower of the time was called "The Blizzard." Those who worked inside the silo would attest that it was aptly named. These men had to keep the silage leveled off and tramped down. The corn came in through the pipe with wind that had been

generated to hurricane velocity. The shower of corn that descended on those working inside was certainly mindful of a blizzard.

The blower was powered by a large and very heavy gasoline engine. This engine would be a collector's item today. It was mounted on a chassis that rolled on four iron wheels. It had a pulley on one side from which an endless belt extended to the blower some 30 feet away. On the other side of the blower was a huge balance wheel. It took someone with the strength of Hercules and the ingenuity of a master mechanic, just to start the engine. To keep it going required additional talents.

Tom Kehoe was equal to any situation and when a breakdown occurred, he always came up with a solution. It was good that he was able to do this as when the blower was idle, so were anywhere from 10 to 15 men.

In later years, tractors were used to power the blower. This greatly simplified the entire operation.

Once inside the silo, the corn silage would start to ferment and did so all through the winter months. The odor emanating from the silo during this process was not unlike that from a brewery. There were those who tapped the bottom of the silos. They collected the juice from the corn that resulted from the fermenting process. The juice was then distilled into what then became corn whiskey. Because of the potency of this powerful liquor, it was called "Sneaky Pete" by some who had sampled it.

So the corn operation was popular with the cows, who were kept warm and happy by the silage. It was equally popular with those who were kept warm and happy by the strong liquid by-product. It should be remembered that these were prohibition days.

At any rate, Tom Kehoe had all the machinery that was necessary to process food-stuffs for the livestock and he had to move this equipment from farm to farm and estate to estate. Because of the size of the machines, Tom would do the moving part in the very early morning hours when there was practically no traffic. It was not unusual to see him, perched high atop his threshing machine, with the oil lantern swinging to and fro under the rear axle, at 2 or 3 'o'clock in the morning.

There was something very exciting about all the activities that occurred at harvesting time. It might even have been considered glamorous to a young boy growing up at the time. Perhaps he may have known in some way that he was witnessing something that would soon pass from the scene, never to be seen again. There are no more farms around this area, where reaping, binding, and threshing are carried on. Silos are still being filled, but generally with grass silage rather than corn. I guess that Dan McKeon is the only one left in Ridgefield who still fills a silo.

You can believe that all of the operations we have mentioned were actually an awful lot of hard work. However, the strenuous effort put forth was balanced by the satisfaction of knowing that the winter supply of fodder was safely stored away.

#27: BAD SMELLS AND GOOD SOUNDS OF THE TITICUS STORE IN THE 20s

On the southeast corner of Mapleshade and North Salem Roads stands the building that was once the Titicus Store. During the 20's, the store was owned and operated by Shoman Elliss.

Shoman was not a showman, as the name seems to suggest, although the pronunciation is the same. Actually he was a very quiet, retiring sort of person. Shoman bought the store from a Mr. Thomas, just 60 years ago. The second story of the building was provided with living quarters so he had a rather compact operation.

The business itself was that of a typical country general store. There were clothes for sale and tools and groceries and vegetables and lots and lots of candies. Probably most of the customers were kids as the proximity of the store and Titicus School had to be a plus for Shoman.

The store had several peculiar and very distinctive odors, depending upon the area in which you were standing. Two of the odors were rather rank. The vegetables and groceries seemed to be all right, but the clothes needed something, perhaps a good airing. The smell from the penny candy was very definitely not fragrant. It had an adverse effect on me and I just could not eat any of this candy, even if they were five for a penny.

It was necessary for me to have some justification for entering the store so I saved my pennies that would have been wasted on candy. When my grubstake reached the grand total of five pennies, they were exchanged for a nickel. Now we were ready to treat ourself to the most melodious music to be heard anywhere.

The most beautiful, most interesting and most attractive single item in Titicus Store, for me, was a machine that I guess was properly called a nickelodeon. This mechanized piano was so intriguing to a little boy that, though the cost of putting it in motion was a whole nickel, we would have gladly paid more, even a dime.

When you looked at this marvelous exhibition of engineering, you had no way of knowing that the enclosed, intricate machinery would lead to the ultimate development of the computers we have today. We were enraptured by the wondrous melodies that emanated from Titicus Store's contribution to the world of culture.

If all of this has not stirred your interest, then try to imagine a very fine piano, from which the front has been removed. It is replaced by stained and leaded glass. The center of the glass is clear but the little square of clear glass is surrounded by glass of various colors, mostly red, green and yellow.

After depositing your nickel, you were then privileged, not only to hear the great music that poured forth, but you could also witness its operation. As you peered through the little square of clear glass you would be astounded to actually see a drum being played by some unknown force, a banjo being strummed by some invisible hand, as well as the piano hammers, rising and falling, apparently without benefit of any human participation.

There was a light inside the nickelodeon that gave a good view of the contents and, thankfully, it did not blink on and off as would be the case today if rock (music?) were being played. Come to think of it, this fine, aristocratic, musical instrument would undoubtedly refuse to play rock.

Titicus Store, for the most part, had a kind of tranquil atmosphere. Neighborhood people would meet there and converse on matters of mutual interest. Kids would march in and out with their penny candies, etc. Of course there were the usual neighborhood pranksters as well as a few real characters who would liven things up once in a while. Their actions always provided food for discussions at the store.

Lou and Sandro Feduzi were little boys living across the road from the store. They once witnessed a local horse trader trying to drive his horse and buggy into the store. Several attempts were made and the horse finally did make it inside the store. However, the buggy was just too wide to go through the door. So there was the horse inside the store and Charley with his buggy outside on the little porch. Eventually the project was abandoned, much to the relief of poor Shoman, who had stood quietly by, hoping that his store would not be wrecked.

The old store was started way back in the last century and has had several owners. At one time it actually served as a district post office. D. Smith Sholes was postmaster of Ridgefield at the time and handled the main office in the center of town business area. The eternal problem of operating space for Ridgefield's postal facilities was in effect at the time. The main office had been moved time and again but the problem remained. It was even located for a short time in the town hall.

This action by the Post Office Department was a giant step forward at the time. Someone down there had vision. The little district post office helped to relieve the congestion in the main Ridgefield Post Office and it provided a more convenient way for the good people of Titicus to handle the postal affairs.

In the 190 years of its existence there have been many pleas to the department in Washington for separate postal facilities worthy of the most beautiful town in America. Our personal knowledge is that the money for this purpose was approved and appropriated more than five years ago. Promises were made time and again and recently we read that it is finally going to happen within the next couple of years. We sure hope to be around to see that.

At any rate the records show that John D. Nash was appointed postmaster of Titicus District, by the Postmaster General, on Feb. 12, 1885. At that time postmasters were appointed by the President, and District Postmasters were appointed by the postmaster general. Today all postmasters are appointed by the postmaster general. In this particular instance we find it a little difficult to understand the date used for the appointment. Perhaps Abe Lincoln's birthday had not yet been made a national holiday.

Karl Nash's grandfather owned and lived in the large white house that still stands just north of the store. John Nash owned and operated Titicus Store with the help of his sons, Howard and Luther. Howard was Karl's father. So John was then a postmaster and a storekeeper and the little store took on an added significance. It is truly a worthwhile landmark and a very definite part of Ridgefield's history.

It seems that each of the columns I have submitted concerning the Titicus area carries some mention of the Nash family. There seemed to be more Nashes than others. Perhaps it would be appropriate for historical purposes that some of this area could be named for the family. It could be called Nashville.

#28: MORE ON THE STORE, SETTLERS OF THE ROCK

Just a little more about Titicus Store. Joe Young owned the store for some time after Shoman Elliss left. Joe did not operate the store for some reason and it remained vacant for several years.

Because it is located in a residential zone, zoning regulations required that it be operated continuously, otherwise it would revert to residential status. When Max Seemann and his brother

Henry bought the place from Joe Young, the store had been closed more than the one-year limitation. Therefore, it was necessary for them to acquire a variance of the zoning regulations.

The Seemann boys received their variance and then got a permit to sell beer. Thirty-three years ago they petitioned for a permit to operate a liquor package store. They planned to close in the shed that was located on the south side of the store for this purpose. However, the Zoning Board of Appeals denied the application. It lost by one vote. We understand that the present owners are converting the former shed into office space.

Max continued to operate the store after Henry left to become an insurance man. Finally, about a dozen years ago, Max closed the doors for the last time and another landmark disappeared.

Just south of the store, opposite where New Street joins North Salem Road, is the entrance to Fairlawn Cemetery. On the left of the entrance is what we would call a stone belfry. It once housed a very fine bell as we pointed out in Dispatch No. 8. The bell has been missing for several years and we hope that it was not stolen. Rather, we would hope that it was removed to prevent just such a thing happening.

On the south side of the entrance stands Settlers' Rock. I suppose it is really not a very beautiful landmark. However, it has great sentimental as well as historical value for those who love Ridgefield.

Legend has it that five of the original proprietors spent their first night in Ridgefield atop this rock. Some are rather skeptical as to the veracity of this story. They generally take the position that the rock is not large enough to accommodate five grown people. These skeptics fail to consider that the rock is somewhat smaller today than at the time. It lost some of its size, in the name of progress, as the road continued to be widened. These people should also spend a night on the rock, while being surrounded by roving bands of Indians, a few unfriendly black bears and some screeching wild cats. We are confident that under those circumstances, the old rock would provide room for many more than the five huddled there.

During our 250th Anniversary celebration in 1958, we had a bronze plaque inserted in the face of the rock. The plaque notes the importance of this landmark of our town. It was unveiled with appropriate and impressive ceremonies.

At this time we are struggling to create public interest in a suitable observance of Ridgefield's 275th birthday. The date is Sept. 30 next year. It happens to be a Friday so I hope to devote that weekend to commemorate this important date in history.

Every organization that we know of in Ridgefield has been invited to participate. The response at this time has not been encouraging. Perhaps when the holidays are over, enthusiasm will mushroom and the old Ridgefield spirit will again manifest itself. A few very dedicated people have met twice concerning this matter. The committee is looking for support and will have its first 1983 meeting on Thursday, Jan. 6 at 8:00 in the town hall.

As we continue up Titicus Hill, one unpleasant occurrence keeps coming to mind. In Dispatch No. 5 we mentioned a little grove of trees that stood about halfway up the hill. It was located across from the cemetery, where Jack Nalley later built the green, stucco house. One of the boys attending Titicus School climbed one of the trees, which harbored a robin family. The nest contained three little eggs which he proceeded to throw to the ground. As if that was not bad enough, he then reported the incident to his teacher but then blamed others for what he

himself had done. Fortunately he had been observed by others while committing his dastardly act. I am not sure what his punishment was, but at least those who were innocent were absolved of any connection with the malicious deed.

This boy continued to commit unsavory acts as he went along. We recall a treasury that became short of money while in his charge. The last we heard of him was several years after he left Ridgefield. He was arrested for stealing from a blind man who was selling pencils. I guess today he would be called incorrigible. We offer this story merely because some readers have wondered why only nice people have been described in this column.

At the top of Titicus Hill, where North Street branches off North Salem Road, was a very large and very old house. The James Kennedy family moved here from Fort Hill during the early part of World War I. It was a very ornate building and must have been considered a mansion at one time.

This property was owned by the railroad, which had intended to build a sort of trolley service between Port Chester and Danbury. The road bed for this project is still quite visible in many areas of the town. The idea was abandoned for some reason that has never been clear to me. Probably the advent of the auto was a contributing factor in discouraging the railroad.

When the Kennedy family moved to Bridgeport toward the end of World War I, the Ciuccoli family moved in. Ciro and Mrs. Ciuccoli had six children, Lydia, Amelkri, Altero, Mary, Nello, and William. The boys were all nicknamed "Chick." This can be very confusing.

Amelkri has operated his own building business for many years and Altero keeps the grounds entrusted to him by the Parks and Recreation Commission in excellent shape. As a young fellow, Altero established a reputation as being the first in Ridgefield to go swimming each spring. As a matter of fact he even beat spring by a few days, as on each St. Patrick's day he dove into the icy waters of Lake Mamanasco. This "Chick" was certainly a very rugged guy. He still is. Nello, of course, operates his own TV repair and sales business and Willie is a fine plumber. It can be safely said that these four "Chicks" make an interesting little "flock."

When this family moved after living here for more than a dozen years (that is another story), the old house was torn down. The very nice little house now on this property is the home of Mrs. Alfredo Eppolite. It has a North Street address, though we always considered it to be a part of north Main Street.

#29: TWO WHO FOUGHT GREAT DEPRESSION & THE GENERAL'S ANVIL

During the Great Depression, men used to congregate in front of the Town Hall each morning. These men were a part of the large mass of unemployed. They were hoping for a few hours of work that the town might have to offer. Perhaps a person would come along, looking for someone to perform some little job of any kind that would pay for the family's Sunday dinner.

Skilled workers, who could not find work in their own trade, accepted whatever was available. No job was menial enough to cause it to be turned down by men who had not as yet become familiar with unemployment insurance. When the family was hungry, pride had to be moved sometimes, to the back burner.

During these times, there were some thoughtless people, especially among those who were more fortunate, who did not experience the disastrous effect of the hard times. They were overheard, on occasion, to make disparaging remarks about these unemployed men. These people seemed to feel that anyone who was unemployed was lazy.

They were only a few, of course, but their unkind expressions hurt just the same. It seemed that these people were completely unaware of the deep concern of these men who wanted, desperately, to provide for their families, at a time when there just was no work available.

The effect of the Depression on the cities was much greater than on a town like Ridgefield. At least people here could plant gardens. Most people had room to grow some chickens, or raise a pig or two. They did all of these things and more, refusing to give in to despair.

Many Ridgefielders met adversity head on, and won. Two come quickly to mind.

Ciro Ciuccoli was an excellent mason and bricklayer. So was Charley Severini. They also had a good working knowledge of construction of a building. Somehow, despite all the misery and gloom that these times presented, these two gentlemen scraped enough money together to purchase a couple of lots on what is now called Roberts Lane.

They were also able to purchase the building materials that resulted in the construction of two exceptionally fine little homes for their families. There were, as we have said, others who would not accept defeat by the discouraging conditions prevalent at the time. However, these two did so much to dispel the snide remarks, directed at the unemployed, that we feel they are worthy of mention.

The two splendid buildings referred to are still in excellent condition. They rest on Roberts Lane as a living reminder of how two families fought the Depression and won.

Next to the Ciuccoli family and going south again, lived William and Mary Creagh and their children, Margaret, later Mrs. Thomas Christopher; William Jr.; Catherine, later Mrs. Octavious J. Carboni; Mary; Alice, later Mrs. Francis Brown; and Agnes. Mary still lives in the old family homestead.

William Sr. was a good-sized man with a large moustache and a very strong will. He was also a very intelligent man. He had been a first sergeant in the Home Guard in World War I, after serving with the Santa Barbara Shani Shooters in the Spanish-American War. These activities were enough to earn him the affectionate nickname "General."

Bill was a carpenter and builder by trade, but was knowledgeable in so many areas that his career was rather varied. In the early part of this century, he was superintendent for Colonel Louis D. Conley, when the colonel was building his beautiful estate, "Outpost Farm." The Colonel had been with the famed 69th Regiment in the Spanish-American War.

Later, Bill became superintendent on the George G. Haven estate. The Haven mansion, just off West Lane on Country Club Road, is now the home of Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Delli-Bovi. Later still, he was head of maintenance for our school system.

Finally, Bill returned to his first love, building. I believe Amelkri Ciuccoli worked with him, also Jack Morrisroe.

As a little kid, I was strongly attracted to the Creagh compound and spent considerable time there. They had a cow or two and a horse and this made it a farm for a kid with a great love of animals.

The horse's name was "January" and when I asked how he got the name, Bill replied, "Because he moved about as fast as molasses in January." He added that if the horse had a sweeter disposition, he would have called him Molasses.

There were no houses in Peatt Park at the time. Most of the area was then an apple orchard. Now, of course, there are many nice houses on Lafayette Street, Washington Avenue, and Rochambeau Avenue.

During the early 20's the old orchard served as a pasture for the Creagh family's livestock. There were times when the cows got too many apples. This made it difficult at milking time, as they had to be propped up before this important chore could be performed. I am not sure what effect this mixing of cider and milk had on those who drank it, but the effect on the cows was remarkable.

The stock had to be herded down North Street to the orchard, which had a gate, just opposite the intersection with Maple Shade Road. The gate was attached to a very large post. The post was round and made of hundreds of stones that were cemented together in what was more like a monument than a gate post. It still stands in the same place and is mindful of the style of those at Fort Hill. Perhaps it was built by Jim Kennedy. At any rate it was strong enough to support a gate that could close off Main Street.

One day as the stock was being herded to the pasture, my sister Mary was riding "January." There was no saddle, no bridle, or even a halter as, of course, he knew where he was going. One of the herders smacked "January" on the butt with a stick, to make him move faster. The old horse took off like Man O'War and we quickly learned that he may have been as slow as molasses in the month for which he was named but in July he was a real speedster.

I guess that I was always asking Mr. Creagh if I could help him, as it seemed that my constant trips there needed some justification. He must have gotten tired of saying that he did not have a job that I could do. So one day he said, "Sure, Dick, you can put that anvil in the cellar for me."

Now, anyone familiar with the weight of an anvil can appreciate the task that this presented. The cellar door opened at ground level and the anvil sat about 10 feet from the door. A valiant attempt was made, but of course a little kid could not budge it, let alone carry it into the cellar.

Ten years later, while driving a team of horses for Irving Conklin, I was assigned several spring plowing jobs. One of them happened to be the Creaghs' garden. When I drove into the old familiar surroundings, the first thing I spotted was the anvil, right where it had stood years before. Before any plowing was done, the anvil was carried, though not easily, into the cellar and placed near the stairway to the upstairs kitchen.

A few minutes later, as the plowing was being done, some very strong language emanated from the open cellar door. When the "General" saw me, he wanted to know who in #\$@&%*! had put the #\$@&%*! anvil in the cellar. He had tripped over it on his way out to the garden.

Fortunately, he had a sense of humor and when it was explained to him that he had actually requested the action years before, he smiled. I was relieved that his memory was good, as he was not one who easily accepted pranks.

#30: THE MOYLANS, 15 CENT GAS, AND PUTTY STEVENS' COW

Next door, on the south side of the William Creagh family, is a very old, two-family house. We have been unable to determine the exact year that this house was built, but it had to be in the very early 1800's. Frank and Margaret Moylan and their children, Mary, Margaret, and Francis, lived in the north side of this house during the early 20's. Another son, Joseph, was born later on. Mrs. Moylan was my Aunt Maggie, a younger sister of my mother.

Frank was a bookkeeper, and apparently a very good one. The term bookkeeper is not used so much today. Generally we hear it referred to as office worker, accountant, or even systems analyst. The important thing was that this person kept his employer informed of how the business was progressing. Uncle Frank kept the books for Charles Riedinger, an electrician back in the early days of electricity. Riedinger had a store right across the street from where The Ridgefield Press is now.

Later on, Uncle Frank performed the same duties for Charles D. Crouchley, who operated a plumbing business next door to Riedinger. The Crouchley business eventually moved to Main Street, where Robert Wilder now conducts his real estate business.

A feature of this new business location, and an additional job for Uncle Frank, was the operation of a single gas pump in the curb in front of the store. The cement curbing still shows the scars where this old hand pump was anchored. It must have been a remarkable pump when one considers that every gas station today specializes in a pump that fits the need of your particular car. Today's pumps dispense unleaded gasoline, leaded gasoline, super unleaded gasoline, high octane and low octane, at a staggering price. We remember that this little old pump gushed out Good Gulf at 15 cents a gallon, seven gallons for a dollar. Whether it was Grade A, Pasteurized, Homogenized, or Golden Guernsey, there was no way of knowing. However, it seemed to keep all the automobiles happy, whether they were Cadillacs, Hudsons, Pierce Arrows, or Model T Fords.

The Moylans were another family that chose to stay pretty much in Ridgefield. Only the youngest, Joe, left for other parts. He is now in Raleigh, N.C., a doctor of psychology. Mary is now Mrs. Robert Mulvaney (Bob is now a retired supervisor of Ridgefield's Public Works Department). Margaret (Peggy) is a retired registered nurse and, of course, Francis is Ridgefield's first full-time fire marshal.

Many young married couples got their start in this nice two-floor apartment. John and Marion Corrie live there now and I guess we cannot class them as newly married, even though Athena appears that way sometimes.

On the south end of the old house lived Charles Stevens. He was affectionately known as "Putty." Several theories have been advanced as to how he acquired this nickname. Some said it was because he was always puttying up the window glass, others said that it was because he pattered around land, still others said that it was because he was so good natured that he was like putty in the hands of designing person.

Whatever the reason, we remember him as good-natured and very fine gentleman. “Putty” always wore a white shirt and a tie, whether he was in overalls (gray with white stripes and a jumper to match) which he wore most of the time, or a business suit in which he was rarely seen. A Mrs. Mathieson, who I think was his sister, lived with him, as well as Addie Gilbert, who worked for him. They were both very kindly women and well liked by all who knew them. Addie was a very tall and very thin lady. She had a facial expression that belied the fact that she had a great sense of humor.

Charley always kept a cow or two in the barn that now houses the Tinker Shop. In the 20’s he sold a Jersey heifer to Ernest O. Wilson who operated a dairy farm on Ramapoo Road. Shortly thereafter, Wilson sold the farm and the livestock to Irving B. Conklin. When Irving learned where the heifer had come from, he promptly named her “Putty.”

Cows are not generally considered beautiful, and rarely do they have much of a personality. “Putty” possessed these attributes and became a kind of pet. She remained a member of the herd that supplied the milk for Conklin Dairy for many years.

Charles Stevens must have been a good businessman. He owned the house we have been referring to, as well as the large two-family house, just south of Nina’s Restaurant at 613 Main Street, and another house on Danbury Road.

He also owned and operated the Ridgefield Bakery for many years. The bakery was where the Roma Pizzeria is now. The actual baking was done in the old wooden building behind the bakery store. It was complete, with very large ovens and the very long paddles that placed the bread, cakes, pies and buns, way back in the ovens.

The bakery enjoyed a very fine reputation and was known for many miles in any direction. Door-to-door deliveries were made in the traditional horse drawn bakery wagons and then later, of course, by Model T Ford.

In the late 20’s, Rudolph Hurzeler acquired the bakery. Rudy operated it as a family affair and the bakery grew to even greater proportions. Deliveries were made as far north as Lake Mahopac in New York State.

One Christmas, “Putty” gave me a sled. I guess it should be called a bobsled as it was made many years before sleds were made with a steering apparatus. He had apparently originally purchased the sled for one of his children, at some bygone Christmas.

#31: THE TRIALS OF TIRES ON A SUNDAY ‘JOY RIDE’

Just south of Charles Stevens lived Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Bates. Herb ran a taxi business from the present Acorn Press building on Bailey Avenue. A taxi business during the 20’s was quite a lucrative venture. At one time Herb had four regular drivers.

There were three other taxi businesses in Ridgefield at the time and all seemed to do very well. Perhaps this was due to the many wealthy people we had at the time (not all had chauffeurs) or perhaps there were a number of people who had not yet mastered the art of driving an automobile.

The population in the 20’s was less than 3,000 and, with the number of people who used taxis, or the railroad, or the regular bus to Danbury, there was much less traffic. Incidentally, the bus was called a “jitney” and Dave Ritch operated it at a profit, even though the round trip fare was only 25 cents.

The term, joy ride, or pleasure ride, was applied to Sunday afternoon tours of the surrounding areas. The rides were truly joyful and any aggravation encountered was not due to congested highways. There were no long lines on West Lane at the fountain, waiting for an opportunity to enter Main Street. There were no long lines on Main Street, waiting for traffic lights to change. In fact there were no traffic lights. Another pleasant part of motoring was the ease with which one could find a parking space.

Of course, the roads were not as good as they are today, and cars seemed to have the distressing habit of developing motor problems, especially when the driver was dressed in his Sunday best.

No doubt, the biggest problem a motorist faced was the pneumatic tire. There was no question that these tires improved the riding quality over the hard, solid-rubber tires. However, the uncertainty of how far these tires would take you, before they blew out or just went flat, tried the patience of many a driver.

Today tires are inflated to between 18 and 30 pounds of air pressure. Contrast this with the Model T Ford, which had a slender 30 by 3½ inch tire that carried 110 pounds of pressure.

On just a short trip to Danbury, one could experience one, or two, or even more flat tires. If one were fortunate enough to have two good spare tires, he could replace the damaged tire without a major operation. However, once the spare tires were all in use, further tire trouble became a real problem.

The procedure was to remove the lug nuts that held the tire and the rim to the wheel. Then two tire irons, one long and wide and one long and narrow, were put into service to remove the tire from the rim. This was no job for a weakling.

The tire was then carefully examined to determine the cause of the deflation. It could have been a nail, or possibly a stone bruise.

No one traveled any distance without a repair kit. The kit consisted of a heavy patch for the inside of the tire and a lighter sheet of rubber that could be cut to the correct size needed to patch the inner tube. The ailing part of the tube was roughened with a gadget, generally the top of the repair kit. This supposedly made the patch more adhesive to the tube.

A patch was then cut from the sheet of rubber used for patching. It was applied to the tube after the puncture spot was coated with a rubber cement glue, which was allowed to dry for a minute before the patch was pressed upon it. The large patch was then cemented into the damaged portion of the tire. When that was set, the tube was finally inserted into the tire. The two tire irons were then brought back into play in a gigantic effort to get the tire back on the rim.

If, by now, you are exhausted from all this activity, we just hope that you have sufficient energy in reserve for the toughest part of the whole operation. A hand pump was considered an integral part of the tire repair equipment. You will now pump steadily for ten minutes and the tire gauge will show that you probably have raised the air pressure in the tire to about 55 pounds. Cheer up, you are now about half way there.

Perhaps you could entice one of those riding with you to share in the pumping. Up to now all the others have contributed, on a very warm Sunday afternoon in July, is their moral support and perhaps a few kind words of encouragement.

At long last, the offending tire is now ready to be put back on the wheel and the lugs are tightened again.

Perspiration is wiped-away, along with the grime on your hands, clothes are straightened and you start the remainder of your trip. You will be very lucky if five miles are covered before the repeat performance is necessary.

Of course, there were those wonderful days when mishaps of this kind did not occur. This generally meant that you could expect a double dose the next time out, to make up for the trouble-free trip.

One thing was for sure, there were not very many teenage drivers in those days. The family car was treated with considerable reverence and probably received more care than the family horse that preceded it. The younger members of the family cleaned and polished the car each Sunday morning, in preparation for the afternoon excursion. Before the young ones were allowed to sit in the driver's seat, they took an oath that they would drive carefully and never exceed a speed of 30 miles per hour.

Despite all the problems attendant to auto trips, it was still considered joy riding and autos were looked on as a luxury. Now that each member of the family has his own car, they must be thought of as a necessity.

I guess we kind of got away from Herb Bates and his taxi service. Herb was a very well-dressed man and always presented a very dignified appearance. His suits must have been tailor-made and he always wore a high, stiff collar. He was quiet, very reserved and showed very little emotion.

The Michael McGlynn family lived next door, between Herb Bates and Joe's Store (now Country Corners). They had five children. Ethel became Mrs. William Ryan and was very active in politics. Irene became Mrs. Joseph Zwierlein. Tom, who now lives at Ballard Green, was a plumber, as was his brother, Richard, and Mary, who taught at Titicus School, became Mrs. Ralph J. Kasper.

Mr. McGlynn, known as "Tinker Mike," was a well-known plumber and also served several terms as the Democratic member of the Board of Selectmen. "Tinker Mike" was a little man, but he had a good voice and was a fine speaker. It was great fun to hear him debate at town meetings. He took issue with some pretty big people and always gave a good account of himself.

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Our hope is that all my fellow Ridgefielders will have a Happy and Prosperous 1983.

#32: DICK'S GIRLFRIEND CALLS, 62 YEARS LATER

It would seem appropriate that we start the new year by acknowledging a few of the many messages received, encouraging me to continue this column. They have come in the form of letters, phone calls and personal conversation. Naturally, I am very grateful for all the kind words and it pleases me greatly to find that our stories have made so many people happy.

One of the first letters was from Mary E. Gazeck, whom we knew when she lived on New Street. She then was Mary McGowan. Mary lives in Danbury now and retains her interest in the old home town, through the pages of The Press.

Another was from Elsa Hartmann, who now lives in Bethlehem, Conn. Elsa taught school in Ridgefield for many years. She is, of course, the daughter of the famous Joseph Hartmann, whose photographs are a feature of each issue of The Press. The Hartmann family

lived for many years in the two-family house on Catoonah Street, between Helen Cumming and the Loren Caddells.

Mary Zandri wrote from Florida, with a very encouraging message. She is the former Mary Dowling and with her husband Levio Zandri, started married life in that haven for newlyweds, at 613 Main Street, as related in Dispatch #3. Later on the Zandris moved to High Ridge Avenue and Marie and I moved into their grand apartment.

Levio taught at Ridgefield High School for many years and his students thought very highly of him. Lev was a great bowler and a mainstay on the fine K of C bowling team. In the great parade that marked the 250th anniversary of the purchase of our town, he portrayed the famed Pere Marquette depicting his exploration of the Mississippi River. John Corrie and Levio's son, Billy, also appeared on that float as an Indian guide and the explorer, Joliet, who accompanied Father Marquette, on their historic trip in 1673.

A letter from Jude Lyons noted her interest in the column and especially the one about Joe's Store, (#1). Jude, who now lives in New York City, recalls how she and other teenagers, used to hang out at the store in the early 60's. We remember her as a very pretty graduate of Ridgefield High, in the Class of '63, with our son.

Another letter, all the way from the Bahamas, was from Beatrice Brown. Beatrice is the former Beady Scott and grew up on Soundview Road, with her brothers, Harold, Francis, and Donald. All the brothers still live, side by side on Soundview.

Beady's husband, Donald Brown, was the harbor pilot at Nassau, as was his father before him, in the days when the large ships crowded the harbor.

Beady was very interested in Dispatch #3, which told of the Will Stevens' house at 609 Main Street, now Paris Hair Stylists. In converting the house to business use, the name Thomas Scott and the date 1917 were uncovered, etched in the concrete. The workmen carefully framed the little plaque for posterity.

Tom Scott was Beady's father. Her mother, Mildred, was the former Mildred Northrop. Mildred's father was Caro Northrop, who was the greatest mover of buildings that Ridgefield ever had. We will be having some very interesting (we hope) stories about Caro later on.

To get back to Tom Scott. He was a fine carpenter and the reason his name was inscribed in the Hair Stylist building is, of course, because he worked on it when it was being built, back in the teens.

A recent letter we received was postmarked, San Bernardino, Calif. I guess by now, it is safe to assume that The Ridgefield Press has a real wide coverage in the good old U.S.A.

The letter starts out, "As one old Postmaster to another." It was from Margaret Kennedy, a retired California postmaster. Margaret was attracted to the column (#22), about "Big Jim" Kennedy. He was Margaret's father.

Apparently we only scratched the surface as far as Jim Kennedy's building activities are concerned. This beautiful, three-page letter, was not only encouraging but very informative. Among other things, it cleared up the mystery of where the name, "Fort Hill," for the Kennedy homestead was derived. We will leave all this great information for another column.

Readers of this column may recall Dispatch #6, concerning Titicus School. It revealed that at age 5, in first grade, I was attracted to a girl in second grade. She was the only one in the

school who had a wristwatch and it made a very big impression on this little kid. In the column she was referred to as my first “girl friend.”

A few days after the column appeared, my phone rang and a lady’s voice asked, “Is this Dick Venus?” When the answer was in the affirmative, the voice continued, “Well, this is your first girl friend.”

If one considers the elapsed time, between 1920 and 1982, perhaps we should be credited for not dropping the phone, in surprise at this very pleasant call. We felt it truly delightful that this fine person would call, so I listened to Lorraine Goeppler recall the early days of our schooling at dear old Titicus School. She even remembered the name of her wristwatch. It was a “Tip Top” and we think it was made by the Ingersoll Watch Company.

Lorraine was understandably proud of her little watch and I was equally proud that she remembered me. That this little column is able to bring voices out of the past, is very inspiring.

Another phone call came, a few days after Dispatch #18, which told of the turkey shoots that used to take place on Tackora Trail, so many years ago. This call was from a gentleman, who asked the usual questions but did not reveal his name. When I asked who was calling, his reply was that I would not know him for we had never met.

An old Parker shotgun that we used to borrow from Howland Adams was described in some detail in that column. The old gun was almost falling apart, but it won most of the turkeys and drove to distraction, those who had modern and expensive shotguns. The caller explained that he made periodic visits to Altnacraig to visit his sister, Mary. He seemed to enjoy the columns which Mary saved for him.

My caller then informed me that he was now the owner of that famous old gun. We were happily surprised that after all these years, the gun was still around. We again asked his name and he once again said that I would not know him, as we had never met.

Finally, our caller said that his name was Joseph Adams. I remembered him immediately as Howland’s younger brother, and reminded him that we had met one time, many years ago. He asked when it was that we had met, and was informed that it was during Danbury Fair week in 1931. After explaining some of the details of our meeting at his brother’s farm in South Salem, he seemed to remember the occasion.

His father was the very well known Joe Adams, of the firm known as Adams and Keeler. Joe Sr. and William R. Keeler, operated a large livery stable at the very southern end of Main Street. The large barn was destroyed by fire and several horses were lost in the terrible conflagration. Details will be covered in a later column,

To say that we are grateful to those who have taken the time to write or call, or stop us on the street with well wishes, would be an understatement of the greatest proportion.

#33: THE MAN WHO DIED AT JOE’S CORNER

So we started at Joe’s Store (Country Corners) [Tony’s Corner Deli], crossed the street to the Newton house. We then went north to the New York state line, on the west side, and back on the east side to Joe’s Store. I hope you enjoyed the trip through this historic part of Ridgefield.

For more than half a century, the names Joe’s Store and Joe’s Corner have been unchanged. Through the ensuing years both the store and the corner have undergone considerable change. From news emanating from Hartford, more changes are contemplated.

It appears that the state Department of Transportation, with its benevolent concern for the safety, health and welfare of Ridgefield's long suffering citizens, is about to supply us with even more-detestable traffic lights. Along the way, it is to be expected that they will also destroy some of the fine trees that have made our Main Street a thing of beauty.

We have witnessed some of the changes made at this corner over the years. Some of the changes were good and others were of questionable value. My interest in these proceedings stems from the fact that I was born only about 50 yards from the corner.

A certain amount of sympathy can easily be generated for those in the late afternoon who are traveling north and attempting to enter North Salem Road. We can also sympathize with their efforts to enter Main Street from North Salem Road in the early morning hours.

However, there are alternatives for those familiar with the roads other than Main Street. Also, a policeman directing traffic during the short peak periods would seem to be more efficient....

There are some who feel the recent alterations at the intersection of Routes 35 and 7 are an improvement. There are at least equally as many who do not agree. Guess it depends on how it affects you personally.

The first major change was made to the corner in 1926. At that time the surface of the highway to Danbury and all of Main Street was changed from tar to concrete. It had been tar all the way to Danbury with the exception of a short stretch along "Sugar Hollow" which kept sinking and was repaired with load after load of gravel. The tar-surfaced roads of that time were made of a far different substance. Black surfaced roads today also contain asphalt which makes them a great deal more pliable.

The firm of Osborne and Barnes rebuilt this highway in 1926 and in the process changed the right-angle corner on the south side of Joe's Corner to the gentle curve that it now has. As well as having a right-angled corner, the road at that point was not nearly as wide as it is today.

There has been one fatality at Joe's Corner through the years and it is doubtful that traffic lights would have prevented it. However, it is felt that the tragic incident did have some bearing on the widening of the road and the reduction of the sharpness of the corner.

In the teens, Peter and Augusta Hornig and their daughters, Flora and Gertrude, lived in the large white house just north of Nina's and across from Joe's Store. Peter had retired as caretaker for George M. Olcott at Casagmo. He and his family had lived about where Wayside Liquor Store is now and operated a little greenhouse and flower shop to the rear of that building. He also had a few cows and pastured them across the street in an open field. The gate to the field was just about where Chambers Army and Navy Store [Bareburger] is now.

It was a simple matter for Peter to cross the road at milking time. Traffic at the time was no problem. However, when he and his family moved to the house opposite Joe's, the journey at milking time was somewhat longer.

It was Peter's habit to carry his milk pail and walk down the left side of the hill to his greenhouse. After caring for his flowers in the greenhouse, he then crossed the highway to do the milking.

On Sunday afternoon, April 9, 1916, about 5:30, Peter with his milk pail on his arm, was walking down the left side of the road. He reached a point between where Bellagarnba's Floor

Covering shop is now located and where Tom Clark now lives. These are the first two structures after Joe's Store, going down the hill.

A chauffeur-driven vehicle came down the hill, crossed the road to the left side and struck Peter. He was knocked down and the wheels of the large auto passed over him. He died the next day of his injuries.

The tragic incident caused considerable repercussions in town. Peter Hornig was a well-liked man and there was talk of proper punishment for the driver as well as recommended improvements in the physical structure of the corner.

An inquest took place on Tuesday, April 11, at the office of Dr. Russell W. Lowe on Main Street where Dr. Peter Yanity now lives and practices dentistry. The inquest made the front page of The Ridgefield Press and is a perfect example of how several persons can witness an incident and have widely divergent ideas of what actually happened.

The Press account states that the inquest was conducted by John J. Phelan of Bridgeport, who was the coroner at the time. It was revealed that the car was owned by George L. Wilson of New York City. He and his party were returning from an afternoon spent at the Port of Missing Men. The large auto was a Pope-Hartford and was driven by the chauffeur, George Brown, also of New York City.

A local gentleman, George Pratt Ingersoll, represented the Homig family. He called Mrs. Frank Miller as his first witness. The Miller family lived in the very first house (brown shingled) on the right side going down the hill. Frank was a harness maker by trade and a very good one. As the horses gave way to the automobile, he became a night watchman on the Frederic E. Lewis estate. His daughter, Ruth Perregaux, still lives on Bryon Avenue.

Mrs. Miller stated that the accident occurred almost directly opposite her home. She was sitting on her front porch when it happened. There was no other traffic and there were no objects to interfere with her view of what happened. She noted that Mr. Hornig always walked on the left side of the road as his flower shop was on that side. Mrs. Miller observed Mr. Hornig making his usual trip with the milk pail on his arm. As he passed her house, a large car turned left into Danbury Road and "hugged" the gutter on the right side of the road. Suddenly the car swerved to the left side of the road and struck Mr. Hornig in the back. Mrs. Miller thought a horn might have blown. She also felt that the car was traveling at a low rate of speed.

Joseph A. Zwierlein had a very different picture of what happened. Joe was one of my favorite characters and we hope to write more about him soon. At any rate, he said that he was sitting on his front porch and saw the whole thing. The front porch he refers to is still there at 613 Main Street, just south of Nina's. It would have afforded him a good view of the area.

Joe said the car was traveling at a great deal of speed and the driver did not sound his horn. He also described the swerve of the vehicle as it veered to the opposite side of the road.

In the house next to the Millers going down the hill lived the Fred Claus family. Fred was a fireman on the NYNH&H Railroad and worked the engine that came into Ridgefield. Fred was musically inclined and played both the piano and the banjo very well. There were many happy times when I accompanied him with my harmonica as the neighbors listened in. At the inquest Fred testified that he heard the commotion in front of his house but that he did not actually see it happen.

More conflicting testimony and a very unpopular decision next week.

#34: PETER HORNIG'S DEATH: WHAT LITTLE LYNCE SAW

We left off last week, in the middle of an inquest held in Dr. Lowe's office. The inquest was caused by the tragic death of Peter Hornig, just east of Joe's Store on Danbury Road. Mr. Hornig died of injuries received when he was struck by a car that had rounded Joe's Corner and then swerved to the opposite side of the road. The accident occurred April 9, 1916.

Witnesses at the inquest had given conflicting testimony as to whether the car was traveling fast, or slow. Some said the driver had blown his horn and others said that no horn had been sounded.

Percy and Edith Humphreys, and their children, Percy Jr. and Lloyd (Gertrude had not yet arrived), lived in the house just east of the Fred Claus family. The former Humphreys home is at present going through a complete face lift, as new siding is being applied.

Mr. Humphrey testified that he heard the noise and ran out on his front porch. He said that the car had stopped on the right side of the highway. He saw Mr. Hornig lying on the left side of the road. It was his estimate that the car had traveled about 250 feet after the impact.

He rushed across the street to see if he could be of any assistance to Mr. Hornig. As he reached the injured man, the car started to back up the hill, on the right side, until it was opposite the scene of the accident. He felt that no horn had been sounded.

Other witnesses who testified were John Raifstanger, the proprietor of The Sportsman Inn, Michael Foshay and young Master Fred Foshay.

The owner of the car, George Wilson, testified that he and his party had been guests that afternoon at the Port of Missing Men. He said that they decided to go to Stamford, via the Danbury Road. There were some skeptics as to the wisdom of this decision.

Wilson said that his four cylinder Pope-Hartford auto was in good condition, with all gadgets operating well. His testimony included a declaration that his chauffeur, George Brown, had blown his horn before reaching the corner and again after making the turn at the intersection of Main Street and Danbury Road.

Wilson placed so much emphasis on the blowing of the horn that one could get the impression that such an act on the part of the driver relieved him of any further responsibility. Everything, including pedestrians, on either side of the highway, should vanish, as they had been amply warned. Objects on the highway must make room for the auto or suffer the consequences.

The chauffeur, George Brown, testified that he was traveling at about 12 miles per hour. He did not explain why, at that speed, it took him 250 feet to bring the car to a halt. One can only imagine that if he were going at top speed (between 45 and 50), he might have stopped half way to Danbury.

Brown also testified that he had blown the horn twice. One might consider the very large horn that a Pope-Hartford sported. It was quite similar to a large trumpet with a rubber ball, the size of a basketball, to provide the air pressure. When that large ball was squeezed with sufficient force, it would put Louis Armstrong to shame, and be heard for miles.

It does seem amazing that so many people could witness this tragic event and have so many different versions of what actually happened. About the only thing they agreed on was that the car entered Danbury Road from North Salem Road. This would be easy to assume as the

party in the auto was on its way back from The Port of Missing Men (also known as the Tea House).

Not so, according to an old-time Ridgefielder, who was there, but was not called to testify. So, as Al Jolson used to say, "You ain't heard nothin yet."

The house just east of the Humphreys' home was a large, two-family building. This house was the other half of the house where I was born, up the hill and around the corner on Main Street, hard by the stone wall that encloses the Casagmo complex. Ridgefield has an awful lot of buildings that were moved to their present location, but that's another story.

Some 20 years ago the house next to the Humphreys was torn down and replaced by the attractive brick building just across the street from Ridge Bowl. In the very next house lived Mr. and Mrs. Benvenuto Carboni and their children Adrian (Ade), Octavious J. (Tabby), Navio (Pete), Olinto (Lynce), Mary, and Reno (Rinz). We will not attempt to write about this fine family at this time. They are worthy of a whole column by themselves. We will note, though, that despite the fact that each boy had his own individual nickname, they all answered to just one. Whereas the Ciuccoli boys were all "Chicks," the Carbonis were all "Bones."

At any rate, Lynce, who as a little boy used to play such games as mumbly-peg, duck-on-the-rock, statue and keily-over with other boys in the neighborhood, was so engaged about 5:30 p.m., on Sunday April 9, 1916. Lynce had become a real good friend of Peter Hornig. He was always ambitious and willing to help. It was his custom to watch for Mr. Hornig to make his customary trip down the hill at milking time. When Peter appeared Lynce would dash across the street and carry the milk pail for him.

On this particular Sunday, Lynce looked up from his game, just as Peter reached the house on the north side of Danbury Road where Tom Clark now lives. Lynce immediately ran toward his friend.

Just as he reached the highway, and started to cross it, he heard a loud roar from a speeding car. Lynce says that he looked up the hill and saw the car coming from the south on Main Street as it swung into the corner and entered Danbury Road. He could see that the car was traveling too fast to safely negotiate the turn.

Then, as he looked on in horror, he saw the car cross to the north side of the road. As the auto struck Mr. Hornig, he said, the milk pail went flying into the air.

Lynce remembers being led away from the scene by some older person. He was not asked to testify and he thinks it was because he was so young at the time. However, Fred Foshay testified and he was about Lynce's age.

One thing is for sure: If he had been a couple of seconds earlier and had made it across the street, he would not be around now to tell about it. As the others all had the car coming from the north whereas Lynce swears it came from the south, one can only imagine the commotion he would have caused if he did get to testify.

Unpopular court decisions seem to be rendered quite often today and apparently they are nothing new. The coroner ruled that because of the conflicting testimony, he found no criminal liability and refused to prosecute. Despite the fact that many local people were very upset, the owner and the driver of the car were freed to go their way.

It was brought out at the inquest that the coroner and the owner of the car were well known to each other. It was not implied that this fact influenced the coroner's decision.

It is doubtful that if traffic lights had been installed way back then that a life could have been saved. Constable Frank Taylor, that grand old limb-of-the-law, was the investigating officer. He was heard to say, after learning where the car had come from, that "They must have been serving some awful strong tea today."

#35: MOVING HOUSES WITH A PAIR OF HORSES

Peter Hornig's death caused considerable sentiment to be expressed in favor of reducing the sharpness of the corner at Joe's Store. It is doubtful that Peter's life would have been saved, had the corner been less sharp at the time. If there had been sidewalks back in those days, he would not have had to walk in the road. Traffic lights would have been of no help.

It was ten years later when the firm of Osborne and Barnes repaved Main Street and Danbury Road with concrete in 1926. At the same time, they did some surgery, reducing the sharp right-angle turn to the gentle sloping curve that exists today. This alteration was a large improvement, with special benefits for those approaching the curve from the business center on Main Street.

However, those coming from the north and those turning left, from Main Street, into North Salem Road, were still at the mercy of those traveling up and down the hill. They were also deserving of consideration.

As the flow of traffic increased through the years, so did the pace of life itself. Everyone seemed to be in a big hurry. Few, if any, were willing to stop, or even slow up, to let those from the north turn left onto Danbury Road, or those from the south turn left into North Salem Road.

Four portable stanchions were placed at the intersection in an effort to create a modified rotary traffic pattern. Like "Topsy," the number of stanchions grew from four to 16. They offered an inviting target and were knocked down, like bowling pins, on many occasions. There was room for a car to maneuver in this congested area, if the driver was skillful, careful and considerate.

The permanent type traffic controllers that now grace the corner were somewhat of an improvement. However, a police officer, directing traffic during the peak periods, plus courteous and considerate drivers, would seem to be an even greater improvement.

Rather than the Department of Transportation plan to install five more lights, we would advocate a bypass to relieve the situation. It would seem that a long-term solution would be to decrease the number of cars using Main Street unless they actually had business in the center of town. This would be preferable to having cars needlessly stopped, bumper to bumper, the length of Main Street in one direction and half way to Danbury in the other. We have seen autos backed up as far as Gilbert Street by the traffic light at the corner of Danbury Road and Grove Street.

Now we have lights at Limestone intersection as well as where Route 35 and Route 7 meet. A trip light at Limestone would be preferable. The blood pressure of drivers must be tremendous when they sit waiting for a light to change, when no cars are entering from the roads that have the green light.

We just wonder if those with the intellect to create mind-boggling traffic stallers have ever figured how much precious gasoline is wasted by autos idly sitting with motors running, waiting for the light to change. More traffic lights, we do not need. Are they trying to make us over in the image of Danbury? Many have noticed that when the lights were turned to just blink

during the height of the Christmas season on Main Street, the lines of traffic moved along slowly and smoothly. At least it was moving.

At any rate, when the state finally got around in 1926 to fixing the corner, it entailed the moving of a couple of houses. One house that sat right on the corner, was moved back a considerable distance and placed on an angle parallel to the corner.

William J. Humphrys and his wife, Phoebe, lived in this house, as well as their son W. Reginald and his wife, Jennie. William was noted for the vanilla extract that he produced in the basement of this house. The extract must have been very good, as people came from miles to get it. One of his best customers was Harvey P. Bissell, when Bissell's Drug Store made their own famous ice cream.

The house, like many of the older houses, has undergone several color schemes during its long life. Just a few years ago it was a real bright yellow and now it is a very light blue, with shutters of a darker blue.

Jennie Humphrys was well known for her ability to knit woolen articles of clothing and was also very adept at making rag rugs. Reggie once worked as a coachman for Morris B. Whitlock, who operated a livery stable where Ridge Bowl is now located. Later on Reggie became a taxi driver, as the horses began to disappear.

Humphrys Taxi was one of several that operated in Ridgefield at the time, as Reggie finally went into business for himself. He was an exceptionally careful driver and if he ever had an accident, it could not have been his fault.

At one time, in the 20's, Reggie had an enormous Studebaker touring car, replete with real leather seats. The leather was affixed with deep-set buttons that gave it a look of genuine elegance. His last car was a little black Chevrolet, vintage 1933.

Reggie's cars always lasted a very long time because of his habit of treating and driving them with care. When he retired, he sold his business to Tommy Scott. Tommy moved to Wilton but continued his business under the name Humphrys Taxi.

Reggie was also well known as a trombone and tuba player with the old Ridgefield Band. You may recall that in Dispatches 3 and 4, we noted that this neighborhood produced some real good musicians. There were Reggie and Percy Humphrys, Fred Claus, Sam Nicholas, Will Stevens, Pat Leary, Phil Leary, and George Knapp, all surrounding Joe's Corner.

The house between the Humphreys house and the Venus house was known as the Roach house. The Ned Roach family lived there for many years. This house had to be moved also, but so slightly that it could hardly be noticed.

To get these houses moved it was necessary to call on Ridgefield's premier mover of buildings, Caro H. Northrop. Caro was considered a genius at moving a building. No task was too great for him and it was said that he never cracked a ceiling or wall. There was some talk about moving the furniture from the house but Caro nixed that. He said you can leave a glass of water on the dining room table and I won't spill a drop. He was as good as his word.

Samuel S. Denton, another member of the band, owned these houses and all the others on that side of the street. He and his trusted lieutenant, Al Ferguson, joined Caro and Caro's son Reed, in this house-moving project.

Great 12-by-12 timbers were used for this work. After the house was loosened from its foundation and jacked up, the timbers were slid under it. The house was then jacked up again and

large wooden rollers were placed between the timbers, in strategic places. Extreme care was exercised to make sure the building was kept level.

A series of block-and-tackles was then brought into play. It seemed like a mile of rope was used and no one but Caro knew what each rope would do. Then it was up to Caro's faithful team of horses, a gray named Jerry and a bay named King.

Jerry and King were not big horses and they were not young. They probably were not very strong. In fact, Caro used to jokingly say that "they could not pull the hat off your head." However, they knew their job very well and by the time Caro had put together his "Rube Goldberg" pulling arrangement, a small pony could have moved the building.

Caro let me drive the horses when each pull was made. At least I thought that I was driving them. Actually, I guess they could have made the trip from the Humphrys' house to where Pamby Motors is now located, without any driver. That "trip," which probably was about 300 yards in length, moved the house about eight to 10 inches. This would give some idea of how long it took to move the house to its present location. However, it was great fun and made me feel very important. It made 1926, a very important year for me.

Another thing that I remember about the project is that at noontime when the men stopped for lunch, one of them opened a nickel can of beans, which he proceeded to eat with the pancakes that were left over from breakfast. There are those who feel he could have afforded filet mignon.

#36: WHEN THE IRON HORSE IRKED THE LIVING HORSE

Last week, the Press carried on its front page a picture of the building that once served as Ridgefield's Railroad Station. We feel that this grand old building has considerable historic value, and hope you agree.

It is more than 100 years old and served both as a passenger terminal and express office until August of 1925. For several years after the last passenger train had made its final run, the building continued to serve as an express office.

A new building, with concrete exterior, had been built in the southern end of the freight yards, to be used exclusively as a freight station. This building, next to the old elevator building, is now occupied by a woodworking business. For several years after the last passenger train, the tracks were used to bring freight into Ridgefield, as well as express, as the old steam engine huffed and puffed up the hill from Branchville.

My father was the express agent in the early part of the century, so the old railroad station has a special meaning for me.

There was a certain excitement about the activities at the station and the arrival of the big steam engine. I think it had emblazoned on its front, the number 600.

The track from Branchville to Ridgefield Center was called a spur. Using the word Branchville in this context makes it appear as though Branchville was another town, whereas, of course, it is a section of Ridgefield, just as is Farmingville, Ridgebury, etc.

The spur ended on Prospect Street and since there was no turntable to change the direction of the engine, it came head on up the hill and then backed down the hill. There were trips on which the engine backed up the hill and then returned head on down the hill.

As a little boy, I had, like many other boys, a newspaper route. The Ridgefield Press was my weekly and the Norwalk Hour was my daily. I also had a weekly magazine route, The Saturday Evening Post, etc.

The magazines always came by the train and they always came on Saturday morning at 8:20. The train ran on time those days. Railroad men seemed to take a fierce pride in keeping to their schedules. They were constantly checking their large pocket watches. The watches seemed to be either Waltham or Hamilton and were attached to large gold chains.

It was always a thrill to stand waiting for our magazines, as the old engine rolled into the station, hissing steam from the boiler, air from the brake system, smoke from the smoke stack and the bell clanging incessantly.

You could hear the loud whistle as it left Branchville Station and as it blew for each crossing, at Route 7, Florida Road, Cooper Hill, Ivy Hill Road, Prospect Street Extension, and Grove Street. The bell rang all the way from Ivy Hill into the station. Sometimes it continued to ring, even after the train had stopped at the station. We never knew why.

All of this noise was a part of the glamour of railroading, and caused many a young fellow to dream about becoming an engineer. The ultimate in thrills would be to sit in that engine, on the high perch on the right side of the cab, with a hand on the throttle, as the train went speeding down the tracks. The fact that the old 600 from Branchville probably never exceeded 15 to 20 miles per hour did not dampen the ardor of a boy who aspired to become the man who actually drove that big engine.

The noise of the engine and the commotion surrounding its arrival had a far different effect on horses that had not become familiar with all this clamor. Many are the stories told by teamsters and coachmen about the first time their horse, or team, encountered the excitement, attendant to the approach of a large steam engine as it entered the station. It was a real problem and taxed the skill of some very good horsemen.

Most people with a new horse took someone along with them to assist in the confrontation of a living horse with the iron horse. Some horses became accustomed after a few such experiences and others never got used to the noise of the great black monster.

Someone must have been looking over my shoulder as I write this column, Just as I reached this point, and at this very minute, the telephone rang. The caller was Frank Scallon, a former Ridgefielder now living in Norwalk. His father worked on the John Hunt estate, at the state line on North Salem Road, and the Scallon family lived on the estate.

The Hunt family was very fond of young Frank Scallon and gave him a donkey and a cart as a present. Frank said that one of his first jobs was to drive the donkey to the railroad station to meet his grandmother who had just come over from Ireland. The year was 1914 and the lady was to arrive on the 2 p.m. train. Frank arrived at the station 10 minutes early and the train pulled in right on time, with bell ringing. As the train came to a stop, a large burst of steam was emitted from under the engine, along with a tremendous puff of black smoke from the smokestack. There was no emission control program in those days.

The little donkey could tolerate the bell ringing, but the smoke and the hiss of the steam were something else. He decided that this was no place for him. The next thing that Frank knew, the donkey had taken the bit in his teeth and was on his way home as fast as he could go. Frank

was in his early teens and was a strong lad. He tried pulling one rein and then the other, to no avail. It is very doubtful that a grown man could have changed the little animal's mind.

At any rate, Frank, against his will, was taken all the way home, with no stops in between. The poor grandmother had no one to meet her, but fortunately she had directions as to where the Scallon family lived.

Undaunted she started the long five-mile walk to the state line. After walking some distance she met someone who had one of the few phones in town at the time. The person called the Hunts who then notified the Scallons. By this time the donkey's aversion to railroad engines had subsided somewhat and he agreed to meet Frank's grandmother half way.

Mules are a hybrid offspring of a male ass and a mare (horse). They inherit the strong sense of self preservation of the sire. They also inherit their stubbornness, which is exemplified by flatly refusing to move one inch or by refusing to stop, once they get started, as the donkey did.

There is a story about an old fellow who drove a mule that pulled a bakery wagon years ago. One day, when out in the countryside, making deliveries, the mule decided to balk. When the driver realized that his efforts to make the mule move were in vain, he phoned his boss and told him of his predicament.

The boss asked if he had used his whip.

The driver replied, "Yes sir."

The boss asked, "What happened then?"

The driver replied, "He just kicked the front of the wagon."

The boss asked if he had tried beating the mule's front legs with a stick.

The driver said, "Yes sir, I tried that, too."

The boss again asked, "What happened then?"

The driver said, "That mule just hit me on the shoulder."

The boss wanted to know if the driver had tried starting a fire under the mule.

The driver replied, "Yes sir, boss, I tried everything."

When the boss asked what happened after he built the fire, the driver said, "That mule went ahead just far enough so the wagon burned up."

#37: WHEN THERE WERE 11 TRAINS A DAY

We have been reminiscing about the old Ridgefield Railroad Station. It seems incredible now, but at one time, it was advertised that there were six New York City trains daily and eleven in all, counting the freight trains. Considering the population of Ridgefield at the time, it seems like an awful lot of train service. Most everyone in town would have to use the train to make the service pay. The town must have been practically empty, from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

The number of people that had a part in the operation makes one wonder how the train service could have been very profitable. Just the actual operation of the train must have been rather expensive.

George Weir was the conductor and lived on the corner of Bryan Avenue and Greenfield Street, where the Garbins now live. Frank Seymour was the engineer and lived in the two family house on "Depot Hill," directly across the street from where the Village Bank [The Prospector in 2019] is now located. Fred Claus was the fireman and lived in the second house on the right,

going down Danbury Road from Main Street. Jack Walker was the brakeman and lived at the very end of Prospect Street Ext.

Marshall Ralston was the ticket agent and lived on Gilbert Street, where Frank Warner is now. Fred Thomas had been a ticket agent before Mr. Ralston, but quit to go with the Ridgefield Lumber Company. Fred and his family lived for many years on Fairview Avenue.

All of these people were employed just to get the train to make its run back and forth to Branchville. There were others, not directly involved with the operation of the train, who were needed to round out the process of delivering passengers, freight and express items.

Walter Olmstead was the express messenger. I was not sure if his first name was Walter or Frank. Charley Elliott was the man who delivered the express; so I called him. Charley has an excellent memory and quickly informed me that the messenger's first name was Walter.

Walt was rather tall and always wore a cap, a pair of very heavy shoes, a trim little brown moustache and overalls of the same color. The brown overalls were of the type made popular by men who worked for the Electric Light Company.

The most important item, of all the things he wore, was a large .45 calibre revolver. Compared to a .32 calibre Saturday Night Special, a .45 is like a cannon versus a pistol.

The reason for this piece of heavy artillery was the valuable cargo that was carried in the baggage car. This was before the days of the private couriers that serve our present-day banking systems. The baggage car carried the U.S. Mail, which included registered articles, jewelry, and cash, as well as the more valuable express items.

Walt was responsible for the safe delivery of these items from station to station. As the train made ready to leave one station or the other, he would lock himself in the baggage car. He stayed locked in until "old 600" pulled into the next station. The valuables were then examined against the manifest by the station agent. When he was satisfied that things were in order, he signed the manifest, relieving Walt of further responsibility.

During the late teens and the 20's, Theodore Mead was the express agent and Charley Elliott delivered the express. Charley first used a fine horse named Evo and then in the late 20's he was provided with a Model A Ford truck.

The express horse used to be stabled at Morris Whitlock's livery stable across from the firehouse. Later on it was found to be more convenient to keep him in Jack Walker's stable that was just around the corner on Grove Street.

The express horses got to know Ridgefield better than some people would know it today. It was said that Charley could tell Evo what stops he had to make and the horse could make the trip by himself.

Charley used to let me drive the horse on occasion, especially when he was working on the new house he was building on the corner of Mountain View Avenue and Hillsdale Avenue. Naturally this gave me a feeling of great importance, until I realized that Evo knew more about all this than I did.

Evo was a good strong horse but like all heavy horses of the day, he suffered from the increasing number of hard paved roads and streets. Horses were just not meant to do their thing on the hard asphalt and concrete surfaces. However, the cursed automobile was here to stay and was catered to as it increased in popularity.

Along the way, some kind-hearted person invented a rubber-padded shoe which helped greatly in lessening the shock to the hooves of the poor horses. Harry Thomas, the fine Ridgefield blacksmith, outfitted Evo with these new softer cushions and the horse actually smiled with relief as he trotted down Main Street. The new device would keep him going a few more years, but his days were truly numbered.

They tell of my father, when he was the express agent, taking a 510-pound barrel of sugar off the back of the old express wagon. I can well remember Charley Elliott, wrestling very heavy trunks and boxes. He was not very big, but Charley knew how to lift and nothing was too big for him to handle.

Fish was shipped in barrels those days. Of course, the fish was packed in ice and the barrel had a piece of burlap stretched across its top. Perhaps it was necessary to have some air get into the barrel. It sure let some air out and the aroma was really not all that great. It kind of curbed my appetite for the denizens of the deep. Fortunately, I got over that.

Hibbart's Market was located in the store now occupied by Cappiello Brothers. This was a very busy little store and they sold a lot of fish. The heavy barrels of fish arrived on the late afternoon train each Thursday. The ground at the back of the store sloped quite sharply to the east. This meant that poor Evo had a real tough job backing the wagon up to the platform.

Charley had an equally tough task in rolling those barrels uphill to the rear of the wagon for unloading. The rear of the wagon must have been more than a foot higher than the front when parked on this incline. There was no easy way. So both Charley and Evo had to work very hard.

I am reminded of the young man who came over here from England. After he had been here a few months, his brother George wrote to him and asked what kind of a country it was, as he was considering coming over here.

The brother wrote back to George and said, "It's a great country for women and dogs, but it's 'ell on men and 'orses."

My, how times have changed!

#38: SOME WILD AND WOOLLY TALES OF THE VILLAGE STATION

If the walls in the old railroad station could only talk, they could tell some very interesting tales. They can't, so I will try.

A place as busy as the station seemed bound to have a lot of things happen. Some of the people who worked at the station developed a fondness for the juice of the fruit of the vine, the nectar of the kernels of rye or barley, the liquid that was left after the corn was squeezed, or the fluid that was found after the apples were pressed. This may, or may not, have had some bearing on things that occurred.

The affection for beverages such as the above, can be dangerous when firearms are within easy reach. One fellow, who was ordinarily as quiet as a mouse, became a real joker after only a little imbibing. He possessed a penchant for dancing. Not his own. He just liked to see someone else dance.

When this fellow discovered that Charley Elliott was light on his feet, he encouraged him to be even lighter. He wanted a demonstration and his requests that Charley dance were punctuated by blasts from a .45 calibre handgun that normally lay in the office safe.

Charley got the message, but tried to ignore the invitation for a command performance. However, when the words, "Dance, d... you," were accompanied by the sharp crack of the old .45, and the thud of a slug tearing into the heavy old oak floor, Charley started paying strict attention.

Fred Astaire and his sister Adele were at this time in the early stages of their illustrious careers. They were sufficiently advanced, however, to fend off any threat that Charley may have posed with his gyrations around the old pot-bellied stove. Come to think of it, he may have been a little ahead of his time as his style was probably more reminiscent of the excessive movements of the Presley years.

After his initial performance it is certainly understandable that Charley exercised extreme caution when approaching the express office. On one occasion as he backed old Evo up to the loading platform, he noted that the office was unusually quiet.

Upon entering the office, he noted that the large door on the office safe was open. Further examination showed that the door to the compartment that housed the Colt .45 was also open. It also looked very empty. Charley did not need any further urging to make himself scarce.

It was quickly decided that Charley did not have time to get back to his horse, so he left Evo and took off as fast as his legs could carry him. He was making pretty good time when he reached the point where the Village Bank now stands. The theater had not as yet been built. The first shot was fired as he reached this spot and Charley was surprised to find that he really had not been running as fast as he could.

For some reason, the shooting episodes generally occurred right after lunch. It is not thought that the solids consumed at lunch were a contributing factor.

There was a time when Charley used to hire Harold "Buck" Mead to make deliveries when he was otherwise engaged. Buck was an affable fellow and got along well with everyone. Charley impressed on Buck that after any registered articles that he may have been carrying, his most important responsibility was Evo, the horse. We always thought the horse should come first.

It is not clear whether or not Charley failed to warn Buck of what he might encounter on certain afternoons at the station. However, early one afternoon, Buck was backing Evo up to the platform when he heard the unmistakable click of a revolver being cocked. Buck took one look at the expression on the face of the person holding the gun and decided that it might be wise to postpone the loading of the wagon, until later in the afternoon.

At about this time his concern for Evo's well-being surfaced. Buck hopped back on the wagon seat and he and Evo were seen passing East Ridge at a gallop.

In retrospect, it should be considered a minor miracle that no one was seriously injured during these incidents that were so mindful of the "Wild and Woolly West."

On one occasion, the dance routine had just started when the whistle and the bell announced the approach of old 600. Walt Olmstead, as usual, was riding in the baggage car as the train pulled into the station. Above the clanging of the bell and the hissing of the steam, Walt heard the crack of the .45, emanating from the express office.

His first thought was a robbery was in progress. Walt dutifully drew his own trusty Colt .45 and fired a couple of warning shots. Once again a shooting spree is ended and the participants in Ridgefield's combination of a drama and an "Our Gang Comedy," are very lucky.

It would be fun to go into the old station once more and look for the bullet holes in the floor. I'm sure that Charley could point out each one without any trouble.

What is to be done with the old station? It is owned by the Ridgefield Supply Company. They have no use for the fine old building. They have offered it to a local society that is engaged in preserving such historic edifices. The company has generously offered a sizable sum to offset the cost of moving the station. There has been much talk but no action on a proper disposition of the matter.

Anyone who has been to Chattanooga, Tenn., would not leave the city without seeing the famous Chattanooga Choo Choo. The little train is well worth seeing and it sits on the tracks, right outside the equally famous Chattanooga Railroad Station. This fine old station has been restored and is a thing of real beauty. It has been converted into a very fine restaurant, while remaining replete with all the characteristics that give that warm and homey effect to a railroad station.

After admiring the very ornate exterior of the station and before entering the restaurant, you approach the ticket office, just as if you were buying a ticket for a trip on the train. There you are handed a very extensive menu. As you make your selection of food and beverages, the "ticket agent" punches your choices on a ticket that resembles the old railroad ticket. After paying your bill, in advance, you proceed into the very elaborate restaurant, hand your ticket to the waiter, and then sit back and enjoy yourself.

It is all so very simple and there is something nice about getting up from a meal that has already been paid for. Wouldn't it be nice if this could be made to happen to Ridgefield's fine old historic railroad station?

We have room for one more anecdote. The south end of the station was actually a large shed. The sides were open and the roof was about 20 feet high. At ground level and near the center of the waiting platform was placed a large scale that gave your correct weight for a penny.

The scale stood a little over five feet and was standard equipment in all railroad stations. What a collector's item that scale would be today. One Saturday afternoon, one of Ridgefield's fine young gentlemen (the term is used in its literal sense), drove his car too close to the platform and knocked the scale over. He had been celebrating that afternoon with some friends and was in a very expansive mood.

Eddie was a real nice fellow and noted for his politeness. He slowly got out of his car, carefully picked up the scale, put it in an upright position, dusted it off, apologized, "Sorry Miss," tipped his hat, returned to his car, and slowly drove away.

#39: WHEN FREIGHT AND COAL CAME BY RAIL

The spur, as the branch railroad line from Branchville Station to Ridgefield was known, was built in 1870. It lasted for 55 years of passenger service and transported many Ridgefield commuters to New York City and to points in between. Passenger service ended Aug. 8, 1925.

The freight business was also handled by the railroad and continued for another 30 years. It was obvious, however, that it too was dying a slow death. The automobile and the trucking business made a tremendous impact on the movement of freight.

The magnitude of the freight business in little old Ridgefield would have to be seen to be believed. Yet its demise was assured when deliveries began to be made directly to the customers by truck.

There were other reasons for the end of the freight business, but as with the passenger business, it was the conveniences offered by the autos and the trucks that really did the job.

The original express business in Ridgefield was known as the Adams Express. It was a vibrant, privately owned business and its success did not go unnoticed by those who operated the railroads. Adams was pressured into selling to the railroad and the American Railway Express was born. It lived a relatively short life.

At one time, the old Ridgefield Railroad Station housed three different operations. The south end of the building was devoted to the selling of tickets for passenger service. Then there was a freight office and an express office. Someone in the freight end of this complex must have been wearing glasses that had a rosy tint, and a new freight house was built at the south western end of the railroad yards. Those responsible for the building of this concrete-sided structure must have had visions of mountains of freight. However, I never saw the building when it was crowded, even in its best years. As the volumes of freight decreased, the freight house appeared to get larger.

Just north of the freight house and on the eastern side of the railroad yards, a trestle had been built. The trestle was a great conglomeration of huge timbers, concrete and steel. It was about 20 feet above ground level and railroad tracks were laid along its upper surface.

The purpose of the trestle, in case you have not already guessed, was to facilitate the loading of the coal trucks that would make the home deliveries. The coal arrived in Ridgefield, in open railroad cars that were equipped, on their underparts, with doors that could be opened to release the coal.

The railroad coal cars were pushed up onto the trestle and parked with the previously mentioned doors, strategically placed over large holes in the floor of the trestle. The coal trucks were then backed under the trestle, directly beneath the doors. The doors were then opened enough to let the coal slide through and pass into the body of the coal truck. This avoided all the shoveling that otherwise would have to be done to unload the coal car.

The trestle would hold only two railroad cars at one time. This could cause a problem from time to time as there were several coal companies in Ridgefield. The use of the trestle had to be handled with some dexterity.

There were occasions when three carloads of coal would arrive on the same day. The company owning the car left at ground level had the choice of either unloading by hand or waiting for one of the two parked on the trestle to get unloaded. This could be expensive as the railroad allowed a limited time, generally three days, for unloading. When the time limit was up, demurrage charges were then incurred. With wages as low as they were at that time, it probably was cheaper to hire someone to shovel off the coal.

This dilemma was solved to some extent, when the Ridgefield Lumber Company (now the Supply Company) purchased an electric conveyor, which could load trucks from the coal car that was at ground level.

Switching the cars around in the railroad yards and getting the empty cars out of the way of loaded car was always an interesting operation. The engineer generally pushed the cars up

from Branchville Station. Its first job, on reaching Ridgefield, was to hook onto the empty cars and switch them to the unused side tracks.

The engineer was the original “sidetracker.” After the empty cars had been sidetracked, the loaded cars were put in their proper place. This could take some time if there were six or eight cars to switch. There were two switches, one on either side of Prospect Street where it crossed the railroad tracks. A third switch was located near the engine house near Grove Street.

It took a considerable push to get the two coal cars up onto the trestle. Each car carried 40 tons and the engine had to proceed rather slowly as it had to stop immediately after placing the car. There was no other place to go when the end of the trestle was reached. The old steam engine had no problem putting the coal cars in their place, but we noted in later years, when the Diesel engine replaced the steam, there was a lot of wheel spinning before the job was done.

Some of the coal dealers that we remember were the Ridgefield Lumber Company, The James F. Kennedy Company, The Samuel S. Denton Company, The Ernest Scott Company, and the B.E. Sperry Company. Each of these companies had access to the rail yards and each had its own little place to store the excess coal. There was no fence around the storage areas and it was said that the harder the coal, the quicker it evaporated.

Charley Standard and Harry Terpenney drove teams of horses for the Lumber Company. Charley had been one of the many fine coachmen in Ridgefield’s horsey days. He must have been a good one as he drove for the Hamilton family on High Ridge.

I guess that Charley’s life story was one which was repeated many times over, across the country. In his early days he was a real dandy and dressed the part [picture next week]. He was what was known as a liveried coachman.

He was considered very proficient in the art of handling highly spirited driving horses. His ability in this connection can only be truly appreciated by those who had to depend on him, or others like him, at a time when horses were the means of getting you to where you had to go.

Charley, his wife and daughter, lived in the same house that is now the home of the editor of this paper. His attitude toward life in general took an abrupt change when it first became known to him that the horse would be banished forever as the main means of transportation.

Even though the horse was through as far as transportation was concerned, Charley felt that the large draft horses could not be replaced. To him it was inconceivable that the horse was no longer a necessity.

The Hamiltons moved away and their house was moved across the street to where the Jack Sherrys now live. Charley found himself without a job and also without his beloved horses. He had no further use for the elegant attire that was an integral part of the exalted coachman’s apparel. This must have been a very severe blow to Charley’s ego. The Hamiltons were one of the last families that required a coachman. There were no more similar jobs to be had.

#40: THE PRANKS THEY PLAYED ON CHARLEY

Charley Stannard was a very practical person. Practical but stubborn. He just could not give in to the hated automobile.

As the glamorous coachman jobs disappeared forever, Charley decided that the next best thing would be a job as a teamster. At least he would still be working with horses. They would be

considerably bigger and slower than the magnificent coach horses that he was accustomed to handling, but still they were horses.

Charley must have swallowed a couple of times as he switched to the heavy draft horses. He got a job driving a team for the Ridgefield Lumber Company. One horse was a jet black named Fritz and the other a mahogany bay named Lady. Both carried the brand USA on the respective rumps. This was the result of having served in the U.S. Army during World War I.

The skill required to handle these horses was not as great as that needed to manage high spirited coach horses. This meant two things to Charley. First, he would not be drawing the amount of pay to which he had become accustomed. Second, he would need an extra job. So he became what we would call today a “moonlighter.”

Charley got a little red push cart. It had three wheels. A small wheel in the front and two larger wheels in the rear. In the bed of the cart, he placed a large cabinet. The cabinet was full of all sorts of goodies that he would sell at various public gatherings.

Arthur Ferry, and later, Jack Coughlin, conducted Saturday night movies in the town ball during these times. Silent movies, of course, but they were well attended. Charley was always out front of the hall shouting “Peanuts, popcorn and Cracker-Jack.”

He never missed a baseball game. They were also well attended. Even though our population hovered around 3,000, it was not unusual for the games to draw several hundred fans.

Charley did a very good business with his little push cart, but his success led him to a rather close acquaintance with John Barleycorn. This lasting friendship caused him to descend the social ladder. It also caused him to be the butt of many pranks.

The boys of the day took particular delight in annoying Charley. His low boiling point only made him a more interesting target for all kinds of jest. It should be noted, however, that when he became an old man and lived in a rest home, the same boys who tormented him years before were very good to him. They used to go to the rest home and take Charley out for a ride as well as furnish him with a nice dinner.

At any rate, there was one occasion at a ball game when one of the boys attracted Charley’s attention, while two others ran off with his push cart. The cart not only contained his various commodities but his cash receipts for the day.

Naturally, he almost went out of his mind. Actually he had nothing to fear and when he finally got home that night, he found his cart waiting for him — and nothing was missing.

The hazing and the teasing continued for many years, even into his advanced age. Somehow, one got the impression that even though Charley’s reaction to the tricks was rather violent, he found some kind of enjoyment in it himself.

There was one prank played on him that we are sure he did not enjoy. Once when I was just a little kid, I was playing a game of catch with Walter “Chuck” Walker. Chuck later became one of the very best pitchers in the history of Ridgefield High School. He lived with his parents, Uncle Jack and Aunt Joe Walker, on the corner of Prospect and Grove Streets. That building now houses several different businesses, including a French restaurant [in 2019, Gallo]. Uncle Jack was the John L. Walker who conducted a very successful moving and storage business before becoming Ridgefield’s postmaster when F.D.R. was elected president.

The Walker property adjoined that of the Ridgefield Lumber Co. The large gate to the lumber yards was, even then, about where it now swings. The office was located to the left of the

gate and near the railroad tracks. It was a house that had been converted to office use and still had an apartment upstairs. The Corbett family lived there at this time. Directly behind the office was a small barn that was home for Fritz and Lady.

One of the features of the gasoline-powered vehicles was that when you were through with them, you needed only to turn off the key. Not so with horses. It was Charley's custom to appear at the lumber yard on Sundays and holidays to care for the horses.

On this particular Sunday afternoon, as Chuck and I played catch, Charley showed up to perform his chores. His first move was to go to the old hand pump, which was located some 60 feet north of the gate. After pumping the large barrel full of water, he turned the horses out to drink while he cleaned the stable.

As we played catch, Chuck threw me a fast ball, and even as a kid, he had plenty of speed. While waiting for my hand to cool off, I observed that it seemed very inhumane to keep animals and birds confined in yards and cages. Chuck readily agreed and noted that the large gate, just a few feet away, was secured by a small wooden peg in the hasp.

After making sure that Charley was busily engaged inside the barn, two kids quickly approached the gate. The small wooden peg "fell" from the hasp. The gate slowly swung to the north. Old Fritz, who had been watching the proceedings, moved over to investigate. The gate had opened enough for him to get his nose through, so he pushed it a little farther.

There was no greener grass directly on the other side of the fence. However, the horses must have been reasonably sure that somewhere out there they would find a lush pasture.

With another nudge of his nose, Fritz completed the opening of the gate. Then like the gentleman he was, he stood aside while Lady raced by him.

Without question, the greatest pictorial of freedom in action is a horse that suddenly finds himself unfettered. With heads held high and tails even higher and with their manes flowing in the breeze, Fritz and Lady headed for Main Street at a gallop. There was no traffic light at the top of Depot Hill so they just turned left and went south.

I can still hear the sound of their iron-shod hooves on the newly laid concrete surface of Main Street. That pair of horses were just about the most happy animals we ever saw.

As fast as the horses went one way, two little boys went the other. Their ears were ringing with words that Charley was shouting. Words that they had never heard before.

Hard cider became a very popular drink during Prohibition days. It was very popular with Charley. One day as he was relaxing at the firehouse, two brothers, John and Harry, produced a gallon of cider. Charley had considerably more than he could handle and went to sleep.

He did not awaken as the brothers sat him up in a wheelbarrow, opened his shirt and stuck into it a large cabbage leaf. They opened other parts of his clothing and then wheeled him right down Main Street and into the Belmont Restaurant, to the astonishment of the customers of that establishment (where the Question Mart and Candlelight Shop are now [Touch of Sedona and Tundi in 2019]).

It was said that two ladies who encountered the group on the street took one look and fainted away.

#41: THE DANGERS OF THE RAILROAD AND OF ONE-LEGGED TOM CURLEY

Railroading has long been considered a very hazardous occupation. Despite this fact, there were those who considered it to be quite glamorous. This was especially true of those who were directly engaged in the actual operation of the engine.

Many a young boy dreamed of one day being an engineer on the railroad. The words, "going like sixty," were generally thought of as referring to an automobile. The big steam engines were much faster and traveled at speeds up to 100 miles per hour. To be the person in command of that big iron monster as it hurtled down the tracks was the ambition of adventurous youths. We wonder if space travel holds the same allure today.

I had two brothers engaged in railroading. Jack was on the New York, New Haven and Hartford line and Charlie on the Harlem Division of the New York Central. Charlie was the engineer selected to go up to Canada and bring back the Queen of England for a tour of New York's World Fair. Charlie had 45 years of railroad life before retiring and yet when he had a day off, it was not unusual for him to pick up Jack and go over to Harmon, N.Y. to see the engines come in.

The engines on Ridgefield's little branch line never approached the speed of the trains on the main line. Still, its great size and enormous power held a certain fascination for a young romantic. The dangers that were inherent to railroading seemed only to increase the desire of some to be a part of it.

When a train came into the sleepy little Ridgefield Station, either passenger or freight, the rail yards would suddenly bustle with activities. Cars had to be switched from one track to another as they were made ready for the return trip to Branchville.

Switching was a rather slow operation and the engine seemed to operate with great restraint. Despite the slow-moving engine and railroad cars, it seemed that this was the time when most of the accidents occurred. Feet were crushed. Arms were mangled, etc.

I can remember one occasion when a freight car jumped the track while it was being switched in the yard. It probably was not traveling more than five miles per hour at the time.

The cause of this accident was not revealed and since no one was hurt, there was no official investigation. It was said unofficially that a loose rail was the cause and made you wonder how bad it would have been if the engine had been speeding.

One time Jack Walker, while serving as brakeman on the train, stepped off a car that was moving slowly through the yard. It was custom to alight from the train at this very spot several times during the day. He was unaware that some bricks had been dumped where he would step down. His ankle was splintered and he was never able to walk again without a cane.

All of the accidents in the yard were not incurred by railroad personnel. Eugenio Frulla was killed in a very tragic accident, only 25 feet to the north of the station platform.

There had been considerable criticism of the policy of backing the engine from Ridgefield down to the Branchville Station. Actually there was no other way to make the return trip as there was no turntable with which to turn the engine around. However, in backing the engine, the view of the engineer or the fireman was impaired and it was felt that this was a contributing factor in this instance. In the night hours the danger was more acute since the only headlight was on the front of the engine and was of no help in the direction the train traveled when in reverse.

On Wednesday evening, Jan. 11, 1911, Eugenio was visiting friends in the area. He lived on Abbott Avenue at the time but had formerly lived at the south end of the railroad yards, about where the Casey oil tanks are now located. Records reveal that the train arrived on time, at 7:38 p.m., and as was customary, it began the return trip almost as soon as the passengers alighted.

On this very dark night, at 8 p.m., John P. Manion was walking along the tracks. He had not gone far past the station when he stumbled over something. Though he could not see what it was, John instinctively knew that something very bad had happened. He went back to the station and procured a lantern. He then returned to make a very gruesome discovery. Eugenio had been cut completely in two by the wheels of the coal tender as the train backed down the tracks.

Dr. E. A. Stratton, medical examiner from Danbury, was called in and a hearing on the tragedy was held. Frank Seymour, the excellent engineer, stated that he never knew that he had hit anything. The controversy over the system of backing the train down to Branchville again surfaced. It boiled, then simmered, and finally died.

Several suggestions for corrective action were proposed but none was ever adopted and 14 years later, the passenger service ended.

Incidentally, we received a phone call from Fred Romeo, a former and long-time Ridgefield resident. Fred now lives in Lakeville and he called to inform us that passenger service did not end on Aug. 8, 1925, as previously stated. Fred claims that he was still taking the train from Ridgefield every morning until 1930. We will stand by the 1925 termination date.

In Dispatch No. 8, we told of another railroad accident in which Tom Curley lost his leg at the knee. He spent considerable time at Danbury Hospital and was outfitted with a wooden leg that was kept in place by a series of straps. With the help of a cane, he was able to get around, but not too well.

The Rev. Michael J. Brannigan once told a story of a visit to Tom's house. He was stationed here at the Holy Ghost Novitiate (now the Board of Education [in 2019, congregational housing]) during the middle 20's. His first assignment was to assist Rev. Richard E. Shortell at St. Mary's, hearing Saturday night confessions.

Father Brannigan had walked to St. Mary's and Father Shortell said that if he would wait while he made a sick call, he would drive him back to the novitiate. As they were riding to the sick call Father Shortell told of how the sick call was being made to insure that one of his parishioners who had over-indulged would stay home and keep out of trouble. He went on to describe Tom as a very kind and gentle giant when he was sober. He then noted the complete about-face that occurred when he was not sober.

Father Shortell's description of Tom's tremendous strength and the destruction he sometimes caused was so vivid that the young priest became concerned for his safety. He offered to go into the house with him. The old priest refused any help and explained that he and Tom knew each other well and all he had to do was make sure Tom stayed home and avoided trouble.

Father Shortell stayed in the house a considerable time and the young priest was on the point of going in to see what had happened. At that moment, Father Shortell reappeared carrying a pile of newspapers which he placed on the rear seat of the car.

Father Brannigan told of how he was worried about his safety and Father Shortell reassured him that he had no need to worry. When asked if he was sure that Tom would stay

home, Father Shortell replied, "Oh yes, that's his wooden leg on the back seat and he knows he will not get it back until he is all right."

#42: THE FATAL WRECK OF 1905

Railroad accidents were numerous, if for no other reason than the very nature of the business. Train wrecks always received considerable publicity and fatalities, on several occasions, were incorporated into music of the day.

Some old phonograph records that come quickly to mind were "Casey Jones," "The Red River Cannonball" and "The Wreck of the Old 97." Later there was "I've Been Working on the Railroad." However, though this song proved to be a great favorite, it did not dramatize railroad work, as the others did.

It would be questionable as to how many young men were led to railroading by music that stressed the glamour and excitement of the big steam engines. One thing is sure, any home that had a phonograph in a corner of the parlor also had at least one of these records. Some would have all these songs and on many a Sunday evening, the family would gather around to hear them and perhaps even join in singing them.

Years later, the songs "The Atchison Topeka and The Santa Fe" and "The Chattanooga Choo Choo" set thousands of feet tapping, especially when played by the great Glenn Miller Band. However, their purpose was to encourage the great indoor sport of dancing, rather than recruiting young men for railroad work.

There was once a very popular song entitled "Come Josephine in My Flying Machine," but it did not cause a rush by young men to join the airlines. It would be safe to say that not one of the many pilots who have lived in Ridgefield were influenced by this nice old waltz. Years later, that stirring march of the US. Air Force that starts "Off We Go into the Wild Blue Yonder" probably encouraged many to enlist.

The old railroad songs kindled a definite interest in the hearts of the young men of the time, even though some of the stories they told were sad. "The Wreck of the Old 97" told of a train that was running behind schedule and the gallant efforts of the train crew to make up the time and maintain their proud record of punctuality. Yes, they once ran on time.

At any rate, as the name of the song suggests, there was a wreck. The engineer, in the best tradition of railroading, urged the other crewmen to leave but stayed with the engine himself. As the words went "She was going down grade making 90 miles an hour, when the whistle blew into a scream, He was found in the wreck, with his hand on the throttle. He was called into death by the steam."

Apparently the song was supposed to illustrate the devotion of these men to duty. I have always felt that these old railroad men were justifiably proud of their ability to run the trains on time.

Our little branch railroad line experienced the death of a gallant engineer in the tradition of a "Casey Jones." It was on April 7, 1905, and the tragic accident caused the engine and the coal tender to leave the tracks.

As related previously, it was the custom for the engine to push the cars up the hill from Branchville Station. It then made its return by backing down the hill, pulling the cars after it.

The 8:20 a.m. train was backing down on the return trip to Branchville Station. It had passed the Prospect Street Extension crossing and was approaching the Ivy Hill Road crossing when several severe jolts were felt. It was a clear indication of trouble.

Somehow, the tender had become disconnected from the engine and was running free on the track. As the train reached the crossing, the engine struck the tender twice. Then they left the track and rolled down the steep embankment, landing on their sides across the tracks from the old Power House. This was near the home of the Tony Gaeta family. Tony Jr. still lives in this area.

The engineer, William Horan, was crushed beneath the engine cab. He was scalded by the escaping steam and succumbed at the scene of the accident. Other crewmen and some passengers were injured, none very seriously.

Railroads at the time must have been somewhat immune to public opinion as no official reason for the tragedy was ever made known. It probably was the fault of the railroad company. Possibly loose tracks or something. It is fairly certain it was not caused by excessive speed.

The old Power House, previously mentioned, is still standing, just a few feet southwest of the crossing. It is a one-story, concrete building with walls thick enough to make it qualify as a bomb-proof shelter. In the late 40's, Otto H. Jespersen converted this solid structure into a very nice dwelling.

Otto and his wife, Greta, conducted their upholstery business from the basement of this building. They were very good at their trade.

The basement had formerly housed two large steam engines. These coal-burning engines ran a generator that produced Ridgefield's first electric power, just one year after the train wreck. The building was equipped with a tall chimney which attempted without much success to carry the smoke to higher levels.

We mentioned switching as being a very dangerous part of railroading. There were several reasons for this. At each end of every railroad car, there is a large metal clevis, or buckle which keeps it attached to the next car. In order to make the connection while switching, the engine pushes one car smartly into the other. The clevis is then activated and they grab each other like two large animals in a death grip.

Hanging alongside each clevis is a rubber hose. It is about four feet long and probably two inches in diameter. This hose carries the air for the braking system in each car. The hoses have to be clamped together as the clevises are slamming together, and this is where most of the accidents happened.

One of the train crew had to stand between the cars that were being joined. As one car rammed the other, the clevises clanged together and the two hoses were connected by the train men. This was all one operation and it was performed with extreme quickness. Just a slight slip could result in the loss of a hand, an arm, a leg or even more. Generally it was an arm that was caught in the large metal connectors.

There were many railroad men with only one arm. Some of the victims of this type of accident went back to the railroad after losing an arm. For a great many, the accident was a cure for any enamored feelings that they once had for the railroad.

Such a man was the late Al Knapp, a longtime resident of Ridgefield. Al's accident did not happen in Ridgefield, but it was on the New York, New Haven and Hartford line. His arm

was severed just below the elbow and his manner of overcoming this very serious mishap is a story that must wait till next week.

#43: WHAT AL KNAPP AND OUTPOST INN HAD IN COMMON

I did not know Al Knapp when he had two good arms, but he must have been some kind of man. My first meeting with him took place one evening when he had tire trouble, on the corner just north of where the Fox Hill complex is now located on Danbury Road.

At the time, Colonel Louis D. Conley had completed the renovation of the old building that became the nationally famous Outpost Inn. In the process Col. Conley had traded to the State of Connecticut that land on which the long straight stretch of road was built in 1926, when the road to Danbury was rebuilt as a concrete highway.

In return the Colonel received that portion of the state highway that is now serving as the main artery serving the Fox Hill complex. It then became a private road. It was a perfect trade as the state could then build the stretch of road in front of Fox Hill and at the same time greatly reduce two curves. This portion of the road serving Fox Hill had been made very attractive by a number of beautiful maple trees, lining either side of the road.

Col. Conley not only did a fine job of landscaping the property around the inn, he also transformed what had been a swamp into the very attractive little lake along the roadside. He then had the foresight to appoint Joseph Gibney as manager of the inn. Joe, in turn, had the common sense to secure John Scala as his head chef. (Years later, John bought The Elms Inn.) [Ed.: Gibney was not the first manager; Gibney arrived about 1934, four years after Col. Conley's death. The first manager was Vincent Bordenave, who had managed the Mid-ocean Club of Bermuda.] This happy combination resulted in Gourmet Magazine's listing the Outpost Inn as one of the ten top eating places in the entire country.

The inn was a thing of real beauty. With its fine landscaping, tall trees, and exotic shrubbery, mirrored in the little lake, it had a kind of fairyland setting. A lot of good times were had at Outpost and we are sorry that most of our newer residents did not have the opportunity to share in the enjoyment that the inn afforded.

Just a few yards in from Danbury Road, on the southern end of the road that goes through Fox Hill, a culvert carried water from the swamp, under the road and formed a brook that flowed through the Great Swamp. It eventually became a part of the Norwalk River.

There was a short metal pipe fence along the road and over the culvert. Next to the culvert there was a kind of swale that allowed one to drive his horse down to the small stream of water emanating from the culvert.

After the horse had satisfied his thirst, he could then pull his wagon across the water and on up the other side of the swale. This little scene was re-enacted many times by those who were traveling to, or returning from Danbury. As the auto began to replace the horse, some of the early autos also found it necessary to stop at this little oasis, for the purpose of replenishing water that had boiled from its radiator.

I did not forget Al Knapp. It is just that I could not go by the Outpost Inn without a tip of the hat. At any rate, on this particular evening, I noticed a car with a flat tire, parked on the roadside, about where the north end of the outlet at Fox Hill is now.

We stopped nearby to give the driver assistance in changing his tire. My pace quickened when it became apparent that he had only one arm. However, instead of helping Al Knapp, I was privileged to witness a remarkable performance by what we had thought was a handicapped person.

After thanking me for stopping and assuring me that he really did not need help, he proceeded to prove his point. His quickness was surprising and he was so right in saying that he did not need help. It would be fair to say that he changed the tire in a flash.

We got to know Al Knapp quite well. We learned along the way of how he lost his arm while coupling two railroad cars. How he had been outfitted with a very complicated artificial arm from the elbow down. He became very disgusted with the arm so he discarded it and refused to wear it.

Al's extreme quickness was coupled with a determination to do anything that anyone else could do and do it better. He was an excellent gardener and was once employed by Louis Morris Starr (of Black, Starr and Frost), in that capacity. One day he was tying beets and carrots into bundles and Mrs. Knapp and her sister offered to help. Al accepted and then asked that they throw their bundles into one pile and he would throw his in another. They were instructed to count and when they had 50 bundles, they were to stop. When they reached the 50 bundles, he asked them to count his and they found that he had tied 55, or five more than they had.

Al could tie a bow tie in a flash. He could fill his pipe without spilling any tobacco, in seconds. He could even drive a six-horse hitch by wrapping the reins around his stub and guiding the horses with his free hand.

He did excellent carpenter work and drove the nails by holding the head of the nail against the side of the head of the hammer, tapping it to start it and then finished driving the nail with his strong right hand.

One time he was repairing the hay fork track in the very top of a barn when the ladder slipped from under him. The barn was empty of hay and Al hung on to the track with his good arm, some 40 feet above the barn floor, until his shouts brought someone to replace the ladder for him to descend.

One time, in the 20's, Major Tumbridge was building the house which is now owned by Henry Leir. Several teams of horses were employed to bring in stones for construction purposes. One of the teams was driven by George Mulvaney Sr. and another by Al Knapp.

George felt that it was incredible that this man could do so many things so well with only one hand. While having lunch one day, George observed that it must have been tough to have to buy a pair of gloves when you could only use one.

"Not so bad," said Al, "I have a friend who is a glove salesman and he gives me the sample gloves when he is through with them and since they are made for the right hand only, it works out well for me."

George then said, "But it must be really tough to milk a cow."

Al replied with a question, "How many valves does a calf milk at one time?"

Of course, the reply was, "One."

Al laughed and then asked, "Well, he gets there, doesn't he?"

#44: GRAPE TRAIN, TOTTERING SHELLS AND THE PEANUT BUTTER MILK

We have been telling about the old railroad yards, the branch line to Branchville, the old railroad station and some of the personalities that were involved in operating them. There is more to tell about them and at the same time we would like very much to generate some interest in saving the grand old railroad station.

The restoration of the railroad station at Chattanooga, Tenn. was mentioned in a previous column. Recently, we had the opportunity of again visiting this excellent example of preservation, at its best. It would be easy to wax with great enthusiasm in describing this delightful memento of the elegance of yester-year.

The Hilton Corporation established a fine hostelry to complement the very unique restaurant. With all this splendor and with the old Chattanooga Choo Choo parked out front, one feels compelled to visit and enjoy this refreshing bit of nostalgia.

Won't someone please come forward and accept the very generous offer that has been made by the Ridgefield Supply Company?

Save the old Ridgefield Station.

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So we are back to the old railroad yards. Until oil burners became popular for home heating, coal was probably the principal product brought to town by rail. Coal was one of the few products that come in carload lots.

Another commodity that filled a railroad car was the grape. Italians have long been noted for their ability to make fine wines. Vino was a very definite part of their diet.

Ridgefield's large Italian population used to get together each year as the families placed their orders for grapes. When all the orders were in, the grapes would be shipped in via the railroad.

It was not unusual to see two full carloads of grapes on the railroad siding in August or September. Can anyone imagine how many grapes there are in a railroad car capable of handling 40 tons?

Making wine was actually a lot of hard work and today the fine art of winemaking has all but disappeared in Ridgefield. It is easier to buy wine in the store and probably cheaper, but is it as good?

Another commodity that came in to Ridgefield by rail was lumber. A full carload could contain enough lumber to build a couple of small homes. The railroad proved to be very handy for the Ridgefield Lumber Company (now Ridgefield Supply), as the cars came right up to its door. There were less lumber cars than coal cars those days, as it was before the building boom hit Ridgefield.

At one time, Ridgefield had several farms of various types as well as the gentlemen's farms that were owned by the numerous wealthy families. Food for the farm animals was available at the Ridgefield Lumber Company as well as at the railroad car itself.

At one time, Irving Conklin Sr. handled products that were produced by the Eastern Farmers Exchange. This was a very popular cooperative, with mills in Buffalo, N.Y. Their products included not only grain for the animals but various household articles and flour for making bread. There was white flour, whole wheat flour, rye flour, buckwheat flour and graham flour. Farmers came right to the railroad car, to pick up their grain for the horses, cows, pigs,

chickens, sheep and that very nice flour that their wives made into bread. I guess that bread making is somewhat like winemaking, if not a lost art, at least it is one that is seldom used today.

One other thing that Irving Conklin imported, in carload lots, was peanut shells. Now that may be a little hard to believe, but it is quite true. What would he use them for, you ask? Well they were used for bedding for his cows and they came by the carload from the Planters Peanut factory in Virginia.

Want to guess how many peanut shells there are in a carload? Probably more than three times as many as the number of grapes in the next car. That's an awful lot of peanut shells, you say? Well, Irving had an awful lot of cows back in the days when he sold just about all the milk that was sold in Ridgefield. Of course, that was at a time when the per capita consumption of milk in Ridgefield actually exceeded the per capita consumption of alcoholic beverages.

I remember that the shells cost \$11 per ton and the freight on them was \$15 per ton. When the freight charges exceed the price of the item, you can be sure that the product is both light and bulky. As a matter of fact, the peanut shells came in bags that were almost large enough to hold a Volkswagen.

Because of the fact that the large bags of shells were really not that heavy, there was a tendency to pile more on the wagon than could be transported with safety. It should be noted that the peanut shells were hauled from the rail yards to the Conklin Farm on Ramapoo Road (now Farm Hill Road, Overlook Drive and Nutmeg Court) by teams of horses, drawing hay wagons.

My team had a real large hay rigging to pull. It was eight feet wide and 22 feet long. The bags of shells kept coming out of the railroad car and we kept piling them on until we were even with the top of the car. My opinion that the load was big enough fell on deaf ears, and the bags just kept on coming, so I put on another layer. The extra layer raised me high enough to necessitate raising the utility wires so that I could pass under them.

We did pretty well going up Depot Hill and along Main Street, until we got to the Elms and then had to turn into Gilbert Street. At that point there is a rather pronounced dip in the entrance, Main Street being a little higher than Gilbert caused the dip. The dip is hardly noticeable today as you turn into Gilbert Street, in your well balanced car, with its coil springs and shock absorbers. However, this large wagon was devoid of all these modern mechanical wonders.

The left front wheel made its descent into the dip but as the right front wheel started to follow, the wagon rocked back and forth as if by a giant hand. The rocking dislodged a couple of bags on the right front end of the wagon. Just as they landed in the middle of the intersection, they were quickly followed by more than 50 of the large bags of shells. Included in this sensational demonstration of just how fast a wagon can be unloaded, was a very scared boy who descended from his elevated perch on a bagful of shells that was mindful of a magic carpet. We will carefully refrain from describing how traffic was blocked by the incident, and the extra wagon that was needed to clear the street.

I guess the cows appreciated the warmth provided by the shells on the cold winter nights, but for some reason they could not resist eating them. The shells had no particular food value but many of the cows would turn their stanchions and reach around to eat them.

Eventually, Irving decided against continued use of the shells for bedding the cows. When asked why he stopped using peanut shells, he answered with a smile, "Because the milk was beginning to taste like peanut butter."

#45: WHEN COAL CAME RATTLING THROUGH YOUR CELLAR WINDOW

Recently, a picture of the Old Railroad Station appeared in The Press and it seemed to remind us that here is an old historic building, just dying to be saved. It noted that it was here that the residents picked up the coal to heat their homes. Actually the local coal dealers delivered most of the coal right to the homes.

The coal was carried in a horse-drawn wagon until motor trucks took over. After the wagon was loaded, a long metal chute was placed on top. When the point of delivery was reached, the chute was hooked to the side of the wagon with the other end of the chute placed through the cellar window.

The sound of the coal, rattling down the chute into the cellar coal bin, was not unpleasant, especially when one thought of the warmth it would give on those cold winter days.

Those who shoveled off the coal developed a rhythm that did not vary as they swung their shovels. When a real good one, like Irving Van Wagner, was shoveling, it was almost like listening to a machine. By the time a shovel full of coal had reached a point midway down the chute, another was on its way, so that sound was continuous.

In the event that the house was set back a considerable distance from the driveway and the lawn could not be disturbed, the coal was delivered in heavy canvas bags. The driver would place the chute in the cellar window and carry the 100 pound bags to the chute. Of course, there was an additional charge for this kind of service.

There were a half dozen or more coal companies. They were allowed four or five days to unload a carload of coal. If the car was not ready for return by the end of the period, the dealer was compelled to pay a demurrage charge for each day that he kept the car. To avoid this penalty, each dealer provided himself with a stall in the railroad yards, across the street and south of the old station.

The stalls had to be large enough to hold whatever coal he was unable to deliver by the end of the grace period. The stalls had a back and two sides, but no front and no top. Each stall always had some coal, piled as near the back as possible. There was no fence or other protection and it was said that homes in the area were the warmest in town, and the cost of home heating was considerably less than any place else in Ridgefield.

While all the piles of coal seemed to shrink a little each night, one pile always had more than the others and grew right back to size each day. It was replenished several times daily.

It was mandatory that each wagon be weighed daily before being loaded. It would be driven up to the D.F. Bedient Company each morning where the large scale was located on the south of Bailey Avenue side of the building. The spot where the platform was is still visible today.

The weigher would be Andrew Bloomer Sr., Lawrence Coleman, Jack Whitlock or Francis "Beedie" Bedient himself. After the weighing ceremony, the tare was established for that day and the driver was free to load the wagon and return with the load to be weighed. The tare was deducted and a ticket verifying the weight of the load was handed to the driver. Sometimes

the driver left the wagon when the tare was being recorded. If he did, he must do so each time the load was weighed that day.

One driver had exceptionally big feet. He would leave the wagon as the load was being weighed, but would stand close enough so that a considerable portion of his feet was still on the scale. This, of course, added several pounds to the load.

Between the front wheels and the rear wheels of the wagon was what was called the “reach.” It was an oversized two-by-four that spaced the wheels to fit the particular body that might be used.

The “reach” was close enough to the underside of the wagon as to be quite difficult for the weigher to see. One dealer used to wrap a very large chain around the “reach” after tare was established. This would add many pounds to each load of coal. He also had his driver make a trip back to the coal yards and throw off some coal before making delivery. This was at the stall that always seemed to have the biggest pile.

If these tricks were played on the wealthy “summer people,” they went unnoticed, or may even have been considered clever. However, if the one being short-weighted was a native, or a year-around resident, it was treated with much disdain and the word spread rapidly through the town.

Men engaged in the building trades used to congregate around Bedient’s each morning and wait for a ride to work. They were very observant and were quite aware of the practices that the dealers engaged in.

One driver did not like being a part of the trickery. He engaged in many heated arguments with his employer. Of course, he always lost and many times he got fired on the spot. If he got fired, the employer would drive the horse that day himself. However, the same driver would be back to work the next morning.

One morning as the men standing by the store listened intently, the daily argument heated up rapidly. The employer was heard to say, “D— it, Fr—, you don’t know nothing.”

The driver answered in a loud voice, “By Golly, I know 1,500 don’t make a ton.”

Fr— had gotten himself fired again, but was back the next day. The men on the corner had a great laugh over the incident and for a while there were no more morning arguments.

Two of the drivers who worked for the lumber company were a father and son combination. Both were excellent workers and handled their jobs very well. Strange as it may seem, both men carried pocket watches. Large watch fobs hung from their watch pockets.

They always had the correct time but neither could tell time.

One morning the two men met in the middle of the coal yards. It was just before noon and the father asked the son what time it was. The younger one pulled on his watch fob and produced his large Ingersoll watch, which, as usual, had the correct time.

He held the watch up for his father to see it and said, “There it is.”

The older man gave the watch a quick look and replied, “D—, it ain’t.”

#46: MY ALL-TIME FAVORITE CHARACTER

Some of the readers of our column have asked that we stop writing about the old railroad station and the railroad yards. They have expressed a desire to hear about other areas. However, when I ask if they want me to write about their particular street, they generally decline.

Well; we would like to do one or two more about the railroad yards and the interesting people who lived, worked or played there. We have mentioned some of Ridgefield's characters from time to time and there are lots more. If a town has any life to it at all, it is bound to have these kinds of people. We have always felt that Ridgefield had a corner on the character market and it certainly has been a lively town.

My own all-time favorite character is Jimmy Rogers. The stories about this funny man are legion. He was a chauffeur for several of the wealthy Ridgefield families. In his last years in town (the 30's) he drove a taxi for Herb Bates. As mentioned in an earlier column Herb's taxi business was conducted from the building on Bailey Avenue that now houses this newspaper.

We think that the many stories about Jimmy are so good that to be thoroughly appreciated, they must be passed out piecemeal. Therefore, we will attempt to relate each one while writing about the area in which they occurred.

Jimmy Rogers, despite an excellent wardrobe — and it was one of the best we ever saw — was a funny-looking character. He never wore a hat but his splendid suit was always topped off with a fine cap. The cap was usually a light tan or camel hair.

The cap surmounted a face that, once seen, was never to be forgotten. I guess that face would compare favorably with the much photographed countenance of the late and beloved Casey Stengel. Two very green eyes peered out at you from under real heavy eyebrows. They were set in grizzled features that were exceedingly red in both winter and summer.

Jimmy's ears were exceptionally large, again like Casey. His right eye had marks across it that looked like scratches made by a cat. We were never sure what effect, if any, the scratches may have had on his eyesight. His shoes were always beautifully polished and the toes turned in to some degree as he was pigeon-toed.

A description of Jimmy Rogers would not be complete without mention of his voice which was very high pitched in its natural state. However, he had acquired the ability to change his voice from high to low and could even be guttural, when the occasion required.

Jimmy was a very kind person and the many people who knew him liked him very much. He had no known enemies. He also had no wife that we ever heard of. If he had had a wife, she would of necessity have had to be a person with a great understanding plus a fantastic sense of humor.

You must understand that Jimmy was imbued with the idea that his mission on this earth was to make people laugh. That he was eminently successful, there can be no doubt.

During the dark days of the Depression, he was priceless to those who needed a laugh. He could cause you to smile just to see him coming toward you down the street. As he came closer your smile would broaden in anticipation of whatever zany act that you knew he was concocting.

I guess by now you must have formed the opinion that Jimmy was at least slightly demented. Nothing could be further from the truth. He had all his buttons and some to spare. He just seemed to enjoy being funny despite the serious expression in his classic features.

There is a great temptation to reveal all of the antics of Jimmy Rogers. However, as previously stated, we will resist the urge and just dole them out at appropriate intervals.

One that he once told me of just did not work out. It was about 1930 and Jimmy bought, for a few dollars, an old Model T Ford. It was of very little value and was probably about to be

junked. He proceeded to take off all of the tires. Those who remember the old Model T with its 30 by 3 1/2 tires know that the rims that held the tires were similar in width to the wheels of the railroad cars.

Somehow, Jimmy with the help of a crony was able to adjust the wheels to fit the railroad tracks. One evening, with the help of a jack, they were successful in hoisting the old Ford onto the tracks. They did this at the most southern end of the dead-end tracks.

There were two empty railroad cars ready for return in this area. The small car was almost completely shielded from view by the large freight cars.

Jimmy then took a dummy that he had previously stuffed with straw and placed it in the driver's seat. The arms of the dummy were then tied to the steering wheel of the car. Next the old Model T was carefully chained to the rear of one of the freight cars.

It was customary for the freight train to arrive in Ridgefield about 10 o'clock in the morning. It would leave whatever freight cars that were intended for Ridgefield and tow the empties back down to Branchville.

However, there must have been a shortage of empty cars and the engine was sent to Ridgefield that night to pick up the empty cars. Alas, Jimmy's carefully laid plans went awry. He and his helper had just finished their work when they heard the engine's whistle as it approached the Ivy Hill Road crossing. They had planned to return the next morning to watch the fun.

The engine entered the railroad yards and no time was wasted switching cars around as nocturnal visits of the freight trains were frowned on by people in town. The engine quickly hooked on to the empty cars and just as quickly backed out of the yards with the Model T in tandem.

As Jimmy once told me this story, a tear came to his eye. It was to have been his masterpiece. What was to have been a laughable incident for many people was seen only by Jimmy and his pal. He said that the Ford made it all the way to Branchville station where it was discovered and removed from the tracks.

The prank was only one of many and Jimmy had much better luck with the others, although one almost cost him his life. We will tell about them as we go along.

#47: FREIGHT AGENT HOUSE AND HIS HOCUS POCUS

In our stories about the old railroad yards, we have neglected one very important building. The former freight house is a large building, in the southwest corner of the yards. It has concrete siding, a flat roof and a large ramp on the northwest end. The ramp was built so as to accommodate the large articles that were shipped by freight.

The railroad tracks went right between the freight house and the large old elevator house. The elevator house is still standing, but not in very good condition. It got its name, of course, from the fact that it housed an elevator that was used to carry grains to the upper part of the building.

At any rate the buildings were just far enough apart to allow two tracks for railroad cars to pass between them and then come 50 feet farther where the tracks ended. Just before the end of the tracks was another building used by Bacchiochi Inc. for storage of such materials as cement. This firm also used this building as a carpenter shop.

All three buildings are still in use. The elevator house serves as a storage building and the other two are used by The Woodworks, which turns out fine woodwork.

This little complex was very handy during the years of the railroad. The doors to the platforms of the three buildings were the exact height of the floor of a railroad car and since the cars came within inches of the buildings loading and unloading operations were greatly simplified.

The freight house was built around the time of World War I and Mr. Pettit was the freight agent for several years. George House became the agent around 1932 after Marshall W. Ralston retired. George had been in charge of both freight and express in Pleasant Valley, N.Y., for many years.

George was an exceptionally nice man with a great sense of humor. He was also, however, a terrible practical joker, as you will see. He and Mrs. House lived at 160 High Ridge until the freight trains stopped coming in and the freight house closed for the last time in 1952.

Ridgefield had almost as many practical jokers as it did characters, so George joined with many other jokers when he came to Ridgefield.

Mr. House had a real large goiter on the left side of his neck. It was said that the great swelling was caused by a lack of iodine in his system. I had never seen a goiter before and felt very sorry for this nice man. However, it did not seem to bother him in the performance of his duties.

Once I ordered a washing machine in October that was to be a Christmas present for my wife. It was to be shipped from Chicago by freight and as it was to be a surprise, I planned to store it in the basement till Christmas.

However, two weeks before Christmas the washer had not arrived and I was beginning to get concerned. Each day I kept asking George about it and he kept assuring me that I would have the washer by Christmas. During the final week before Christmas, my concern turned to alarm and I guess George got tired of my inquiries.

The day before Christmas George called in the morning to tell me that he had the washer. He planned to close the office at noon because it was Christmas Eve and he wanted me to come by at noon and pick up the washer. I asked that he leave the washer out on the platform and I would pick it up later in the afternoon.

George insisted on my coming before he closed as he said the box was very heavy and he would have to help me load it on the pickup truck.

When I arrived at the freight office George showed me an exceptionally well constructed, large wooden box. When he said that the box was heavy he was not kidding and it took our combined efforts to load it on the pickup. Had I not been so excited over the arrival of the washer I probably would have given it a closer examination.

Marie had an appointment at noon so I planned to get the washer into the basement while she was gone and uncrate it after work. It was a real hard struggle and I still do not know how I ever got that crate out of the pickup and down the basement steps.

That evening after work I scurried home as fast as I could and prepared for the unveiling of the big surprise and a surprise it sure was. It took a wrecking bar plus a crowbar to get the first board off the top of the box. The board revealed that exceptionally large nails had been used. Finally the last of the top boards was removed and there in the middle of the box was a tiny

washing machine, about six inches in height. George had bought it in the toy department of a local store.

To give the crate sufficient weight, he had placed three 100 pound bags of rock salt in the bottom of the box. My first impulse was to look at the basement windows, as I was sure someone must have been out there laughing as they enjoyed my displeasure at being so thoroughly fooled.

George must have spent more than a week constructing that box. I finally got over it and we remained very good friends. It was just a good example of the lengths to which a practical joker would go.

He later told me of a young fellow who had ordered a diamond ring for his fiancée. The young man came each day to George's express office in Pleasant Valley to see if the ring had arrived. George assured the man that he would call him as soon as it arrived.

Finally, George went to the nearest five-and-ten cent store and bought a cheap little ring with a large glass centerpiece. He had Mrs. House wrap it nicely and then called the young man to come to his office, which he did on a lead run. George had him unwrap the ring so that he could see it.

As the stone was much larger than the young fellow expected, he was thrilled by the sight of it. George asked how he could know that it was any good and the man replied that it had to be because it had cost so much. George asked to examine the ring and then told the young man that he thought it should be tested. With that he picked up a hammer and struck the ring a sharp blow. Of course, the glass shattered in many pieces, and the poor fellow passed out cold.

The greatest practical joker we ever knew was the late Raymond Keeler and we will tell about him as we go along.

#48: THE RAZING OF THE OSBORN EMPIRE & THE ARRIVAL OF THE ITALIANS

We will leave the old railroad yards briefly but it will be necessary to come right back, as we feel that there are still some interesting stories about the area.

So let's start at the top of Depot Hill — they now call it Prospect Street. On the south corner of Prospect and Main Street until just a few years ago stood a large and very well built house. It was the home of Richard Waldo Osborn, where he lived with his wife, Annie Talman Osborn, their grand-daughter Winnie, and Mr. Osborn's sister, Miss Winifred Osborn. It was at that time 149 Main Street and since the number changes, 10 years ago, it has been 470 Main Street. This beautiful house was torn down in recent years to make room for the large brick structure that houses the Silk Purse and other stores and offices.

"Dickie," as Mr. Osborn was known to his friends, was a rather short little man. He was not short on talent, however, and was a great baseball pitcher in the days of Francis D. Martin, D. Harvey Valden, Charles D. Crouchley, Lou Abbott and other fine ball players of the time. Mr. Osborn was also a very respected businessman and around the turn of the century was owner and operator of the Ridgefield Lumber Company.

The Osborn holdings extended from his home on Main Street, down Depot Hill to the corner of Prospect Street and Bailey Avenue. Mr. Osborn had built his house early in the century after moving his old one down the hill. To the rear of the new house was a brown shingled bungalow where Al and Ann Girolmetti lived for many years. A bit farther down the hill was the

old Osborn house, now for two families. The railroad engineer Frank Seymour lived there, as well as my brother Gus and his family. Harold and Ann Mead as well as several other families, lived in this house through the years. There are few, if any, houses like that one, in Ridgefield today. Like its successor it, too, was torn down to make way for Yankee Ridge.

Just below the two family house, George Clarke Operated a furniture repair shop, where he also sold antiques. He had a sister, Flossie, who helped him at the shop, when she was not busy as a clerk in the Ridgefield Savings Bank. Flossie was a little lady, I guess she could have been considered tiny. She was probably less than five feet tall and always quite thin. Her voice was very squeaky and might startle you when you first heard it. This is not meant to be disrespectful in any way as Flossie was a very nice little lady and she was very well thought of .

The building in which George operated his business, had been moved to that location. Apparently they had been in such a hurry to get the place in operation, that they failed to provide a basement. The building was deposited on several poles that kept it about two or three feet above the ground. It must have been a very difficult place to heat. The building was two stories high with a facade that was mindful of the storefronts that were to be seen in some of the cow-towns out west.

In later years this place served as an antiques shop that was operated by Raymond Krotz. Ray also repaired and sold furniture. Still later, my niece, Kathryn Rosa, carried on an antique business from this old building. It was also occupied by the Toy Caboose.

Next there was a small, one-story building that was used mostly as a storehouse. At one time it was used briefly as a meeting place for one of the trade unions and before that as an office for the Lumber Company.

On the corner of Prospect and Bailey Avenue there was a two-story building that was the original Ridgefield Lumber Company warehouse and sales office. This building was right where The Regiment is now.

All of these buildings were removed to make room for the many new business establishments that now line the south side of Prospect Street.

Mr. Osborn operated the lumber company for many years until he finally sold the business to a group headed by William H. Cargon. Ownership of the business passed on to Frank Dain and eventually to the Louis Price family who are the present owners.

Richard Osborn died in 1933 at the age of 86, while his wife, Annie, lived on until 1965, by which time she had reached the age of 101.

The area started to go through some real changes in the early 1900's, when Italian families began to arrive in Ridgefield. In 1902 the first four Italian men appeared and settled on Bailey Avenue. Much of this information, concerning the advent of our Italian population, was gleaned from an interview with Octavius J. (Tabby) Carboni, conducted by his son Robert Carboni. The interview took place a dozen years ago, and Tabby has a good memory now, so it is reasonable to expect that it was even better then. Bob Carboni was exceptionally well suited to the job of interviewing his father, as he had, for several years, written a column for this newspaper. [Note: The complete Tabby Carboni interview is posted on Old Ridgefield.]

Benvenuto Carboni and John Christafaro were two of the first four Italian men to come to Ridgefield. The other two will go unnamed for now. Benvenuto and John came here at the time the first water lines and the sewer lines were being installed. Italians are noted for their

proficiency in masonry work and these gentlemen were no exception. Therefore, they readily found employment on the two projects previously mentioned. John Christafaro had somehow learned a little English and quickly became a foreman on the job.

The trick was, how did they know that so much work was available in Ridgefield? Somehow the word had traveled across the ocean (by grape vine?) to Italy, to the Province of Ancona, to the town of Monterado, near Ancona, to Castelvechio, Mondolfo, Ripe, Cesano and Castel-Colonna, and Ridgefield then started to grow.

The first four men lived together in a two-story house that used to sit on the south side of Bailey Avenue, just about where the back loading platform for the GranCentral store [today the Thrift Shop] now stands. As more Italian people began arriving, it was natural for them to seek out those already here for guidance. Perhaps this was a reason for the heavy concentration of Italian families in this area.

It was not unusual for men to migrate to this country and then, after working a few years to establish a “grub stake,” they would send for their families to come over and join them. Such was the case with Benvenuto Carboni. He was very industrious, a “Jack of All Trades” as Tabby called him. My father said that he was the hardest working man that he ever knew. At any rate, in a couple of years. Benvenuto had sufficient funds to send back to the old country for his little wife, Assunta and their two boys, Adrian and Octavius.

More on the Carbonis next week.

#49: HARD-WORKING BENVENUTO CARBONI OPENS STORE, AND DANCES

In the year 1904, Center School was located on Bailey Avenue, on what is now a municipal lot. On the south side of Bailey Avenue, right across the street from the school, lived the Carboni family. The two-story building in which they lived has long since disappeared to make way for the GranCentral store.

Benvenuto Carboni would be a rare individual today. He firmly believed that to get ahead in the world, a person should work hard. He instilled this philosophy in the rest of his family. His ability and capacity for hard work was coupled with an eye for business.

Benvenuto quickly realized that the many Italians who followed him to Ridgefield would need grocery products that were not readily available in a small New England Yankee town. He knew that to be truly happy, his friends, with their love for Italian dishes, had to have their native hard cheese, olive oil, pasta, Italian bread, etc. Somehow, he was successful in locating a firm in New York City that would supply him with these necessary ingredients.

In due time Benvenuto transformed the two front, downstairs rooms of the family home into the first Italian store in Ridgefield. A salesman from the New York firm would call each week and take the orders for the much sought after food stuffs.

Assunta (who was the first Italian woman in Ridgefield) and her little boys, Adrian and Octavius, ran the store during the day, while Benvenuto handled the operations in the very early morning hours and again after his days work was completed. The fact that none of the family spoke English was not a hindrance as their customers, during this period, all spoke Italian. \

To augment the store, one of Benvenuto’s friends, Giuseppe Tonetti, was persuaded to open the first Italian bakery in Ridgefield, in the rear of the Carboni store. Giuseppe had been an excellent baker in the old country and the Carboni enterprise flourished.

With the family living upstairs over the store and bakery, the store hours became quite flexible. Customers came very early in the morning and still it was not unusual to hear a knock on the door at 10 or 11 at night. When this happened, one of the family was sure to accommodate by producing what the caller required.

In four years, business at the store had increased to a point where it became necessary to find larger quarters. Benvenuto learned that Richard Osborn was planning to move his lumber company operations across the way, to the north side of Prospect Street. He lost no time in setting up a meeting with Mr. Osborn concerning the building that stood on the corner of Prospect Street and Bailey Avenue.

Apparently Mr. Osborn was very much impressed with Benvenuto's aggressiveness and his business acumen. At any rate, Carboni's Italian Market was moved to the former lumber company building, on the corner where The Regiment is now.

The year was 1908 and soon a little girl, Mary, was born into the family. Unfortunately the little girl died while still a baby. Next to come along was Navio Peter Carboni and we called him "Navz" when he was a schoolboy, then in later years he became known as Pete to his friends and customers at the A&P Liquor Store.

Shortly thereafter, another boy, Olinto arrived and he was quickly to become known as "Lynce." When, a year later, a little girl joined the boys she was named Mary, just as was the daughter who had preceded her. In those days, it was not an unusual practice to do this. My own father was named Charles, after a little brother who had predeceased him. [Another son was Adriano, known as "Ade."]

The last of this original Italian family came into the world a couple of years later and he was named Reno. The name did not last very long and he became "Renz." When we were little kids, and he was asked where he had been born, his stock answer was "In a showcase at my father's store."

As pointed out in Dispatch No. 34, even though each member of the Carboni family had been dutifully assigned an appropriate nickname, they all, and that includes Mary, answered to the name "Bones."

In order to survive in this very active family, it was absolutely necessary that you be an athlete. As Casey Stengel used to say, "You could look it up," as the records will reveal that the Carbonis were eminently successful in just about every sport, as well as the avenues in which they pursued their livelihoods.

Benvenuto has been previously portrayed as a very hard working man. As a matter of fact, while busily engaged in his daily employment, and his activities at the store, he somehow found time to build the very nice future home of the family, at what is now 24 Danbury Road [now gone; it was in the area of today's Webster Bank]. It is a very well constructed house and the greater part of the work was actually done by Benvenuto (in his spare time). Tabby had dubbed him as a "jack of all trades," and that he must have been.

It is very doubtful that all his activities left him much time for sports. We have however, witnessed at first hand, while playing in the band, his considerable talent on the dance floor. There was this Italian folk dance that I think was called Farlanda. I believe that its purpose was to portray a cow and a hull. The dance went on until one of the partners had to quit because of sheer exhaustion, as the music was fast and a great deal of energy was expended.

Benvenuto would start the dance with, of course, Assunta as his partner. Perhaps because of the exertion he had put into his normal daily activities, he was never able to finish the dance. He would drop out and another man would replace him, only to suffer the same fate. It was not unusual for Assunta to wear out four or five partners before she would reluctantly give in and allow some other lady to replace her.

It was a very exciting dance and the crowd would always loudly applaud as each of Assunta's partners fell by the wayside. She was a great little lady.

Though the elder Carboni did not have time for sports, the younger ones did, even though they did their share of the work. Each excelled in at least one sport and some were proficient in several. More about them, next time.

#50: THE CARBONI FAMILY, ON COURT AND FIELD

The name Carboni was considered synonymous with the word sports. For more than half a century, an examination of the local sports pages was bound to reveal the name of at least one member of the Carboni family, listed in one of the line-ups. They were in many different sporting events.

Adrian (Ade) was a good baseball player and a fine bowler as well as a great man. He never stopped running, even in his advanced years. He was also a very good student and in eighth grade was first in his class.

The following year Octavius (Tabby) also finished first in his class. Tabby excelled in baseball and basketball. He was a good bowler and played a fair game of golf and was considered very good at ping pong. As a matter of fact, if you had some money and needed a lesson in pool or billiards, he was always willing to oblige.

Tabby used to have a standing invitation to play a game of pool or billiards with the late B. Ogden Chisolm. Mr. Chisolm had a fine game room in his beautiful mansion on Peaceable Street, and his billiard was the very best to be had.

There were those who felt that Tabby was pretty good at pinochle and poker. No doubt this feeling was generated to a great extent by their rapidly diminishing stack of poker chips.

There are many who believe that the nickname "Tabby" is not necessarily a contraction of the word Octavius. It could very well have been given in recognition of his feline-like quickness. His very alert mind kept pace with his physical speed.

A person with a real strong heart could thoroughly enjoy watching Tabby play baseball. He always played the infield, either at second base or short-stop. In a real tense moment of a close game, it was a treat to see a ground ball hit the heel of his glove, run up his arm to the elbow, then bounce to the opposite shoulder, from which vantage point it would then roll down his right arm to his hand. The batter, in the meantime, would be racing to first base, but a lightning-like throw would nip him just as he was about to step on the bag.

Tabby was not a power hitter like Babe Ruth but he acquired the ability to "hit them where they ain't," like Wee Willie Keeler used to do. Tabby, like the rest of his family, was not very tall and therefore he was not easy to pitch to. If he did not succeed in pushing the ball past one of the infielders, he would usually draw a walk.

Now that Tabby was on base, the excitement mounted as he was almost sure to try to steal second base. He was not quite as fast on the basepaths as his brother Ade. However, he was

a good runner and if the play at second was close, Tabby would slide in head first (a la Pepper Martin).

Tabby played a good game of golf and some of those he played with were Mally Knapp, who was the pro at the Bloomerside Course, Peter McManus, Johnny Kelly, and Bernie Christopher. Twenty-five years ago Tabby was Ridgefield's town treasurer.

Navio (Naz or Pete), was good at baseball, but his best sport was basketball. He starred on more than one of the champion high school teams. Pete was also a real good golfer and once scored a hole in one on Vail's Course.

Olinto (Lynce) was probably one of the very best all-around athletes that Ridgefield ever had. Though he was good at baseball, like his brother Pete, Lynce excelled in basketball and was very exciting to watch. Many of us thought that he could have played with any of the professional teams. As might be expected, Lynce was not very tall. He would probably not stand much above the belts on some of the gigantic basketball players of today, but they would find it almost impossible to stop his great speed and elusive maneuvers.

Like Pete again, Lynce was a top player on the champion high school teams of the mid-20's, as well as several of the town teams, later on. On some of the teams, he and Pete played together, as a fine brother act.

Lynce also starred in football with the Ridgefield Spartans as an excellent ball carrier. His prowess in the field of sports did not end there.

In the late 20's and early 30's, Lynce was considered an excellent boxer and there were many who felt that, had he chosen to pursue a career in the ring, he would have been another Willie Pep. That was at a time when boxing bouts were in the auditorium of the town hall, or in the Italian American Hall. We seem to remember one of Lynce's bouts that was unscheduled and took place in the parking area back of the town hall.

Nowadays he will settle for a quiet round of golf, unless dancing can be considered a sport. Lynce, like his mother, is a great dancer and once the music starts he is out there for every dance. Lucky for him, Dorothy also loves to dance and it is nice to see them tripping the light fantastic.

Mary Carboni, now Mrs. James T. Mitchell, was not to be outdone by her brothers, and she played a great game of basketball. Had there been as many opportunities for girls in sports in those days, I'm sure that Mary would have been top notch in any one of them.

Along with her other talents, Mary was an exceptionally good dancer and it was my good fortune to have had her teach me the way around the dance floor. Today, and for many years she has been the Republican Registrar of Voters.

I am the youngest of nine children so please forgive me for ascribing to the theory that they get better as you go along. Of course, I am being quite facetious, as I never really felt worthy of carrying the shoes of any of my six brothers or my two sisters.

So, we come to Reno "Renz," the youngest of the large Carboni family. Renz kept the family's tradition going in the field of sports. He excelled in both baseball and basketball, as well as some of the minor sports. He always had a very intense urge to win no matter what the game was. We can well remember one very close baseball game when he slid into second base with such fierce abandon that his ankle was shattered. He still walks with a slight hitch as a result of that unfortunate incident.

Renz loved to play tricks and he would use wile along with his great natural talent to best an opponent. Once while we were playing some kind of kid game in back of his home on Danbury Road. He called out that he had injured his foot and limped into view. The other kids were aware of his penchant for playing tricks and went on with the game. This time, however, Renz was not kidding.

Adolph Hoffman had operated a laundry in an old building that was in a state of disrepair, and had been abandoned. The building stood just about where Pamby's Body Shop is now. Renz had stepped on a nail that protruded from a board and we saw him hop all the way home with the board still clinging to his foot.

Many years after his father sold his store (where the Regiment now stands), Renz bought it and ran the store for a while and then turned it into a lunch room. A new customer seated at the lunch counter might be impressed to see a snake slithering down the counter towards him. It was a fake, of course, but it was always good for a laugh on the unsuspecting customer.

He also used to place a life-sized dummy on the seat of his panel truck, to give the impression that he had a passenger. Unless you paid strict attention on the golf course, you might discover that your ball was not near the place where you expected to find it.

He enjoyed good fun and still does. You can be sure that there is never a dull moment when he is around.

#51: THE POPULAR OLD MARKET OF BRUNETTI AND GASPERINI

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

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

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

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

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

Nanny held a responsible position in the operation of the Port of Missing Men (many of us referred to it as The Tea House). Ernest did not have sufficient funds with which to purchase the Carboni store at the time. However, his friend Nanny had been here long enough to

accumulate enough money to close the deal. So a partnership that lasted more than a quarter of a century, under the name Brunetti and Gasperini, was born.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Following the repeal of Prohibition, one of the first beer parlors to open had been on the easterly side of the old building. It was operated for many years by the late Attilio Pongetti. Like

so many businesses of the kind, there are many stories about things that happened at this little oasis.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The American writer Emma Lazarus composed the inscription on the pedestal at the main entrance. It reads "Give me your tired, Your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore, Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The homes in Ridgefield seem to exude a warmth and friendliness not found in other communities. Many are those who have experienced the friendly feeling upon their return from a

trip, or perhaps on their visit to our community. This birthday party should be a friendly one, a chance to express our feelings in a happy and neighborly fashion and certainly it should be fun.

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

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

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

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

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

The children of these families were involved in sports at an early age. Baseball was the most popular of all games and it was played with great zest by these kids. Unfortunately, they did not have the fine athletic fields that we have today. Many times it was difficult to get permission to use a cow pasture or other open field on which to play. On many occasions a stone would be the substitute for the padded base of today.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#54: THE BIG SCHOOL AND LICK SANTINI

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

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

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

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

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

My introduction to the Big School came in 1919, as a kindergarten had been established in a first floor room in the south end of the building. Miss Mabel Cleves and her able assistant Miss Mable Nickerson had kindly attitudes that were ideally suited for the task of inducting little kids into the school system.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Last week we incorrectly named Alex's younger sister Elsie. She is, of course, Louise and is today is Mrs. Richard T. McGlynn, wife of our fire chief. Also in Dispatch No. 51 we listed Mrs. Gasperini as chef at The Port of Missing Men, whereas actually the chef was Attilio Pongetti. We knew better and for two such lapses, we get a slap on each wrist and a chance to stand in the corner for a while.

#56: COULD ALEX SANTINI BOWL 200 STRAIGHT GAMES?

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

As usual, the whole affair started with a bet. Someone very foolishly wagered that Alex could not bowl 200 consecutive games. Again, as usual, a careful analysis of the odds was made

and then Alex accepted the challenge. We do not remember the size of the bet, but do recall that it was considered a sizable sum, for that particular time.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It was great to have the support of his friends, but Alex was beginning to get rather groggy from his strenuous ordeal. It was after 11 o'clock that night when Alex bowled his 192nd game. By this time, even some of his most ardent fans were beginning to doubt that he had maintained sufficient energy to complete those last necessary eight games. He had put forth such tremendous exertion that there was fear that he would collapse.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Louis Brown Sr. served as a butler for several of the wealthy families and I think his last job was with Mrs. Mary Olcott (no relation to George) in the Old Indian Trading Post, after it was moved from the business district to south Main Street. Louis was well thought of and in his white butler's jacket and his rimless glasses, he made an impressive appearance. His son, Louis Jr., was a fine athlete and starred in basketball and as a pitcher for Ridgefield High.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the late 30's, the beautiful Frederick E. Lewis estate was being dismantled and someone thought of a good use for the little octagon house. Over at the old Ridgefield High School, there was a need for a place for visiting ball teams to change into their uniforms. So the little building was picked up and hauled over to the ridge and came to rest where the tennis courts are now. It served its purpose well for a few years.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

My brother Paul and I were examining the ruins when he noted a piece of metal protruding from beneath a charred timber. It turned out to be a cymbal and the mate to it was

soon located. The handles of the cymbals were burned off but otherwise they were undamaged. The handles were easily replaced and the cymbals were used by Leno Marinelli for many years in Aldo Casagrande's new Oreneca Band.

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

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

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

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

There were two such fights of which we have vivid memories. One was between Jack N. and Ed M. and was the most brutal contest that I have ever witnessed. Both men were big and very powerful. They just stood toe to toe and slugged it out. I do not think there was a clear winner, as after what seemed like a very long time to a scared little newsboy, both men were exhausted and completely destroyed.

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

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

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

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

My next approach was to inquire if there was any such thing as a "five cent teenie weenie sandwich." Edgar Masten and a couple of other men were seated at the counter. On

hearing my question, Ed laughed so hard he almost fell off the stool. He quickly produced another nickel and I thoroughly enjoyed a full-sized hamburger, and nothing ever tasted so good.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Seated at the wheel of the car was Jimmy Rogers, complete with a light tan duster, a fluffy light tan cap, an oversize pair of racing goggles and large gauntlets that reached all the way to his elbows. Jimmy had the car in low speed, with both the accelerator and the cut-out in wide open positions. The roar was deafening as he slowly approached the lunch wagon. Despite the terrific noise, the car in low speed probably did not exceed 10 miles per hour. The lunch customers recognized Jimmy and quickly left the counter to gaze in wonderment at the motorist

in all his sartorial splendor. No one would attempt to guess, as to what his next move would be as he was entirely unpredictable.

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

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

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

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

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

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

#62: OLD BAILEY BUSINESSES INCLUDING POP CROUCHLEY'S

Right across from Coleman's Lunch Wagon on Bailey Avenue stood an old one story, wooden building. It had a porch that extended the length of the front of the building. There was a pipe railing along the porch and that seemed quite fitting, as the building housed Charles D. Crouchley's plumbing shop.

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

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

Pop was one of the early chiefs on the Ridgefield Volunteer Fire Department. He was also a very good baseball player and played several positions, including first base and catcher. He also served for many years as president of the Ridgefield Savings Bank. That was at a time when

mortgages were not as easy to come by as they are today. Bankers were extremely cautious and a person had to prove to be a good risk before a mortgage was granted.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Charlie wore gold-rimmed glasses, a soft black hat and a well-trimmed mustache and was never seen without his cigar. For some reason, the cigar was never full length. Where he

secured so many cigar butts is not known but it was always a two or three inch butt that he took from his pocket.

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

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

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

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

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

#63: THE MISCHIEVOUS RAY KEELER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He was a graduate of Bucknell where he had been a star athlete. He quickly became more than just a principal. His other duties included teaching chemistry and coaching the

baseball and basketball teams. That he was eminently successful is a fact that can be found in the records of the fine teams that he molded together through the years.

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

More on Kip Holleran next week.

#65: WHEN TOWN HALL WAS A BASKETBALL ARENA

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

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

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

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

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

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

During the extensive renovations of the old Town Hall, the room became an office and is now used by our first selectman. The room on the left also had several uses such as an office for

the assessors as well as a dressing room for the visiting team. It had all the luxuries of the local team's dressing room, plus the advantage of considerable illumination from the street lights in the event that no electric bulb was available.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#66: A HOT TIME IN THE OLD TOWN HALL

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The referee was John L. Sullivan, a former star baseball and basketball player at Ridgefield High a few years earlier. John later became postmaster of Ridgefield, in which

position he served until he passed away after being stung by an insect at the firemen's clambake 22 years ago.

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

To say that the Danbury coach disagreed with the decision would be a gross understatement. Not even "violently disagreed" would adequately describe his reaction. Keep in mind that the wooden seats had been moved forward to make room for the overflow crowd that stood five deep behind them. The net result was a playing area diminished to little more than half its normal size.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

You mentioned the fact that because of the long ride home and your stop after the game at Mr. Holleran's Watertown home for cider and doughnuts, you did not get back home until three in the morning. That must have been considered scandalous at the time. Your dear old father waited at the Town Hall until the bus finally arrived, so he could walk you safely home to Ramapoo Road. Karl and I have figured that you then lived where later on the Courtney family lived and where Al and Toni Tulipani live now.

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

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

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

Incidentally, you were correct about the floor registers in the floor of the basketball court in the Town Hall. There were four of them, through which heat from the pipeless furnace was transmitted to the auditorium. Because of the high ceiling it was a difficult place to heat. On one

cold night, Pres Zandri put extra coal in the furnace and when I landed on one of the registers, I was almost fried by the hot metal.

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

Most sincerely,
REV

#68: SOME GOOD LAUGHS WITH KIP HOLLERAN

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

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

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

One had to do with Jack Cranston, who pitched for the high school baseball team more than 50 years ago. Jack was a big fellow and pitched lefthanded. He had a terrific fastball but was noted for accuracy. However, Jack decided that he needed a curveball to make him even more effective. He practiced with the curveball diligently, in secret, to perfect his new pitch. When Jack was satisfied that his curveball would be difficult to hit, he decided to try it in a real game.

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

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

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

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

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

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

By way of giving a graphic illustration of an equation to the student, Mr. Holleran stood before him and placed an 18-inch ruler on his index finger. When the ruler was perfectly balanced, he asked the student what he would have if a 100-pound weight was attached to each

end of the ruler. Without hesitation the boy, who was supposedly “slow learning,” answered: “I guess you would have a very broken finger.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Before we leave Bailey Avenue, we must refer back to Dispatch No. 48 in which we stated that Benvenuto Carboni and John Christopharo were two of the first four Italian men to come to Ridgefield in 1902. We said further that for the time being, the other two would go unnamed. Our information had come from an interview granted by Octavius J. (Tabby) Carboni to his son Bob.

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

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

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

#69: WATER CAME TO TOWN AFTER THE GREAT FIRE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Henry B. Anderson, a very enterprising man, turned his attention to the problem and decided to buy the toddling Ridgefield Water Supply. Under his careful guidance, lines were laid from Round Pond to a standpipe at the rear of the William Harrison Bradley Estate on West Mountain. From this vantage point, water flowed by gravity to an artery of pipes and to the fire

hydrants in the Village District. Many of these pipes are still in use today, eighty-one years after their installation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Pictures of some of our respected senior citizens appeared in a supplement to The Press, as part of Ridgefield’s 275th Anniversary. On the same page there were splendid articles, written

by four very astute high school students. The purpose was to further the theme of the tabloid, which was the past, the present and the future.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He told of how in the early days of the Ridgefield Volunteer Fire Department, horses were used to draw various pieces of equipment to the fires. They had no horses of their own, but used those of the livery stable, right across the street from the fire house, when they were

available. On occasion it was necessary to commandeer a team from a farmer who might be passing by the fire house at the time.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Some fine committee members represented organizations and others were very civic-minded individuals who just wanted to help. Suggestions were made as to what members thought would be suitable things for the celebration. They were carefully sorted and the committee seemed to agree with my suggestion that the whole affair be packed into one exciting weekend, rather than try to spread it out into a year-long series of events.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The supplement was to carry articles of historic value, along with the necessary advertising. Elisabeth felt that it should have something that would interest our school children. Her time became limited due to business pressures, and she enlisted, with our approval, the assistance of Geoffrey Kean. Geoffrey was eminently qualified for this assignment and with the tremendous help of Thomas Nash, this little group came up with a tabloid that should be a collector's item. The entire operation proved to me that with fine young people like Tom, Mary Hart, Frank McPike and others, our town's future is in good hands.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Interesting lectures were often given by prominent speakers and even some who were not so prominent. Once, during the mid 20's, the selectmen made the mistake of renting the hall to a group that turned out to be the Ku Klux Klan. That was a very exciting evening and, though no one was seriously injured, there were a number of discolored eyes and bent noses as the Klan was driven out of town by an organization known as the Nightriders.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Great pains were taken to make the hall attractive for these affairs. There was a large metal grating in the very center of the ceiling. It could only be reached by climbing high over the stage and then crawling through a very narrow passageway over the ceiling and some 50 feet

above the floor. The person doing this would carry with him a wire that he would poke through the grating. When the wire reached the floor it was fastened to a metal hoop to which had been attached several hundred colorful streamers that had been twisted, ribbon like, the other end of which had been attached to the side walls. The fellow above the ceiling then pulled the wire and the decorations to the desired height and the effect on the old auditorium was an instant and beautiful transformation. The fellow who crawled along over that ceiling could not be the squeamish type as it was a rather scary trip.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

On one occasion George threw me a high hard one. In fact it was so high that I could not reach it. The ball bounced upward from the tip of my glove and found its way through the north

window of Llewellyn Crossman's Jewelry Store. Mr. Crossman had just bought the store from Francis Martin and it was located where the United Cleaners is now.

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

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

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

George's uncle Pete was a big man and had done considerable professional wrestling. He was also a weight lifter and we have a picture of him somewhere, in leotards with a large dumbbell held high over his head. It was Pete who kindled the interest in boxing and wrestling that led to these events being held in Town Hall.

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

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

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

#75: LIMPING, LEAPING AND THE TERRIBLE TURK

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Admission fees would soar when some local boy accepted the challenge. His friends would crowd around a small ring set up inside the tent. The ring was made small for two reasons:

to make more room for the paying customers and to make less room for the local boy to run away from The Turk.

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

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

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

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

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

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

#76: A LOOK AT OUR POSTAL PAST

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We have been talking about the many uses to which our Town Hall has been put and somehow we got sidetracked into the post office. We'll get back to the Town Hall, but since the

post office is so much in the news today, we might as well finish out this column with some more data on this very important part of our everyday life.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Todds were so concerned that someone might scratch that classy car that they drove it only as far as the Titicus watering trough, at the intersection of North Salem Road and Saw Mill Hill. They walked the final mile. After voting, their civic duty performed, they visited with other voters, did their shopping, walked back to Titicus, and then drove home. At home it was necessary to repeat all the chores that had started before daybreak that morning. The “Good Old Days”??

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#78 INTIMIDATING VOTING MACHINES AND SOME VOTERS WHO USED THEM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The process of making voters has changed dramatically in the past few years. At one time it took place on Saturday at the Town Hall and the Board of Selectmen and the Town Clerk made up the voter-making committee. It was necessary for at least two of the Board and the Town Clerk to be in attendance. Among other qualifications, it was necessary for the prospective voter to prove that he or she could read. This was done by pointing to the state statutes and asking the person to read one paragraph.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#80: WHEN STEPPY SHOT THE POST OFFICE THIEF

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

His civic activities brought him in contact with the parents of these young people that he had to deal with each evening. With the parents solidly behind him, Frank wielded sufficient

influence over the youths of Ridgefield that when he approached another older group at 9 o'clock, they too dispersed as directed.

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

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

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

There was little crime in Ridgefield, in those days.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Frank was in the driveway between Saint Stephen's Church Parish House and S.D. Keeler's store (now Ridgefield Auto Parts). Frank hurried to the front of the store, as best he could. He was somewhat impeded by an affliction that caused him to throw his right foot out forward, in a rather awkward manner. This encumbered his stride and earned for Frank the nickname "Steppy." It was, however, never said in disrespect.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Some of these people were from fine families and behaved like real gentlemen. They were called transients, wanderers, tramps, bums, nomads, hobos, and knights of the road. They

did not seem to care what they were called as long as they were not badgered and could have a peaceful night's sleep.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

When that man left the Jackson residence, he left a sign for his brethren who followed. A table and two chairs remained on that porch for many years and I cannot tell how many hundreds of knights of the road got their start each day with a sumptuous breakfast prepared by the compassionate Susie with kindly Mrs. Jackson's approval.

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

#82: TALES OF CHRISTMAS PAST

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

However, two things happened around Christmas that broke through the barrier. One of my newspaper customers lived in one of the apartments over Bissell's Drug Store. Her name was Mary Cooney and we called her Miss Cooney. She was a doctor and I think she was a chiropractor. At any rate, she took a liking to me and bought a chance in a raffle at S.D. Keeler's store, across the street where Ridgefield Auto Parts is now. Miss Cooney put my name on the raffle ticket and when I delivered the paper to the store, they informed me that I had won the 25-pound turkey that was offered as a prize.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Later on the wagon was stored in a shed at Hillscroft after the estate had been sold to Dr. Royal C. Van Etten. When I became superintendent for Dr. Van Etten, I was delighted to find the wagon again. There was no driving horse at Hillscroft at the time, but I lost no time in acquiring one, as I had to have a ride in the old wagon.

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

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

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

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

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

During these years, Charley and his family lived upstairs in the large Tudor building that has been known as the Biglow building, the Ballard building, the Martin Block and more recently as the Pizza building. This great building also housed the Telephone Company and

several operators were employed there keeping Ridgefield connected with itself and the outside world.

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

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

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

Charley was not a big man but he made up for that in "know how." He was well versed in the use of leverages and could handle the biggest and heaviest trunks with ease. Fish used to come in barrels, packed with ice and must have weighed around 300 pounds. The barrels were no problem as S.D. Keeler's Store where the ground was fairly level. However, at Hibbart's (later Schultz's and now Cappiello's), it was a different matter. There was a slope to the platform and the rear of the wagon must have been two feet higher than the front. How Charley got those barrels up that incline and onto the platform was something to see.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Happy New Year.

#84: A HISTORY OF A LITTLE DOG

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A couple of months later, the Knights of Columbus was having a carnival and a crisis developed when they ran out of prizes. I remembered the puppies and mentioned them to John Bacchiochi. Johnny took off for the Edels' home and bought the litter. When he returned with the

puppies, there was great joy among young and old alike, and the games went on with renewed interest.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jennie said that while the drifts in '88 were deeper, the snow on the level in '34 was greater. She noted that the wind, which really makes a blizzard, was of hurricane velocity in '88. It piled snow in places where it would cause the most trouble — in highways and against buildings, especially around the doorways. At the same time, open fields were swept clean by the gigantic winds.

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

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

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

In '47 we had several storms, one just two days before Christmas. Then the day after Christmas it got down to snowing in earnest. We were at Hillscroft Farm on St. John's Road at the time. We had a truck with a snow plow and used to keep the road clear from Wilton Road

West to the bottom of the Silver Hill. Not this time though. There was just too much snow for the truck to handle.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I guess there are few, if any, who remember when instead of clearing the roads, they used a large wooden roller and packed the snow down on the highways. As each storm occurred, the snow was just rolled on top of the last one. This made for excellent sleighing before the advent of the cursed automobile.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The storm was not considered a blizzard as there was no wind and therefore no drifts. There was lots of snow, however, and it must have been nearly 30 inches deep. The tank had

been kept busy opening roads that were more heavily traveled. At any rate, we finally reached Gilbert Street and just as the last shovelful was being deposited, we saw the tank on its way down High Ridge Avenue on its way to our rescue.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Victor was always right on top of local happenings. People used to do a lot of ice skating on the many local ponds. When some of the better ponds were closed to the public, he put an ad in The Press, inviting everyone to come and make use of his pond at Stonehenge. He even installed lights so they could skate at night.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thank you, Victor.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jerusalem Lodge No. 49 A.F. & A.M., was 175 years old in 1983 and was the first of Ridgefield's fraternal organizations. The lodge still owns this large building and still uses the second and third floors for its fraternal activities. Masons came from miles around to help the Lodge celebrate its 175th birthday, as well as Ridgefield's 275th Anniversary.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The new Press office provided the space needed and the newspaper changed rapidly to meet the needs of a growing community. It was a one-story building and remained so for almost 40 years. The second story was added almost ten years ago and operations were further streamlined.

In the front part of the Masonic Building, on the first floor, was Louis Joffee's tailor shop. Later it would house the Ridgefield Thrift Shop and now the Gordon Walsh Agency. Louis was a real good tailor and numbered many of the wealthy "summer people" among his customers.

It was Louis Joffee and Joseph Hartmann that first discovered the smoke and spread the alarm, relating to the disastrous fire of 1895. The terrifying experience must have had a profound effect on Louis and he became a lifetime member of the Ridgefield Fire Department.

Like all good tailors, Louis did his sewing by hand, while seated in the show window of his establishment in full view of the passersby. Also like other tailors, he kept a tom cat in the window with him. It seemed that tom cats were a necessity in the operation of a tailor shop.

Of course, the cat's name was Tommy. From a distance he would appear to be sleeping, but whenever anyone approached, he would rouse himself and strut around spitting and hissing, acting as disagreeable as possible. The big reddish-yellow feline had a regular skit that he performed to the amusement of onlookers.

We once heard Tom Kehoe put down a rather pompous person by telling him that he reminded him of a tailor's tom cat. The pompous one would have been so much better off if he had let the matter drop right there. However, he made the mistake of asking why he was being compared to a tom cat. Tom went on to explain in great detail, which we will not do here as some of it was unprintable.

At any rate, Tommy lived to a ripe old age and when he finally passed on, one of Louis's customers gave him a young cat the exact color of Tommy. Louis was quite pleased and promptly named the new cat Tommy. He was a good provider and soon had the cat growing at a rapid rate. Even Louis was surprised at how fast the new Tommy filled out.

One morning when Louis unlocked the door to his shop, Tommy failed to greet him. Louis went to the back room of his shop and there on a pile of soft fabric was "Tommy" with five cute yellow kittens.

#90: THE INCREDIBLE BLIZZARD OF '34 ISOLATES TOWN FOR THREE DAYS

It has been almost 100 years since the Blizzard of '88 and it is just 50 years since the Blizzard of '34.

Many of the oldtimers have expressed the opinion that the storm of March 1888 was the granddaddy of them all. That storm was before my time, but I sure witnessed the one in February

of 1934. Some who were around to see both of these killer storms have said that in '88, the drifts were greater while the snow, on the level, was much greater in '34.

I am sure that those who were around 50 years ago will never forget hardships caused by that terrible storm. Those unborn at the time probably will not believe that it could have been that bad in Ridgefield. Young people today are apt to give you an incredulous look when you recount some of the incidents that occurred in that great storm. They also find it hard to believe conditions that existed during the Great Depression.

Many seem to operate on the theory that modern snow removal equipment would insure against the town's ever being isolated again, as it was for three days in 1934. They are equally confident that government safeguards will protect against financial disasters such as occurred in 1929. We sure-hope that they are right in both instances.

At any rate, Feb. 19 was a Monday in 1934. It started to snow at four o'clock in the afternoon. It looked like an ordinary light snow and gave no indication of what was to come. However, around nine o'clock, the skies opened up and the snow came down like never before.

Ridgefield had two trucks with snow plows, one large and one of medium size. First Selectman Winthrop Rockwell ordered the plows out. Raymond "Buck" McClean drove the big one and I think Raymond Fish operated the other. Both were excellent drivers, with plenty of experience.

By eleven o'clock that night, both trucks were hopelessly stuck, one on West Mountain and the other in Ridgebury. Win Rockwell's favorite expression when perplexed was "Judas!" and for the next few days it must have been used a great many times.

Buck managed to get all the way to Lyman Keeler's (where Keeler Drive is now). The snow had become so heavy he could go no further. He backed into Keeler's driveway to turn around, only to find that the snow had drifted in behind him. The truck was stuck there for a couple of days and had to be shoveled out by hand.

Tuesday morning the snow had slackened off somewhat and an attempt was made, with two little graders, to open Catoonah Street, in order that the fire trucks could get out. They were not very successful and a crew of snow shovelers had to help. The fire trucks would not have been able to go very far as Main Street was completely impassable.

Win called Hartford for assistance and was authorized the use of CWA workers. The CWA work force was a Depression-inspired program, made up of men who could not find employment of any kind. They were a big help in this crisis.

The State Highway Department had its own station in Ridgefield at the time and Cap McAllister was the foreman in charge. They were no better off than the town crew. Cap had his men on the job, but the two state highway trucks were both stuck and had to be shoveled out. The two trucks had to be hitched together as one truck could not make it alone.

This made for slow going and it took two hours just to make a single track from the town hall to the fountain.

Since the storm had eased a little, there was hope that the great effort put forth by the workers would be successful. Alas, in the afternoon the storm became more intense and snow fell even heavier than before. To make matters worse, it became very cold and the wind started to blow very hard.

The big storm continued through the night undoing the hard work of the day before. The state highway crew had cleared a single track to the Danbury Town Line by three in the morning. They retired, expecting to open the road wider the next day. However, the wind had drifted the snow right back level across the track they had made.

By Tuesday evening the shelves in the food stores were just about empty and it would be Thursday before trucks with supplies could get to Ridgefield.

Only a few people had oil burning furnaces in those days and delivery of both coal and oil could not be made. Wednesday afternoon Lou Price announced that a freight train had finally made it to Ridgefield with a carload of coal. One oil burner in Byron Park exploded and blew the cellar door in the air.

To add to the woes of the people of Ridgefield, the electric power went off at 11 o'clock Monday night. This was not such an unusual occurrence in those days, but during a storm of this dimension, it created real hardship.

An emergency hookup was made with the electric power of neighboring Katonah, N .Y. but the current was not sufficient to meet the needs of the whole town.

Through the heroic efforts of the hardy electric crewman, full power was finally restored at nine o'clock on Tuesday night. Power went off again several times but for shorter durations.

Several unsuccessful attempts were made to plow a single track to the coal yards on Bailey Avenue. Ernest Scott owned the block where Ridgefield News Store is now. He had to supply the heat for all those stores and the apartments. Ernie was one of the town's large coal dealers but he was like the cobbler whose children had no shoes. At the height of the storm it was found that the coal bins in his building were empty. It was necessary for his men to carry the coal on their backs from the freight yards to the empty bins. A bag of coal weighs about 100 pounds and trudging up the hill through all those drifts must have been extremely difficult.

Telephone service went off several times, but for only short periods. It was our only link to the outside world on Tuesday and Wednesday. Bacchiochi's caterpillar tractor tried to open Branchville Road, but a huge drift at the top of Biddle's Hill repulsed its every effort. The firm had not yet acquired the huge army truck that was used in later storms.

Duncan Smith issued the sage observation that "we should bear with the weather, for in a few short months, the girls will be wearing skirts again."

More Next Week

#91: BOBSLEDDING THE MILK IN THE BLIZZARD OF '34

So, many Ridgefielders went to bed on Monday evening while an ordinary little snow storm was making the change to a very extraordinary blizzard. By 4:30 in the morning we had about 16 inches of snow and it was still coming.

It was now Tuesday, Feb. 20, 1934, and the milk had to be delivered. We lived only a little over 100 yards from the Conklin Dairy on Ramapoo Road and it took about 15 minutes to negotiate that little distance.

We well remember how happy we were at the prospect of delivering the milk with the horses. It was obvious even then that there would be no motor vehicles moving for some time. This, even though we were unaware that the town's two snow plows had been stuck since 11 o'clock the night before.

At the dairy, the first order of business was to get the bobsleds down from under the roof of the wagon shed. They had been hung there with baling wire, for just such an occasion. Once the bobs were hooked together, the body from one of the wagons was lifted and placed on the bobs.

Irving Conklin had three teams of horses. He drove Dick and Major, a pair of dappled greys. I drove Kit and Lady, a big pair of black percheron colts. Harry Terpenney drove Duke and Diamond, a pair of strawberry roans.

The roans were an older team. The blacks were a little young for such a test. The greys were long legged and seemed ideal for snow, so they were chosen for the first tour of duty. Before this day was over, all three teams would be pressed into service — and exhausted.

The task of assembling the sleigh, harnessing, and hitching the horses was all done with the aid of kerosene lanterns and flashlights as electric power had been off since the previous evening and would be off until Tuesday night.

By the time the sleigh was loaded with 360 quarts of milk, all in glass bottles, it was a little after 6 o'clock and still quite dark. We had only the one sleigh, so Ernest Sturges, Percy Humphreys and I accompanied Irving to make the deliveries.

By the time we had struggled up the little grade from the dairy to Ramapoo Road, it was apparent that no plowing had been done. Gilbert Street was always one of the first roads to be opened, so when we reached it and there was still no sign of a plow, we became aware of the tough job ahead.

There was no sign of life on Gilbert Street until we reached Arthur Carnall's house. Arthur was always an early riser and he greeted us from an upstairs window.

It was seven o'clock when we reached Main Street and it was beginning to get a little light so we decided to try to get a picture. It came out but not very well. We were to get a number of good pictures later on.

By 7:30 we stopped in front of the bakery (where Roma Pizzeria [Planet] is now). The bakery was a good place to buy milk so we left them a good supply for those with the courage to venture out in this storm.

Up to now we had all been so busy that we did not think to look at a thermometer. There was a big one in front of Oscar Schultz's Market (where Cappiello's was later).

Jimmy Dixon was manager of the market and lived only a short distance away on Catoonah Street. Jimmy had already opened the market in anticipation of customers who would want to stock up. Ernie Sturges was on that side of the street and as he said hello to Jimmy, he noted that the temperature was just 10 below zero. It was to get much colder.

Just south of the market, Ernie came upon a huge pile of snow in front of Howard Freer's Store. It looked like a drift, almost to the second story. Ernie brushed some snow away and discovered a little Chevrolet coupe with the front bumper of the car within an inch of the show window.

Dr. Francis E. Woodford had received a call during the early morning hours from a family on Abbott Avenue. Sometimes babies seem to pick the most unusual times to make their entrance into the world.

The good doctor bravely started out from his home at 325 Main Street. He spun and skidded for almost a quarter of a mile until he found himself on the sidewalk, against the store

window. Undaunted, and in the best tradition of the "country doctor," Fritz, as his friends called him, left his car and walked the rest of the way to Abbott Avenue. Some time later, little Doris Hunt appreciated his arrival as she increased the population of Ridgefield to an unprecedented 3,427.

Just the other day, Mrs. Woodford told me, when I reminded her of the story, that on his way home, the doctor stopped by the market and bought a large ham from Jimmy Dixon. He was unaware that neither of his daughters, Joan and Anne, liked ham, so it must have lasted long after the storm.

By 9:30 we were out of milk and had to retrace through the only tracks, the ones we had previously made, to the dairy for another load. This gave us a chance to partake in the marvelous breakfast that Mrs. Conklin could provide.

We used the blacks for the second tour and as well as the bottled milk, we added a couple of 40 quart cans full of milk. Some of the customers came out to meet us with little pails and we obliged by using a dipper that held one quart, to provide for their needs.

Some of the other dairies had as yet been unable to get out on their routes so we dispensed the milk to all who came out to meet us. Although by now the milk was freezing rapidly, despite the blankets we used for cover, people were glad to get it frozen or not.

In the early afternoon we returned to the dairy for a third load and the strawberry roans. When all the milk was gone we had to wait for the cows to replenish the supply. It was impossible to cover all of the town so it was decided to go to visit the other areas the next day, Wednesday.

Early in the evening there was a call from a family with a little baby and they needed milk. I was put on the back of one of the big horses, with a two quart can of milk strung over my shoulder and took off for West Mountain. The gratitude of that family seemed to make it all worthwhile. However, the mercury had dropped to 15 below and I wound up with two frozen feet.

Wednesday turned out to be somewhat better as it stopped snowing around noon time and the sun came out. However, even with the sun shining, it got colder and soon was down to 20 below.

Employees of the stores faced a monumental task in clearing the sidewalks. Duncan Smith gave Bissell's credit for being the first to have theirs clean. Freddy, Johnny and Squash did the job.

Continued next week

#92: WHEN THE THERMOMETER HIT 32 BELOW ZERO

It seems only fitting to end the saga of the Blizzard of '34 with a few of the many human-interest stories that accompanied the great storm.

There was the one about the very important local gentleman, who was the president of a real large corporation. He called and asked for transportation to the Branchville Railroad Station. The board of directors of his firm was holding a meeting in New York City and he just had to be there.

This important gentleman lived in the northern section of town and it was 11 o'clock at night when the two mares, drawing an open sleigh, pulled up at his mansion. He came out,

dressed in a coon-skin coat that extended to his ankles. He wore a little derby hat, with no ear muffs and had no gloves. When asked where in the h--- he thought he was going in such an outfit, he became very annoyed. However, after getting a feel of that terribly cold air and it was explained that it was then 25 below zero, he began to get the message.

The gentleman disappeared into the house and in a few minutes returned with a woolen shawl over his derby. He was also wearing huge, elbow-length gauntlets and carried several bottles of Johnny Walker.

It was a long ride to Branchville and a couple of detours through the fields had to be made. One of the necessary detours was at the very top of Biddles' Hill, near where Nutmeg Ridge is now. The drift in that cut was so great that even the caterpillar tractor was unsuccessful in opening it.

It was near three in the morning when Mr. — was deposited at the station. He was a little the worse for wear and needed assistance to board the special train that had been waiting on the siding for him since six o'clock the previous evening. He was still clutching the bottles (all except one) as he began his train ride to the big city.

On Wednesday morning, Bill and Jimmy Christopher started from their farm (now the Hobart Keeler farm) in North Salem for Ridgefield. The milk trucks had been unable to get to their farm to collect the milk. They were unaware that the trucks from Clover Farms Dairy in Norwalk had still not gotten to Ridgefield. Bill and Jimmy arrived in front of Mignery's Drug Store (now the Yardage Shop) about 1:30 in the afternoon. Their old bay team was nearly exhausted and they were just about frozen. They had ten cans of milk (400 quarts) on their wood shod sled. A sleigh of this kind had a flat body and no seat. As the name implies, the runners were made of wood, rather than steel.

The two men were very discouraged when they found that there was no way to get their milk to Norwalk. Prohibition had recently been repealed and there was a liquor store across the street where Dr. Martin and Dr. Doty now practice optometry.

Jimmy never drank anything stronger than milk, but Bill took up the slack. Bill crossed the street and procured a fifth of gin and, doing double duty, finished it off in some 20 minutes. I have been told that this cannot be done without the imbiber dying. I saw it happen and Bill did not spill any. The thermometer registered 20 below at the time.

It was suggested that rather than try to drag all that milk back to North Salem, they stop at Conklin's Dairy and run it through a cream separator. The ratio is ten to one so they would have one can of cream to take home along with nine empty cans. At least they could make butter from the cream.

The drain from the dairy emptied into a little brook that emanated in Bryon Park and 360 quarts of skim milk froze as it hit the outside air. The little brook remained white for more than a week.

This has not been a happy story and the rest is even worse. Jimmy and Bill started their long and lonely trek back to North Salem with a much lighter load. However, the terrible trip to Ridgefield had taken its toll and when they got as far as Farrar's Lane, one of the horses played out, went down, and it was necessary to shoot the noble animal.

The two men left their sled and its contents and rode the other horse all the way back to their farm. They must have suffered greatly.

That evening Dick Rapp and Bernie Christopher, a cousin of the two just mentioned, started by auto for Danbury. They got only as far as the Danbury town line, just this side of The Yellow Shutters. The Danbury State Highway crew had not opened Route 35 and they managed to turn around and come home.

There was a family that lived on West Lane, just over the New York State line. They were very poor and as this was the heart of the Depression, there were many like them. It was Thursday before Ernie Sturges and I got that far with the sleigh. We found this family, father, mother, and three children, huddled around a pot-bellied stove. They had the rug pulled up from the floor and wrapped around them, in an effort to get some warmth. They had no coal or oil, or even wood. All they had to feed the stove was a small pile of newspapers, which when inserted in the stove, just made a puff as the burning paper flew up the chimney. A bottle of iodine froze and broke on the table right next to these people.

This family was very glad to see us as they had no other food in the house. They owed \$34.10 for milk, which was a lot to owe in those times. Somehow they were able to get moved out when the storm finally subsided and we had no idea of where they went, and it was concluded that they would never be heard from again.

The nice part of this story is that all members of the family became quite famous as writers and two years later came a check from Chicago for \$34.10.

The mercury continued its descent and we saw it hit 30 below zero. Francis Martin, who kept good records of the weather, said that his thermometer registered 33 degrees below zero. It is doubtful if it ever got that cold before or since in Ridgefield.

The water mains froze in places and one burst on the corner of High Ridge and Bryon Avenue. Arthur Carnall was passing at the time in his green Essex. The cascade of water hit his car and by the time Arthur stopped, near Catoonah Street, his car looked like a huge, green ice cube.

There were many other stories about the great storm but you must have had enough for now and we should be looking forward to spring. Interestingly, on the following Sunday, the snow started again but this time it was only eight inches, just enough to patch up the sleighing and practically went unnoticed.

#93: WHEN THE HOBOS SET TYPE AND THE MUGAVEROS CUT HAIR

Despite all the modern machinery that is used today, the production of a newspaper is still a very complicated matter. In the years past, it was a very laborious project.

When The Press was located in the Masonic Building, back of where The Gordon Walsh Agency [Coldwell Banker in 2020] is now, the type was set by hand. The type was produced on pieces of metal, approximately two inches in length, one inch in height and about one quarter of an inch in thickness. The type for each page of the paper was set in a large rectangular case or tray.

A typesetter had to have considerable talent. Each little slug of type had to be placed in its proper sequence and then hammered in tightly. He also had to be proficient at reading backwards as in the printing, this was all reversed.

Once the type for an entire page was in place, the tray was placed in the printing machine where it slid back and forth under a huge roller to which the paper was attached. As the

page was printed, the paper left the roller and was deposited on a fork-like affair that laid, it in front of the person assigned to fold it. The late Carleton Scofield did the folding when I was a kid and the late David W. Workman was the editor.

S.C. O'Connor was the manager of the paper before Mr. Workman became editor and "Tabby" was a typesetter. "Tabby," of course, is Octavius J. Carboni, who we are happy to say, is still around and still very active.

No doubt, Tabby was a very good typesetter as he was very talented and very alert. He tells of how The Press never seemed to have enough help and used to augment its staff by hiring hobos that had printing experience. These men were passing through town and always paid a visit to the local paper in each town where they stopped over.

Typesetting was a rather tedious job that required not only good eyesight and reading ability, but considerable patience as well. These men seemed to have an abundance of these attributes and were a welcome addition to the staff at The Press.

An apprentice was known as a "printer's devil," but these men were considered real pros. They would stay just long enough to build themselves a "grub stake" and then move on to other towns, until more funds were needed.

These "knights of the road" were different from those who used to stay for the night in the jail cells at the old town hall. As a matter of fact they would exhibit disdain for the free lodging that the town provided and opted instead for the cots in the basement of the Masonic Building, which the manager of The Press had thoughtfully provided.

Unlike their counterparts who made their one-night stands at town hall and then moved on, never to return, many of those who did typesetting made periodic visits. Somehow they always managed to turn up at a time when they were most needed.

Tabby got to know some of these nomads and remembers one in particular whose name was Masterson. His first name was unknown and he was promptly dubbed "Bat." Bat was a great story teller and never failed to regale the staff at The Press with his experiences in journalism and the world of travel. His listeners marveled at these tales, but some were so far-fetched that they concluded the stories were mere figments of a very vivid imagination.

Karl and John Nash acquired The Press in 1937 and the following year bought Jake Walter's garage on Bailey Avenue. The Press moved that year to its present location.

The late Howard Freer then moved into the quarters vacated by The Press and operated his radio business there for several years. Mr. Freer and John Hubbard were two of the very earliest radio dealers in Ridgefield.

This part of the Masonic Building is now the home of Mike's Barber Shop. In July of 1950, Jerry Mugavero moved the barber shop that he and his brother Vincent operated, from where James of Ridgefield is now to where the radio store had been.

Vincent had started the business in 1930 as The Ridgefield Tonsorial Parlor at 392 Main Street. We had never heard the word tonsorial used in connection with a barber shop and wondered if it was a place where throat operations were performed. Vincent and his wife Bernice built and operated the restaurant called The BV Ranch on Route 7.

Vinnie retired and Jerry kept the family business going. It should be noted that they are nephews of Brooklyn's Bishop Mugavero. Just to keep the family flavor, their father used to

come to Ridgefield each summer and help his boys during the busy season. He was an old retired barber and gave me the best haircut I ever had.

In 1956, Michael Pontello made his appearance. Mike married Agatha Mugavero. Agatha is Jerry's daughter so you just know he had to be a barber.

Jerry also has a son, Peter, of whom it is said that he was born with clippers in his hand. Peter, like the dutiful son that he is, served his apprenticeship with his father and then opened his own "Peter's Barber Shop" in the Branchville area at 43 Ethan Allen Highway. It is hard to believe that Peter is already in the 22nd year of operating his own business.

It is even more amazing when you consider that the combined barbering of Peter, his brother-in-law Mike, his father Jerry, his uncle Vinnie and his grandfather, total almost two centuries of service. If all the hair that these five gentlemen have cut, was placed in one pile, it would make a small mountain.

After 54 years in Ridgefield, the Mugaveros must be considered one of the community's oldest family owned services.

Mike has been plying his trade for 28 years and has some interesting observations concerning the many changes in the barbering profession. He proudly displays the examination papers that he had to take to become a licensed barber, his training records, etc. None of these are required today. You still must have a license to be a barber. However, the examining board no longer exists, inspections are few and far between and your qualification to perform is dependent, to a great extent, on your ability to squeeze a pair of scissors together.

Mike takes a rather dim view of the flimsy regulations that govern the operation of a barber shop. It is obvious that he takes great pride in carrying on the family tradition.

Mike likes outdoor sports and is an ardent fisherman. He also has several hobbies, not the least of which is his passion for woodworking. Several of his creations are on display in his shop. We were much impressed with a fine rocking horse which Mike recently donated to the Ridgefield Family Y.

#94: THE HAPPY STORY OF THE CRAIGS; THE SAD TALE OF HARVEY LOWN

A family owned business is not unusual in Ridgefield. There was a time when we had a lot of them and we still have a few.

Next door to the Masonic Building is Craig's Jewelry Store and it has been a family venture for the past 34 years. The late Helen Craig (Mrs. Ross Craig) bought the business from the late Francis D. Martin in 1950. The store was at that time located where the Yarn Bee is now at 415 Main Street.

Mrs. Craig, assisted by the then Elsie Fossi, kept the business going while her son, Norman, went to school to learn watch repairing, as well as gain knowledge of jewelry in general. Norman had a great interest in rare gems and after graduating, quickly exhibited his knowledge in that field by asking Elsie to marry him.

Norman and Elsie have three children, Karen, William, and Lori, and they are all actively engaged in the operation of the store. More recently, there have been three little grandchildren, whom we fully expect will keep Craig's Jewelry Store going in the years to come. There must be something very satisfying about seeing your children carry on a tradition such as this.

Beside being an avid golfer, Norman has been involved in numerous civic affairs, and has chaired several fundraising events. He has been active in local service clubs and fraternal organizations and his interest in politics has resulted in his recent election as Democratic Town Chairman.

The building where Criag's is now located was built in the 20's by the late George G. Scott who was for many years our judge of probate and town clerk. It is now owned by another former judge of probate, Attorney Joseph H. Donnelly.

It was known for many years as the Scott Block and since there was another Scott Block, directly across the street and built about the same time, you just had to know that these Scotts were not related. The Scott Block on the west side of Main Street, which was recently sold to the Addressi brothers, was built by Ernest Scott.

The original wooden building that stood where Judge Scott built his block was completely destroyed by the great fire of 1895. After the debris from that terrible fire was cleared away, the lot remained vacant for more than 20 years. Al Girolmetti and others remember when the Masons used to hold their annual carnivals on the unused property.

Judge Scott's new building was a welcome addition to the Main Street scene and the stores were quickly occupied. Earl Roberts was the first in the store where Craig's is now. Earl was an electrician and sold electric products at his store. Then came Harvey B. Lown and his insurance business and later George Grunig operated his real estate business from that store.

Harvey Lown was one of my favorite heroes when I was a kid. I still think he was a very good man despite the trouble he encountered later in life.

Harvey was born in Lewisboro [Ed: Wilton] and came to Ridgefield as a young boy. He had a very pleasing personality and was very easy to like. He was a great baseball player, an exceptionally good hitter and baserunner, and played the outfield with the grace of a Tris Speaker or Joe DiMaggio.

If Harvey had an enemy, it must have been himself. Everyone thought he was just a great fellow. He could never refuse any favor that was asked.

During World War I Harvey served in the U.S. Navy aboard the U.S.S. Minnesota. He contracted pneumonia, was transferred to a transport, the USS Tenadore, and made eight trips to France. He was shipwrecked in the Bay of Biscay and drifted two days in a lifeboat before being rescued.

After the war Harvey returned to Ridgefield and went into the insurance business. His popularity was such that he probably would have been successful in any business venture. He was one of the organizers of the Promoters Club that was a forerunner of the Lions Club, of which he was also a charter member.

If there was any worthwhile activity being carried on in town, you were sure to find Harvey involved in it. He put great effort into many civic projects, served on the school board, and was chairman of its building committee. Later on he became assistant town clerk.

It was while Harvey was a young man that a Mr. Big in Ridgefield got himself in a lot of trouble. He asked Harvey to take him off the hook and as usual Harvey obliged. As we have said, he was young at the time, but he must have deeply regretted it later on.

We like to remember Harvey, with his deep resonant voice, leading the singing at various song feasts. He was always the life of the party.

It seemed only natural that this very popular man would enter the political arena. When he ran for the office of tax collector, he was a shoo in. He served several terms and was always a top vote getter.

I really think Harvey could have been elected to just about any office. It should be noted that the fact that he always tipped me for delivering his newspapers really had no bearing on my fondness for this nice man. Well, maybe a little.

Mrs. Frederic E. Lewis was president of the local chapter of the American Red Cross for many years. This very elegant lady never failed to give Harvey the lion's share of the credit for the great success of Red Cross projects.

Harvey married the very pretty Elizabeth O'Shea. Elizabeth was a very popular school teacher, as was her sister Isabel, who became the beloved principal of Veteran's Park School.

Everything seemed to be turning up roses for the Lowns. He was successful in business as well as in politics. They built a very fine home on Wilton Road West and both were in great demand wherever nice people got together. When important people were planning a party, it would not be unusual for them to start their guest list with Elizabeth and Harvey.

However, there were to be dark days ahead. First there was the tragic stock market crash and then the Great Depression was to have an adverse effect on most everyone, in one way or another.

Money was very scarce, people were out of work and could not pay their bills, bankruptcies were commonplace and people were doing things that they just never believed they would be doing.

It was rumored that in the State of Connecticut, people in political office were misappropriating money from accounts that it was their duty toward.

(Continued Next Week)

#95: TRULY A SAD CHAPTER IN RIDGEFIELD'S HISTORY

During the Great Depression it was suspected that there was considerable commingling of funds on the part of some public officials. During the late 30's the State Tax Commissioner was successful in getting the General Assembly to pass a law requiring periodic audits of public officials handling taxpayer's money.

It was said that some officials could see the axe about to fall and were successful in getting their houses in order. Several audits were made and failed to disclose any wrongdoing. Then in November of 1939 the auditors came to Ridgefield.

Harvey Lown had just been re-elected tax collector the previous month and was again one of the top vote-getters. When the examiners paid their visit and continued to stay, there were rumors that they had found a shortage.

The original estimate was that a shortage of about \$10,000 existed. The audit continued all through the month of December and each time a figure was released, Harvey would make a replacement. At the conclusion of the audit the shortage had increased to about \$14,000 [about \$260,000 in 2020 dollars].

After more than 12 years as tax collector, Harvey Lown resigned his spot on Jan. 16, 1940. He was arrested and charged with embezzlement. It was as though a bomb had been dropped in our little community.

There was a general feeling of disbelief among the townspeople. Many wanted to see the auditor's report. First Selectman Winthrop E. Rockwell said that he could not release the report until the authorities gave their consent.

Win Rockwell was a shaken man when he scheduled a meeting with the Board of Finance. He asked the newspaper reporters to leave the meeting. The reporters said that they were not demanding to see the report, they just wanted to cover the meeting. A taxpayer, John Eustis, refused to leave and vigorously defended his right to be present at the open meeting.

The very confused meeting was further muddled when the town counsel, Judge Light, ruled that the meeting should adjourn until the room was cleared and then it could be reconvened. The board never voted to clear the room.

The case finally came before judge Carl Foster in Bridgeport, with State's Attorney Lorin Willis as prosecutor. Willis was an able prosecutor and noted for his toughness. [Editor's note: Both Judge Foster and Prosecutor Willis were prominently portrayed in the 2017 biopic, *Marshall*, featuring Justice Thurgood Marshall.]

Harvey Lown was represented by Attorney William Hanna, who declared that the whole matter was a simple case of intermingling of funds. He stated that rather than an actual shortage, there had just been a lot of poor bookkeeping.

It was revealed that Harvey was having a difficult time in collecting his insurance premiums and the insurance companies were pressing him for payments. When this happened he used available tax dollars to cover the premiums, replacing it when he was able to. Actually he was also having difficulty in collecting taxes from people whose incomes had been drastically reduced because of the hard times through which the country was then moving.

We know of several people who went to see Harvey when they were unable to pay either their premiums or their taxes. After hearing their plight, he would agree to carry them until they were back on their feet. There were some, but only a few, of those he had assisted, who were quick to condemn Harvey. However, most people felt sorry for this fine man who was always ready to do a favor.

Harvey had a host of friends and probably his closest were Joe Roach and Bob Richardson. We used to see them each morning when they went out for coffee together. When Harvey was going through his ordeal, they stood staunchly beside him.

One day while at the service window of the First National Bank (now Union Trust) [Wells Fargo], we overheard one V.I.P. make a snide remark about Harvey's unhappy position. Apparently Bob, who was an officer of the bank, heard the remark, too. He whirled around and, loud enough for us all to hear, informed the person that if he had paid Harvey what he owed, the whole thing would never have happened.

The court case started with Judge Foster presiding. State's Attorney Willis was vigorous in his successful prosecution of the matter. The result was a verdict of guilty of embezzlement.

Judge Foster in meting out the sentences of two to five years was almost overcome with emotion. In a halting and choked voice, the judge acknowledged that this man deserved every ounce of credit possible, but the law must be upheld.

If the authorities were looking for someone to make an example of, Harvey had to be ideal for their purpose. As we have indicated, he was probably the most popular person in Ridgefield. He was a highly respected athlete. He was an authentic war hero. He was active in so

many worthwhile civic ventures. He was a member of the school board. He was chairman of the School Building Committee. He had been assistant town clerk. He had been Ridgefield's representative to the General Assembly in Hartford. Not only had he been the tax collector for more than 12 years, he was also president of the State of Connecticut Tax Collectors Association.

The very stiff sentence handed out to Harvey must have struck fear to any others who may have been so inclined.

This tragic situation had a profound effect on many people. The person most affected, after Harvey himself, was his ever loyal wife. Elizabeth stepped into the breach and carried on the Lown Insurance business with a great assist from Robert "Twitter" Seymour.

There were those sympathetic people who came forward with offers of assistance. They were anxious to help relieve a little of the pain. An example was Dr. and Mrs. Robert DuBois, who, to show their support, doubled their insurance with the Lown Agency.

The harshness of the sentence contrasts sharply with the kind of justice meted out today. Harvey not only had to serve two years in prison, but during the first year could receive no more than one letter each week and his wife was limited to only two half-hour visits per month.

When he was released, Harvey's business was intact, but the strain had taken its toll. The once vibrant and enthusiastic Lowns would never be the happy people they had been.

Elizabeth died much younger than she should have, and so did Harvey. It was truly a sad chapter in the history of Ridgefield.

Harvey's loyal friends have always felt that he never shortchanged anyone but himself.

#96: SHOES, BOOZE AND PLUMBING AND 'GOOSING' A TICKLISH COP

The store next to Craig's has been used to enhance the appearance of our townspeople, ever since it first opened more than 50 years ago. First there were the Mugaveros and their barber shop, as related in Dispatch #93. Now it is James of Ridgefield Beauty Salon.

We seem to have a large number of places devoted to the beautification of mankind. Perhaps that is why Ridgefielders look so much better than those from other towns, especially the ladies, or haven't you noticed.

The next store [390 Main Street, now Shine Salon] was Frank Gabbianelli's Shoe Store. Frank had previously been in business in the old three-story building where the Savings Bank is now. When that building was moved to about where Colby's of Ridgefield is now to make room for a new bank; Frank moved his business to the spanking new Scott Block.

Edward Hyde had been manager of the A & P Liquor Store, where Liberta's Spirit Shoppe is now. Ed was quick to note that the people of Ridgefield had a particular fondness for his products. His business was greatly enhanced by people from South Salem and Wilton, who did not seem to mind traveling a little to get what they could not obtain in their own towns.

The combined commotion of the inhabitants of the three towns must have raised the eyebrows of the state liquor commissioner. He probably would have been afraid to drive through town until it was explained that the per capita consumption had to be shared with at least two other towns.

At any rate, when Frank Gabbianelli decided to go into semi-retirement in 1940, Ed Hyde saw his opportunity and moved from one Scott Block to the other where he established his

own business. Jack Jones was a young fellow at the time and assisted Ed in the operation of the store several years. Jack is now a retired state police lieutenant.

Business was brisk in Hyde's and Ed's sons Douglas and Brian soon began to help in the store. Ed passed on and the boys kept the store going for a while and then sold to Rosemary McLinden, who later sold it to Barbara McCarthy. The present owner is Frank Zarro. Despite the changes in ownership, the business is still known as Hyde's Wines & Liquors.

Next door, in the two-story structure where DeLuca's Footwear is now [388 Main, now Weichert Real Estate], was the McGlynn & Ryan Plumbing Shop. Michael "Tinker Mike" McGlynn was the senior partner in the firm and his son-in-law, William H. Ryan, was the junior partner. Tinker Mike's two sons, Thomas and Richard, worked as plumbers for the fun, making it pretty much of a family affair. Thomas is still living and is the father of our fire chief, Richard McGlynn.

Aldo Salvestrini, Peter and Lynce Carboni and the late Joseph McGlynn were young plumbers who got their start with this firm. Francis D. Martin once said that he started his watch and clock repairing business in the front show window of the McGlynn and Ryan Plumbing Shop.

Will Ryan took care of the store and did the bookkeeping and also operated a picture framing business in the store. There was a long wooden porch along the front of the building and one had to walk up two steps to make entry to the stores. When I delivered newspapers to this store, if business was slow, Will Ryan and I would pitch pennies against the wooden steps. It seemed that I won most of the time and Will must have arranged it that way, as he was not a person who would take advantage.

Much of the firm's plumbing equipment was stored in the basement of the building. In those days, before copper tubing came into vogue, it was the custom to use lead in sealing waste pipes. The lead had to be heated until it was in liquid form. It was then poured into and around the connections.

The lead was heated in an iron pot on top of a gas heater. As might be expected, the gas was capable of creating intense heat in order to melt the lead. The heaters were also stored in the basement when not in use.

The venerable Frank I. Gilbert was the janitor for all the stores in the Scott Block. Frank I., one of the better known persons in town at the time, was diligent in the performance of his duties.

One afternoon he was cleaning the basement under the plumbing shop when he decided to light his pipe. Unbeknownst to Frank I., the jet on one of the melting pots had loosened and gas was escaping. As the match was struck there was a terrific explosion.

Frank I. was knocked to the floor and the basement door was blown out into what is now the parking area. Soon the whole store was ablaze. Quick work by the always-dependable Volunteer Fire Department avoided a repeat of the conflagration of 1895.

However, the building was extensively damaged and could not be used until major repairs were made. One thing in the store that did not need to be replaced was the tin ceiling which is still there today. Among the changes made were the removal of the old wooden porch and a complete new light colored brick face that took the place of the porch, reducing the two steps to just one.

By the time the new facelift was completed, McGlynn and Ryan had moved their operations to the building just off Catoonah Street that now houses the Ridgefield Thrift Shop. The building had at one time been St. Mary's Church. When the new church at the top of Catoonah Street was completed, the old building was moved back to its present location and became a blacksmith shop. This is just one of the many, many buildings in Ridgefield, that do not sit on their original sites.

Harry M. Thomas, the village blacksmith, had just moved to his new shop in the building west of the firehouse. I get the feeling that this building will soon disappear in the name of progress. [Ed: It's still there in 2020, home of New Beginnings Landscaping.]

When the former plumbing shop was completely renovated, Harold Finch took it over and established his United Cigar Store. As previously noted, the store now had only one step and it became a favorite place for our town policeman to stand and make a surveillance of the activities on Main Street.

One day as the policeman stood on the step, he was approached by a stranger who was seeking directions. The very cooperative officer happened to be the one described as being excessively ticklish. in Dispatch #63. As he bent to give the very well-dressed stranger his directions, the door behind him opened just enough to allow Ray Keeler's ever-present yardstick to emerge. A deft poke of the yardstick to the policeman's rear resulted in the stranger's being deposited unceremoniously on the sidewalk.

Gus was mortified and picked up the stranger, apologizing profusely as he brushed off his unhappy victim. To make matters worse, at this point Ray again applied the yardstick and in a repeat performance the stranger went sprawling on the sidewalk a second time.

#97: OLD STORES ON MAIN STREET; FOLKS WHO LIVED OVER BISSELL'S

The store next to DeLuca's Footwear was once the J. Howard Burr Men's Clothing Store [384 Main Street, now Rodier Flowers]. The Burr Store had its home base in Danbury and the Ridgefield store was managed by Samuel Patterson.

The store did a fine business as the quality of its merchandise was of the very best. During the Depression the going got rather tough and Burr relinquished ownership to Sam Patterson. Sam was very popular in town and did well for several years until his health began to fail.

As well as fine clothes, the store had another feature. Heim's Music Store in Danbury was the leading store of its kind in the area. So many Heim's customers came from Ridgefield that Sam and Heim's worked out a deal whereby a portion of Sam's store was devoted to the music trade.

In the days when many people provided their own entertainment, Ridgefield seemed to have a great number of people interested in music. Young people were encouraged to play the piano, the violin, the banjo, or the mandolin. Now it seems to be easier for them to carry around a transistor with ear plugs.

Heim's did well in Ridgefield, selling a lot of sheet music as well as a variety of musical instruments. The heavy influx of radios had an adverse effect on the trade and the music store went out of business in Ridgefield.

1938 arrived and so did Edward Rabin. Ed established his Ridgefield Hardware Store where Sam Patterson had conducted his clothing business. So another family-owned business was born. Today the store is still operating with Ed's son, Jerry, as president. Jerry is ably assisted by his mother, Dorothy, his wife, Sandy, their daughter, Kim, and son, Todd.

Peter Gabbianelli (Frank's son) was on the original staff. The popular Pete stayed with the store for 35 years and now lives in Maine. Laura Tones, who will be 89 this year and lives in Derby, was also with the store for many years.

After 46 continuous years of operation, this must be considered the oldest of the family owned and operated businesses on Main Street. Ten years after the business started, it had grown to such proportions that the limited space caused a large portion of the sales to be conducted on the sidewalk in front of the store.

Ed Rabin looked to the future and purchased an old house and lot directly across the street. Before construction started on his new store, he used this property as a garden center. Upon completion of the new store in 1948, the business was moved to its present location.

Rose Serfilippi (now Belardinelli) had been operating her Rose's Kiddie Shoppe in a little store on Bailey Avenue. The town was growing at a rapid pace. Kiddies were arriving at regular intervals, new schools were being built, and older ones were being enlarged.

The Kiddie Shoppe needed more room, so when the hardware store moved across the street, Rose's relocated at the more spacious Main Street address. Helen Goldsmith now operates her Sweaters Etcetera from this store. The Etcetera covers a multitude of other items of ladies' apparel.

Originally there were apartments over these stores and they are much needed today for young married couples to get their start. The problem seems to be that because of the great need for additional business space, these former apartments generate much greater revenue by using them for offices.

The next building houses one of the most famous of all businesses in the history of Ridgefield. Of course, we are referring to the H.P. Bissell Drug Store. The building is an imposing, three-story structure and at one time the upper two stories were devoted entirely to apartment use.

A lot of very nice people lived comfortably in those apartments. Just a few were Frank Taylor, the first policeman we ever knew. Frank lived with Mally and Mabel Knapp. Mabel was Frank's daughter and Mally was the golf pro at Bloomerside Golf Course at Peach Lake. Mally was not a tall man and in later years put on considerable weight. We used to think he would have some difficulty in seeing the golf ball, but he managed very well.

The late Ernest Sturges moved, with his wife Esther, to Florida several years ago. The Sturgeses made a practice of returning to Ridgefield for a visit each summer and Ernie always stopped by to see me. On one occasion as he knocked at my office door. I noticed that he kept one hand behind his back. Ernie was full of tricks and I did not know what to expect. Then with a broad smile, he said he had something that Esther had been using for a walking stick which he felt I would put to better use. and with that Ernie handed me Mally Knapp's old putter. It has Mally's name engraved on it and is, of course, one of my most prized possessions.

A few of the others who lived over Bissell's store were Miss Mary Cooney, our first chiropractor, and the Ed Burrs and Arthur and Marion McGlynn Mullen. There were many others

through the years. but by far the most interesting was my old friend and famous character. Jimmy Rogers.

We have previously described Jimmy's natty wardrobe, his red complexion and his green eyes in Dispatches 46 and 61, so we won't go into that again. Suffice to say that you would laugh just to see him, and making people laugh seemed to be Jimmy's main purpose in life. In making people use whatever muscles we use in laughing, he was eminently successful.

We promised to periodically dole out some of the zany things he used to do, so here is another. Jimmy had a funny voice that he could change from a high pitch to a very low pitch at will. He probably was the nearest thing to a ventriloquist that we had at the time. He had great fun throwing his voice around while keeping a straight face and unmoving lips.

Jim Bacchiochi and I used to stop in at the Fairfield Lunch for breakfast after church on Sunday morning. On this particular Sunday, Jimmy Rogers was just a little ahead of us as we approached the entrance to the restaurant.

Jimmy as usual was immaculately dressed and wore his camel hair cap. He waited and held the door for us and suddenly his attention was directed to a large truck coming from the north end of town. We could see nothing unusual about the truck, but because Jimmy had that certain look, we felt it was necessary to see what he would do next. Others in the restaurant had the same feeling and crowded to the doorway to see what had been concocted in Jimmy's fertile brain. They did not have long to wait.

As the truck passed, we could see that it carried three large horses. Jimmy's mouth opened wide and from it came the unmistakable whinny of a horse. The three horses turned their heads and whinnied right back at what they thought was one of their brethren, much to the delight of the onlookers.

#98: THE POWER PEOPLE OF BISSELL'S AND THE EVER POPULAR SQUASH

The H.P. Bissell Co. has been an institution in Ridgefield for many years. Its popularity stemmed not only from the routine dispensing of drugs for those who were ill, but other sidelines as well.

In 1853 it sported the town's first soda fountain and for a century, it was a big attraction. Hiram K. Scott owned the store at that time. During the 19th Century, he must have been a real spark plug for the town. Both he and his son, Hiram Jr., were postmasters for many years. Hiram Sr. was also a longtime town clerk for Ridgefield. He was very active in the local Masonic Lodge and served as master. In 1859, he was elected Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Connecticut. His name is listed on just about every committee that functioned in the town.

When he was the postmaster, the post office operated out of his store. The store carried enough different commodities to qualify it as a general store.

In 1895, Harvey P. Bissell purchased the store and continued to operate it under Scott's name. Just a few months after Mr. Bissell took over the store, it was destroyed in the great fire of that year. Within a short time Mr. Bissell built the present building [destroyed by fire May 26, 2005] and changed the name to the H.P. Bissell Company.

Mr. Bissell became a power in the Republican party, not only in Ridgefield where he was the town chairman of the party, but in the state as well. He served as the state comptroller in the early 1920's.

As a matter of fact, Harvey P. Bissell and his close friends, Dr. Russell W. Lowe and the Rev. Richard E. Shortell made up a triumvirate that pretty much controlled the political action in Ridgefield. At a testimonial that I was tendered on becoming postmaster, the Rev. Hugh Shields, pastor of the First Congregational Church, told a story that pretty much sums up the power that these men had in the political arena.

Mr. Shields was a nationally known speaker and noted for his recitation of poetry, especially poems by James Whitcomb Riley. We were delighted to see this fine man at the speaker's table.

He told of how during the late 20's it became necessary to find a new representative to the General Assembly in Hartford. According to Mr. Shields, a meeting took place in the back room of Bissell's store, with all three of the leaders present. Mr. Bissell and Dr. Lowe argued at some length as to who the replacement would be. Father Shortell stood quietly by, listening to the other two, extolling the virtues of their candidates.

When, after some time they were still at loggerheads, they turned to him and asked who his preference was. Father Shortell brought up a name that had not been mentioned and said, "The best qualified man is the Rev. Hugh Shields."

Mr. Shields then added, "and that is how I became Ridgefield's representative to Hartford. The political process was rather simplified in those days."

During Prohibition, Bissell's was kind of an oasis for those who were denied access to their favorite alcoholic beverage. The store offered two ways of securing it. A prescription from a sympathetic physician would do it — of course, for medicinal purposes. If one knew the right word, he might call at the basement door in the rear of the building. In this door was a little sliding window from which one could be identified and through which many bottles passed.

To be sure, Bissell's had several other attractions, not the least of which was the aforementioned soda fountain. The employees at the store were adept at making chocolate syrup in a large washtub and probably made vanilla as well, from vanilla extract purchased from William J. Humphreys. Mr. Humphreys was noted for the excellent extract that he produced at his home on the corner of Main Street and Danbury Road. The Humphreys house sits on an angle now, but used to be square with the corner before being moved back in 1925, as described in Dispatch 35.

Bissell's used Horton's Ice Cream for many years and then turned to Rider's. Both were considered the best product available. Until you had savored one of Bissell's ice cream sodas, you really had not ever lived. They were so good that people were attracted from miles around.

When the store was completely remodeled some 20-odd years ago, the great soda fountain was removed. I was fortunate enough to acquire the large mirror that framed the back of the fountain. It now hangs on the back of a door and makes an excellent full-length dressing mirror.

There have been several owners of the famous store. James J. Kelly had been Mr. Bissell's partner and bought out Mr. Bissell's interest in 1928. Mr. Kelly took in Edgar C. "Dick" Rapp as a partner and Dick, in turn, became the owner in the 30's. Mrs. Cornelius S. Lee bought the business and the building, which she still owns, and then Joseph December bought the business.

Then Pat DiMearia bought it and it is now owned and operated by James Dubuque. Jim is ably assisted by Paul Willis, Ada Leary, Judi Peterson, Amy Baird, Lisa Judson, and Anne Johnson. Through all those ownerships it retained the name Bissell's.

Those who worked in the old store were always considered to be very accommodating and Duncan Smith used to say in his column that Bissell's sidewalk was the first to be cleared after a heavy snow storm.

Many are the young Ridgefield people who got their start in Bissell's Store. Just a few of them are my brother Paul and my son Richard Jr.; Danesi Birarelli, later to become Father Birarelli; Jerry Zandri; Fred Romeo; my nephew Michael Venus; Helen Keeler; and many others, including the popular Aldo "Squash" Travaglini. The late Johnny Gunn was the pharmacist for some 30 years. They were all very loyal to the old store and its customers.

Squash told me the story of how he got his start at Bissell's and we think it is worth retelling. It seems that as a kid he was sitting on the porch of the Masonic building, back in the late 20's, watching the workmen as they cleared the lot next door, where the brick building known as the Scott Block (now Donnelly's) was to be constructed.

Squash's daydreaming was interrupted by the appearance of one of Bissell's clerks, Jerry Zandri. Jerry asked him if he would like to work in the store.

Does a bear like honey?

Every kid would have liked to work in Bissell's. So Squash jumped at the opportunity. Jerry Told him that he would have to go to see Mr. Kelly for an interview.

Mr. Kelly was a very meticulous gentleman with a rather severe countenance that belied a man who was actually very kind. Squash did not relish coming under the scrutiny of the pharmacist. However, after having a talk with Mr. Kelly, Squash was informed that the job was only temporary and would not last more than six months. When he asked when he would start, Mr. Kelly remarked, "Right now. Go home and change your clothes."

Squash says it was a long six months that became 25 years duration.

#99: SOOTY, TOOTSY AND THE BOMB

We have been writing about Bissell's Drug Store, and while this story has actually nothing to do with the store as such, it did take place in the immediate area.

Back in the 30's, there was a chimney sweep who came to Ridgefield from Bridgeport on a regular basis. There were many families that depended on this fellow to keep their chimneys clean. For want of a name, we will call him "Sooty." The name does not describe his appearance, but rather his trade.

Sooty dressed in the very best tradition of the chimney sweep, complete with a nice blue serge suit and a high silk hat. He was rather short, about five feet tall, with a nice personality and was very loquacious. He could quickly convince anyone that failure to avail themselves of his services would most certainly result in a disastrous fire.

We are not sure of how much Sooty really knew about cleaning a chimney for he never got physically involved in the operation. Somehow he was always able to employ two young men to do the work for him.

The little fellow drove a black Ford panel truck, in which he carried the bare necessities of his trade. There were the usual coils of rope and the round wire brushes of various sizes. If his

brushes did not fit your chimney, he could improvise by wrapping a burlap bag around a stone of the proper dimension to slide up and down inside the chimney. Though he had a rack on top of his truck, we never saw him carry a ladder.

The reason Sooty had no need of a Ladder was that he had the foresight to always hire a couple of acrobats to do the actual work of cleaning the chimney. We found it remarkable that each time he came to town, he had two different boys. The boys he had previously used no doubt had joined a circus. Where he found the new boys we never knew, but that they were acrobats, there could be no question.

I have seen these young fellows in action many times and they put on a good show. A large mansion presented no more of a problem than a small bungalow. It just took a few minutes longer.

One of the boys would approach the building and select an overhang such as a porch roof. He would leap into the air and grasp the projection. Somehow he would then swing himself up and the next thing you knew, he would be on the roof and then he would stand atop the chimney with a foot on either side of it. He was truly a human fly.

Once atop the chimney, his partner would toss up the tools of the trade: ropes, brushes, etc. The articles were deftly caught and quickly put to work.

The partner, in the meantime, had disappeared into the basement with brushes and pails to gather the soot which had descended to the bottom of the chimney. The roles played by each of the young men were reversed from job to job.

Each of them was expert at scaling any building. When asked if they ever encountered a building devoid of projections to aid in their climb to the roof, they explained that it would be a rare occasion and they would then use a grappling hook.

Sooty would wait in this truck for the job to be completed, when there was only one chimney to clean. However there were times when there was a great number to do in the same area. In such instances Sooty would instruct his boys as to what homes to service and he would then drive off and come back later to pick them up.

During his many trips to Ridgefield, Sooty got to know a number of people. He fancied himself as a ladies' man and many of his acquaintances were housewives. On West Mountain there was one in particular that caught Sooty's attention and when she responded to his overtures, he was smitten by her very obvious charms.

We will not describe Sooty's paramour as a rare beauty. However, she was comely and possessed of a delightful personality. The fact that she had at least three other boy friends was unknown to Sooty. He probably would have overlooked this fact anyway as he was completely captivated by, let's call her, "Tootsy." It was said that she had the ability to make a man feel that he was the only one on earth.

One afternoon about 2:30, I drove into town to make a deposit for Conklin Dairy at the First National Bank (now Union Trust [Wells Fargo]). As I parked in front of where Ridgefield Hardware is now, there appeared to be a gathering of people in the driveway between Bissell's and where Sweaters Etc., [Rodier Flowers] is now. After making my deposit, I walked down to where the people were gathered and inquired as to what was of such interest.

Someone pointed to Sooty's little black panel truck and said that Ray K. had planted a bomb in it. The truck was parked just south of where the Town Clock is now. At the time, parking was allowed all along that side of the street as the traffic lights had not yet been installed.

Sooty had given his boys enough work to keep them busy for a long period and had gone off for a ride with Tootsy in her car. It should be explained that the bomb referred to was actually quite harmless. However, to an unsuspecting victim it could be terrifying. As soon as the ignition key is turned on, the bomb is activated. First a loud siren is set off and clouds of black smoke are emitted from under the hood. This is followed by a blast from the bomb and it is extremely loud.

The crowd waiting for the return of the lovebirds grew, as word spread of the approaching event. As the crowd grew it would have been easily discovered by anyone with a clear head. To avoid detection some people went inside the stores and watched from the windows.

At last Tootsy's black 1933 Ford with its yellow wheels was seen approaching from south Main Street. She parked the car in front of the bank and Sooty hopped out.

The anticipation of the crowd was a fever pitch as he got half way to his truck. Suddenly he wheeled around and retraced his steps. Sooty wanted one more kiss before going to pick up his boys. Anyone whose mind was not saturated with thoughts of love could have easily heard the numerous "Oohs" and "Ashe" emanating from the crowd of onlookers.

Their patience was finally rewarded when after a last lingering kiss, Sooty made it to his truck. After a few more waves back and forth, he turned the key. There was the screech of the siren and the billows of smoke and the thoroughly frightened Sooty was so confused that rather than exiting through the door he had just used, he dash through the vehicle to the rear doors just as the bomb went off.

To the delight of the crowd, the doors burst open and Sooty, minus his top hat, raced down the middle of Main Street in an effort to escape what he surely must have felt was his very end.

Up to now the story has contained a great deal of humor. However, we regret that it must end tragically. Tootsy's husband was an exceptionally fine gentleman and when he learned of her numerous conquests, it upset him to the extent that he took his own life.

#100: BISSELL BUILDING IN THE DAYS OF FLINTS AND BRUNETTI'S MARKET

Before we start Dispatch #100, we feel we should correct #97 in which we inadvertently listed Joseph December as an owner of Bissell's Drug Store. Joe did manage the store for Mrs. Lee, but did not actually become a proprietor until he acquired Smith's Drug Store at the other end of Main Street.

Bissell's Drug Store has remained in the same location, with the same name, since the building was erected 88 years ago. The same cannot be said for the other store in this fine old building.

Originally George Scott operated his painting business from this store. When his son, George Jr., joined him in the operation of the business, it also became an automobile dealership. I believe that this is the only time that there was ever a Chevrolet franchise in Ridgefield. It may

have been a subsidiary of the Lewis Chevrolet Co. of Danbury. At any rate, when the business shut down, George Jr. went to Danbury and the firm of Scott and Lewis was born.

George Jr., who passed on only recently, was a very well liked gentleman and he sure sold an awful lot of Chevys. Later on George went into the insurance business and again was very successful. In the sale of autos and insurance, he depended greatly on the many friends he had in his old home town.

In the early 20's, two brothers, Jacob and John Walters, took over the store. They had the agency for three automobiles, the Flint, the Durant, and the Star. Where the name for the Star originated, we are not sure, but the other two were named after the Michigan cities where they were built.

They were a fine family of cars and built to last on highways that were not nearly as easy to travel on as the roads we have today. Francis Martin bought a Flint touring car and in the mid-'20's drove it all the way across the country and back, pulling a trailer as well. It was a camping trip as motels as we now know them, had not yet hit the scene. Doris and Phil Martin and Ralph Brundage accompanied Marty on what we felt was a very historic trip.

The Walters brothers did very well in their business. John had a very nice personality and he ran the store and kept the books. Jake was an excellent mechanic and took care of the repair business. The repairs were made in a long narrow building that stood directly behind the store. It had formerly been a six-lane bowling alley and suited Jake's purposes very well.

The repair business was not as great as it is today. Of course, there were fewer cars to repair but the quality of the cars was another factor. The very best of metal was used in the manufacture of automobiles and as stated previously, they were made to last. It was said that the cars that were sold by the Walters and others such as the Hupmobile, Hudson, and Essex, were built so well that they did not wear out fast enough.

At any rate when General Motors was formed, it gobbled up many different automobiles, including the Flint, the Durant, and the Star and the process of getting them to wear out quickly was soon discovered.

It was a little more than 50 years ago that Herb Bates went out of the taxi business that he operated from his garage on Bailey Avenue. Auto Sales had been crippled by the Depression but good mechanics were still needed so Jake Walters moved his part of the business to the garage vacated by Herb and then in the late 30's, the building was taken over by the Nash boys and The Ridgefield Press.

In the meantime, John Walters became an excellent carpenter and built some fine houses, including his own at 362 Wilton Road West. We have always felt that this very nice home is one of the finest structures in Ridgefield.

After the store was closed someone took it over briefly, we think it was Leo Pambianchi. At any rate, Franklin D. Roosevelt had just been elected President and someone decided to name an auto after him and they were sold from this store. [Ed. note: Other historians say this car, made in 1929 and 1930, was named for President Theodore Roosevelt.] To show his impartiality, Bernard Christopher, a staunch Republican, bought one of the new Roosevelts. The car gave him excellent service but the company itself became another victim of the Depression and did not last nearly as long as F.D.R.

The repair business in back of the store was revived by Nicholas Romeo and John Kehoe. A young man named Harry Pambianchi learned his trade here from the two master mechanics. When World War II came along, mechanics were vitally needed in other fields and the repair garage was closed.

For many years the only bowling alleys available were at the Congregational Church House. They were great alleys but only two in number and many of our bowlers had to go to Danbury to do their bowling.

“Marty” Marinelli and “Ratsy” Rossini came forward about this time and rejuvenated the garage back to its original status, a six-lane bowling alley. The bowling alley did very well for a long time but then was torn down to make room for the present parking area of the Donnelly Shopping Center.

Just north of the bowling alley there was an old red barn that also bit the dust at this time. It had been used as a storage house by George Scott and by McGlynn and Ryan. North of the barn was the very large three-story house that had been moved there from where the Savings Bank is now and near the town hall was a smaller house. They were all removed to make room for the new shopping center.

In the meantime, the A&P left the small store where Allan’s is now [440 Main Street] and moved to the Bissell building next to the drug store. John Franzman was the manager, Jimmy Dixon the butcher. Fritz Lotterele was the grocery clerk and Elmer Mayer was the vegetable clerk. We could not remember Elmer’s last name and neither could a lot of other people. Everyone knew Elmer — but Elmer who? His last name was finally supplied by Mrs. Elmer Evans.

After World War II, Joe Brunetti joined the staff as a butcher and when in the early 60’s, the A&P moved to its new and larger quarters on Danbury Road, Joe elected to stay behind and open his own store. He must have been aware of the old adage in the business world, to the effect that when people become accustomed to traveling to a certain location to make their purchases, they find it difficult to change.

At any rate Joe’s foresight in going into business for himself resulted in another of Ridgefield’s many success stories. With many of the old A&P customers, plus the new ones that the hardworking Joe attracted, Brunetti’s Market became a very busy place.

Joe is now retired and has turned the business over to the very capable Ed Bowie, who had worked for Joe for many years. Ed keeps things going very well while continuing to prove that a small business can successfully compete with the big boys.

#101: AN OLD SOUTH SALEM ROAD FARM WITH AN EXPOSITION BARN

Sometimes, when a routine is interrupted, one may find it difficult to get back in the groove again. Such was the case during my rather enforced absence [due to illness] while this column has been missing from this page of The Press.

Something was needed to get me started again. Suddenly there it was, in the form of a photograph by Joe Hartmann that recently appeared on this page. The picture was of the fine old farmhouse that still stands on Old South Salem Road. It is now the home of the James Madison Blackwells and has gone through considerable change since that photo was taken.

Rita Potter correctly identified it as the house in which her family resided in the early 30's. It sure brought back a lot of memories.

The farm was once owned by Richard Keeler and this old Ridgefield family farmed the surrounding land for many years. They should have received some kind of a medal for being able to eke out a living from a farm that had little topsoil and an awful lot of stones. It must have taken a lot of ingenuity as well as some very hard work.

It was primarily a dairy farm and the small wing that showed in the photo on the west side of the farm house was a little milk room in which cream was separated from the milk, and butter and cheese were made.

The cow barn itself was set a good distance back from the highway and has since been converted into a very nice family dwelling. Another barn that was used mostly for storing hay sets out close to Old South Salem Road. This building has also been converted to family use.

The hay barn may have some historical value since it came all the way from Chicago. As the story goes, Richard Keeler attended the World's Columbian Exposition that was held in Chicago in 1893. While there he was strongly attracted to this building that was put on display.

The design of this building was somewhat of a departure from the traditional farm building that had a straight gable roof. This one had a roof that was rather concave in its construction. Many of the buildings at the Exposition were to be dismantled when it closed and some were put up for sale. The public was invited to place bids on these buildings and Mr. Keeler was moved to bid on this large barn. When the bids were opened at the close of the exhibition, he turned out to be the successful bidder.

Many of these buildings proved to be a great bargain and they were carefully taken apart in sections that were numbered to facilitate reconstruction. The sections were placed on flat railroad cars for delivery. In a few weeks Mr. Keeler's new barn arrived at the Ridgefield freight yards and was then reassembled where it stands today on Old South Salem Road.

World War I had ended and Reginald Lewis' (brother of Wadsworth of the Lewis Fund) had reconstructed the mansion on South Salem Road [#100] which is now the home of the Harry Neumanns. Reggie needed more land to round out his estate so he purchased the neighboring Keeler farm. The Keeler family then moved to the corner of West Lane and Olmstead Lane to the house that is now the home of the Richard Callahans.

Reggie Lewis now had land that extended northwest to Peaceable Street and northeast to Golf Lane, some 70 acres in total. In fact, whereas his front driveway entered from South Salem Road, the back driveway exited on Golf Lane by use of a raised road bed that was to have had tracks laid on it for a proposed railway that would have connected Ridgefield with the large cities to the south of us.

Reggie invested a lot of money in renovating his mansion and when that was completed he turned attention to the farm. The large cow barn was completely changed from the commercial type to one more suitable for what was known as a gentleman farmer. I once heard Francis Collins, who owned Whipstick Farm, describe a gentleman farmer as one who made his money in the city and then came to Ridgefield to spend it.

Achille Bacchiochi was engaged to renovate the cow barn and a silo was erected, and two additions or extensions were made. The extensions were built either side of the barn in the direction of the highway and this made the barn take the shape of a horseshoe.

The extension on the east side had box stalls for four horses and a pony and the one on the west served as a maternity ward for the cows and had box stalls for the calves. Each extension was capped with a concave, concrete ceiling. They were very smooth and very attractive but later on, as you will see, they caused a serious problem. At the time, however, they were ideal for the purpose which they were intended.

To be sure, those ceilings were very well constructed and probably do not have one crack even today, although one was disengaged from the main barn and moved years later to Mead Ridge where it made a very substantial home for Joseph Tulipani and his family.

Richard Hopper Sr. was engaged as superintendent on the estate and moved with his family to the farmhouse. The farm was put in operation and its produce was used mainly for the Lewis family and those who worked on the estate.

A dam was constructed near the highway east of the farm house and it created a nice little pond. We always called it Hopper's Pond and had lots of fun skating there. Someone stocked the pond with goldfish and there were so many fish that the water sometimes took on a reddish hue. For some reason, the dam was opened some years ago and now the pond has shrunk to a small pool.

Mr. Hopper's son, Richard Jr., used to care for the saddle horses and when it was necessary to have them shod he brought them to Harry Thomas's blacksmith shop. Dick would ride one horse and lead another early in the morning and leave them at the shop while he went to school. I always knew when he had brought the horses, for when he showed up at school he would be wearing his riding pants and boots. In such instances I made a quick exit when school was over, and then a mad dash for the blacksmith shop. Dick used to let me ride one of the horses back to the farm and I was in seventh heaven.

However, the return trip was slightly altered. We went down Peaceable Street rather than pass the mansion on South Salem Road. The Lewises might not have liked to see someone else enjoying one of their prize saddle horses.

More on this farm next week.

#102: MORE TALES FROM AN OLD ESTATE

Reginald Lewis was like his father, Frederic E., in several ways. He was very thorough in anything that he set out to accomplish. When he took on the task of transforming the Keeler farm from commercial to that of a country gentleman's farm, he went all the way. Nothing was spared in making the farm into a real showplace.

The approach to the big barn that the Bacchiochis were remodeling was very impressive. A perfect stone wall lined either side of the long driveway. The walls are still in excellent condition today, but trees and large shrubs overhang them and cut off the view of the great barn that has since been made over into a lovely dwelling.

Reggie also easily adopted his father's fondness for the juice of the grape and constructed a very large wine cellar that would have been the envy of the crowned heads of Europe.

A rather sizable fire at the Lewis mansion occurred and was brought under control by our always very efficient volunteer fire department. When the great efforts of the firemen were successful, they were introduced to the fine art of popping a cork. Reggie was always the perfect host, even when his guests were unexpected. All of the firemen were in complete agreement on that deduction.

By the end of the 20's, Reggie had tired of the good living afforded by his beautiful estate and moved with his family to New Preston, just north of New Milford. There he started once more, from scratch, to build a second gentleman's estate.

The Hopper family at this time moved from the little farm house to the Bell estate, just across the state line in Lewisboro.

Richard Sr., was very adept at estate work and was also a very good bowler. He bowled on a team that was sponsored by the Horticultural Society in a league that used the alleys at the Congregational Church House.

We recall that he and George Tator were much alike in size and had similar bowling styles. Both kind of tiptoed up to the foul line and dropped the ball in a marvelous hook that always seemed to wind up in the pocket. If a second ball was required, they both had the habit of placing their right hands on the window ledge while waiting for the ball to return.

In 1930 the entire estate was sold to Robert P. Scripps. Patrick Potter became superintendent for this famous newspaper family. Pat and Nellie and their daughters, Rita and Patricia (McManus), moved into the nice little farm house on Old South Salem Road.

Pat was a great man, with years of experience in the operation of a private estate. Like all the Potter boys, he was a rugged individual and what he did not know about estate work was just not worth knowing.

Daniel Bennett, an excellent horticulturist, looked after the gardens. Chauncey Wilson, an accomplished stone mason, was kept busy building fences and helping on the farm. Howard Beers was the teamster and Porter Stannard was the cow man for a nice little herd of purebred Guernseys.

Porter had been one of the very early state policemen, along with John E. Kelly, Leo Carroll, Henry Palau, Louis Baker, and Harry Tucker. For some reason, he quit the police work and worked with the cows.

Porter also did carpenter work for Peter McManus and built a nice home for his family on New Street. He was an excellent shot and the Potter girls remember how, during his lunch break, he would practice by shooting snakes that had come out to sun themselves on the rocks near the pond on the farm.

Patsy also remembers riding the Scripps pony bareback and how the pony would throw her off when he tired of the sport.

Ernie Stash was the Scripps family chauffeur. We wrote about Ernie and what a great character he was in Dispatch No. 9. Milo Holub was an excellent mechanic and doubled as a second chauffeur. Milo and Jenny and their son Edward still live on Golf Lane.

There was a huge garage with two apartments at the rear of the mansion and the Holub family lived there at the time. The Stashes and their two daughters lived in the yellow house that still stands on the corner of Saw Mill Hill and North Salem Roads.

The Scripps garage has since been converted into a large family dwelling, almost as large as the mansion.

Because of the Lindbergh kidnapping, wealthy and famous families lived in constant fear in 1934. The Scripps family was naturally concerned about their children. When they received some kind of warning, either by note or by telephone, they did not hesitate. They just packed up and left for their ranch in California, never to return.

The Stash family accompanied the Scripps and we never saw them again. However, one of the girls contacted us last year after we wrote the column about her father.

Milo Holub stayed behind and looked after the estate for many years. One of the automobiles that the Scripps did not take was a large seven passenger 1931 Buick. My brother Jack purchased the car and enjoyed it for many years. It was a great car.

Eventually the mansion and adjoining property was sold to August Zinsser, a prominent New York banker. After a few years, August passed away and his wife, Mary, kept the place going for several years. A family named Ward owned it for a while, and then it was purchased by an osteopath, Dr. Sossei.

In the meantime, the farm remained idle for a number of years. Joe Pinchbeck used the Chicago barn to keep a team of horses and William Patten had a pony farm there for a while. Finally in 1942, the farm was purchased by the Walter H. Deiches and things began to liven up considerably.

Walter had been an official in one of New York's largest clothing stores, and apparently had made a lot of money. Now, as Francis Collins would say, he would spend it in Ridgefield.

He had the idea of turning the farm back to commercial use. He must have had a lot of courage for, to be charitable, his knowledge of farming was absolutely nil.

Walter was to learn a lot in the following year, not the least of which was how much it cost to operate a farm. He and his wife, the former Nancy Westheim, lived on the corner of Nod and Branchville Roads.

I got to know him because someone referred him to me for information on how to get the farm started again. It turned out to be a most interesting relationship.

#103: THE LONG NIGHTS AT BULLARD AND CALLS FOR FARMING HELP

Our first phone call from Walter Deiches came at 2 p.m. one afternoon in March 1943. It woke me from a sound sleep. Sleeping during the day was necessary for I worked from 8 in the evening until 8 in the morning.

At the time I was employed by the Bullard Company in Bridgeport. An aptitude test had shown that I possessed some ability in tool-making and this type of work was considered vital to the war effort. Because of this happy discovery, the production line was bypassed and I found myself learning the trade in the tool room. One of the master tool-makers was assigned to teach me the fine art of toolmaking.

My instructor turned out to be a very fine gentleman named Steven Norris. No one called him Steve; he was always Mr. Norris and was held in awe by the other toolmakers. Some of them referred to him when not in his presence as "Curly" because he was completely bald. At any rate, he received my undivided attention. The result was that after a few weeks, I had my own milling machine to operate. My pride must have been noticeable when the blueprints for my first job were handed to me.

In the toolroom there was not the hustle and bustle of production that was so evident in the other areas of the great Bullard enterprise. However, the work was very exacting and the tolerance for error was practically nil.

Many people from Ridgefield were employed at Bullards during this period. Some worked the day shift and some worked at night and all worked 12 hours straight. I rode to work with Gene Casagrande, Orrin Beers, Herb Shaw, and Charles Cain and we took turns driving. We arrived home each morning about nine o'clock, had a meal and slept until five, when it was time to get ready to go back to work.

Therefore, a 2 p.m. phone call was not actually relished. During the first phone call, Walter asked an awful lot of questions and he got so much information that I felt it would take him at least a week to digest it. However, the next day, at two, he called again and then the calls became daily. It was nice to be of some help but we finally had to explain to him that the calls were interrupting my sleep pattern with a very adverse effect. Despite Walter's apologies, the calls continued and soon he was inviting me to visit at his home on my day off.

Walter seemed to be a pleasant man and I guessed him to be in his early forties. My guess was wrong and he turned out to be younger. If you have gotten the impression that he was persistent, we would agree with that analysis.

One Sunday he appeared at our home with a friend and asked that I accompany them for a look at his farm. As usual it was difficult to say no and against my better judgment I got into the car with him and Larry.

The barns were pretty much as I remembered them except that instead of the nice saddle horses, the east wing now housed eight, very picturesque, horned Dorset sheep. The sheep, with their large curved horns, were just elegant but looked as though they would have been more at home on some craggy mountain top.

When asked what he intended to do with the sheep, Walter said that he was not sure but felt he needed something to start the farm off with.

The west wing that had previously been home for the purebred Guernsey cows was now occupied by a herd of hogs, twelve sows in number. There were many different breeds: Chester

Whites, Jersey Reds, Poland Chinas, Berkshires, and one Dutch-Belted. A Dutch-Belted hog is black with a white stripe around its middle.

Walter had named this one Brady after his friend Sim Brady. He did not explain why. It was probably Sim who had steered Walter around in my direction. We asked Walter what he planned to do with all these sows and he explained that there was a great need for pork so he decided to raise some pigs. We noted the absence of a boar and pointed out that one was needed if there were to be little pigs. Walter wrote that down in a little book that he carried.

It was truly amazing to see how little the man knew about farm life. No doubt he was intelligent and had made a considerable amount of money in his business. However, he never did learn to tell a bull from a cow and the only animal on the farm that he ever recognized was Brady, whose colors were so distinctive. This hog became his pet and would come running when he called her.

Walter pointed to the large Chicago barn and announced that he intended to have it converted into the largest chicken house ever seen. He had his own idea about egg production. At his home on Branchville Road he kept a small flock of 20 New Hampshire Red hens. One day he collected 20 eggs and theorized that with 2,000 hens he would then collect 2,000 eggs. We tried, without any noticeable success, to explain that it really did not work out that way.

It was plain to see that Walter was badly in need of someone with experience to take charge of his new venture. Soon he was trying to entice me to move into the nice little farmhouse. Despite my love for animals and farm life, I declined the invitation with thanks. All of his considerable persuasive powers were brought to bear but to no avail. Extending some friendly help was one thing while making a career of it was something else.

The Bullard Company had spent no small amount of time and money in training me for the work I was doing. My progress had been rather good, due no doubt to the urgent need for machine operators. The firm had been very good to me and bonuses were coming my way with regularity.

This and the fact that I was happy and proud of my present employment was carefully pointed out to Walter. It was also noted that the kind of employment the farm offered could never warrant the pay I was now receiving. He was informed further that Bullard would never release me as the work I performed was vital to the war effort and I had just earned the Navy E for a job just completed.

Walter was not the least impressed by all of this and stated that he was confident that he could match or even better my present wages. That should have told me something. He went on to note that his farm would also be a very definite part of the war effort. He was so persistent that I reluctantly agreed to ask for my release from Bullards, secure in the knowledge that it would be denied. My feeling of self-importance proved to be slightly unjustified.

As agreed, that night my foreman was asked to put in for my release. He looked at me in astonishment and then started to laugh as he thought it was a joke. I laughed also but then explained that I had to prove to a certain person that I could not get a release.

(To be continued)

#104: WALTER HAS BIG PLANS FOR A SMALL FARM

When my wartime foreman at Bullard's assured me that there was no way that my release from that firm could be secured, his opinion was received with considerable relief. However, he agreed to forward my request through the proper channels.

As expected the denial was received in writing the following evening. It carried with it a feeling of security as well as indicating that I was much needed. The feeling was short lived.

Two nights later I received a message directing me to report to the office of the superintendent. The super was most cordial in his greeting and then he handed me a letter that I still have, 41 years later. It started out in a very complimentary manner, noting my accomplishments and guaranteeing reemployment at any time in the future. It ended, however, with the announcement that I was being released to supervise an agricultural project in Ridgefield.

The super could offer no explanation for the abrupt change in the firm's decision and I felt quite deflated to say the least. It was more than five years later that the story unfolded. My brother Gus was introduced to a man who at the mention of the name Venus asked Gus if he had a relative named Richard. When Gus informed the gentleman that I was his brother, the man said that he remembered the name because of an incident that occurred during his employment with the Department of Agriculture in Washington.

According to this man, a fellow appeared in his office one day and in no uncertain terms demanded that I be released from employment with a firm in Bridgeport. Of course the fellow was Walter Deiches who then proceeded to paint a picture of some gigantic agricultural enterprise that I was scheduled to operate. He backed up his demand with a letter from some high government official who had endorsed Walter's request. That was how I was Shanghaied and I guess by now you would have to agree that Walter was a very persistent man. When he made up his mind there was no stopping him.

So back to the little farm on Old South Salem Road where the first job was to acquire the livestock and get the farm going. We say "little farm" for as farms go, it did not have many tillable acres. This was solved by renting or leasing additional acres of unused fields around the town.

Though we still did not have any milk cows, Walter wanted to find a place to market milk. The names of several large dairies were furnished and he settled on Round Hill Farms in Greenwich, which was operated at the time by William Tuttle. Mr. Tuttle came to make an inspection of the farm and seemed astonished at not seeing any cows. Walter assured him that the cows were on their way and he could expect a certain number of gallons of milk each day. Mr. Tuttle looked to me for confirmation of all this and I assured him that Walter would do just as he said he would.

Now we were in the market for milk cows and various dealers were canvassed. If there was one profession that had more than its sharp operators, it had to be the horse and cattle dealer. After talking to a few, I suggested we go to see Morris Budinski. Morris had a reputation for fairness and had a farm between Newtown and Brookfield.

At the time we visited Morris, he was making ready for a cow buying trip to Canada. Walter and he engaged in a very lively conversation and during their negotiations Morris quickly came to the conclusion that he was dealing with no ordinary person.

When Walter asked how many cows came in a railroad carload, Morris informed him that it was governed by the size of the cow, but generally he would get between 40 and 50 in a carload. Walter told him that he would need a full carload. It was no place for me to interfere but on the way home I told him that if he went through with his idea of buying a full carload of cows, he would have to put an addition on the barn as even with using both wings of the barn, it would hold no more than 20 cows. Walter assured me that he would find a way of getting them all in. When I questioned why he needed so many cows, he seemed very evasive.

George Bloomer Sr. was building a house for the sows at the time. It turned out to be a nice pig barn with 12 fair-size stalls, one for each sow and a very large stall, twice the size of the others. We guessed correctly that the large stall was for the boar. George had had the advantage of seeing the new boar and planned accordingly. Walter had purchased an enormous Chester white boar from Howland Adams. He must have weighed more than 600 pounds and the stall was none too big for him.

It may be of interest that the pig barn was originally constructed close to the woods at the rear of the cow barn. When Bill Shipley bought the farmhouse some years later, the pig house was moved out near the highway on the west side of the farmhouse and remade into a garage. The Blackwells have informed me that the garage burned several years ago and they had it reconstructed, exactly as it was and it now serves as living quarters.

At any rate the farm now had a total of 13 hogs and while I have always considered 13 to be a lucky number, on this occasion I had some misgivings. When I asked Walter where he would keep all the little pigs when they arrived, he said we could cross that bridge when we came to it.

Since each sow could have somewhere between 12 and 16 little ones, we felt it only fair to apprise Lee Vance that after a gestation period of 112 days, he could have an awful lot of pigs to care for. Lee was a little “shook up” at the prospect but reasoned that if the little pigs were sold off quickly enough, he might be able to handle the situation. Little did he know of the plans Walter had in store for him and the pig project.

(To Be Continued)

#105: DISASTER LOOMS AT WALDEE FARMS AS COWS & CHICKENS ARRIVE

Waldee Farms was the scene of feverish activity, as preparations were made to make the farm a going concern.

George Bloomer had no sooner finished building the new pig barn than Walter Deiches had him start on the renovation of the large Chicago barn. Up to this time the barn had been used primarily for storage of hay and machinery. Walter planned on making it over, into a huge chicken house. It probably would be, at least during this period, the largest chicken house in this area.

There are the old axioms that say, Don't count your chickens until they are hatched and don't put all your eggs in one basket. Walter would furnish another that said: Don't put all your chickens in one house.

It was the spring of 1943 and the production of food was of vital importance. In the upper portion of the Chicago barn, another floor was being added. The new floor was almost completed when Walter's first order of baby chicks arrived.

This shipment consisted of 1,000 fuzzy little New Hampshire reds. The barn was so big that the chicks must have looked real tiny to Walter. I assured him they would grow rapidly and would soon use up what now looked like a lot of extra space.

However, Walter soon began talking about a second order of baby chicks. He was cautioned about the dangers of overcrowding as the chicks grew. Lee Vance and I measured up the barn and concluded that it would safely accommodate 1,800 full-grown chickens.

This information was passed on to Walter in the hope that he would order accordingly. He accepted our advice with a wave of his hand and I was not the least surprised when a week later an additional 1,000 little red chicks arrived. When the following week a third shipment of an equal number was delivered, there was a genuine cause for alarm.

Lee was very upset about the number of little charges that he must care for, and with good reason. A few days later, Lee came over to the dairy barn to see me and he was obviously distraught as he asked that I speak to Walter at once as he had reason to believe that he was planning to order again.

We went together to try to talk Walter out of getting any more chicks. He listened to what we had to say, but it was obvious that he had no intention of canceling the order, which he had already placed.

We drew a very graphic picture of what could be expected as the 4,000 little chicks approached their full size. Walter insisted that his goal was to get 4,000 eggs per day and we kept warning him that the death rate from overcrowding would be disastrous.

I felt sorry for Lee but there was nothing we could do about the situation.

Walter's attention was now directed to the dairy part of his enterprise. There was a nice silo attached to the cow barn and he wanted to know its purpose. It was explained to him that it was intended to store ensilage that was chopped up corn and corn stalks.

We noted the importance of having fodder of this kind for the cows during the cold winter months. We measured the silo and informed him that it would take about five acres of field corn to fill it.

There was need for all the acreage of the farm for pasture use but just over the New York State line, on the former Dr. Shelton estate, ten acres were available for this purpose. Walter hired Bill Patten and his Alis Chalmers tractor to plow and plant the entire field. The field has since been partly developed and the rest has become a wooded area, directly across from Elmwood Road on West Lane.

All of this plowing and planting activity must have fascinated Walter and the next thing we knew he had Patten plow a tract of about five acres that stood just east of his home on Branchville Road. This acreage has since been made over into a very nice development, with a road called CasaTorch Lane. The name is a contraction of the names of the late John Casavecchia and Gino Torcellini who developed the property.

Bill Patten had a potato planting attachment for his tractor and when Walter saw that, he decided to plant the biggest field of potatoes that I ever saw in Ridgefield. A normal harvest of potatoes from a field of this size would have been sufficient to supply the whole town at that time.

A normal harvest of corn from the ten acres he had planted would have filled two silos the size of the one at Waldee Farms. However, it did not turn out that way. My main concern was the corn as it was of such importance to the cows.

When we saw the corn field for the first time, the weeds were as tall as the corn. Apparently it was thought that all that was necessary was that the corn be planted. It had to be learned that cultivation was a very important part of the growing process.

We located a nice little gray horse and a cultivator and went to work on the corn field in an effort to save as much of the corn as possible. It was a monumental task. The horse worked very well but the weeds made it very difficult to see between the rows of corn and they had such a hold that many resisted the tugging shoes of the cultivator.

Several local boys were put to work, pulling by hand the weeds that could be destroyed no other way. This can be a very tedious process and boys lose interest in it very quickly, especially in a field of this size. It looked very hopeless.

It was some weeks later before I had a chance to see the potato field on Branchville Road and by then it was in even worse condition than the corn field. It was obvious that the yield would be practically nil.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch a call was received from Morris Budinski announcing the arrival of a carload of milk cows. When Walter and I went to see them, they were all turned out to pasture. They were not very impressive and out of the 48 cows, only a few looked very promising. What was of even more concern was the fact that they all looked a little on the wild side. Most of them were Holsteins, with a sprinkling of Jerseys. Guernseys and milking shorthorns.

Walter and Morris engaged in a prolonged conversation as to how the transaction would be completed for the purchase of the cows. Somehow on the way to see the cows, I was able to convince Walter that he should not take the entire carload.

It was fun to hear an experienced cattle dealer extolling the virtues of a bunch of cows of which he himself actually had no personal knowledge. It was equally amusing to hear a real tenderfoot in the buying of cattle, circumventing each offer of the cattleman by substituting one of his own.

Walter sure did not know much about cows, but he did know his way around the marketplace.

#106: THE HALF-WILD COWS AND OVERCROWDED CHICKS

While Walter Deiches and Morris Budinski continued their negotiations, 48 cows were milling around in the pasture, awaiting their fate. Offers and rejections flew thick and fast. First Walter suggested that I select 40 of the cows and he would buy them, though he had been made aware that this was at least 10 more than the barn could properly house. Morris agreed to Walter's suggestion but then balked when I asked that the cows be put in the barn where an examination and then a sensible selection could be made. We learned later why Morris was reluctant to have the cows put in the barn.

When it was explained to Walter that it would be impossible for me to evaluate the worth of an animal which was walking around in the field, he did not seem overly impressed. I

began to get the feeling that Walter was more interested in numbers than in the quality of the cows.

After a great number of ideas on how the problem could be solved, Walter said that he would buy all 48 cows and then sell back eight of them to Morris. Selecting the eight cows that were the least desirable rather than choosing the best 40 seemed a lot easier and I finally agreed to try this method.

The whole operation seemed a bit unreal and I found it hard to believe that I could be in the middle of such a situation. However, the process of elimination was started and one could not help but feel sorry for the eight poor critters that were separated from the herd. We will not attempt to liken it to a Miss America contest, but the system was pretty much the same.

On the way home, after the purchase of the cows was completed, it was explained to Walter that it would be necessary to breed the cows at intervals that would produce three or four calves each month. In that way a steady flow of milk would be provided and that would keep the buyer, Mr. Tuttle and his Round Hill Farms, happy. Walter thought that cows just continued to give milk, day after day, and was surprised that they had a dry period during the two-month rest period prior to calving.

We went on to explain to Walter that cows' main purpose was not to produce milk for human consumption, but rather for their calves, just as the bees work hard to fill their hives with honey and intend it for their own use. Through the years, because of careful breeding, production has been substantially increased and we humans benefit from the excess. He seemed to have a genuine interest in these facts of farm life, with which he was so unfamiliar.

It was suggested that artificial insemination, which was relatively new at the time, be used to breed the cows. Several purebred bulls were being kept on a farm in Woodbridge for this purpose. They were of top quality and offered a real opportunity for the improvement of their breeds. Walter wanted none of that. He had his heart set on having his own bull as it would add another animal to his herd. So I began looking around for a bull.

Morris Budinski lost no time but started right away delivering the cows. They were deposited in a pasture adjoining the cow barn and that's when the fun began. In altering the barn to house the cows, the storage area in the center of the barn and the horse stables were put to use. The sheep had been sold to make room for the cows but it still would be an awful tight squeeze.

Now it was time to put the cows in the barn. It would prove to be the very first time they had been put in a stanchion. Apparently in Canada, where they had come from, they were kept loose in a shed. It was now quite clear why Morris had refused to put them in his barn.

The old days on the western range, at roundup time, could have been no more exciting than the project of getting these half-wild cows secured in the barn. It took most of the afternoon and the combined efforts of Lee Vance and myself, as well as the farm boys Dick Freivogel, Mario Scala, George Bloomer Jr., Dick Scala, and another boy named Bill, whose last name escapes me. As might be expected, these young fellows exhibited much more enthusiasm as cowboys than they did as weed pullers in the cornfield.

When the cows were finally secured, we fed them before bringing them into the 20th century by introducing them to the milking machine. It would be some time before one could feel safe while applying the machine to one of these cows. Their ability to kick and the accuracy of their aim is second only that of the mule.

One of the cows caught Lee Vance on the forearm with a real smart kick one day. It did not break his arm but it was very painful. Lee said that he had no idea what he was getting involved in when he came to Waldee Farms. Poor Lee, for him the worst was yet to come.

The chicken population in the Chicago barn had now reached 4,000, and while they were still not half grown it was easy to see trouble ahead. Day by day you could see the available space in this barn diminishing rapidly. The barn was like a pail under a running faucet and it would soon be overflowing.

As the crowding began, the story becomes a sad one. Each morning I could see that Lee would carry out young chickens that had smothered during the night. It was not long before he was using a bushel basket for this purpose. Lee tried letting some of the chickens out during daylight hours to avoid the summer's heat, but to no avail. Soon there was more than one basket and Lee was a very sad man, though he did the very best he could.

By the time the chickens started to lay eggs, production was far less, as you can well imagine, than Walter's goal of 4,000 per day. Then one day an old friend, LeRoy Chapman, visited the farm. He was the director of the Fairfield County Farm Bureau.

Chappy was recognized as outstanding in his knowledge of farm life. It did not take him long to size up what was going on at Waldee.

In an aside to me, after looking at the chicken situation, he said, loud enough for all to hear, "You did have enough points, but you are losing them fast." The reason for overstocking was beginning to become clear.

Following Chappy's visit, Walter and I had a rather hurried conference. Since he was listed with the Farm Bureau as a farm worker, it was strongly suggested that he get himself a pair of rubber boots and show up early the next morning. He thought that I was kidding, but was assured that he was expected to perform his duties as a bona fide farm hand.

Walter did not like his new career but to his credit he was right on the job the next day with a brand new pair of knee-length Ball Band boots. It was a bit comical to see him perform the chores that are done with relative ease by those who are accustomed to farm work.

#107 A COOL-RUNNING FLINT AND A BOILING DURANT

One of the nice things about this business is that a lapse, or an omission on the part of the writer, will generally elicit a response from someone. We find this enjoyable since it indicates that the column is being read.

Last week we mentioned some of the boys who worked at Waldee Farms during the summer of 1943. One of the boys was listed as Bill, with no family name. It turns out that Bill's last name was Rogers.

Bill was a nephew of the late Mary Linda Bradley and a descendant of one of our most prestigious families. Miss Bradley, who lived in the family mansion on West Mountain, was very prominent in local affairs and during World War I became the first local chairman of the National League of Women's Service.

Mary Linda's father was the Honorable William Harrison Bradley, who held several posts at the U. S. Department of State. At one time he was our consul at Nice and then was consul general at Manchester, England, and at Montreal.

William Harrison Bradley was the son of Judge William Henry Bradley who served as clerk of the United States Circuit Court at Chicago for many years. William Henry was a grandson of the famous Colonel Philip Burr Bradley. The Colonel, as everyone knows, was one of Ridgefield's genuine Revolutionary war heroes.

Colonel Bradley's homesite is now our Ballard Park. He was the second postmaster of Ridgefield and served in that capacity from 1794 to 1801. His mother's maiden name was Esther Burr and she was an aunt of Aaron Burr, who served as vice-president of the United States during Thomas Jefferson's first term. This fact accounts for the Colonel's middle name.

We do not know where Bill Rogers is now, but remember him as a very handsome teenager. Like most youths, Bill was chock full of energy, but exhibited excellent decorum and we are sure he has been a credit to his famous ancestors.

A few weeks ago, in Dispatch 100, we told of how more than 50 years ago, a new car agency was being operated from the store that is now Brunetti's Market. It was from this store that George G. Scott Jr., sold several makes of autos including the Flint. Recently George's younger brother phoned to say that he enjoyed the article.

"Hi," as we always called him, and his wife Marion, now live in Florida and he keeps track of his home town through the pages of The Press. The Flint was a favorite car of his and he recalled how well constructed they were. We had noted in our column that the Flint was so well built that it did not wear out quickly and this fact helped to put them out of business.

Hi agreed with our observation and told of a Flint that was used in a demonstration on Main Street back in the mid 20's. Overheating has always been a problem with automobiles, especially when left at idling speeds for any length of time. It was probably Hi's brother George that parked a Flint one afternoon on the sidewalk in front of the store. 5

The car was started at 6 o'clock in the evening and left with the motor running at idle. It ran all night and in the morning it was still running well. The amazing part of this is that it was not necessary to add any water to the radiator. Of course, gasoline was added more than once. The car was allowed to run until 6 o'clock in the evening and still no water was added. Hi wondered if any of our modern autos could endure such a test without boiling.

While the Flint was like a camel, not all of the cars sold at the store would run as cool. About the same time Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Haggert lived upstairs in Carrie McCann's house on Gilbert Street. Tom bought a new Durant touring car from the same store. He was a railroad man and knew my brother Charlie, also a railroad man, who lived in Pawling, N.Y.

The Haggerts' first trip would be to Pawling and they invited my mother and me to accompany them. The trip to Pawling was pleasant and rather uneventful. However, the trip home to Ridgefield was a different matter.

There was a hill on old Route 22 midway between Pawling and Brewster. It was called Jack Yale's hill, probably after a farmer in the area. When we were about half way up the hill, the radiator started to boil over and we had to back all the way down to a brook that crossed under the highway.

We had no pail with which to carry water for the radiator, but my mother had a felt hat which she donated for the purpose. It took several trips to the brook, but we finally satisfied the thirst of the little car. With the radiator full, we tried the hill again and reached the top before it started to boil again and we had to stop again at the very next brook for a refill.

When in Ridgefield, the Hiram Scotts lived on Casa-Torch Lane which we have previously described as a part of Walter Deiches experimental potato field. In so doing we told of how the word Casa-Torch was a contraction of the names of the developers, John Casavecchia and Gino Trocellini but failed to mention Donald Torcellini who was also a member of the team that created this fine little development.

Speaking of Walter's potato project reminds us that I must get on with the story about Waldee Farms. As far as the potatoes are concerned there is not much to tell. When it was time to harvest the potatoes, Walter hired Bill Patten with his tractor and plow. He must have had great expectations as he had four or five of the farm boys with bushel baskets to follow the plow and pick up the potatoes.

As previously noted, there had been little or no cultivation and the weeds ran rampant through the field. Picking up the potatoes must have been the easiest job the boys had while at the farm and they thoroughly enjoyed it.

On my way to lunch I drove down Branchville Road to see how the harvest was progressing. It was quite a sight. Normally you would plow just the row in which the potatoes were planted in order to expose the crop. However, the weeds had overgrown the potato vines to such an extent that it was just impossible to see where the rows should have been. Therefore it was necessary to plow the whole five acre field.

With the field almost half plowed they still had not filled one basket. It was most discouraging to see this operation and the potatoes that they did find were no bigger than marbles.

Walter sure was learning about farming the hard way. I often thought that it might have been easier to transport the hogs from the farm and turn them loose in the field where they could rout out the potatoes with their strong snouts.

#108: BRINGING IN THE MILK — AND HAY

At long last, Waldee Farms had its first product to put on the market.

To be sure, milk production was not great to start with, but as the Canadian cows became accustomed to their new surroundings, and the milking machines, they began to respond and the flow of milk increased. They even seemed to get used to those who worked around them, and as they are naturally a docile animal, they soon became contented.

As the number of cans of milk picked up each day by the Round Hill Farms truck reached the level that Walter Deiches had agreed to furnish, he became a happy man.

A farm in New Fairfield advertised a bull for sale in one of the area newspapers. The price must have been right and Walter bought the bull without ever going to see him. A couple of weeks elapsed before the bull was delivered and by that time Walter apparently forgot the deal he had made by telephone.

There was a fine bull pen in back of the cow barn near the wooded area that had been constructed when Reggie Lewis owned the farm. However, the bull looked as though he needed a square meal so I tied him out where the grass was plentiful.

The hull was a rather nondescript character and it was obvious that he was of questionable ancestry. My disappointment in this animal was not so great as it was becoming increasingly apparent that this whole operation was not being geared for a long haul.

The first time Walter saw the bull tied out by the barn, he asked if I had bought a new cow. The difference in gender was explained to him and he then wanted to know the bull's name. We told him that we thought "Hornet" would be suitable. Walter thought it was an odd name, but we thought it fitting as he sure got stung when he bought him.

Walter had read someplace that contented cows give more milk and that music was one way of keeping them contented. We were not surprised when a few days later he showed up with a nice radio for the cow barn. Like some of the young people today, he thought louder was better. We had to convince him that he was scaring the cows rather than soothing them. It was also pointed out to him that the cows adjusted easier to the rhythms of Wayne King, the "Waltz King," than to the vibrant syncopation of Spike Jones and his "City Slickers."

Most of the cows were bred before they arrived at Waldee and a few were ready to calve. The first calf to arrive caused a mild sensation and Walter was happy with the additional point it provided to the farm. There would be a lot more points, and the sows would do their part in boosting the total.

All of the cows were not cluckers and some were even better than average. One in particular seemed to have the makings of a big producer. She was a very large holstein and was obviously well bred. Because of her size we named her "Bertha," after the huge World War I canon of that name.

Bertha was dry when she came to the farm and was about a month from calving. When her day arrived we found that there was ample reason for her size as she delivered twin calves.

They were a pretty pair of heifers, almost identical, and caused considerable excitement around the farm. Walter was inclined to send a birth notice to Ripley, for his Believe It Or Not cartoon, until it was explained to him that while twin calves were very unusual, we had seen others.

This great cow must have known that she would have two mouths to feed and prepared herself accordingly. For several months after the arrival of the twins, Bertha averaged 40 quarts of milk each day and certainly did her part towards the milk quota. As a matter of fact, if nine of the other cows produced as she did, we could do without the other 30.

Soon it was haying time and Bill Patten was kept busy with his tractor, mowing fields, where they could be found. The fields on the Shelton estate on West Lane were harvested as well as those in the Mill River area, the Rainsford estate (now Le Chateau) and the old Kraft estate, owned at this time by Mr. Kaplan.

Kaplan's estate was directly across South Salem Road from Le Chateau and was one of the largest estates in Westchester County. The mansion on this place burned to the ground just a few years ago, in a spectacular fire that was visible in most areas of Ridgefield. Actually the mansion had been vacant for years and had had numerous fires. The last one did a complete job.

I do not believe that the Kaplan family ever lived in the mansion. There were several houses on the estate and they chose to live in a cottage, on the corner of the road that leads to Pound Ridge.

Mr. Kaplan was president and owner of the North American Molasses Company. It must have been a very large operation and it was rumored that during World War II, the government had commandeered 50 railroad cars from the firm to assist with the war effort.

Mr. Kaplan was a rather rugged, gray-haired, little individual and Walter, after talking to him briefly about cutting his hay fields, decided to withdraw and let me do the negotiating.

He was a very interesting man and had some rather unusual habits. Although he was well along in years, he insisted on walking from his home all the way to Katonah to get the train for New York. While walking, he carried his head to one side, as if to act as a ballast against the large, ever-present briefcase that always swung from the opposite side. On several occasions we offered him a ride, but he always declined.

There was a good-sized porch on the cottage and Mr. Kaplan always slept there, winter and summer. It was said that on many winter mornings, Mrs. Kaplan had to sweep the snow off of him as she awakened him.

He had another little peculiarity. He did not believe in having his shirt laundered; he just wore them the limit, threw them away, and bought another.

Much of the haying for Waldee Farms was done by hand, in the old-fashioned way. There was no side-delivery rake or hay baler. We did locate an old Yankee dump rake. Once in a while, you will see one of these rakes today, used as an ornament on the lawn of an old farmhouse. It has wooden shafts that go on either side of the horse and the rest is completely made of metal. The iron wheels stand about five feet tall and between them there are 50 large tines that drag the hay along until it is dumped into windrows.

After Bill Patten cut the hay, the gray horse was hitched to the rake and after the windrows were made, the boys came along and rolled them into haycocks. Then each haycock was pitched by fork onto the hay truck.

There was an old Dodge truck that had been left behind by the Scripps family and we made a hay rigging for it that worked quite well.

Incidentally we named the horse "Traveler" as he had a marked resemblance to General Robert E. Lee's famous steed. As we will see, this little horse will show us that he also had plenty of speed.

#109: LOTS OF PIGS AND A RUNAWAY HORSE

At Waldee Farms we were like Smith Barney: We did things the old-fashioned way.

This was especially true when it came to making hay and it was no easy task. The cocks of hay had to be pitched by hand onto the hay truck and they were large enough to tax the strength of a man. They soon diminished in size as the boys who made them found that they also had to pitch them up to me. Walter Deiches was pressed into service as the truck driver.

The very first day while getting the hay at the Kaplan place, the boys got a considerable distance ahead as the truck failed to keep up with them. We rapped on the cab of the truck with our fork as a signal to Walter to move the truck ahead. When the truck still did not move, we climbed down from the load to find out what the problem was.

There was Walter, oblivious to what was going on around him, studying the financial section of the New York Herald Tribune. An immediate summit meeting was held with the result that all newspapers were banned from the truck for the duration of the haying season.

The boys also learned a lesson that day at Kaplan's. They had been told and shown the proper way of harnessing the horse. It was impressed on them that in hitching the horse to the

wagon, the hold-back straps must be quickly snapped into place as the traces were attached. They were likened to the brakes on a motor vehicle and without them the wagon could not be stopped.

On this occasion, we were finished loading the truck and ready to return to the farm. The boys hitched the horse to the wagon but failed to fasten the hold-backs. The horse took a few steps with George in the wagon and as they were headed down hill, the wagon rolled into Traveler's rear. The horse started into a trot down the hill and as he reached the highway, the wagon hit him a good crack. The trot quickly became a gallop and it was most fortunate that there was no other traffic as the horse and wagon, with a very frightened boy at the helm, streaked across South Salem Road and into Old South Salem Road.

There are not many things that are more exciting than a horse in full flight and this had now become a full-fledged runaway, as Traveler raced for the barn under a full head of steam. As he sped past Pinchbeck's greenhouse, the traces became unhooked, freeing the horse, and the wagon with George still aboard finally rolled to a stop.

Traveler, without the cursed wagon to impede his progress, continued his flight but had the good sense to turn into the long driveway leading to the barn. As described earlier, the barn had an extension on either side that made it into the shape of a giant horseshoe. Between these wings and in the center of the barnyard, stood an apple tree.

As the horse flew by the tree, one of the traces caught in a lower limb and Traveler was thrown to the ground and that is where I found him a few minutes later. The poor horse was terribly frightened and covered with lather. It was some time before we could quiet him and then he promised not to run away again. The boys also promised not to forget the hold-back straps again.

We harvested an awful lot of hay that summer as there were a number of mouths to feed. It was one of the few projects that turned out right and we had enough to carry us through the winter.

Grain, however, was another matter. It took only a few bags of grain each week when the chicks were small, but as they grew and with the addition of the cows and then the little pigs, the feed order was multiplied many times over.

They used to say that pigs were either mud or gold and in 1943 they were gold. In fact while they usually sold for \$5 a pair, when seven or eight weeks of age, this year they were bringing \$25 apiece. As word got around that we had a lot of little pigs, people came to buy them.

We thought Walter would be happy at the prospect of turning a neat profit. However, he refused to sell them. He operated on the theory that if they were worth that much to others, they must be worth that much to him. We tried to explain to him that the price was very unusual and it was a great chance to cash in, but he said that he wanted to keep them all. We pointed out that it was going to take an awful lot of feed to keep all those pigs till maturity. Walter was steadfast in his refusal to sell and at one time we had 157 pigs on that farm.

On the northern side of the barn, there was a wooded area and beyond that a large swamp that extended all the way to Peaceable Street and encircled what is now Mead Ridge on South Salem Road. Lee Vance used to let the pigs roam through the several acres that made up their playground.

Except for their unmistakable squeals, one would have thought that a herd of elephants was loose in the swamp as the pigs went crashing through the brush and fallen trees.

No other domestic animals grow as rapidly as pigs — providing they get enough to eat and Lee made sure that they had plenty of grain. The small loads of feed increased to large truckloads and then rapidly swelled to railroad carloads. A carload of grain cost \$2,500 at the time and amounted to 40 tons. The pigs went through their share as if there was no tomorrow.

They were the happiest little porkers that I ever saw. I'll say one thing for Walter: He never complained about the enormous cost of feeding all those animals.

There was something about life on the farm that fascinated Walter and he seemed to have a genuine interest in learning as much as possible about it. He once asked me to show him how the various farm products were processed for use by those who actually lived off their farms.

There was a time when we had some surplus milk so I took Walter over to the little dairy that was attached to the farmhouses. There was a cream separator that had been left behind by the Scripps family and we showed him how cream is separated from the milk by centrifugal force. He was surprised to learn that it took ten quarts of milk to make a quart of cream.

The dairy also had a butter churn and he wanted to see how it worked, and even turned it himself. It took a lot of turning and considerable patience but the cream finally turned to butter. He was again surprised to learn that it took a quart of cream to make a pound of butter.

Walter quickly figured that making butter was a losing proposition, but after a glass of that fresh buttermilk and a taste of that fine fresh butter, he agreed that it might be worthwhile after all.

We showed him how to make cottage cheese out of the skim milk and he was delighted with his brief excursion into the mysteries of dairy farming.

#110: THE VERY FINEST ICE CREAM EVER

If Walter Deiches needed anything to sell him on the advantages of home-grown farm products, it was a batch of homemade ice cream. We used an excellent recipe that Mrs. Irving Conklin had used with great success on so many occasions.

Mrs. Conklin would carefully mix the numerous ingredients and pour them into the freezer can and then allow me to turn the crank until the can would turn no more. This carried with it the privilege of licking the dasher as well as a nice dish of ice cream that this fine lady always made sure to provide.

For some reason, the ice cream left on the dasher always seemed to taste a little better than what came later in the dish. Could be that the first taste is always the best. One thing was for sure and that was that this was the very finest ice cream ever made since Dolly Madison surprised her White House guests with this famous delicacy.

There can be no other delightful repast that conveys such a pleasant taste, along with the urge for a second helping. A host will really enjoy the plaudits of the guests when serving ice cream made with Mrs. Conklin's renowned recipe. It is a sure way to put everyone in a good mood.

I guess that with the price of the ingredients on today's market, this ice cream could cost about \$10 a gallon. The cost with the accompanying calories would be enough to put it off limits to today's weight-conscious public.

Why is it that so many things that we so thoroughly enjoy have to be listed as taboo. As I write this I am actually convincing myself that I must make some more of that heavenly ice cream.

To start with a quart of heavy cream would be needed; most of the other ingredients would be right in the refrigerator. There is nothing, absolutely nothing, quite like it.

Perhaps we do not work hard enough to burn up the calories found in the foods that were consumed as a regular part of the diet years ago.

We felt bad when doctors started recommending skim milk rather than whole milk. Remember that beautiful bottle of milk topped with that golden cream? We have always contended that the butter fat in milk burned up much more rapidly than the fats found in meats. We know of several people who survived well into their nineties on nothing more than bread and whole milk. We knew others who actually drank heavy cream and never gained a pound.

One young fellow in particular worked at Conklin's Dairy back in the 30's and consumed at least two half-pints of heavy cream every day. Of course Donald worked very hard, as we all did, but all that cream had no visible effect on him and he remained quite slender.

We were just going through the Williams-Sonoma catalog for cooks and noticed a Minigel ice cream machine that would yield a quart of ice cream in just 15 to 20 minutes. It had been reduced in price from \$750 to \$595 and that alone would be enough to discourage any aspiring ice cream maker.

This infernal machine posed double jeopardy in that the price is out of reach of most households and if a family could afford it they would miss all the exercise from turning the handle in the old-fashioned method.

With this modern method, you just throw the mix into the machine and presto, the ice cream is produced for you. Sometimes good things do not come that easy.

Walter looked around for some other produce from the farm to sample. A bull calf was being fattened up for sale to a butcher and Walter suddenly developed a penchant for veal. The order was given that the calf must not be sold but rather it would be butchered for consumption on the farm.

We made sure that Walter was on hand to witness the butchering. It had the effect of changing somewhat his expressed desire for veal. Finally he decided to settle for the wiener schnitzel and the rest was divided among those on the farm who had a taste for veal.

Now it was time to harvest the corn and fill the silo with fodder for the cows during the cold winter months. This was always an enjoyable project despite the hard work that it entailed. There was always something fresh and wholesome about the newly cut corn and there was an air of excitement from the noise of the ensilage blower and the increased activity around the farm.

Ten acres of corn were ready to be cut on the former Shelton estate owned at the time by Konrad Bercovici. We had measured the capacity of the silo and knew that five acres of good corn would fill it. Walter always thought big and this time it was well that he did as he had Bill Patten plant twice the needed acreage. The corn had fought a valiant battle with the weeds and as a result it was somewhat retarded. In fact it took the entire crop from the 10 acres to fill the silo.

The corn was all cut by hand with the curved corn knives that were shaped like a hook. The stalks were laid in piles and then loaded by hand onto the truck to be carried back to the farm.

The ensilage blower had been set up with its long pipe extended to the top of the 32-foot silo. The corn stalks were placed on a chute that had a conveyor that carried them into the mouth of the blower where whirling knives cut them into one-inch pieces. Along with the knives there were huge fan blades that turned at terrific speed as they blew little pieces of corn up through the pipe and into the silo.

All of this was powered by an ancient Fordson tractor with a belt that extended from its pulley to a pulley on the blower. The tractor was made entirely of iron and steel, even the wheels with their large metal cleats. It was really not adapted for farm work and was a far cry from the sleek, rubber-tired machines of today. Aside from using it to power the ensilage blower, the old tractor got very little use. We did use it to dig out a watering place for the cows with a rolling scoop that we borrowed from John Morganti. It got the job done but not nearly as well as the bulldozers of today would do it.

Just about every farm had a silo, especially if it had a dozen or more head of cattle. Ensilage made great food for the cattle and in some instances served a second purpose. Around the base of many silos one could see where small holes had been bored. The holes were kept plugged until the corn had fermented and the juice had settled to the bottom of the silo. A spigot then replaced the plug and the juice was drawn off and distilled into the very potent corn liquor.

Walter thought this was a very nifty idea but after a taste of "Brown's Mule" and experiencing its devastating effect, decided he would stick with scotch.

#111: ONE OF THE WILDEST DAYS AT WALDEE

[Warning: Persons who are sensitive to the treatment of animals will probably find parts of this column troubling.]

On Sunday afternoon, Jan. 8, 1944, Lee Vance had some visitors at Waldee Farm. Each year at about this time, several couples from the Bronx made an excursion into the hinterlands in search of hogs. They would go from town to town inquiring as they went along of anyone who had hogs for sale.

In this instance, their timing was perfect as only a few days before their visit to Ridgefield, Walter Deiches had agreed to sell a few of the large sows. He still insisted on keeping the younger pigs.

The Bronxites and Lee did some negotiating with the result that they purchased three of the sows. One of the conditions of the sale was that the hogs be butchered at the farm and Lee hired the late Joe Young to do the job. Joe had real good equipment and did a lot of butchering of both hogs and cattle.

It was the middle of January when the date set for the butchering arrived and the thermometer was stuck right on zero. To make matters worse, a stiff wind was blowing. Today they would probably say there was a chill factor of 20 below.

At any rate, Joe decided that this was no day for him to be butchering. As Lee did not have the phone number of his customers, there was no way he could inform them of the change in plans.

It was noon and I was home having my lunch when Lee called to say that the people were at the farm to get their hogs and would I please do the butchering? This was something I had not bargained for and I refused to do the job. When I got back to the farm, there were no less than 10 people from the Bronx. They had come in two cars and an old R.H. Macy truck, an old high-wheeler.

There were many unusual days at Waldee and this would be one of the wildest. These people had built a fire in the field on the west side of the barn and had a large kettle over it in which the water was boiling. We soon learned that the boiling water was for the purpose of cooking several pounds of spaghetti which they had thoughtfully brought along.

They also brought four gallons of wine and it looked as if they were prepared for a real party. This was an annual ritual that they went through and the wind and frigid weather did not bother them in the least.

When Lee informed them that the butchering had been postponed, there was almost a riot. These people were devastated as the men had taken the day off for their annual party and soon were asking for their money back.

Lee pleaded with me to do the butchering and when the pork people heard this, they surrounded me and it began to look as though I would be pressed into service, like it or not. They all promised to help and I soon regretted their kind offer.

Then started one of the wildest scenes I have ever witnessed.

Three of the largest sows were selected and their average weight must have been close to 500 pounds. What we were unprepared for was the insistence of these people on having the hogs turned loose in the field so they could run them down. It was similar to the practice of turning the bulls loose in the streets of Spain and it could have been just as dangerous. These sows were not the least good-natured and as they raced over the frozen turf, they must have figured that this was their last chance to run.

The biggest of the sows was cornered and with her large powerful jaws open wide, she rushed at her pursuers and they scattered like tenpins. Both men and women joined in the chase. Finally, two of the men were successful in grabbing the hind legs of the hog and the strong animal dragged them in a mad dash for freedom. The hog did not just scream, she roared, as she seemed to know that her day had come.

The men wore the knees from their pants and the elbows from their jackets as the others followed along shouting encouragement. Finally two other men grasped the hog's front legs and she landed with a thud on the hard ground. The noise from that hog could have been heard a mile away.

The exhausted animal was thrown on her back with four of the men each holding a leg. The fifth man held the hog's snout, and one of the women, caught up in the excitement, sat astride the hog's belly.

With all these people just about covering their quarry, my job was going to be difficult. After some careful searching through this mass of humanity and with the aid of a large, double-edged sticking knife, I was finally able to apply the coup de grace. It was done as quickly and as painlessly as possible.

The Bronxites wanted to complete the dressing of the first hog before starting on another, but as the afternoon was rapidly wearing on, I insisted on completing the butchering

before the dressing started and then all could be done together. After a few glasses of wine, the second hog chase became a duplicate of the first, except that fortified by the wine, the pursuers exhibited a lot more courage. The animal was quickly subdued and dispatched with alacrity.

The last hog was the smallest of the three and had considerably more speed. The wine seemed to have slowed down the runners and it took a little longer to throw the hog. One of the men stepped forward and announced that he would do the sticking. He was the one who had the barber shop and after watching me do the first two felt confident that he could do the job.

The barber approached his victim, double-edged knife at the ready, as if he were about to give a shave. His incision was several times larger than necessary yet he still missed the jugular vein by a good two inches. His helpers released the hog with blood streaming from her wound and she roared to her feet, very much alive. She was recaptured but by now the Bronxites were a very bedraggled group.

Now the woman, who had sat on the hog, grabbed the knife from the barber and announced that she would finish the job. The fact that she wore a camel hair coat did not seem to faze her. Unfortunately, she entered at the same spot and though her arm disappeared almost to the elbow, she also missed the vein and it was necessary to take the knife away and mercifully finish the job.

Now it was time to dress the hogs and here the others could be of some help. We had enough “candlesticks” for everyone to use and I put them right to work. To those unfamiliar with this, they are tools used to remove the hair or bristles from the hogs. They have a round metal base and a straight wooden handle and do resemble a candlestick in appearance.

After scalding water is poured over the dead hog, the candlesticks are used, generally in a circular motion, to clear the skin of the unwanted bristles.

Around these parts there is a saying that “they use everything but the squeal.” These people were fortunately interested in only the popular cuts of pork. We were grateful as it was now quite dark and the cows still had to be milked. After hoisting each carcass with a block and tackle from the yardarm that extended from the top of the barn, they were cleaned and ready to split.

We had one more incident during the splitting, which could have been serious for me but I was lucky. The proper way to split a hog that is hanging is to do it from the inside where the entire spinal column is in full view. In this way an exact split can be made.

We were working now in semi-darkness as the auxiliary lighting was not very effective. I was about half way down through one carcass when from the other side of the hog came the long blade of a very large butcher knife. It went right by my right eye and actually grazed my cheek.

Someone had decided to help by cutting through from the outside. All activity ceased until it was thoroughly understood that only one could do the splitting.

Lee Vance and I both heaved a sigh of relief as the truck, loaded with the six halves of hogs, disappeared down the long driveway and headed for the Bronx.

#112: PAINTING A PIG'S RUMP AND THE BIDDING FOR #13

[Some parts of this column, though not as graphic as #111, may be troubling to those sensitive to the treatment of animals.]

You may be tired of reading about Waldee Farms, so I will promise that this one will wind it up. There was one more incident concerning the hogs that shows yet another method of preparing them for table use. It was not as gory as the one involving the five couples from The Bronx [Dispatch #111] but almost as brutal.

On this occasion, two very rough-looking men appeared one day, just a week following the first butchering episode. Lee Vance sold them two of the remaining large hogs.

These men were also from somewhere in New York. They made arrangements to return the following week to pick up their hogs. They did not request that they be butchered at the farm, so Lee supposed that they would just crate the hogs and haul them away. This was not the case, but it was comforting for me to know that my services were not required in this transaction.

On the appointed day, the men returned with a station wagon and no crates so it was apparent that the hogs would not be alive when they left Waldee Farms.

It was a terribly cold winter day and the wind blew right from the North Pole. I watched the proceedings from the shelter and comfort of the cow barn, as Lee led the men to the pig house. They carried a heavy rope and when a few minutes later, a large hog burst through the door of the pig house, the rope was secured to one of its hind legs. The man was big and strong but he had an awful time holding the lunging hog.

The other man reached into the station wagon and produced a rifle that appeared to be a 22 calibre. Because of the bobbing and weaving of the hog's head, the man had to change his aim several times, being careful not to get his partner in the line of fire. Eventually he was successful in planting a bullet between the eyes of his victim. The hog dropped and the man shot twice more to be sure. The same procedure was used to dispose of the other hog.

Now came a complete departure from anything I have ever witnessed.

There was no attempt to bleed the hog or dress it. The men asked Lee for some hay and he went to the barn to get it. Then before my unbelieving eyes, they piled the hay around the dead hogs and you just knew that when they lit the hay, it was not for the purpose of keeping the carcasses warm. Yes, it was just a vain effort to burn the bristle from the skin of the hogs.

There seemed no end to their innovations and when this plan fizzled, one of the men bought a blow torch from the station wagon, in yet another approach to ridding the hogs of their bristles.

I'm not sure how well the bristles burned, but the pork must have been half cooked by the time the charred remains were loaded in the station wagon. We came to the conclusion that during those war years, there must have been a lot of weird people roaming the highways in search of pork.

There are several ways of sticking a hog and none of them are pleasant. The best job was done by a Frenchman, who lived in Katonah back in the 20's. His name was Jacques, but everyone called him "Frenchy," and he traveled from farm to farm at butchering time.

He was a marvel with the knife and limited his activities to just sticking the hog. The rest of the work was done by others. With the hog flat on its back, he would sit on his belly and with unerring aim, dispatch the animal with one thrust of the blade.

Nothing unusual about that except that Frenchy always wore a top hat and full dress suit and never got spattered. He was as neat at the end of the day as when he started.

Many of the people in Ridgefield back in the butchering days used to stick the hog in a pan and they would then make blood pudding from it.

Meanwhile, Walter Deiches had a birthday and shortly thereafter he began to receive job offers. One call was received on the dairy phone one afternoon from one of New York's largest stores. The figure I heard was \$40,000 and Walter turned it down, calling it peanuts. This was 1944 and you better believe that kind of money was not considered peanuts at that time.

At any rate, it became clear that Walter was making ready to reenter the business world and the days of Waldee Farms were numbered. Early in April we were informed that he had engaged the finest auctioneer in these parts to conduct the sale of livestock.

The choice of Mr. Granger was a wise one as he had a big following and it assured a good attendance from all over the area.

The sale was held on April 29 and it came just one year after the birth of Waldee Farms. We were surprised that it had lasted a year, it had really cost a lot.

Granger came to the farm on the day prior to the sale and made sure everything was in order. For a man of his stature, this would not be considered a large auction. His plan would be to sell the chickens first and try to sell them all to one buyer. If this was not successful he would offer them in lots of 100 and then in lots of 50.

The pigs would be sold next and then the cows. For purposes of identification, numbers were assigned to each cow and pig. The numbers were painted on the side of each pig and on the rump of each cow.

This was easy to do on the cows but the pigs were another matter. They took a lot more time and a great deal of paint, but the boys enjoyed the exercise and the excitement.

Walter wanted a large number one, painted on the bull's rump and also requested that I select one cow for him to keep at his Branchville Road residence.

There was one little Jersey that produced very rich milk, though not a great deal and seemed like an ideal family cow. Her name was Friday, and Walter immediately asked that I bid her in for him, in the event that he was not there when she entered the sales ring. We took one look at the number, 13, that Mr. Granger has assigned her and flatly refused, telling Walter he better be there.

The weather was fine and there was a good crowd at the auction. The chickens were quickly sold, as out of the original 4,000, there were now only 800. What a loss!

The pigs were next and the boys had great fun singling them out, by number, for the bidders. It is interesting to note that pork, which had been gold the previous fall, was now mud. Pigs that could have been sold as babies for \$25 each, were now bringing the same price, after consuming several thousand dollars worth of grain. Another big loss.

Walter was not present when the auction started and several cows had been sold before we noted his Ford station wagon turning from Old South Salem Road into the long driveway that led to the barn.

He had timed it well as number 13 would soon be coming up. When she entered the ring, we were surprised at the spirited bidding. We felt that she would bring \$200 tops.

The bidding started at \$100 and went quickly to 300. 400, and finally 500 as two bidders at opposite ends of the crowded barn yard competed for the little brown cow.

It was the highest price, and Walter — and his wife Nancy — were bidding against each other.

#113: A HISTORIC HOUSE AND APPLE

In the past 276 years, Ridgefield has developed an admirable history. Much of the history concerns the many fine people who were a part of it and much of it is retained in the grand old homes that still line some of the older streets.

One such structure is now the home of the William H. Casey family at 536 Main Street. A great part of the history of this elegant example of early architecture revolved around the Gilbert family. Members of this fine old Ridgefield family had lived in what we have always called “The Gilbert House” for almost a century and a half.

Bill and Valerie Casey have done considerable research on this grand old home and the families that have lived in it. They have a document from Mrs. Harriet Walker of Simcoe, Ontario, Canada. Mrs. Walker is a direct descendant of the original Gilberts who came to Ridgefield in the early 1700’s. Mrs. Walker, who fittingly lives on Gilbert Road in Simcoe, furnished some valuable information on the Gilbert family.

We are also greatly indebted to Walter Boyce for information about the Gilbert family and the Gilbert House. Walter’s interest stems from the fact that he is also a direct descendent of the Gilbert family. His grandmother, Emily Davis, and her sister, Jennie Gilbert, were the last of the venerable Gilbert family to occupy the house. He recalls many of the happy hours he spent with the lovely old ladies when his parents were away,

The actual year that the house was built may be questionable, as well as the original appearance, for some additions were put on the house and some remodeling was done through the years.

It seems fairly well established that it was built by Benjamin Stehbins, who lived where Casagmo is now, right after the close of the Revolutionary War. The house has a simple Federal form that was modernized many years ago with the Greek Revival style and has been recognized by the Connecticut Historical Society as an architecturally significant home and so documented in the archives of the State of Connecticut.

Benjamin Stebbins had a daughter, Sarah, and she married Dr. Amos Baker, who was a surgeon’s mate in Colonel Philip Burr Bradley’s Regiment in the war. Doctor Baker and Sarah lived in the Gilbert House following the war and the property passed from the Stebbins family to the Bakers.

As everyone knows, Dr. Amos Baker was an authentic hero of the Revolution and was one of the local men who participated in the Battle of Ridgefield. This famous battle can be successfully argued as being the one actual land battle fought in the state during the entire war.

There were other doctors in Ridgefield before Dr. Baker, but there seems little doubt that he was the very first surgeon. He was known as a very religious man and used pew No. 19 in the early Congregational Church. The church was located near the spot now occupied by the War Memorial, at the junction of Main Street and Branchville Road. The church was set in the middle of Main Street and the road ran on either side.

Later on, the Doctor was active in the establishment of the Methodist Church in Ridgefield. In fact, some of the early organizational meetings were held in the kitchen of what is

now the Casey home. The church became the third Methodist Church to form in all of the New England states.

There was an old grist mill at Mamasasco in Scotland District where local families took their grain to be milled into flour. On one occasion when Dr. Baker waited for his flour, he noticed a nearby apple tree that was loaded with very attractive fruit. He sampled one of the bright red apples and was agreeably surprised to find that it tasted every bit as good as it looked.

Dr. Baker remembered that tree and returned early the following spring and cut several scions from the tree. He had several apple trees on his Main Street property that ran all the way back to Grove Street and he proceeded to graft them with the scions from his favorite tree.

The grafts were successful and the all-purpose Baker apple was born. The Baker apple was destined to become popular all over the country. It was good to eat just as it came from the tree, or as a baked apple, or in a pie, or as applesauce and it also made excellent cider.

Years ago people used to buy their apples by name as they had varied uses. Each variety of apple had its own particular purpose and they were different both in appearance and in taste. The red and the yellow delicious and the McIntosh are probably the most popular today, as applesauce and apple pies are more often bought in the grocery store than baked in a housewife's kitchen. We had ten acres of apple trees at Hillscroft Farm on St. John's Road and as well as the three varieties mentioned above, we had the old fashioned sheepnose, greenings, northern spy, Wolf's River, Baldwin, Cortland, Baker, fall pippin, and russet.

Greenings were the favorite pie apple and a combination of the fall pippin and russet made the best cider. The sheepnose resembled the red delicious in shape and in color, but there the similarity ended. I would be surprised if there are any sheepnose trees left in Ridgefield. They were very dry and rather tasteless, but there were those who liked them above all others.

At any rate Amos and Sarah Baker had a daughter, Laura, and she married Abner Gilbert Jr., about 1805. Abner built what is probably best known as the Pierrepont house, across the street from Casagmo, about 1812. The Bakers left their home to Abner and Laura and since both houses then belonged to the Gilberts. The Pierrepont house was called the Gilbert Homestead and the Casey home was known as the Gilbert House.

Abner had a brother-in-law, Richard Randall, with whom he ran a store on the east side of Main Street, just south of the Pierrepont House, under the firm name Richard Randall Company.

It should be noted that Abner was a very enterprising man and took a very active part in town affairs. He was selected as a delegate to the Constitutional convention of 1818.

Abner and Laura Gilbert had a son they named Abner and they left him the Gilbert House. When the younger Abner married Frances Lewis, they went to live in the Gilbert House.

When they passed on they left the Gilbert House to their children, William A. and Lizzie.

In 1893, William bought out his sister's share and became the sole owner of the Gilbert House. William was very prominent in Republican politics but never held an elected office.

(Continued Next Week)

#114: FROM TEA TO TOURISTS: LIFE AT GILBERT HOUSE

It was William A. Gilbert (1853-1921) who thoughtfully preserved the documents that contained information about Ridgefield's part in the War of 1812. Our town's participation in the Revolution was recorded in much better fashion than activities during the second war with England.

William, who was born in the Gilbert House on [538] Main Street, saved records that reveal that Ridgefield had its own Peace Party, which actively opposed participation in the War of 1812. Interest in this conflict mounted to a point where a celebration, or rally, was planned in 1813. The organizational meeting was at the Amos Smith Tavern, located where the Ridgefield Library now stands.

Sunday, July 4, 1813, was selected as the day for the demonstration. Members of the Peace Party refused to attend, using as their excuse that the day was inappropriate, and asked that the affair be held on Monday, the 5th. However, their members were few, and apparently ineffective, for the committee voted to proceed without them.

There was a military demonstration and Abner Gilbert read the Declaration of Independence and William Hawley read Washington's Farewell Address. James Perry read the Toasts of the Day, but unfortunately they were not included with the material that William Gilbert saved. They certainly would have made interesting reading today.

William was a scholarly person and after attending Ridgefield's public schools, continued his studies at the High Ridge Institute for Boys. This school was conducted by William O. Seymour in his home, the Peter Parley house, now the residence of the Preston Bassetts.

William Gilbert became one of Ridgefield's leading horticulturists. After his schooling was completed, William was a clerk in the store of Seymour and Barhite. He was a smart young man and saved enough money so that in 1896 he was able to become a partner with Richard W. Osborn in the lumber business. The business would be the forerunner of our present Ridgefield Supply Company.

William's wedding to Jennie Pehrson was not of the May-December variety. Perhaps it was more like a November-December romance since William was 66 and Jennie was certainly not a school girl when the knot was tied on Jan. 26, 1919 [Editor's note: She was 48]. Neither Jennie nor he had ever been married before.

Unfortunately the marriage was of short duration as William was to pass on less than three years later. Following his death, Jennie and her widowed sister, Emily Davis, joined forces and turned the Gilbert House into the very charming Colonial Tea House.

Colonel Louis D. Conley was in the process of organizing the great Outpost Nurseries in the 20's and it was to be the town's largest commercial operation up to that time. This enterprise was to cause the need for lodging space for some of the personnel connected with it. The two little old ladies, with a sharp eye for business, changed the sign in front of the Gilbert House from the Colonial Tea House to The Colonial Tourists.

Walter Boyce remembers many of the boarders that patronized Colonial Tourists and wrote to some of them to secure some of their remembrances of the old house. There were some whose stay at Colonial Tourists was for only a short period of time, but Joseph M. "Woody"

Woodcock, Charlotte Sandman, Jerry Rathjen and Bob Mitchell had rooms there for several years and were considered members of the family.

Charlotte was executive secretary at Outpost Nursery and the other three were salesmen at the nursery.

There was an old upright piano in the main hall that no doubt had been used by Emily's daughter, Lottie Davis, who was to become Mrs. Willis Boyce and mother of Walter. Like her husband, Lottie was an excellent musician and specialized in piano, which she taught to many young Ridgefielders, including Jim Bacchiochi.

Charlotte Sandman was also a fine pianist and provided great entertainment for the people at Colonial Tourists with selections of the day such as The Old Spinning Wheel, Easter Parade and Wagon Wheels. There were also the evenings when they enjoyed sing-alongs with Charlotte at the keyboard. These festive occasions were interrupted during the muggy summer months when dampness caused by the many large trees that surrounded the house would get into the piano keys, causing them to stick.

Others who stayed at Colonial Tourists from time to time were George Tuoti, Bob Buhl, Bob Templeton, Phil Piser, Steve Zvoncovic, and a lady known only as Miss Chestnut. She must have been some kind of character, as Walter remembers she came from some western ranch and always wore leather pants and boots and a large cowboy hat.

When the Ridgefield Playhouse opened some 45 years ago, where the Village Bank is now, Steve Zvoncovic was the first projector operator. Bob Templeton came from Oregon and was noted as a teller of tall tales. George Tuoti was an Outpost salesman and when the nursery closed down, George started his own nursery business. Mrs. Tuoti still lives in Ridgefield. Phil Piser came from Massachusetts to help clear the town of the debris left by the great hurricane of 1938. Phil looked at the town and liked what he saw, including May Moore, whom he married and they are now good neighbors of mine.

There is a feeling that Harvey Tanton stayed for a brief time at Colonial Tourists. If so, then the old house spawned two of our first selectmen as both he and Woody were not only salesmen for Outpost but also served in our town's top office.

All of these nice people must have been intrigued with their friendly hostesses. Both Jennie and Emily were great soap opera fans. Of course the soap operas at the time came through the speaker of a radio rather than from the picture tube of a TV. One thing was for sure, while there was much frivolity at Colonial Tourists, it was necessary to remain completely silent as the two ladies inched forward in their chairs, hands cupped to their ears, to catch every thrilling word from such favorites as Our Gal Sunday, Portia Faces Life, The Guiding Light, Just Plain Bill, or Ma Perkins.

These programs were of only 15-minute duration, most of which was taken up by commercials that kept Jennie and Emily fidgeting for the resumption of the romantic stories. This form of entertainment would be considered very quaint today, especially when compared with the hard rock music that blares forth from portable and auto.

#115: COUNTING CARS, PLAYING PINOCHLE, & FIREWATER FOR FIRE CHIEF

We have been writing about the various ways in which the people at Colonial Tourists were able to entertain themselves. There was the piano and the little Atwater Kent radio.

Walter Boyce remembers that, as a little boy, he sat on the front porch with his grandmother Emily Davis and counted cars. Walter would count the cars going north on Main Street and Emily would count those going south. There were not so many cars in those days, but enough for their quaint little game.

Then there were the more adult games such as Chinese checkers, regular checkers and Old Maid, but the favorite game was pinochle. Sometimes they would have several pinochle games going at one time.

Players in these games were not only Emily, Jennie and the roomers, but neighbors as well. Essie, Charlie and Amos Reed lived across the street on the corner of Gilbert and Main and were regular visitors at Colonial Tourists, as were the people from the Olcott estate next door. The personnel at Olcott's changed quite rapidly and some of the card-players were Bert Anderson, Ed Holt, Owen and Evelyn Wright and their children, Peter and Yvette, and Mrs. Hall who took care of Miss Olcott's prize poodles.

Jennie and Emily were such avid pinochle players that they hated to have the games end. Jennie was not averse to tricking the players into continuing the games long past bed-time. She would slyly turn back the clocks and the unsuspecting contestants would think they were going home at 10:30, whereas it was actually the wee hours of the morning when the playing stopped.

The four regular roomers — Charlotte, Woody, Jerry and Bob — all had fireplaces in their rooms and Jennie or Emily were always sure, in cold weather, to have a fire going in each room when the roomers came in from their day's work. We call them roomers rather than boarders for boarders get meals along with their rooms. Roomers never developed the boarding house reach.

The two ladies were very proficient in the kitchen but were getting along in years and the task of feeding all these people would have been too much for them. During these years, Rudy and Mrs. Hurzeler were operating the Ridgefield Bakery, where Roma Pizzeria is now. Marie and Bertha Hurzeler remember how their mother used to cook meals for the help at the bakery.

When Woody heard about these scrumptious dinners he persuaded Mrs. Hurzeler to cook for Charlotte, Jerry, Bob, and himself. This opened a new door and as word spread around town, the bakery quickly became a restaurant as well.

Mention of the fireplaces reminded Woody of an incident that could have ended the glorious history of the grand old Gilbert House. Charlotte received a large box of china that was well-packed in excelsior. When the unpacking was completed she decided to burn the excelsior. The fireplaces had not been used for several months and when she filled hers with the volatile material, plus the box, the result was a flash fire that ignited the soot in the flue of the chimney. The walls of the house got real hot as a jet of fire arose six feet above the chimney top.

A call was put in to the ever-faithful Ridgefield Volunteer Fire Department and within minutes they responded, accompanied by Chief Ellsworth Brown. The fire was quickly extinguished and the firemen returned to the firehouse but without the chief. Someone had produced a bottle of firewater and Brownie remained till it was finished and he departed only when a promise for a repeat performance for the following year was extracted.

In a previous column we mentioned a letter the Casey family received from Harriet Walker. Mrs. Walker lives in New Brunswick, Canada, and is a direct descendant of Isaac

Gilbert, who was born in the Gilbert Homestead (Pierrepont House) in 1742. Her letter contains a fine history of the Gilbert family and though it is too lengthy to reproduce here, there are anecdotes that will prove to be interesting to some.

Isaac was Mrs. Walker's great great grandfather and when he was grown, became the only Loyalist in the Gilbert family. Of course, Isaac was on the losing side and when the Revolutionary War was over, he had to move along with thousands of other Loyalists. He had married Mary Rowland in 1771 and they had three children. Mary came from Redding, as did the late Joseph S. Rowland, who was once our next door neighbor and whose wife, Alice, became a state senator from this district.

At any rate, Isaac and his family migrated to New Brunswick but left their youngest, a three-year-old girl, in the care of a local family. After having seven more children, they moved to a newly opened "Long Point Settlement" along Lake Erie and proceeded to build their frontier-type log cabins.

Mrs. Walker's great grandfather (Isaac II) used to walk all the way to Ridgefield each autumn to visit his relatives. He walked 60 miles each day, 10 miles before breakfast and then a considerable distance after supper. It is plain to see that these were very hardy people.

Meanwhile, back to Colonial Tourists where Walter Boyce remembers Dino Giardini mowing the lawn and Howard and Fred Williams doing maintenance work and Charley Russell delivering ice up the old stone steps at the southeast corner of the house. I can remember delivering milk up those same old stone steps and kindly Emily would always ask me in to have milk and cookies. She no doubt forgot that I had a whole truckload of milk standing outside.

Before milk delivery started, the two ladies had their own cow and I think her name was Molly. Jennie used to milk Molly and take care of her. Molly supplied things other than just milk, which when applied to their big asparagus bed, produced the finest spears ever seen of that delectable food.

When Colonial Tourists closed, it was purchased by John Jay Pierrepont who lived across the street and wanted to keep the historic property from being developed. He did a considerable amount of renovation on the old house, all in good taste, and deserves great credit for its preservation.

Dr. and Mrs. Theodore Safford made this fine house their first home when they came to Ridgefield in 1951 and for the past 31 years Bill and Valerie Casey have kept it going with what is best described as tender loving care.

#116: THE MOVING OF ORENECA INN & THE MAN WHO PEEPED ON NUNS

A couple of weeks ago, there were some photos in The Press of the Gaeta Shopping complex that was recently sold. They brought to mind some things you might find of interest. One picture was of the old Odd Fellows Hall that now houses Marshall's, Rodier's, Cortina's, Century 21 Associates, Gigi's, and Rubin Associates.

At one time it was the site of one of several inns that were located along Main Street. The original inn at this location was a large three-story structure, not four as The Press reported recently, that was operated as The Oreneca Inn by Harvey K. Smith after the Civil War. The Dyckman family purchased it by the mid 1870s and it became known as The Dyckman House.

The name was changed again in the late 1880's when it was purchased by James Thompson and was then called The Thompson House. Another label was attached in the early 90's when J.O. Poole bought it and it became The Ridgefield Inn. In the mid 90's the place was sold again to Mrs. Sidney (Lydia) Ruggles and she changed it back to its original name, Oreneca Inn.

Mrs. Ruggles was probably the most successful of the hotel managers and kept the place going until the turn of the century. She accommodated both permanent and part-time guests. It was at a time when the wealthy families in the city were discovering beautiful Ridgefield and Oreneca Inn offered a convenient place for them to stay while they selected a suitable place to build their "summer cottages."

As the 20th century dawned, Lydia Ruggles apparently tired of the quite arduous duties attendant to the operation of an inn and leased Oreneca to the Ridgefield Land Improvement Co. A few years later the large building was sold to Samuel S. Denton.

S.S., as he was called, was about as sharp as any businessman Ridgefield ever had and could see dollars in most anything. When he died some 40 years ago, he must have been just about the largest property-owner in town. His exploits would fill a good-sized book.

At any rate S.S. had plans for the old inn. No project was too big for him to tackle and he always had the dependable Caro H. Northrop for assistance. Caro had the reputation of being the best building-mover for miles around. He would guarantee to move any building without cracking the plaster. There were those who said that you could set the dining room table and when the building reached its destination, the knives forks and dishes would all be in their original positions.

Caro and his son Reed, along with S.S. and his right hand man, Elbert Ferguson, proceeded to jack up the old inn and then slid long heavy timbers under it. Then the timbers, plus the building, were jacked up again, this time high enough to slide more timbers under those on which the building rested. Round wooden rollers were then placed between the timbers.

Several sets of large block-and-tackle were used and guyed to nearby trees or other stationary objects. The leverage provided by all the pulleys made it comparatively easy for Caro's trusted team of horses to draw the big structure which was now ready to move.

The path of travel was to the west where S.S. had thoughtfully beforehand purchased land on which to set the house. He must have gotten permission from the Biglows (Mrs. Ballard's parents) to cross their fields on the way to High Ridge.

Negotiating the hill on Abbott Street would prove to be difficult as it necessitated raising the east side of the building to keep it level at all times.

It was slow work as the building moved only a few feet with each pull of the team and after each pull the block and tackle had to be reset and the timbers had to be constantly replaced as the house moved over them.

Caro Northrop was a patient man and the large three-story building finally came to rest on the corner of High Ridge and Abbott Street where it still rests today.

It served as the Denton family home for many years and evidence to that effect is still visible in the stepping stone on the south side of the house. The steps are a relic of bygone days when they were used to make entry into the great horse-drawn carriages easier. On the front side of the steps in raised letters is the name S.S. Denton.

During the mid 50's, Saint Mary's School was built and the nuns who taught at the school took over the Denton house as their convent. Later on an addition was put on the school for the nuns and the convent then became an apartment house which it is today.

The nuns' stay at the Denton house was not without incidents, some of which they probably would like to forget. At the time, there were no less than three Peeping Toms operating within a short distance of the convent.

One whom we will call Peeping Tom No. 1. was a prominent man in town. In fact he held a public office at the time but could not resist the temptation to look in on other people. The nuns were in a state of shock one evening when they discovered him peering in the window at them.

The police were called but the peeper heard them as they left the Town Hall where they were quartered at the time. He made a quick exit from the area and though there had been a light snow he had covered his tracks well.

The urge to peep must have been very strong in this man and he returned many times and kept the telephone lines between the convent and Town Hall busy. On each occasion the result was the same as Peeper No. 1 was an exceptionally fast runner and always made it back to his home, just a couple of blocks away. It is doubtful that any policeman could have caught him in a straight race.

Finally came an occasion to which I was a witness. The approach was made without the benefit of flashing lights and sirens. This time Peeper No. 1 must have been over-confident and waited too long to make his departure. When the first car pulled in to Abbott Street, he could be clearly seen standing at the window of the convent.

As the lights of the car were turned to high beams, Peeper No. 1 took off at a fast pace and was hotly pursued. As luck would have it Mrs. Foley had taken in her wash but left up the clothes line. As he raced through the yard the clothes line caught the peeper under his chin and flipped him to the ground. He quickly scrambled to his feet, continued his flight and escaped, but not before he was clearly recognized.

No arrest was made but it was noted that his position in public office was quickly filled by another person.

Nothing more now on Toms No. 2 and No. 3.

#117: IN THE DAYS OF CIRCUSES AND DANCING AT ODD FELLOWS

It was 1903 when the Oreneca Inn was moved from Main Street to High Ridge, and it left an open lot that would remain vacant for some 25 years. It made a swell place for kids to play ball and many events of a temporary nature through the years.

Traveling shows used to visit Ridgefield on a regular basis during the early years of this century. There were circuses of the smaller variety, such as the Hunt Brothers and Sells Floto, and they pitched their tents on one of the many lots that were available at the time. One of these lots was east of the library where later on the Ridgefield Playhouse was built, which is now the Village Bank. On several occasions they used what we called Con Nevin's lot at the top of Prospect Street Extension.

The best and most level location for these shows was the lot left vacant when Oreneca moved from Main Street. It later became known as Odd Fellows Lot, when that organization purchased it in the 20's.

When compared with the Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey circus, the shows that played in Ridgefield would be considered tiny. However, to those who never saw "The Greatest Show On Earth," the little shows provided great excitement. These shows might boast only one elephant, perhaps one or two large cats, a few horses and ponies, a dog act, and the usual group of clowns. All in all, they provided great entertainment for the local kids.

Sometimes a boy might be lucky enough to get a job carrying water for the horses and the elephant in exchange for a free ticket to the show. If there happened to be a camel with the show, the waterboy really earned his ticket.

One show that came each summer could have been properly called a one-man show as it consisted of just one man and a little black pony. The man's name was Hammond and the great little pony was called Black Bear. They performed most times in a tent on Odd Fellows lot, although we remember one appearance they made on the stage at the town hall.

I guess I liked the pony show best of all. We were too young to understand that the pony did everything on a signal from his master. It seemed the pony was of super intellect as he performed his seemingly endless number of tricks, adding, subtracting, and dividing numbers that were supplied by those in the audience.

Without our knowing it Mr. Hammond would order Black Bear to start pawing out his answer as well as when to stop. We were greatly disappointed later on when we learned that this great exhibition of mathematical prowess on the part of the cute little pony was actually only a demonstration of Hammond's sign work.

Another great attraction that came to Odd Fellow's lot was the Chautauqua. This organization put on a show that was part musical, part lecture, and the speakers placed considerable emphasis on religious teaching. There is still a Chautauqua Institute in a town of that name near Jamestown, N.Y.

At one time the lot was the site of Ridgefield's only public tennis courts. They were operated by the late Harvey Keeler who played a great game of tennis and spurred considerable interest in the sport. After the construction of Odd Fellows Hall (Gaeta Bldg.) in the late 20's, the tennis courts continued at the rear of the building.

The lot proved to be an ideal place for a carnival and both the Odd Fellows and the Volunteer Fire Department would each hold one every year. Along with the various games of chance there would be a temporary dance floor that was erected in the middle of all the activity. Ballroom dancing was very popular at the time and dance contests were held with trophies offered as prizes to the best couple. At first, winners were selected according to the amount of applause they generated. To prevent its becoming a popularity contest, the system was changed and judges were appointed to make the selections.

Some of the musicians who played for dancing were Willis and Lottie Boyce, Allen Sterry, Charles Wade Walker, Joe Venus, Page Kange, Victor Davis, Aldo Casagrande, Stephen DisPence, Harold Davis, Artie Seymour, and the great Mary Fox.

By dint of a lot of hard work, the Odd Fellows were able to raise enough money to construct the present building and when it was completed, the dancing was moved inside.

Ballroom dancing remained popular and orchestras such as Jack Miller's, Frank Volk's and Charlie Sterling often played for dancing. It was noted that no matter which orchestra played, Andy Bloomer was always in the sax section. Some of the more memorable dances were sponsored by the late Francis D. Martin. Marty and Doris were great dancers and he always felt that there were too many people who just did not do enough dancing.

One of Marty's fine affairs was a Washington's Birthday dance in February of 1933. It was a program dance, and by invitation only. The program was a cute little booklet about 3 by 5 inches, with several pages on which were listed about 16 dance sets. The name of the song that would start each set was also listed in order that you would know what to expect: a slow set, a fast set, a waltz, or a fox trot.

Marty was of the belief that people should mix it up and dance with as many different people as possible. Therefore, you were allowed to dance the first and last set with the partner that accompanied you to the dance, but in between it had to be someone else. The trick was that you must approach your prospective partner for each set and have that person sign the program, with a tiny pencil that was attached by a braided cord, in the space provided.

I still have my program and it starts and ends with the name Miss May Moore. Charlie Sterling's orchestra played and as expected, Andy Bloomer played his sax.

In later years, the Odd Fellows found another source of revenue when interest in square dancing was revived. They were held each Saturday night in their hall and were jam-packed with people from all of the surrounding towns as well as local people who enjoyed these vigorous dances.

Some of the musicians who played for the early square dances were Allen Sterry, Frank Lancaster. Mrs. Harry E. (Elsie) Hull, and Andy O'Connor. Al Broadhurst and Elisha Keeler were the callers and they had a great following. In later years, the Tulipani boys [Sagebrush Serenaders] — Aldo, Albert, Alfred and Johnny, along with Bud Morrisroe and his violin — became a popular fixture at these Saturday night affairs.

#118: WHEN HOPI WITH RATTLESNAKES DANCED AT 'ODD FELLOWS LOT'

We have been writing about the many events that took place on the Odd Fellows lot back in the 20's. One very interesting exhibition was put on periodically by a group of genuine Indians. They were of the Hopi tribe that originated in the south west and these particular Pueblo Indians came from northern Arizona.

The Hopis were very proud of their culture and were skillful potters as well as being expert in weaving baskets and blankets. On their visits to Ridgefield, they brought along their wares and sold them as they went along. They put on a good show and did not charge admission. They did accept contributions, which along with the sale of their goods gave them a comfortable livelihood.

The Indians traveled from town to town in horse drawn wagons and always created great excitement, especially among the young people, as they paraded along the street. The tribe was noted for being industrious and many of the Indians were considered excellent farmers, but those who made the trips were probably selected because of their dancing ability or perhaps because of their skill at handling snakes.

The Hopis worshipped various forces of nature and were influenced by the supernatural. The purpose of their shows was to attract customers for their wares and time was allowed between the three events to make their sales. With their brilliant costumes and painted faces, the Hopis put on a show that consisted of very colorful exhibitions of their War Dance, the Rain Dance and the very exciting Snake Dance.

The Snake Dance was held until last and took place after the Indians were convinced that they had sold as many of their wares as possible. Since a permit would be required today for their huge campfire, they might not be able to perform.

People were still talking about Lindbergh's dramatic flight over the Atlantic in late May of 1927 when the Hopis landed in town with ten or a dozen wagons, drawn by multicolored horses. They set up camp on the Odd Fellows lot and planned to stay for two days and nights. A large crowd was attracted, especially for second and final night performances.

It should be noted that the Indians used live rattlesnakes in staging the Snake Dance. The snakes still had their fangs and had not been deprived of their poison glands. There were skeptics who felt that the poison glands had been removed. This, however, was refuted by an examination that was made by expert reptile handlers. There were also people who felt that the snakes had been doped in some manner, but this was also disproved.

Rattlesnakes are not noted for being good natured and one could not help but wonder what action would be taken if a mishap occurred. No doubt the Hopis had some home spun remedy to combat the poison and they all carried knives which you could imagine they would use in case of an accident.

We understand that there were very few instances where a performer was bitten and are happy to report that none occurred during their stay in town.

One thing we noticed was that all the snake dancers were young braves. Also none of the women were allowed to handle the snakes. Of course, this was long before the equal rights movement. The Hopis still perform their dances on the reservation and perhaps by now the squaws have joined the braves in handling the reptiles.

The older members of the group either played the tom toms or sat cross legged in a circle around the dancers.

On the second night, just before the Snake Dance started, we saw in the crowd our favorite character, Jimmy Rogers. Jimmy was always ready to perform some zany trick to get a laugh so we were ready for something unusual. We have described what Jimmy looked like in other columns, so will not repeat but just say that just seeing him would elicit a hearty laugh.

It was a warm, late-spring evening but Jimmy was wearing his long khaki duster. No one was surprised at this as Jimmy could always be counted on to do something a little different.

As it turned out he had a very definite purpose in wearing his long coat. We decided it best to keep Jimmy in sight without getting too close to him.

As the dance started he began to move forward and soon was in the very front row, almost touching elbows with the dancers. It was about this time that we noted two of Ridgefield's "wild boys" and they also were working their way to the front row of spectators. We were aware that we had a setting here where an incident could easily occur.

The beat of the drums intensified as the dance neared its end and the dancers responded to the mounting excitement by actually holding the deadly rattlesnakes in their mouths. It was an

amazing display of raw courage and many of the onlookers shuddered at the prospect of seeing someone bitten by one of the snakes.

As one of the braves went gyrating by with a huge snake draped over his shoulders, he seemed to stumble, then stagger and finally he fell to the ground as the snake slithered off in the direction of the Indian ponies that were tethered nearby.

The braves were about as sure-footed as could be and for one of them to fall would be most unusual. Since this all took place very close to where the “wild boys” were standing, there was good reason to suppose that they had something to do with it.

At any rate, the brave quickly regained his footing and took off in hot pursuit of the escaping snake amidst the shouts of the terrified spectators.

It was at this point that Jimmy Rogers chose to emit a blood curdling war whoop as he pulled from his long coat (as you may have already guessed) a large replica of a rattlesnake.

Jimmy quickly wrapped the dummy around his neck and went into his own version of the snake dance, all the while yelling at the top of his lungs.

The fact that the brave had captured the live snake and returned to the scene had no pacifying effect on the crowd as the lot emptied in record time.

The Hopis left at dawn and I do not think they ever returned.

#119: THE LAST BLACKSMITH & GREATEST WALKER

*Under the spreading chestnut tree,
the Village Smithy stands.
The smith, a mighty man is he,
with large and sinewy hands,
and the muscles of his brawny arms,
are strong as iron bands.*

It was 143 years ago that Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote his famous poem. That was 43 years before Harry Marvin Thomas was born, so we can not say that the great poet had Harry in mind when he composed it. Yet, the description of the village smithy fit Harry to a T, especially the references to his honesty and sterling character.

I was less than ten years of age when I first met Harry Thomas and a friendship began that was to last all those many years. Harry enjoyed a great reputation for miles around and we felt very privileged to be included in his circle of friends. When he passed on, just a few years ago, in his 89th year, he was the last of Ridgefield's many blacksmiths. Just a few years later his wife Minolia, followed him to her reward at the age of 96.

Harry Thomas was a descendent of Benjamin Stebbins, one of Ridgefield's very earliest settlers. Members of the famous Stebbins family lived where Casagmo is now for almost 200 years. Harry's father, George M. Thomas, was a conductor on the railroad branch that ran from here to Branchville. George was only 27 when he was crushed to death while assisting the brakeman in the coupling of two railroad cars.

As reported in an earlier column, the business of hooking the railroad cars together was probably the most dangerous part of railroading. This tragic accident left Mrs. Thomas with the task of raising three children, a daughter, Edna, and two sons, Harry and Howard.

Howard will probably be best remembered as the proprietor of the West Lane grocery, where Gene Casagrande has his CasaMore store today. Sports enthusiasts will recall how Howard made those great left-handed shots in basketball games at the old town hall. For some reason, Howard would always shout "Hey" as he unerringly made those shots from either side of the court.

Harry and Minolia had three daughters, Gertrude, Esther and Marie. Gertrude is now Mrs. Lawrence Hoyt and still lives on Silver Spring Road. The Hoyts' daughter, Doris, is Mrs. George Ventres and the Ventres'son Dale is proprietor of the Ridgefield Power Equipment Shop. So Dale can easily trace his lineage back to 1714, when Benjamin Stebbins came to town.

The Thomas family has had an active participation in town affairs for many years. Harry's great grandfather, Albert N. Thomas, was town clerk for Ridgefield back in Civil War days. Albert was also an original member of the Library Club, which formed a nucleus for our present Ridgefield Library.

Albert's son Elijah L. Thomas (grandfather of Harry) succeeded his father as town clerk and also served as a judge of probate for the town. All this would seem to indicate that the Thomas family were pretty solid citizens.

At the time Harry's father suffered his fatal accident, there was no such thing as Social Security to assist Mrs. Thomas in raising her three children. When Harry was 16 he went to Purdy's Station, near Brewster, N.Y., to learn the blacksmith and farrier trades.

Perhaps we should explain for those not familiar, that a farrier is a shoer of horses, whereas, a blacksmith performs all kinds of iron work and may also engage in horseshoeing.

During his years at Purdy's, Harry worked 12 hours each day and six days each week. The shop opened at six in the morning and normally closed at six in the evening. However, if six o'clock came around and there were still horses to be shod, the farriers continued to work until they were done.

Harry was a religious man and always looked forward to Sunday. After church services he would walk the 15 miles to Ridgefield to visit his mother. He would time his return walk to Purdy's so that he would arrive in time for work on Monday morning.

Harry Thomas was the greatest walker we ever saw and even in his late 70's, he would think nothing of a Sunday walk to Danbury or Brewster. Though he was of average height, his long strides were as great as those of the long-legged giants that play basketball today. He was often offered a ride but would always, graciously, turn it down and then many times he would keep pace with the horse, whose driver had offered the ride.

Ridgefield had several real good walkers. Frank Parks Jr. took very quick steps when he was a young man and Earl Hibbart had a very smooth and graceful stride, but they could not keep pace with Harry Thomas.

He was by nature, a very friendly man, but always walked alone, for no one could keep up with those great strides. He got over the ground, at a walk, just as fast as some of the joggers that I see on the highway.

Harry was born in the old Bailey Inn that was located on Main Street on the west side almost directly across from where the Christian Science Church is now. Before he and his family moved to their new home, next to the firehouse, he walked daily from his home in Flat Rock near the Wilton town line.

He rarely wore a jacket, except in real cold weather and very seldom was seen with a hat, although when he got to his shop he would don the little black cap with the shiny visor that was the trademark of the smithy.

After Harry had finished his apprenticeship at Purdy's, he returned to Ridgefield and worked at the Big Shop for a short time. The Big Shop was, as everyone knows, at the rear of the Allan Block, where it had been moved from the corner of West Lane and Main Street, to make room for the Congregational Church. Today the old building is home to a multitude of enterprises, but at the time it served as a blacksmith shop and a carriage shop.

Soon Harry was able to open his own little blacksmith shop. It was located on the Rufus Seymour lot on Olmstead Lane about opposite from where the Piser family now lives. It was while he had this shop that he almost lost his life.

When you brought in a horse to be shod, Harry would never refuse to tackle the job, no matter how bad or unruly the horse might be. He was shoeing a real wild horse one day when he received a kick in the head that Dr. Bryon said would have been fatal if it were one half inch closer to a vital spot. Fortunately Harry was in excellent physical condition and recovered.

#120: HARRY AND THE HOOVES

When we left off in our story, Harry [Thomas] was in the process of recuperating from a kick in the head that had been delivered by a wild horse. During this period he must have wondered whether or not he was engaged in the right business. His excellent physical condition was a big factor in his recovery and the doctor suggested that he find less arduous work until his health was fully restored.

The Ox Ridge Hunt Club in Darien was looking for a farrier at the time so Harry closed his shop on Olmstead Lane and took the job. After wrestling with the great draft horses, shoeing the sleek little polo ponies was just a snap for Harry.

We have seen farriers who felt that it was only necessary to cut down the horse's hoofs and nail on the shoes. Harry was a perfectionist and settled for nothing less than a first-class job.

After removing the worn shoes, he would carefully cut and shape the hoof, just so. He would take his heavy rasp and smooth the bottom and the outer walls of the hoof. The new shoe was then placed on the hoof to size it up. The shoe was then placed in the forge and shaped until it fit the hoof perfectly.

The shoe would be red hot when Harry removed it from the forge and when he placed it on the anvil he knew exactly where to apply his hammer in order to bend it to the correct shape.

Sometimes calks were applied to the toes and heels of the shoe, to prevent the horse from slipping. The shoe was then subjected to more heat from the forge and while it was still hot, several trips would be made back and forth between the hoof and the forge to make sure that the shoe fit perfectly.

The hot shoe would burn the hoof in each instance as Harry blew away the smoke so as to observe the fit. This all looked very barbaric but really was not and caused no pain or discomfort to the horse.

To carry the shoe back and forth during this fitting procedure, Harry used a punch that had a rectangular point and was inserted into one of the nail holes in the shoe. When he was

entirely satisfied with the fit of the shoe Harry would again use this punch to clear all the nail holes in the shoe.

The punch would be set in a nail hole and then tapped with the hammer until the hole was large enough to accommodate the rectangular shaft of the horseshoe nail. Between the clearing of each hole, the punch was inserted in a hole in the large wooden block on which the anvil was set. Into this hole a piece of suet had been packed. I suppose this was to facilitate the removal of the punch from the shoe after each nail hole had been cleared.

Whatever the reason, this maneuver added to the many delightful aromas one could encounter in a blacksmith shop as the punch was hot enough to melt the suet and a gentle little cloud of smoke would arise from the anvil as each nail hole was cleared.

There were eight nail holes, four on each side of the shoe. Actually Harry only used seven nails. The back hole on the inside of each hoof was not filled as there was the danger of drawing blood because of the location on the wall of the hoof. Harry was so expert at nailing the shoe that the eighth nail was not really needed.

There was a saying that went something like this, "For want of a nail, a shoe was lost and for want of a shoe, a hoof was lost and for want of a hoof a horse was lost," etc. This did not apply to Harry's workmanship and we do not recall any of his horses ever "throwing a shoe."

As each nail came through the hoof as it was being nailed, Harry would twist off the end of the nail, leaving about three eighths of an inch of the nail to be bent over and "clinched."

Before clinching the end of the nail he would carefully prepare a place for the clincher by using his rasp to make a little receptacle on the side of the hoof to receive it. He was so careful and painstaking in doing this that when the job was completed, the hoof was as smooth as it could possibly be.

If a horse's hoof could be considered beautiful, then it would have to be said that when Harry was through, the hoof could be considered a thing of beauty. I think even the horses were proud of the way they looked and they probably stepped a little higher.

There were times when a horse may have had a hoof problem and Harry was expected to correct whatever it might be. Sometimes the frog of the hoof became tender or it might have an infection. The hoof might also have become dry or brittle.

Harry would cut a piece of leather to fit the shoe and before nailing the shoe he would stuff pine tar and oakum into the bottom of the hoof. The piece of leather would then be placed over this concoction to hold it in place and the shoe was then nailed over it to keep the leather in place.

This must have felt good as we can remember a horse that was very sore, looking at Harry when he had completed his errand of mercy with a look of gratitude. Harry must have sensed it as well and it is doubtful if any man before or since ever thoroughly enjoyed his own work as much as he did.

Harry was very proficient at correcting many problems that afflicted horses. The speedy driving horses seemed to be particularly susceptible to overreaching (striking their front hooves with their rear hooves as they trotted) or interfering (striking one front hoof with the other or one rear hoof with the other). Harry would correct this by making a shoe with more weight in one area than another to make the horse throw his hoof away from whatever he was striking. Many times this resulted in some very funny shaped horseshoes.

Dr. Edwin B. Van Saun had a bay driving horse that was exceptionally fast. He used to enter it in the Sunday afternoon races on Main Street, along with William R. Keeler, Henry C. Swords, George G. Haven, Edward Payson Dutton, and others. Doctor Van Saun's horse had a real problem with interfering and Harry was charged with correcting his stride to eliminate this serious problem.

Harry was a very patient man and this assignment would test his patience to the limit. He must have made at least 15 different shoes before finally correcting the interference. The shoe that eventually would prove to be successful hung in the blacksmith shop for many years after the horse was gone as proof of Harry's uncanny ability. It sure did not look like a horseshoe and caused many a comment but it enabled Van Saun to beat Haven and the great dentist was always loud in his praise of Harry M. Thomas.

#121: WHEN CHURCH-TURNED-THRIFT-SHOP WAS THE SITE OF AN ANVIL

By the start of World War I, a number of wealthy families had moved to Ridgefield and many of them still retained their horses, despite the increasing popularity of the automobile. In many instances the man who had previously been their coachman now became their chauffeur.

A great many of these families kept their horses for sentimental reasons.

John Dollar operated the blacksmith shop in the building that was formerly the Catholic church and now serves as the Ridgefield Thrift Shop. John needed a first-rate farrier to take care of the pampered horses of the Swords, the Doubledays, the Chisolms, the Lewises, the Scripps, etc. He was successful in luring Harry Thomas back from the Ox Ridge Hunt Club and a lot of horses were the happier for it.

When the war was over, Harry bought the business from John Dollar and then operated as Ridgefield's blacksmith for about half a century. The old shop had a cathedral-type ceiling and was very difficult to heat during the cold New England winters. Harry had a large pot-bellied stove as well as the fire in his forge, but in cold weather the shop could be really frigid.

There was room for about ten horses on the east side of the shop and the anvil, the forge, and material such as iron and steel, were stored on the west side of the shop. Harry also had a little office on the west side of the shop and it was located strategically near the front door. He was a smart businessman and would have the bill ready as his customers were leaving for they had to pass the office door.

The floor of the shop was heavily gouged by the iron shoes of the horses. Most of the wear occurred during the winter months. During the summer months the horses were shoes that were either flat or had toe and heel calks that were dull.

The winter shoes had very sharp calks that were either screwed into the shoes or were driven in by a hammer. They were, of course, to prevent the horse from slipping on icy pavement, but they sure cut into the floor. I would bet that those old worn planks are still there, beneath the modern floor of the Thrift Shop.

As well as the cathedral ceiling, the shop also retained the long narrow church type windows that are arched at the top. These windows have been well preserved through the years and may still be seen on both the east and west side of the Thrift Shop.

The first means of preservation for the windows was furnished by Harry himself. He was well aware that horses are, by nature, very inquisitive animals and love to explore things

with their long soft noses. So Harry took several long half-inch-round metal rods and cut them into lengths that would stretch across the windows. The ends of the rods were then placed in his forge until they were red hot. Each rod was then removed from the forge and the ends were flattened with a heavy hammer on his anvil.

While the ends were still hot, he used a punch to make a hole for a screw in each one of the ends. It should be noted that the electric drill had not yet been marketed when Harry made the holes in the rods, which were then fastened horizontally across each window, about two inches apart. The rods had the desired effect; the windows were saved and the rods remained for many years, even after the old building had become a plumbing shop.

I must have been about seven when I was irresistibly drawn to Harry Thomas's blacksmith shop. The attraction was two-fold, as the desire to be with the horses was equally as strong as the urge to add yet another customer to a fast growing newspaper route. An unexpected bonus was the happy acquisition of Harry's firm and lasting friendship.

Kids, in their efforts to be helpful, many times just get in the way. I am sure that this was the case when I tried to be of assistance to Harry Thomas. He was very good natured and overlooked my attempts to do things that were beyond my capabilities.

However, though the learning process was rather slow, I did manage to do a few little things. If a horse was small enough and gentle enough, he might look the other way while I labored at taking off the horse's front shoes. Whenever I was successful my pride knew no bounds and I might observe Harry smiling to himself.

Of course, this would inflate my youthful confidence to a point where I would feel indispensable to the operation of the blacksmith shop. However, life has its own way of reducing that feeling of self importance. It can teach a lesson that will help a young fellow stay within his limitations.

One day Arthur Northrop (Caro's brother) appeared at the shop, with his fine little bay driving mare. For me, that mare was just about the last word in horseflesh. She was bigger than a large pony, yet smaller than most driving horses. In retrospect I suppose she had many of the attributes of the great Justin Morgan. She was exceptionally well-mannered and gentle.

Harry Thomas's attention was commanded by several large draft horses that were in the shop at the time. So, it was no problem for me without attracting any attention, to pick up a small nailing hammer, a sharp chisel with which to straighten the nail ends (clinches) and a pair of pincers, for pulling off the shoes. Since I was aware that the mare was very well behaved, I approached her without trepidation and picked up a front hoof.

After eliminating the clinches, in order that the nails would slide through the hoof, I grasped the shoe with the pincers, which had one sharp jaw and one dull jaw. There was considerable pulling and twisting and finally the shoe began to separate itself from the hoof.

During all this operation, the little mare just stood there, the perfect model of a patient animal. I should have quit when I was ahead, but boylike decided to push my luck by cutting down the mare's hoof. A curved knife, used for trimming the hoof, was found and the trimming began as the walls of the hoof took on a sharp edge.

It was at this point that Matt Holmes chose to enter the shop. Matt was described in an earlier column and it was noted that he was a big man with a very loud bass voice.

On this occasion he wore a very large floppy straw hat and as he came through the door shouted a hearty hello that must have rattled the windows. The little mare jumped straight into the air and I went flat. When she landed that sharply trimmed hoof was resting on my left index finger.

Somehow I freed myself and quietly retreated out the side door where it was discovered that the bone was protruding from the end of my finger. I still have that large scar and it is a constant reminder that horse shoeing should be left to an experienced farrier.

#122: WHEN SIXTH GRADE WAS AT THE FIREHOUSE

For me, the year 1925 has to be one of the best remembered and certainly one of the most enjoyable. The previous year had been one that I would like to forget, and for the most part, I have succeeded in doing just that.

Fourth grade was as far as one could go in 1924 at Titicus School (now the Legion Hall). Therefore, in the fall of that year, we were uprooted from that friendly little schoolhouse and transferred to the Benjamin Franklin Grammar School (now Boehringer-Ingelheim [Richard E. Venus Office Building]) on East Ridge. Later on, this move caused us to appreciate the trauma experienced by little kids who had to switch from one school to another, especially when the change is from the intimacies of a tiny school to one of large proportions.

The “Big School” was not as large then as it is today, as several additions have been made through the years. However, it was big enough to be rather intimidating to a little kid. That school was, for many years, the biggest structure in Ridgefield.

One of the things that made that transition a little hard to take was the fact that the school system was suffering a severe classroom shortage at the time. This caused some mixed classes and youngsters 10 years of age were often placed in rooms with older students.

In the 1925-26 school year, the situation got so bad that several high school classes were conducted in the town hall. The effects were also felt by the lower grades and two sixth grades were installed on the second floor of the fire house, and the kids really enjoyed this.

Miss Margaret Callahan and Miss May Boland were the teachers at the firehouse. Neither of these ladies was great in stature but more than made up for that as both had an exceptionally strong will. Their voices were very commanding and they were proud of their ability to keep order in their classrooms. They were very good teachers and were dedicated to their profession.

The very first day of school at the firehouse, the teachers laid down the law. We were reminded in no uncertain terms of where we were and ordered to stay in our seats, in the event that the fire whistle was sounded.

Ridgefield was a much smaller town at that time and as a consequence there were not so many fires. It was probably more than a month before the siren went off and by that time we had become so accustomed to our surroundings that the air of expectancy so prevalent during the first couple of weeks had almost disappeared.

However, when that very eventful day finally arrived and the siren began to whirl, the unusual noise had an electrifying effect on the teachers and their pupils. This was our first electric siren and the telephone operator could set it off from her switchboard, upstairs over where the Roma Pizzeria is now [Planet Pizza]. It took a little while for the rotor inside the siren

to rev up. By the time it had reached its piercing shriek, the two teachers with arms outstretched were firmly planted in the doorways leading to the stairs.

Also at this time every pupil was on his or her feet and it became obvious that there was about to be a confrontation. Two of the boys, Bob Mulvaney, who would later become a fireman and later still, superintendent of road maintenance, and Eddie Conley, later to become a professional boxer, carefully lifted the two little teachers and set them to one side as some 50 pupils went dashing down the stairway.

We had no paid firemen at the time, but volunteers always seemed to be close at hand. Firemen were soon arriving from every direction. The excitement was intense as they clambered into the trucks. Fortunately the pupils had the good sense to stay out of the way and give the firemen room to operate.

There were four fire trucks at the time and three of them had self starters. The hook and ladder truck was an old, chain-drive Republic with solid rubber tires and it had to be cranked by hand. The Reo was a pumper and the Locomobile was a general purpose truck carrying both a pump and a few lengths of hose. The fourth truck was something else. It was a 1924 Packard and, like the Locomobile, had been converted from a limousine for use as a fire fighter and carried many lengths of hose. This great machine had 12 cylinders, a V engine with six on a side. It was without question the most beautiful-sounding engine that I have ever heard.

Like the other trucks, the Packard had no cab and the shifting levers were outside on the running board. One can only imagine how much a vehicle like this would be worth today. Although this was not an easy truck to drive, all the firemen wanted to try it. It attracted drivers the way a pretty girl attracts the boys. This caused so many contests that Chief Ellsworth F. Brown had to assign a driver for each truck with backup drivers to take over when they were not available. Arthur Dingee was assigned to the Reo and Ed Scott to the Packard. Gus Venus drove the Republic and Fritz Frinder handled the Locomobile.

Each of the trucks was equipped with a small siren that had to be turned by hand. The Packard also had a beautiful bell as a part of its warning system and the sound of that bell could be heard for miles.

Things slowly settled down after the trucks had left and we fully expected that we would now have to face the wrath of the teachers. However, they apparently were as caught up in the excitement as their pupils and we escaped without the use of the birch rod. The scene just described was to be repeated several times during the school year.

There was a small gray building in back of the fire house. It was not quite as large as a one-car garage and served as a storage place as well as a convenient place to keep a barrel of cider. Next to the little building was a very sturdy, arbor-like affair with two uprights and a cross piece on top from which hung a large heavy metal hoop or ring. A sledge hammer hung from one of the uprights. In years past it was used to call the firemen and when the hoop was struck by the hammer, proved to be an effective warning device. Many times these hoops would have a cut in them and in some instances a piece was actually cut out of them. Perhaps this caused more vibration in the ring.

With all the changes that have been made around the firehouse, this ring was taken down. We have seen it or one exactly like it on a private estate in town.

Yes, this certainly was a very eventful school year and it was thoroughly enjoyed by the students. None of them could have been as happy as I when we were moved right across the street from B.E. Sperry's Livery Stable, slightly in back of which stood Harry Thomas's blacksmith Shop.

#123: CROWDS WOULD GATHER TO WATCH HARRY SHOE THE WILD HORSE

Yes, the 1926-27 school year that we spent in sixth grade at the fire house was truly the most exciting ever. My two favorite haunts were Harry Thomas's blacksmith shop and B.E. Sperry's livery stable and then they were right across the street from our temporary classrooms. After the dark days of the previous year at the Big School, the world had brightened considerably.

One morning before school started, Miss May Boland discovered that her toothbrush was missing. She called home to see if she might have left it there and was assured that she had. Miss Boland knew that I had a bicycle so I was appointed to go and fetch the brush. Her family lived at that time on Olmstead Lane, right next door to where my family now lives.

As I peddled into the Bolands' Driveway, a very familiar aroma wafted through the air. It was from the burning soft coal in Albert Baynham's forge. Al conducted a little repair business at the rear of the property. He would not shoe a horse but did all the other things that a blacksmith was supposed to do. The smell of the smoke should have prepared me for things to come.

The toothbrush was picked up and the ride back to the fire house started. As I left West Lane and entered Main Street at the fountain, I could see but not hear a team of horses, hitched to a buckboard, entering Main Street from Branchville Road (Rte. 102). I peddled faster and realized that the reason I could not hear the horses was because they were bare-footed.

As I neared the wagon I noted some familiar signs about the driver. It just had to be Burr Sanford with his western-type hat. He never wore the ten-gallon style or the sombrero. His was a little smaller but the wide brim and its style and fawn color were unmistakably western and he always wore it at a jaunty angle, just so.

I peddled faster and caught up with the wagon as it was entering the business area. By now Burr Sanford's handsome face and ruddy complexion were plain to see and I felt excitement mounting as he turned into Catoonah Street. There was no question where Burr was going nor was there any question that there would be some intense activity at the blacksmith shop the rest of the day.

Burr Sanford was one of the famous Sanford family that at one time just about made up the whole town of Redding. He had left Redding early that morning after two men had helped him hitch the horses. It took three men to do the job as this was another pair of western horses that Burr periodically had shipped to his farm in Redding. He had been bringing in these wild horses for some years and this pair of greys had come from Wyoming without benefit of ever having been harnessed or driven, and, of course, without shoes.

Burr avoided the word "break" when referring to his association with these wild horses. He preferred to say that when he was through with them, they would be well trained, not broken. One thing was sure and that was that when they first arrived in Redding these horses could kick the stars right out of the sky.

They were right off the range where their knowledge of the human side of animal 'life had been limited to an occasional passing cowboy. Then came round-up time and the relationship between man and horse deteriorated rapidly. The closest that Burt's grays had been to a human was when a lasso settled over their heads and they were snubbed down long enough for a halter to be placed back of their ears and around their noses.

These horses were not real large animals and compared to the huge draft horses they were considered small. However, they were much larger than the ordinary range mustang. The increase in size was due in no small measure to the ranchers who had thoughtfully turned out large stallions to run with the wild herds.

It was not necessary for one to make an appointment when one brought a horse in to be shod at Harry Thomas's blacksmith shop. You just came in and took your turn. However, when Burr Sanford planned to come in, he always called a couple of days ahead so that the entire day would be reserved for the battle that never failed to take place.

When the day for Burt's horses to be shod arrived, word would quickly spread and a good crowd always assembled to see the show and nobody was ever disappointed. This is not to say that it was an official holiday or that the stores closed for the day. The stores just operated with fewer people as clerks took turns watching the show.

Andrew Bloomer Sr., Jack Whitlock and sometimes Bedie himself came over from Bedients. Of course, Dr. Van Saun left his office over the store to attend. Tom Ryan and Edgar Master Sr., represented the J. E. Ryan Company. Oscar Schultze and Howard Freer always came and even Louis Joffe would put away his needle and thread to join the crowd. William R. Keeler, Fleet and Bert Sperry were regulars and stayed most of the day. I do not believe any ladies ever attended.

Harry Thomas always had assistance with Burr Sanford's wild horses in the person of Gus Sturges. I think he was a brother-in-law of Harry Thomas and all of the Sturgeses were very good horsemen. Burr Sanford also helped and I do think that could be the reason that Harry would waste a whole day with these horses. If you did your part as a horse owner, Harry would go all the way. He was that kind of man.

I doubt that he ever charged extra for all the time used on those wild horses. However, knowing Burr to be a real good man, I would like to think that he paid Harry extra for his time and the chances he took.

It was a long ride from Redding to Ridgefield and no doubt it would have been easier for Burr to have gone to Bethel where they had a blacksmith shop or to Danbury where they had stocks. The stocks were generally used to shoe oxen but sometimes were employed in getting shoes on a dangerous horse. No doubt Burr avoided the stocks as they tended to break a horse's spirit. We learned later that the blacksmith at Bethel flatly refused to go near wild horses and with good reason. It took a lot of know-how and an equal amount of nerve to approach an animal that had every intention of kicking your head off if you would just get in the line of fire.

At any rate, I followed the buckboard and the grays into Catoonah Street, and as if drawn by a magnet I made the left turn into the blacksmith shop as all thoughts of returning to the classroom in the firehouse quickly evaporated. On this day the teacher would have to wait until lunch time to brush her teeth.

(Continued next week)

#124: HOW TO SHOE A WILD HORSE

After the long drive from Redding, one would expect that Burr Sanford's horses would be very tired, but if they were, they did not show it. While Burr held their heads, Harry Thomas and Gus Sturges carefully unhitched them from the backboard. They were then taken into the shop and unharnessed.

Most horses were shod while still wearing their harness. If they were troublesome, perhaps the britching might be removed and some were divested of their saddle and girths as well. With Burr's horses everything came off including the traces, the hames and the bridle. All that was left was the collar, which played a very definite part in the proceedings and the halter, which with these wild horses was always worn under the bridle.

As soon as the bridle was removed, it was immediately replaced by what was called a pulley bridle. Harry had acquired the pulley bridle while taking a course in horsemanship from the Professor Jesse Beery School. The crow piece that went in back of the horse's ears was about one inch wide and made of a webbing material. The bit was made of one inch rope, with large rings on either side through which a smaller rope passed, that went through a pulley and became a cheek piece on its way to meet the crow piece.

The pulley bridle was not a very pretty piece of equipment, but it was very effective in the training of a horse and proved to be valuable in securing the horse's attention. At first glance, a person might think the pulley bridle was a rather cruel gadget. However, compared to other means of acquiring and holding the horse's attention, this method was actually very humane. I'm sure you have all heard about the man who used a two by four for the same purpose.

It has been said that a horse that cannot be controlled by a pulley bridle is just uncontrollable. I am told that this bridle is still very popular today among real good horse trainers.

At any rate, the show is now ready to start and the first horse is led out of the shop and into what is now the parking area for the Thrift Shop. There would be need for a lot more room than the blacksmith shop afforded.

By ten in the morning there had assembled at least 30 people, who had come to watch the proceedings. They formed a ring around the parking area and most of them tried to be where they could beat a hasty retreat, should the occasion demand it.

At the very start, the horse was allowed to walk to the end of the bridle rope. He was then brought sharply around with a hard pull and the command, "come here."

It was amazing to see how quickly the horse learned to obey this command. In a few minutes, he was so docile that it was hard to believe that he was really a wild one. That all changed with the next step in the proceedings.

A large rope that must have been two inches in diameter was then draped over the horse's neck near the withers and thence through the collar which had thoughtfully been left in place. As soon as the rope touched the horse's neck, he must have remembered his first encounter with a rope at roundup time. The animal reverted to the wild in a matter of seconds.

There are those who feel that a horse is more dangerous with his front hoofs than with the rear hoofs. Our own experience is simply that they are more accurate with the front hoofs but

take in a lot more territory with the rear hoofs. This horse lashed out vigorously with both front hoofs, but fortunately the three men were not surprised.

The horse went raging around the yard until the pulley bridle was employed to bring him to order as the crowd scattered to make room for all this activity. The rope was then tied around the horse's neck with a bowline to prevent it from slipping and choking him. While the knot was being tied, the horse just stood there and trembled from one end to the other. He was a bundle of pent-up energy, ready to fly off into orbit.

A large leather strap with a metal ring was then put around the horse's right front hoof, near the fetlock. I guess that I may have made this sound too easy. Actually it took a considerable while to get the strap in place and several passes were made around the yard, giving ground without ever being directed to do so.

The pulley bridle played an important part in this maneuvering, but mostly it was but another exhibition of the incredible patience of Harry Thomas. Imagine if you will, trying to do a favor for someone while they are trying to kick the head off your shoulders.

If you think that a horse cannot move around on three legs, you are greatly mistaken. As soon as Harry attempted to cut the hoof and shape it, the horse would go on his hind legs with the free front leg flailing the air in what would have been lethal blows had they ever connected.

Again the bridle was put to use and Harry had a chance to fit the shoe. It would not be the polished job that Harry was noted for. Just to get the shoe on the hoof was a major accomplishment. Strange as it might seem, tacking the shoe on did not appear to bother the horse as much as having his hoof held off the ground.

As the final nail was driven home, one could get the impression that the horse had finally decided to cooperate. Nothing could be further from the truth. When the strap was transferred to the other front hoof, there was a repeat performance, every bit as intense as the first.

Finally, the front hoofs were completed and now the strap had to be put around the fetlock of the rear hoof.

No man in his right mind would attempt to walk up to one of these wild horses and attempt to place the strap around the rear fetlock. As a matter of fact, if you walked within 12 feet of the rear of one of these horses, you were courting a quick trip to the hospital — or worse.

So another rope was used with a large loop as a lasso and laid on the ground, until the horse was coaxed into putting his rear hoof into the snare. The loop was drawn tight and the kicking was fast and furious as the horse and the three men went around and around the yard.

At long last, with the performers near exhaustion and with the help of the pulley bridle, the horse agreed to have the strap applied. The rope was then passed through the ring in the strap and back through the collar until the mighty rear leg was secured.

It was still necessary to use extreme caution in taking on the shoes. By now it is after one o'clock in the afternoon and a break was made for lunch before the second horse was tackled.

Eventually the dangerous job was completed as the sun started its descent behind Sperry's Livery Stable and Burr, with his fine western hat at just the right jaunty angle, began his long ride home to Redding.

The crowd had stayed to the very end and now dispersed as Harry and Gus looked forward to a well-deserved rest and the sound of the new shoes on the hard pavement receded in the distance.

#125: THE TRICK HARRY PLAYED ON TWO MISCHIEVOUS BOYS

It has been pretty well established that Harry Thomas was a man of great patience. We have witnessed his enduring things that would have driven lesser men to distraction. On those few occasions when his forbearance was stretched beyond the breaking point, his actions were always swift and sure and someone learned a lesson.

We remember a Mr. Hotchkiss who used to enjoy sitting around Harry's blacksmith shop swapping stories with anyone who would reciprocate. He had two sons who would sometimes accompany him and they were probably seven and eight years of age. They were nice boys but like others of their age, they needed something constructive to do or they would get into mischief.

On the west side of the shop near the forge and anvil, there were four chairs generally used by teamsters as they waited for their horses to be shed. The chairs had curved backs and were very similar to captain's chairs and were exceptionally well made. They would be worth a fortune today.

Most every day, Mr. Hotchkiss could be found, tilted back in one of the chairs, while reading his newspaper. One particular August day business was slow and there were no horses in the shop when Mr. Hotchkiss and his boys arrived. Since all four chairs were unoccupied, he proceeded to make use of two of them by propping his feet in one while seated, tilting back in another. The boys scurried around the shop, getting into various things that would amuse them for the moment.

It must have been rather boring for the boys as they waited for their father to read the paper from one end to the other. They must have run out of games to play and time must have lain heavy on their hands as they searched for something that would interest them and hold their attention.

Mr. Hotchkiss paid no attention whatsoever to what they were doing. He must have been a pioneer in letting kids do their own thing. Dr. Spock's book was written many years later.

As previously noted, the building where the old blacksmith shop was, is now the Thrift Shop and before the Thomas shop was established, it had been St. Mary's Church. While serving as the shop, the building still had the cathedral type ceiling, the peak of which extended some 30 feet above the floor.

A single electric wire came all the way down from the very top of the ceiling. At the bottom end of the wire there was attached a single electric light bulb. The wire was positioned in such a manner as to allow the bulb to hang directly over Harry's anvil at about head high.

The boys decided that it might be fun to use the light bulb as a pendulum and started swinging it back and forth. The problem was that when they pulled the bulb back as far as it would go before releasing it, the bulb on its return trip would bounce off Harry's head. The boys thought this was great fun but Harry found it to be very annoying.

After being hit several times as the long wire carried the bulb back and forth, Harry suggested in a nice way that the boys find something else to play with. When the boys continued,

annoyance became harassment and Harry made his suggestion in a much stronger tone of voice. It made no impression on the boys and the father seemed oblivious to what was going on.

I found myself wondering how long Harry's extraordinary patience would hold up. Finally, after suffering a direct hit on the back of his head, Harry left the anvil and went to a large wooden box where he kept his large metal rasps when their teeth became worn down. He elected two of the bigger rasps and poked them into the hot coals of his forge, next to a couple of crowbars that he was sharpening.

It became obvious to me that Harry was about to play a trick that I had seen him perform on a previous occasion. The trick was one which was guaranteed to clear the shop in seconds. Therefore, with a knowing look at the blacksmith, I quietly left the building and waited just outside the door for what I knew would happen.

The trick was to allow the rasps to get so hot that they were just about to disintegrate. When they were just right, Harry dipped his hand into the ever-present barrel of water next to his anvil and then sprinkled some of the water on the face of the anvil. Then, with long tongs he removed the melting rasps from the forge and quickly placed them above the anvil and with the same quick motion he struck the rasps with a terrific blow from a large hammer.

The effect was devastating. There was an explosion such as would come from a good-sized cannon and the shop filled from one end to the other with red hot fragments of the molten metal. Why it did not start several fires, I never clearly understood.

At any rate, there was a second great crash as Mr. Hotchkiss went over backwards in his chair and two very terrified boys went flying out the front door of the shop as fast as their legs could carry them.

The father lay on his back until he regained his bearings and struggled to his feet, swearing a blue streak about how he knew those damn kids would cause a short circuit if they kept on playing with the light bulb. He tended to forget that he had made no attempt to stop the boys from annoying Harry with their antics.

Harry went on about his work as though nothing had happened and it is doubtful that his tormentors or their father ever learned what had actually happened. They did not stay around long enough to find out and once they were gone, Harry and I had a good laugh. It is a good bet that the boys received considerably more supervision following this incident.

There are many good stories about things that happened in Harry Thomas's blacksmith shop and with one exception the ones that I relate are ones that I actually witnessed. However, there is one that is felt to be very good that happened several years before I got to know Harry. He told me this one.

I would preface the story, which I will not have room to conclude in this column, by stating that in all the years that I knew Harry Thomas, I never heard him swear. As a matter of fact, the strongest word he ever used was damn. He used that word only once that I know of and he certainly had good reason.

Not only did Harry not swear, he did not drink and he did not smoke. This, despite the fact that some of the language used in the blacksmith shop by the teamsters was a great deal more than just salty. Somehow, he never picked up the habit and he could be considered the original Mr. Clean.

The story has to do with a horse owned by the Rev. Richard E. Shortell, and will reflect the great-personalities of both Harry and the good Father.

#126: WATCH WHAT YOU SAY AROUND FATHER SHORTELL

The Rev. Richard E. Shortell was a very prominent man in local affairs for many years. He was possessed of a very strong personality and left his mark on the history of our town.

We will not attempt to write his long and illustrious history at this time. However, Father Shortell passed on to a reward he so richly deserves just 50 years ago last month and we are reminded of a story that may be of interest, especially since we have been writing about horses and blacksmith shops. As previously stated, this is a story of an incident which I did not witness, but it was told to me by Harry Thomas and that makes it a very true story.

Father Shortell had a fine driving mare named Blossom, and Blossom presented him with a beautiful little mahogany bay colt. The colt was named Peggy and served the good Father with distinction for many years.

According to Harry Thomas, when Peggy was old enough to train, Maurice Anderson was employed to do the job. Maurice, a brother of Bert Anderson and a grand uncle of Rodney Anderson, enjoyed a reputation as an excellent horse trainer, and the best was none too good for Peggy.

After being assured that Maurice would be kind to his fine colt, Father Shortell instructed him to take as much time as was necessary and not to rush through the training.

Michael Dowling (J. Edward's father) was the sexton at St. Mary's for those many years and among his chores was the daily care of Peggy. So it is easy to see that Peggy was treated with kid gloves from the moment she was foaled.

Her training took place in the open fields, just north and west of the horse barn, now the site of a development called Victoria Gate. Preliminary training was given in the horse barn.

Peggy was given time to get used to the bridle before the rest of her harness was put on her. The first bit that was put in her mouth was made of leather rather than the conventional metal bit.

When the harness was put on, care was taken that the girths were not pulled too tight. Peggy was led around inside the barn with the harness straps flapping until she was thoroughly familiar with the weight and the movement of all the various pieces of the harness.

Once Peggy became accustomed to the feel of the harness, Maurice put her between the shafts of a small two-wheeled training cart. The shafts were carefully poked through the tugs and a little weight was applied until she accepted all these things and was ready to pull the cart.

When that great day arrived, Peggy to the surprise of no one went right off like the lady that she was. All the careful, patient handling paid off and Peggy seemed anxious to complete her training in the open fields. She had already learned the meaning of the signal to start and to stop

and soon she would learn to back the wagon, but first there would be the endless trips around the field.

All of this training had taken place on rather soft turf and shoes were not required. Soon she would be ready for the hard pavement of the highway and shoes would be a necessity.

When the day arrived for her to receive her first pair of shoes, Mike decided that since the blacksmith shop was only a short distance down the hill, he would lead her rather than hitch her to the wagon. So the pretty little filly with one of Mike's strong hands on her halter, the other on her lead rope, arrived at the shop like a kid going for its first haircut.

Later in the morning, when Father Shortell observed Mike mowing the lawn, he must have grown concerned about his little mare at the blacksmith shop in the hands of total strangers. At any rate, he decided to pay a visit to the shop in order to see for himself that Peggy was receiving all the decorum due a lady of her stature.

According to Harry Thomas, he had never met the good Father up to this time. However, like most everyone in town, he was well aware of his stern mannerisms and his rather formidable opposition to anything he considered to be wrong. It would not be unfair to say that he was a strict disciplinarian.

On this particular day, there were several horses in the shop which also meant that there were several teamsters in attendance. It was a well known fact that the vocabulary of these rough and ready horsemen was not intended for tender ears.

As Harry told the story, the men were exceptionally vocal on this day and their choice of words had no connection with a breviary. Harry went on to say that just as Father Shortell entered the shop, a particularly vile stream of profanity floated through the door.

To say that the priest was upset by the language that he heard would be a gross understatement. There was no way for him to tell which of the men had uttered the offending words. However, at that point, Harry said that he was nearest the door and more importantly he was bent over and in the process of picking up some tools of his trade from the floor. He must have presented a very inviting target and Father Shortell, who always carried a stout cane, took full advantage of it. Without hesitating he brought the cane down in a very resounding — crack — on Harry's rear.

Now it should be remembered that Harry was one man who never, ever used profanity of any kind. He must have been tempted to do so on this occasion.

However, as usual Harry kept his cool and proceeded to tell his assailant that he had made a terrible mistake. Finally from the group of men in the background came the voice of one who took the blame off Harry by admitting that he was the culprit responsible for the swear words.

With John ----'s admission and the blame properly placed, it seemed to Harry that apologies were in order. He said that he waited and was disappointed when none appeared to be forthcoming.

We asked Harry if the good father said anything at all about his obvious mistake and his reply was “Yes, he told me that I should accept that crack just in case I was ever tempted to use such language.”

After thinking it over, Harry said that he finally got a good laugh out of the incident and the two gentlemen became good friends. While we are sure that the admonishment was not needed by Harry, it was said that there was a remarkable improvement in the language used at the shop on that day.

We asked Harry if he had any problem in putting the first set of shoes on Peggy, and he said that you would have thought she had been wearing shoes for years.

“As a matter of fact,” he said, “she was a perfect lady.”

#127: TWO INTERESTING CHARACTERS FROM THE BLACKSMITH'S SHOP

It was late in 1926 when Harry Thomas decided to start building a new blacksmith shop on the opposite side of Catoonah Street. He had bought the lot just west of the firehouse some time previously. The grayish building is still standing at this time, but no doubt will have to make way for additional parking in the near future. [Ed.: Both house and shop are still there in 2021.]

Orlando Ciuccorelli built the foundation for the new shop and the carpenter work was done by William Browse Sr., Gus Sturges and Gene Scott. I never got to know Mr. Browse very well. He and his family lived in South Salem, but were very active in Ridgefield.

Mrs. Browse was an excellent singer and appeared in several local shows. Their daughters, Josephine and Vera, were also very talented, and Bill Jr. sang and acted in several plays. Bill was, like his father, a carpenter and was associated with “Bub” Finch in the construction of some very nice local homes. Bill also played on the Spartan football team, which sparked a lot of interest in the 30's.

Gus Sturges was the same man who helped Harry Thomas with the wild horses. He was a good carpenter as well as a fine horseman.

Gus did have a characteristic that must have been very painful for him. He stuttered. Without any question, he had the worst case of stuttering that I have ever encountered. This fact must not be construed to be uncharitable in any way. Like most people who have afflictions of this kind, Gus was a very nice man. However, it was actually agonizing to hear him attempt to carry on a conversation.

Those who knew Gus paid no attention but anyone meeting him for the first time would be startled when, before he could say a word, his well trimmed mustache would start to jump up

and down and his eyes would blink in time with the mustache. The problem did not end there. The first sounds that he could emit were Com, Com, Com, Quip, Quip, Kewaw, and this might be repeated before he could start to talk.

Those who knew Gus were fond of him and did not see anything funny about his grievous problem.

It was interesting that Gus could sit down and milk a cow and sing a song without missing a word, but as soon as he tried to speak, his problem returned. It was said that when he became annoyed, he could speak without difficulty and we know of two incidents where this actually happened.

There was a time when he went into a clothing store with his nephew, Ernest, to buy a suit of clothes. A clerk approached to take the order and Gus, with eyes blinking and mustache jumping, attempted to tell the clerk what he wanted.

Of course, when the clerk asked what he had said, there was a repeat performance. Finally, the thoroughly confused clerk turned to Ernest and asked that he tell him what Gus wanted. With that, Gus also turned to Ernest and said, as clear as a bell, "You will like h—; I'll tell him myself."

On another occasion, while I was superintendent at Hillscroft Farm, Gus learned that we had a bull calf, and wanted to buy it. He wanted to fatten the calf and then use it for veal.

However, the calf was not quite ready to leave its mother. So, every morning at exactly seven o'clock, our telephone would ring, and upon lifting the receiver (phones were not the compact unit that they are today), the sound coming through was Com Com Com, Quip Quip, etc.

After this was repeated several times, Gus would get squared away and inquire as to whether or not the calf was ready to go. This procedure was repeated every morning for a week.

So on this particular morning, when the phone rang at exactly seven o'clock, and I heard a familiar Com Com Com, it seemed only natural to say "Good morning Gus."

Immediately the voice came through loud and clear. "How the h—— did you know it was me?"

While there is some humor in these little anecdotes, we trust that it will be clearly understood that we are not poking fun and really had the utmost respect for this fine man. I am told that today his malady could be corrected.

There is a very sad ending to all this.

Like so many people, Gus in his later years became very hard of hearing. On an early evening in the first week of January 1954, Gus started across Wilton Road West to get his mail. Two automobiles, one traveling north, the other south, passed each other in the rapidly gathering darkness. The auto traveling north was driven by Gordon Auchincloss. After the two cars had passed, there stood 81-year-old Gus directly in the path of the Auchincloss vehicle. He died some

four hours later in Danbury Hospital. The driver was later exonerated and the accident was called unavoidable. It was all very tragic.

Gene Scott was a very interesting character. He lived on Silver Spring Road, right near the Wilton town line. For at least the last 25 years of his life, he lived all alone and attained a very old age, despite a lifestyle that was not guaranteed to provide longevity.

Gene drove a 1919 Model T Ford touring car and townspeople had long since learned to give him a wide berth when meeting him on the highway. He was still driving in his 80's and his ability to guide the old vehicle was not improved on when he had imbibed on the fruit of the grape, which he was known to do on occasion.

He was a real large man, with mannerisms that can best be described as gruff. In cold weather, because of his open car, he wore a black-and-white fur coat that had once warmed a large holstein cow. It must have taken the entire hide of that cow to make Gene's coat.

I had a little white dog that was part bull terrier. I guess just about everyone in town knew Sport as he accompanied me most everywhere I went, even to school. He was exceptionally good-natured, but at the same time he was a great fighter and when stirred up, he would grab onto an adversary with a death grip and never let go.

One day while we were at the blacksmith shop, Gene paid Harry Thomas a visit. He had been celebrating something or other and was more than a little unsteady. Apparently Sport considered him to be menacing and grabbed the lower portion of Gene's great coat. Gene spun around in an effort to dislodge the dog, but Sport hung on till he was swinging three feet off the floor.

Of course, this was all too much for Gene and there was a tremendous crash that shook the whole shop as he landed flat on the floor and Sport was disappointed to find that his quarry was not the ferocious enemy he had anticipated.

Sport's efforts to make amends by licking Gene's face as he lay there were not the least bit appreciated.

#128: HOW GENE & HIS GOAT CRASHED INTO THE SCHOOLHOUSE & A COP

We have been writing about Gene Scott, one of the carpenters who built Harry Thomas's blacksmith shop in 1926. Gene was described as a very large man with a demeanor that could be considered rather gruff.

He drove a 1919 Model T Ford touring car. He and the old car were involved in some incidents that may be worthy of note.

Touring cars, as such, seem to be things of the past. Actually they are convertible sedans. We have many convertible coupes today but the touring cars have just about disappeared and are seen mostly at antique car shows.

There was a time when most of the wealthy families in Ridgefield had at least one touring car. They were of the larger variety: Packards and Cadillacs. They were excellent for a ride through the countryside if one happened to be interested in a good view of the scenery.

These great cars had tops that could be folded back and before glass windows were installed in each door, they had side curtains. The curtains were kept in place by metal buttons on both top and bottom. The transparent part of the curtains was made of isinglass, which was flexible so they could be rolled up and stored away when the weather was nice.

Many times Gene would leave the curtains on when the weather was clear. However, he would unbutton the bottom of the curtains, leaving them to flap in the breeze. When the bottom of the curtains was not secured, Gene would drive down the street at 25 miles per hour with the side curtains out straight like the wings of an airplane and you fully expected the little Ford to become airborne at any moment.

One day Gene had been out celebrating something or other. He lived on Silver Spring Road, right on the Wilton town line, and was returning home by way of West Lane. He safely negotiated the turn at the fountain and sailed past the Casa-More Store under a full head of steam (about 25 miles per hour). As he approached the turn-off for Silver Spring Road, with his wings spread, he apparently lost control and failed to make the turn. Instead, Gene's Model T Ford came to rest against the side of the Little Red Schoolhouse.

At the time Gene was about as flexible as his side curtains and, luckily for him, he was uninjured. Other than losing the front bumper, the little car survived very well.

There was no damage to the schoolhouse, but its feelings must have been hurt for being subjected to such an undignified attack. However, the police took a rather dim view of the assault on one of our town's landmarks.

For several obvious reasons, including his advanced age, Gene's driver's license was indefinitely suspended. He did not accept the grounding gracefully and after a few weeks decided that since he still had the car he would use it.

He had a "girlfriend" in Norwalk named Daisy and as he lived alone, no doubt felt the need for companionship other than that provided by his livestock.

Gene cranked up the old Ford and started for Norwalk. He did very well by keeping to the back roads but eventually had to contend with heavy city traffic. At one point as you enter Norwalk's Wall Street, it is necessary to make either a left or a right turn as a concrete bridge abutment prevents further travel in the direction you are headed. As this is a very busy intersection there was generally a policeman at this point directing traffic.

Most of the policemen in area towns were familiar with Gene and made allowances for his rather erratic driving habits. It would not be unusual for them to halt traffic from other directions and allow Gene to make his entrance.

On this particular day the officer on duty must have been a rookie. At any rate he put up his hand in a signal for Gene to stop. The next thing that the unfortunate cop knew, he was pinned against the abutment over the bridge.

The fact that the front bumper had been lost at the Red Schoolhouse no doubt saved the policeman from having at least two broken legs. The cop must have been terrified as he discovered that the two front fenders, which protruded a couple of feet beyond the radiator, had without question saved him from serious injury.

This time the old Ford followed Gene's license into permanent retirement. He was heard to grumble on several occasions that he would buy another car, but to the best of my knowledge, this trip to Norwalk was the last that he ever made as the driver.

One of Gene's most prized possessions was a goat which he called Nanny. This was no ordinary goat, Nanny was Gene's constant companion and she was very intelligent. She always rode proudly on the back seat of the Model T except for the incidents in Norwalk and at the Red Schoolhouse. On both of those occasions, the sudden stops caused Nanny to wind up in the front seat with Gene.

The goat was well trained and would patiently wait on the back seat of the car while Gene did his shopping or whatever. Someone jokingly told him that if he kept her waiting too long, Nanny would eat the "tin Lizzie," as the Model T was sometimes called.

One time Gene drove into Hillscroft Farm and, of course, Nanny was with him. I bid him "Good Morning," but he did not return my greeting. He just looked at me and gruffly inquired whether or not I had any blackstrap molasses. When I answered in the affirmative, he merely said "I need a gallon."

For those not familiar, blackstrap molasses is that dark, viscid syrup that when properly refined becomes the kind of table molasses available in grocery stores. In its raw state it is extremely heavy and meant only for animal consumption.

We used to buy it in 55-gallon drums for the cows. It is never used full strength but mixed half and half with hot water and then sprinkled on the hay. It makes the hay more palatable as well as more nutritional.

Gene had brought along a gallon jug which he handed to me without leaving the car. As I went into the barn to fill the jug, I could not help but think that a gallon of blackstrap would last that little goat a very long time.

I returned and put the molasses in the backseat with the goat. As I stepped back I told Gene that I hoped the goat enjoyed the molasses. "It ain't for Nanny," said Gene. "I been feeling poorly and that vet down in ----- told me I should take some every day for a month."

He noted my surprised expression and assured me that I had heard correctly. He said he never went to a medical doctor and that if a vet was good enough for Nanny, one was good enough for him. Somehow, despite his unorthodox methods, Gene survived to a ripe old age.

#129: THE GREAT STRENGTH OF HARRY THOMAS

When Harry Thomas moved his blacksmith shop across Catoonah Street next to the firehouse in 1926, horses were rapidly losing the battle with the autos. This caused him to divert his attention from farrier work to the complex duties of a regular blacksmith. There were still horses to shoe but their numbers had diminished greatly. He could fix just about anything and people came to him with things to build as well as things to 'repair.

There was one fellow who was some kind of inventor and he used to dream up ideas and then come to Harry to have his gadget constructed. Sometimes he would furnish a drawing of his brainchild, roughly sketched on a plain piece of paper, and more often than not it was drawn on a brown paper bag. It was little short of amazing how Harry could decipher these sketches and come up with what his customer wanted.

One time he worked on a rather large project that defied imagination. It was at least six feet long and had a series of gears and pulleys. When I asked him what the odd machine was, he replied. "It is a running gear to a hen's nest."

He had a couple of other pet words to describe these things. We never did find out what this particular project was all about.

When they built the floor of the new shop, they left an open space about five feet square. His answer to our query was that it was a 'Thing-a-ma-jig."

It turned out to be a place where a concrete base would be built for a trip hammer. This infernal machine must have weighed more than two tons. It ran by electricity and could sure flatten out a large piece of iron. It saved Harry many swings of his sledge hammer and when word got around, there was a steady stream of townspeople who were inquisitive about the town's first trip hammer. It was but another example of how this man looked ahead.

Harry's shop was full of odd tools, many of which have been long since outmoded, although they would be worth a fortune today to those interested in memorabilia.

One such tool appears in the accompanying photo. The tool itself was a wheel about eight inches in diameter on which there were graduations like a ruler, down to one sixteenth of an inch. This instrument had a handle with two shafts through which the wheel could turn.

We came to learn that it was used in setting a tire on a wagon. It was run around the outside of the wagon wheel and the distance recorded and then it was run around the inside of the iron tire in order to find out how much the tire must be shrunk or expanded for a perfect fit.

The tire was then placed in the forge and constantly turned by use of a pair of tongs until it had been heated enough to change its measurements to fit the wheel.

When we first saw this rather unique measuring device and asked its name. We were told that it was a "perrywinkle." Whenever one of these misnomers was used, we knew that further questions as to the identity of the tool were futile.

Harry kept the old anvil that he had used so often but decided on getting a new forge to start business in his new shop. The forge was delivered by two big men in a truck. Instead of driving into the shop, they merely drove their truck onto the sidewalk, a good 125 feet from the shop and after a great deal of struggling, deposited the forge on the sidewalk and drove off.

Harry was so incensed over the inconsiderate way in which his forge was delivered that he rushed out to the sidewalk, picked up the heavy, cumbersome forge and carried it all the way to the shop. It must have weighed more than 350 pounds.

Harry never flaunted his great strength. but we have seen it exemplified on several occasions. One instance which we will never forget occurred on a very hot day in July.

A new customer came to the shop with a very large gray horse to be shod. After tying up his horse, this individual picked up his newspaper, sat himself in a chair and ignored everything else. The horse just happened to be one who delighted in throwing his weight to the quarter on which the blacksmith was working, putting tremendous weight on that individual.

It was a common practice for the person with such a horse to stand and hold the horse's head and cause him to bear his weight on the other three quarters. Harry struggled with the horse for some time and finally when the horse began to look as though he was going to sleep, it became obvious that Harry was in danger of losing his temper.

Finally, in desperation, Harry dropped the horse's hoof to the floor. He then said "Damn you" and swung the open palm of his hand against the sleepy animal's side.

It was the first and only time I ever heard Harry use that expression. The horse was surprised, as was everyone else, as he hit the floor with a crash that shook the shop. He quickly scrambled back to his feet and stood at attention as his owner leaped from his chair to hold the horse's head. Suddenly the horse was most cooperative.

Harry Thomas was an ardent member of the Odd Fellows and when they started their Saturday night dances in the building that now houses Rodier's and the Cortina shop, among others, he was there each night to offer his assistance.

One evening a man, who had obviously drunk more than he could handle, decided he would enter the ladies room. Harry, ever on the alert, told the man that he did not think he should do that. When the man made a second attempt, the advice was furnished in much stronger tones.

The stranger looked at Harry and apparently decided he should make a third attempt. This time Harry wrapped his arms around the man and those nearby heard the unmistakable sound of cracking bones, as three ribs were in need of a doctor's attention.

Word of the incident spread rapidly and the dance continued for many years without incidents of the type just described.

Harry enjoyed watching the happy dancers and the fun that they all seemed to have. Though he had never been a dancer, it occurred to him that he would like to join in the merriment.

Unbeknownst to anyone else, Harry started to take dancing lessons and in due time he became a part of the action that he used to watch. I guess he could be called a late-blooming dancer.

The ladies all loved to dance with Harry and they must have felt very secure in his embrace. Of course, his partners had to be prepared to occasionally being airborne, for at times he employed those gigantic strides that he used while walking.

My favorite recollection of Harry Thomas was captured on the film of the parade celebrating Ridgefield's 250th anniversary. He is shown on a huge float with his forge and anvil, actually fashioning a piece of metal as the float traveled down Main Street. It was said that by the time the parade ended, he had done three jobs.

#130: WHEN RIDGEFIELD WAS 10 YEARS OLD

The year was 1718 and dear little Ridgefield was all of ten years of age.

Since its purchase from Catoonah, sachem of the Ramapoo Indians, the settlers were busy, clearing land and building their homes, on lots that had been assigned to them. It was at a Town Meeting in Norwalk on Nov. 25, 1708, that the 25 original Proprietors divided up the land on either side of what was to become Ridgefield's famous and beautiful Main Street.

The original lots would extend from the corner of Main Street and Wilton Roads East and West, northerly to the corner of Main and Prospect Streets on the east side and as far north as Catoonah Street on the west side.

The following spring, another lot was added with the approval of the Proprietors. This was to accommodate the Ebenezer Smith family on the lot where now stands the Ridgefield Library.

In the fall of that year (1709), the settlement was again increased by adding another lot on the opposite end of town. This would encompass the property which just a few years ago became Ascot Lane. It would be the home of Joseph Benedict who, like the other settlers, had come from Norwalk.

One of the originals, James Bennedick, had already been awarded the corner lot just north and west of the fountain, where the Thomas McCue family now resides. The two family names are so similar, it is possible that they may have been related. There are still some descendants of the Benedict family in Ridgefield.

No town could successfully operate without certain mechanics and tradesmen and the people of Ridgefield were quick to start a campaign that would attract these people to the new settlement. In recent years our town has been successful in attracting industries from other states

and even from foreign countries. We were not so well known 270 years ago, so the settlers made their recruitments from their former home town of Norwalk.

If the town was to survive, it had to have a blacksmith and a miller. They would prove to be very important cogs in the wheel that would turn the little hamlet in the wilderness into a bustling village. Norwalk seemed to have an abundance of skilled workers and it was noted that as Ridgefield's population increased by one, Norwalk's population decreased by the same amount.

The search for a blacksmith turned up a gentleman from our Mother Town, named Benjamin Burt. Ben was not only a very good blacksmith, he was a person with a real sense of humor. He and his wife had come to Norwalk from England six years earlier. Before docking in New York and while still on the high seas, Mrs. Burt gave birth to a son. At the boy's christening, some weeks later, Ben was asked the boy's name, he answered without hesitation "Seaborn."

The proprietors had thoughtfully reserved lot 28 for their future blacksmith to operate his business. It was the lot just north of Catoonah Street, where the Carnall Agency and Ridgefield Photo, among others, are now located.

Perhaps this very desirable location was instrumental in enticing Ben Burt to make the move to Ridgefield. He paid a nominal sum (nine pounds) for the lot. Wonder what the lot is worth today?

The agreement that Ben signed seemed to indicate that there was fear that he would not stay. In the event that he did not stay a required four years, the property could be transferred only to another practicing blacksmith. The fears were apparently groundless as Ben spent the rest of his entire life in Ridgefield and is buried in Titicus Cemetery. There are descendants of this fine man living in Ridgefield today.

Only wealthy people could afford a horse in the early days of our town and most of the beasts of burden were oxen. So while Ben Burt put shoes on the horses and the oxen, his talents were applied, in the most part, in making tools and materials to be used in the construction of homes for the settlers.

Carriage makers had not yet made the scene so Ben was also needed to work at building and repairing wagons, as they were so essential in the transportation of materials and people.

Food was a most important commodity in the fledgling community and flour was the staple for these hardy pioneers. Therefore, their attention was turned to procuring a miller and the establishment of a grist mill.

The early settlers were a very industrious group and through an awful lot of hard work, they had cleared enough of the forests to plant fields of Indian corn, wheat, rye, buckwheat, barley, and oats.

It is truly remarkable that in such a short time, they were able to accomplish all this. It meant not only cutting the trees, which they used to build their cabins as well as for fuel, but

there was the arduous task of pulling the stumps. The surface stones had to be removed and then when they were plowing the virgin soil, more stones were brought to the surface. Ridgefield has always had a goodly supply of rocks and stone.

The roots of the fallen trees were also a problem. All this strenuous work was done with oxen, as one neighbor helped another in what must have been a true exemplification of community cooperation.

The time came to make another raid on Norwalk's skilled craftsmen, this time for a miller. Daniel Sherwood seemed to fill the bill and he was persuaded to come to Ridgefield.

A very complicated agreement between the Town and Dan Sherwood was signed on Jan. 30, 1716. This document was a great deal more binding than the one Ben Burt had signed. It was sweetened somewhat by the gift of several hundred acres around Mammanasquag (Mamasasco).

Sherwood built his mill at the outlet of the lake and it stood there for more than two centuries. He was also given a lot on which to build his home and it reached from where Roma Pizzeria is now north to opposite Prospect Street.

So Ridgefield had its first grist mill and Dan Sherwood became its 29th Proprietor.

Long before Christmas Day of 1718, the pioneers were planning to celebrate the birthday of The Lord and the 10th anniversary of their Town. They did not have electricity to light their trees. There were no stores in which to buy candles — they made their own. Santa Claus was still being called Saint Nicholas and gifts that were exchanged did not come from the shopping center. There was no bank from which to get money for the celebration, but the whole affair would be a joint effort by all of the settlers.

There was no Community Center, nor was there a town hall. However, a few years before, these God-fearing people had constructed a little building on the Green, in front of where the Patrick Crehans live now. It would serve as a church as well as a place to meet and also as a school.

However, there was no building large enough to accommodate everyone under one roof. This problem was solved by having the celebrators visit a half dozen of the larger homes.

And a Merry Christmas to all.

#131: A FICTIONAL FEAST IN 1718

There was much preparation in Ridgefield for Christmas 1718. A major requirement for a wife in those days was that she be a good cook. On this particular Christmas their talents would be observed by everyone in town.

The previous 10 years had been little short of pure drudgery, as the pioneers strove to get the new settlement in order. New things had begun to take shape and they felt it was time to enjoy some of the fruits of their labor. There was a certain excitement in the air as the settlers planned for the approaching holiday.

After the purchase of the town had been completed, some of the Indians had remained nearby and they were invited to share in the festivities. They were not aware of the significance of December 25th, but the prospect of free food made a big impression on them.

However, the Rev. Thomas Hawley took the time to explain to the Indians what it was all about. He had arrived in Ridgefield some five years earlier and his house had been built on the lot on the corner of Branchville Road. The Proprietors had thoughtfully reserved the corner lot for Ridgefield's first clergyman and his house, which still stands, is recognized as the oldest house in town.

Mr. Hawley showed great vision when he selected Ridgefield as the town to settle in. He was a young man at the time and had graduated from Harvard only nine years before. The Proprietors had also exhibited great vision in reserving a place on the Village Green nearby for a combination church and meeting house.

Visitors many times marvel at how well our Main Street was laid out by the Proprietors — and to think it was done without a P & Z Commission.

Samuel Keeler Jr., Thomas Hoyt, Jonathon Rockwell and Daniel Olmsted formed a hunting party a few days before Christmas and went into the woods in search of game. The wooded areas were well stocked at the time and they were successful in bringing back many rabbits and partridge, as well as several wild turkeys. The prize of the hunt was a large deer that Sam Keeler was fortunate enough to bring down. All this game was augmented by several hogs that had been raised especially for the occasion.

Matthew Seamer had received a shipment of goods at his trading post that included many herbs and spices that the housewives had longed for. Now the competition between these ladies would intensify for the honor of having the tastiest pie, cake, or pudding.

Cranberries had been discovered in a bog where Cranberry Lane is now, just off South Olmstead Lane. They would add color to the buffet style feast that was being prepared.

All in all, as Christmas Day neared, the pleasant odor emanating from the various kitchens was almost overpowering.

There was grape, dandelion, and elderberry wine, which was reserved for use during the meal. If any hard liquor was available, it was kept well out of sight. The favorite alcoholic drink was cider and it was used sparingly. It should be remembered that these were very religious people who practiced sobriety. This did not prevent them from celebrating with great enthusiasm.

The great day arrived and rightfully started with the Rev. Thomas Hawley, presiding in the little church on the Green. Everyone turned out for the services and the building would hold only half of them. Fortunately the weather had moderated and those who had to stand outside in the snow were not uncomfortable.

In his sermon, Mr. Hawley retold the story of Christmas and asked the Lord's blessing on the food that had been prepared and the activities that were about to take place. He lauded the

great efforts of the settlers and told them that they richly deserved a day to be festive and joyous over their remarkable accomplishments. Mrs. Hawley led the assemblage in singing the favorite Christmas hymns.

Following the service the families divided into two groups that would visit the homes that had been selected and in which they would start their day of celebrating. Those visiting the south end of Town would start at Jonathon Rockwell's home (just south of where the Keeler Tavern is now). Those who walked north would visit first at Matthias St. John's (where Aldrich Museum is now).

Presents for each group had been delivered to these two homes the previous evening. Tables were laden with goodies and various items that might be considered appetizers, although it is doubtful that there was any need to whet any appetites.

Soon it was time to open the presents and somehow they managed to have something for everyone. There were no computers among the presents, no Ataris or calculators or Cabbage Patch dolls. The handmade presents were rather humble when compared with the lavish gifts of today, but they were very much appreciated. Any kind of fruit was highly prized, as were sugar plums and popcorn balls, and a plain rag doll would make any little girl very happy.

By the time the goodies were consumed and the presents opened and inspected, it was near to high noon and time to move on to the next stop. To those going north it would be the Thomas Smith home (where Allan's store is now) and to those going south it would be the Samuel Keeler Srs., (on the corner where Main Street becomes Wilton Road West). At these stops, the main food of the day would be served. The deer that Sam Smith Jr. had furnished had been barbecued and divided between his father and Tom Smith and was now a buffet item along with the ham, pork loin, rabbit, wild turkey, and partridge.

The venison and other game was all quite familiar to the visiting Indians, but the ham was something else. Indians were rather stoic by nature, but when they had their first taste of the ham, they were delirious with joy. Oreneca and Narranoke were the ranking Indians at the feast.

The third and last stop for the group that had traveled north was at the Benjamin Wilson home (across from where Market Street now joins Main) and the group that had traveled south made their last stop at the James Bennedick home, (just north of where West Lane joins Main). The very pleasant odor of spices emanated from these homes, for this would be where pies and cakes and plum pudding would bring the great feast to a close.

The tour had ended close to where it had started that morning and as many as could gathered inside the little meeting house on the Green, as the sun began its descent behind West Mountain.

James Brown was an accomplished fiddler and Ben Burt brought out a little concertina that had accompanied him from England. Soon the air was filled with lively music and the dancing started. The settlers would find that they would use muscles that had lain dormant, while

the arduous work of building the settlement took precedence over anything as frivolous as a Virginia Reel.

Everyone had their chance on the little dance floor, as the well-fed pioneers took their turns to trip the light fantastic to the wondrous music of Jim and Ben. It was eight o'clock that evening before the tired but happy Proprietors and their families ended the celebrating and returned to their homes to prepare for another hard day's work.

It was the first attempt at a genuine community celebration and it would not be the last, as all agreed that it was a tremendous success.

I'm sure my readers will have fun separating fact from fiction in this Dispatch.

#132: FROM HORSES TO CARS AT SPERRY'S STABLE

Another attraction on Catoonah Street, to go along with the firehouse and the blacksmith shop, was Sperry's Livery Stable. This great building was erected before the turn of the [20th] century and was originally called Adam's & Keeler's Livery Stable.

The business had been started by Joseph Adams and William R. Keeler. They sold out to Morris Whitlock and when Morris passed on, his son Arthur sold the business to B. E. Sperry. At the time the building was constructed, it must have been the largest in Ridgefield.

By the time that Bert Sperry took over the business in the 20's, the horse was rapidly losing out as a means of transportation to the auto. The stables had been ideally located across the street from the firehouse and the horses had been used to pull the various pieces of fire equipment.

Now the Fire Department had become motorized and though Bert was a great lover of horses, he was also a good businessman and could easily see the handwriting on the wall. Soon he had installed autos that he used for taxis and the big building housed several autos that people used to store there.

One of the stored autos was an electric car and it proved to be a real curiosity. It resembled a coupe in appearance. It did not have a steering wheel as such, but was guided by a shaft that came up through the floor that had a rod attached to it making it look like a large number 7. At the end of the rod was a button, which when pressed put the car in motion. It was powered by large storage batteries and was kind of weird as it seemed to glide along with almost complete silence.

My curiosity got the best of me and kidlike I experimented until I was successful in getting the car to move forward. Fortunately it moved slowly as the front bumper came in contact with the side of the building. Though nothing was broken, it was very embarrassing as I did not know how to back the car away from the side wall.

To make matters worse, my little dog, Sport, sensed my frustration and barked so frantically that everyone in the building came on the run. It was my one and only ride in an electric car.

Some of the other cars in the big barn were a Jordan, a Wills Sainte Claire, a Marmon, a Graham-Paige, a Peerless and a French car called a Touraine. I guess the companies that made those cars have all long since gone out of business, but they were great cars.

Bert Sperry added a coal business as a supplement to his livery business and delivered the coal on short hauls with his last horse, a big black that they called Maggie, even though it was a gelding, and on long hauls a truck called a Republic was used.

Soon Sperry was operating a moving and storage business and the second floor was put to use as a storage place for furniture and other household effects. Then a gasoline pump was installed in front of the building. It furnished Socony gasoline and one pump was sufficient as in those days there was only one grade of gasoline and, of course, there were not so many cars.

To round out the many commercial ventures, Bert Sperry acquired the local Studebaker agency. The Studebaker was a popular automobile with a long and honorable history. In fact the company that manufactured these cars had started many years before by building the sturdy covered wagons used by the pioneers in the settling of the West. They were called Conestogas after an Indian tribe and many years later the name was applied to a Studebaker station wagon. just a few years before that company went out of business.

All of these activities at the old livery stable provided employment for a number of people. There were more. but some who come quickly to mind were Harry Dodson, Andy Frattini, Matthew Holmes, Charley Washington, Alfred Dodson, Walter McInerney and my favorite character, Jimmy Rogers.

Fleet Sperry, Bert's brother, looked after the coal and moving business and he had a son named Bill who assisted him. Helen (Coffey) O'Hara was the bookkeeper.

The office for this enterprise was on the northeast corner of the building and was complete with a large pot-bellied stove surrounded by five or six chairs where customers or passersby would sit and swap their wonderful stories. There was a metal grating, like a cage, that encompassed the large desk, at which Helen sat on a high stool to do her bookkeeping.

The horse stalls kept disappearing to make room for the autos until there was finally only one left for Maggie and that was at the extreme rear of the building. The poor horse looked awfully lonely in that great big stable, and he must have realized that he was on the way out.

One of the most interesting features of the great building was a hand-operated elevator. Its purpose was to carry furniture for storage to the second floor. This was no ordinary elevator. It was very large, rectangular in shape and probably twelve by fifteen feet in measurement. It was not enclosed and had no guard rails. When this contraption descended from the second floor, it was as though a large section of the floor was coming down.

The elevator was suspended on steel cables and had a rope that ran through such a series of pulleys that even the heaviest load was easily taken to the second floor. It probably could have handled an auto but the only thing we ever saw on it was furniture.

The second floor of the building was as big as some of our gymnasiums. It was always full of such interesting articles that it made a veritable fairyland for a kid to play in. There was a little apartment in the front northeast corner, which I believe Bill Sperry occupied. Later on there was a larger apartment built in the rear of the second story for Harry Dodson and his family. .

Some of the people who stored their furniture in this enormous storage place must have forgotten it as many of the various items remained there for years. This place would have been seventh heaven to a connoisseur of fine furniture and valuable antiques. Several homes could have been lavishly furnished with the beautiful dining room, bedroom and living rooms sets. We remember one four-poster bed, complete with what looked like a silk canopy that would have been right at home in Buckingham Palace. There was also a Jacobean oak dining set that would have brought an admiring smile to the face of James I. These things were all in excellent condition and belonged to some. of Ridgefield's wealthiest families.

Of equal interest were items such as the antique Victrolas and phonographs with their large tin speakers. Some of these machines played the old flat tin records and some played a cylindrical tube. One thing is sure: they were great fun to play and listen to before radio and television.

#133: THE DEATH OF A VILLAGE LANDMARK

For a number of years, B.E. Sperry conducted a thriving business at the old livery stable on Catoonah Street. What with his coal and wood business, his moving and storage, his taxi and gasoline and his new car agency, he was well diversified.

However, in the name of progress and other reasons that were beyond his control, many changes were taking place in both the domestic and the business world.

By the 1940's, coal was giving way to oil, just as the horse had given way to the automobile. The war had brought on gas rationing and the auto industry had turned its attention to the manufacture of articles of war rather than items for domestic use. Even the taxi business had deteriorated to a point where Sperry's was not the bustling place it had once been.

David Westheim was the owner and operator of the popular Martha West stores. He was very well known and highly respected in the clothing world of ladies fashions.

Apparently Mr. Westheim was just looking for an investment when he purchased B.E. Sperry's business and property, for he soon leased it to Patrick O'Keefe. Pat, who was a carpenter by trade, and a good one, operated the place as a service station for a time. Like so many others. he was engaged in making the necessary adjustments that resulted from the transition back to

peacetime activity. After a time, Pat decided to return to his trade and the big old livery stable was once again available.

Leo Pambianchi was involved at the time in the restaurant business as well as the garage business and had the dealership of the Nash automobile. The Nash car is no longer being built and I believe that company was taken over by American Motors and Leo's brother Matty now owns that dealership under the name Pamby Motors. Pamby Motors also had the Studebaker agency.

Things progressed very well for Leo in his new location, but then on Dec. 23, 1947, it started to snow. We were sawing out fireplace wood on that day at Hillscroft Farm. When the snow started, it was very light and there was no indication, nor was there a weather prediction, that would warn of what was to come.

However, Clifford Seymour, who was operating the saw, had a favorite saying, "As the days get longer, the winter gets stronger." When Clifford once again uttered his admonition, we all laughed, but as the day wore on, the storm increased in its intensity and continued all through the night and into the next day.

Christmas eve was extremely cold and many roads were blocked with snow. This was before Ridgefield had the modern snow removal equipment that it has today. Local contractors were employed with their trucks and bulldozers and they worked day and night to open the roads. It was this storm that caused First Selectman Harry E. Hull to ask for a special appropriation with which to purchase two additional trucks and the famous giant grader that the road crew named "Molly."

Christmas Day in '47 was clear and cold, but the following day the snow started again and came down harder than ever. The temperature did moderate enough to make the snow rather wet, but then it suddenly changed and dropped to ten below zero. This caused the snow to harden and made its removal that much more difficult.

There was great concern for buildings with flat roofs because of the great weight of the snow and ice. Once the roads and sidewalks were cleared, attentions were directed to the several buildings that were threatened with collapse. Many men were employed in this difficult task.

The old livery stable had a great concave roof that would normally have shed the snow. This time, however, the sudden frigid weather kept the tremendous weight planted firmly on the top of the big building.

Several days after it stopped snowing, there were signs that the old structure was in trouble. Some of the rafters in the roof had started to separate from their supports. An attempt was made to remove the snow but the roof was so steep that it was impossible for anyone to stand on it and it was feared that the added weight of the snow shovellers would increase the danger of its collapsing.

Pat O'Keefe and a crew of men attempted to shore up the building from inside. Heavy timbers were placed where it was felt they would do the most good.

Their efforts were in vain and there was a general feeling that the only solution was for a thaw that would melt the tons of snow and ice. There would be no thaw as the terrible cold weather continued unabated.

Horace Walker was the fire marshal at the time and after inspecting the building, advised that it be vacated. Two weeks after the big Christmas storm, the roof of the old livery stable was still heavily laden with snow. There had even been a couple of light snow storms during that period and sub-zero temperatures ensured that the accumulation remained intact, and each day seemed to furnish new evidence that the grand old building was doomed.

One person who seemed to have the utmost faith in the durability of the big structure was Harry Dodson. An apartment had been constructed on the second floor in the south end of the building and Harry and his family had lived there for the past dozen years. Like the horse who would not leave his stall when the barn was burning down around him, Harry steadfastly refused to leave his apartment.

After three weeks, most of the valuables had been removed from the building and fire marshal Walker had erected a sign warning those who had an idea of entering the building that they do so at their own risk. Now bets were being made, not only on how long the building would stay up, but which way it would fall.

The William Brown family lived in the house where the Rusty Nail Restaurant is now located. A little creek, about four feet wide flowed between the two buildings (and still does). and that was all that separated them. Bill was very worried, and with good reason, that the large structure would demolish his home.

Still, the Dodson family remained firmly entrenched. even though the gaps between the rafters and their supports widened with each passing day. They sure had a lot of courage.

It must have been the loud cracking noise of the crumbling timbers that finally convinced Harry Dodson to move his family to safer quarters. This he did in the afternoon of Jan. 16, 1948, and it was well that he did. Just 12 hours later, at 4 a.m. on Jan. 17, there was a tremendous crash as the huge structure gave up the struggle and disintegrated.

Fortunately the only damage, other than to the building itself, was to the front porch of Bill Brown's house, where bricks from the falling chimney struck it. Torquinio Pambianchi and Dino Giardini rushed across the street from the fire house and prevented a fire by turning off the power.

When it was all over. Ridgefield had lost one its best known landmarks.

#134: THE MAN OF WEALTH, POWER, PROGRESS

There was a time, back around the turn of the century, when mention of the name Henry B. Anderson would probably stop all other conversation. The name was synonymous with wealth, power and progress. It also meant to a great many Ridgefielders at the time activity, work, and jobs.

Mr. Anderson was a young man in his mid-thirties when he and Mrs. Anderson moved here from New York in 1897. After graduation from Yale and Harvard Law School, he interned in a Wall Street law office and then joined his father's prestigious law firm. A few years later he and his brother formed their own very successful New York law firm, Anderson and Anderson.

Mrs. Howard Lapsley Thomas was a sister of Mrs. Anderson and when the Andersons visited Mrs. Thomas at her beautiful brick mansion on Golf Lane, they were enraptured by the beauty of Ridgefield. Soon the Andersons bought the property across Golf Lane from the Thomases, where Manor Estates is now.

Like so many who came to Ridgefield over the years, H.B. Anderson could envision numerous opportunities amidst all the elegance, serenity and beauty that the town had to offer.

When the Andersons moved to Ridgefield, the town was still reeling from the effects of the disastrous fire of 1895. The need to take steps to protect the town from a recurrence of that terrible conflagration was obvious. The Ridgefield Volunteer Fire Department was organized, with Charles S. Nash as its first chief, and it has remained through the years, a most efficient organization.

There was an urgent need for a public water supply. Without sufficient water, the town was at the mercy of any small fire. Many towns are located near a river and some even have a stream that flows right through the town. Ridgefield did not have this luxury and the protection that we take for granted today was a matter of grave concern, at the turn of the century.

The Ridgefield Water Supply Company was formed and a search was conducted for that precious element that would provide the much needed security. There were many ponds, but most of them were too distant from the village to be of real value to that area. During the search for water, a number of wells were discovered, tapped and the water was pumped by gasoline engines into the original stand pipe on West Mountain, from where it filtered by gravity into the mains.

There must have been great jubilation when the first water flowed into the pipes on June 13, 1900.

Though the population of Ridgefield at the time was only just over 2,500, it soon became apparent that the supply of water was not sufficient to meet the needs of a growing town. Into the breach stepped H.B. Anderson, who in the short time he had lived in Ridgefield, had taken an active role in town affairs.

In 1902. Mr. Anderson bought the controlling interest in the water company and things began to happen. His law practice in New York was flourishing and much of his time was spent in arduous commuting. Despite this fact, this energetic gentleman somehow found the time to devote to the welfare of his adopted community.

Under the direction of H.B. Anderson, the water company purchased Round Pond. This transaction was a master stroke as this body of water, entirely fed by springs, had the purest of water and the supply seemed endless. No debris or other objectionable material would ever taint this water because it was not fed by any stream that would carry such substances.

It is believed that the reason for the round shape of this fine pond is that a glacier once set where it is located and just melted away, gradually forming the contours of the pond as it disappeared into the soil.

The great taste of the water from Round Pond has changed somewhat through the years. as chemicals were added as a safeguard. However, this excellent source of water is still functioning well today, even though the population of the town has increased ten times.

In recent years there has been some concern that the strain of the population increase may cause an eventual shortage of water. We would like to think that additional sources will be located before these concerns become a reality.

H.B. Anderson was not through with his innovations. The Ridgefield Illuminating Company was a fledgling organization. It had installed a four-inch gas main from Bailey Avenue along Main Street and down West Lane. We remember seeing the gas fixtures in the old town hall, although they had even then been long in a state of disuse. I would bet that the gas lines are still in the walls of the grand old building, though the fixtures themselves were all removed during the alterations in 1950 that removed the large auditorium and provided many of the present-day offices.

Apparently the gas business was not very profitable, as it went out of business after a short time. Once again, H.B. Anderson was “Johnny on the spot” and in 1906 he formed the Ridgefield Electric Company. It was not just a project where lines were laid to a neighboring town to secure the power. The electric power was generated right here in Ridgefield. A building that was made completely of concrete, with walls so thick that it would probably have served as a bomb-proof shelter, was erected at the foot of Ivy Hill Road, right next to the railroad tracks. Two enormous coal burning engines were installed, to operate the large generator, that manufactured the electric power.

It was Anderson’s plan to first use the power to run the pumps to bring the water from Round Pond to the standpipe. If there was power left over, it would be distributed for lighting purposes among the three dozen stockholders in the company. These people were, for the most part, summer residents of Ridgefield, which automatically designated them as people of means.

The electric company proved to be a prosperous undertaking and plenty of electric power was available. Soon a few electric street lights began to appear as power lines were extended along Main Street.

Jack Cranston, a very knowledgeable electrician, was engaged to operate the new plant and provide the line services. Jack lived, at the time, right next to the new plant. There were those who believed that his living right there was to allay the fears of those who felt that the plant would surely blow up, as well as for his convenience in getting to his job.

#135 : THE POPULAR PORT ON WEST MOUNTAIN

The Ridgefield Electric Company prospered under the guidance of Henry B. Anderson and by 1910 there were more than 100 families that were enjoying the new source of energy it provided. The number of street lights increased slowly and they were strategically placed. Even by 1920, there was a considerable distance between the street lights on Main Street.

There was a light in front of town hall and then going north, there was one in front of Johnny Lannon's house (where Allan's Store [Conservatory of Dance] is now). The next light was on the library corner and no more until the entrance to Casagmo. There were two more lights, going north, one on Rolly Gilbert's (where Nina's is now [Main at Danbury Road]) and one on the corner where North Street branches off North Salem Road, which at that time was known as North Main Street up to that point.

The southern end of Main Street fared better with street lights, probably because there was more wealth in that area. I know it was awful dark and spooky going down the grade next to Casagmo.

In the early 20's there was a silent movie, "The Hunchback of Notre Dame." It starred the great Lon Chaney, in a most terrifying portrayal of the "Hunchback." This picture was shown in the old town hall on a Saturday night to a capacity crowd.

Jack Cranston manned the movie projector in the balcony and music, the sound of which rose and fell as well as slowed and sped in conjunction with the story being depicted on the screen, was provided by Lottie Boyce at the piano and Willis Boyce, with his violin.

It was a sure thing that the sight of Chaney, in his scary costume, was enough to strike fear to the heart of the bravest. People were in a high emotional state as they emerged from the hall after the show.

The group going north had reached the library when Jack Walker shouted in a loud voice, "Here comes the Hunchback!"

It must have been a good 150 yards to the next street light at Casagmo and I must have set some kind of record in reaching the haven of its friendly glow. It was much darker from Casagmo to my home, across the street from the next light, and it is doubtful if my feet ever touched the ground while covering that distance.

H.B. Anderson, satisfied that his latest venture was a resounding success, began to look for new worlds to conquer. He was a dreamer and one of his dreams had to do with establishing Ridgefield as a resort town.

Even while conducting the operations of the water company and the electric company, he was amassing large tracts of land in the northwest section of Ridgefield. Before he was through, he had close to a 1,000 acres in the area of town that is now known as Eight Lakes Estates. Just over the line in New York State, adjacent to his Ridgefield property, he accumulated almost 2,000 acres.

Mr. Anderson's interests had grown to a point where they were demanding too much of his time, so he brought to Ridgefield a man named Bailey. Eldridge N. Bailey was a man of considerable intellect and proved to be of great assistance in the Anderson enterprises.

The acquisition of so much acreage caused Mr. Anderson to need additional cash and he sold his interest in the electric company to E.N. Bailey and soon Bailey sold to the Associated Gas and Electric Company. A few years later the company was sold to the Litchfield Light and Power Company and in the early 40's, it changed hands again, this time to The Connecticut Light and Power Company. We still make our checks to C.L.&P. Company; however, the parent organization today is Northeast Utilities, a firm that encompasses other New England states.

Anderson's dream of establishing a resort on Titicus Mountain was about to begin, but additional cash was still needed. Among the wealthy clients of his law practice was a gentleman named Odgen Mills. Mills, who would later become secretary of the treasury in the cabinet of President Herbert Hoover, took an active interest in the Anderson operations, in which he soon became a partner and the stage was set to make the dream a reality.

Soon the construction of roads was started and the men, mostly the newly arrived Italians who had completed the building of the water and sewer lines, were employed in Anderson's new project. When the roads were completed, they extended through the vast acreage for more than ten miles.

The roads were of the finest construction, with a deep base of crushed stone of which Ridgefield has an unending supply. The roads were intended primarily for the use of horse drawn carriages, which were more narrow than today's automobiles. The roads served their original purpose well, but they were just not wide enough for the vehicles of today and this would cause a real problem later on.

A large rambling building was constructed at the top of Titicus Mountain. It was very picturesque and provided a commanding view of the surrounding countryside.

Meredith B. Nicholson, a prominent author, had a best seller at the time, "The Port of Missing Men." Anderson liked the name and borrowed it to apply to his soon-to-be-famous enterprise.

Mrs. Ida Smith, who was widely known for her ability to manage a high-class hostelry, was engaged to manage what would become an internationally known establishment. With Nanny Gasperini handling the food end of the operation, a solid organization was formed and opened to the public in 1907.

The reputation of the Port of Missing Men spread rapidly to every state in the union and in many foreign countries as well. I suppose that today we would have to call it the Port of Missing Men and Women. Of course, the ladies were welcome at the inn and in many instances they outnumbered the men, especially at the elegant afternoon teas that caused many to refer to the place as "The Tea House."

In the first two years of operation, more than 20,000 people signed the guest book. The roads were well kept in the summer, but the inn was closed during the winter months and so were the roads and large wooden gates prevented these private roads from being used.

This large operation provided employment for a great many people, not the least of whom were the local girls of high school age who worked there as waitresses. These jobs were much sought after as the guests were good tippers.

Mr. Anderson was so taken by the success of his new undertaking and the majesty of its surroundings that he built a large new home on Titicus Mountain. The Andersons moved to their new palatial home in 1908 and that same year, sold their West Lane estate to Frederick E. Lewis.

It is sad to relate that the Andersons did not have long to enjoy their new home, because of the untimely death of Mrs. Anderson. In his grief, Henry Anderson moved to Sands Point, Long Island, and allowed the house [on Oreneca Road] that he had been so proud of, to deteriorate and finally fall in ruins.

#136: TOWN LOVERS & FAST-BUCK ARTISTS PLUS ANDERSON AND BAILEY

In the early days, some of the original settlers that came to Ridgefield were encouraged to do so by their parents, who lived to the south of us. The parents probably had only one or two hundred acres and were beginning to feel crowded. Therefore, the young were pushed from the nest to make it on their own.

In later years some, after a visit, were captivated by the beauty of the town and others were seeking a quiet, restful place to live.

There were others who felt that a Ridgefield address carried with it a kind of status symbol. Employment was an attraction for some and the proximity of the town to larger cities made it attractive to those with sufficient fortitude to commute to their place of employment.

There were those, at one time, who were attracted by our low tax rate. In an effort to slow the growth of the town, concessions were made to large property owners. Valuable farm land was assessed at only \$50 per acre. The theory on the part of those who fostered this idea was that it encouraged owners of great acreage to avoid allowing their property to be developed.

The scheme worked well for many years. The day of reckoning came when the owners died and the property was split among the children.

A top-notch school system was also a great attraction and some of those who came to take advantage of it stayed here, but many moved on as soon as their children were educated.

There were also those who liked the friendly atmosphere of the town and once they settled here, found it difficult to move away. Some who had to move for business or other reasons returned years later to once again enjoy the good feeling and community spirit that Ridgefield had in abundance.

There were many who saw an opportunity to make money in Ridgefield and the vast majority of them did. The success stories of those who came seeking their fortune is endless. Some of these people learned to love Ridgefield for other than monetary reasons and stayed here. Others were “fast-buck artists” and quickly disappeared after making their bundle.

One thing is sure: They had a very definite impact on the growth of the town.

We would have to establish a separate category to fit H.B. Anderson. His record would indicate that he did not come to Ridgefield to have his young ones educated, or to line his pockets, as they were already well-lined. My guess is that an examination of his record would show that he gave our town a lot more than he got in return. It would seem reasonable to assume that had it not been for the untimely passing of Mrs. Anderson, the town of which he was so fond, would have benefited a great deal more.

After the closing of his Port of Missing Men, Mr. Anderson kept the roads repaired. For many years, the large wooden gates would be opened each spring for those who wanted to enjoy the scenic beauty of the area. Finally the gates, like the buildings, just fell in ruins. Then the shrubbery and trees along the roads grew out over the traveled portion, in such a manner as to choke off passage by auto.

One can only imagine what Ridgefield would be like today if H.B. Anderson had remained in town. We probably would have been one of the very first towns to have a radio station. With the Port of Missing Men flourishing, he no doubt would have added a TV studio to the building and top ranked artists would have been engaged to perform there. Our high school would have been more centrally located and the roof would never have leaked.

Ridgefield would have long since had its own modern and well-staffed hospital, probably in the expanded and converted mansion at Casagmo. A by-pass would have been carefully selected that would ease the terrible traffic congestion in the center of town.

Yes, we feel that a resourceful gentleman like H.B. Anderson, with his fertile mind and great energy, would be most welcome in our town today.

After his death in Sands Points, Long Island, on March 17, 1938, his large holdings were acquired by a syndicate that planned to develop the area. After World War II the area was named Eight Lakes Estates and lots were sold to many people who were promised that the roads would

be widened and drainage systems would be installed. As time went on it became increasingly apparent that the developers had no intention of providing the promised improvements.

Homes began to appear on Sib Road, Blue Ridge, Scott Ridge and Caudatowa Drive and the homeowners found it necessary to take matters into their own hands. An association was formed that gave every appearance of being a potent political force. The association was determined that if the developers reneged on what was clearly their responsibility, the town would provide the necessary improvements to these private roads.

Over the strenuous objections of one member of the Board of Selectmen, the association was eminently successful.

After H.B. Anderson left for Sands Point, his influence was felt for many years in the person of Eldridge N. Bailey. While handling the various aspects of Anderson's enterprises, Bailey became very prominent in town affairs. Among other things, he ran the Ridgefield Water Company, until it was sold to Francis W. Collins in 1928.

Mr. Bailey was slender, well over six feet tall and altogether was a very imposing figure, with his light tan coat and camel-hair cap, that matched his facial complexion. His two gold teeth blended well with the aforesaid colors.

Anderson showed a great deal of confidence in Bailey when he selected him to oversee his interests. The building of the roads leading to the Port of Missing Men was an enormous responsibility and there were times when more than 200 men were engaged in this project. Bailey got a big assist from Big Jim Kennedy.

Neither Anderson, Bailey nor Kennedy spoke or understood Italian very well. However, Kennedy learned the language well enough to make himself understood and was very instrumental in bringing the laborers from the province of Ancona. When Julius Tulipani was promoted to foreman on the road-building project, communication took a giant step forward.

Despite all his other duties, E.N. Bailey found time to get involved in local politics. In 1910 he was elected to a Board of Selectmen that was headed by Benjamin Crouchley. The following year (elections were held each year in those days), Bailey was elected first selectman. He lost the following year to Charles B. Northrop and then was returned to the office of first selectman three years in a row.

Orville W. Holmes won the post in 1916 and for the next three years Bailey was not a member of the board. Bailey returned as first selectman in 1919 and won for seven straight terms. His total of 11 terms is a modern record.

#137: THE GRAND UPAGENSTIT ESTATE ON WEST LANE

One of the nicest things that H. B. Anderson did for Ridgefield was to sell his West Lane property (now Manor Estates) to Frederic E. Lewis. The Lewis family would prove to be a decided asset to a community that already had more than its share of millionaires.

Mr. Lewis, a descendant of Moses Taylor, and Mrs. Lewis, the former Mary Russell, were very, very wealthy people. After purchasing the Anderson estate, they began to buy up the surrounding properties, until they had added more than 10 additional parcels of land that would become a part of what was to be one of our nation's showplaces.

The Lewises had two sons, Wadsworth and Reginald and 43 years after his death, Ridgefield still benefits from a trust fund, established by Wadsworth (better known as Waddy). The fund has been aptly named the Lewis Fund and many worthy, local organizations share in its annual proceeds. Waddy was a born philanthropist and, like his parents, always seemed to have the welfare of others constantly in mind.

The family had lived in a mansion on their estate in Tarrytown and while visiting here, were struck by the beauty of Ridgefield. They acquired the Anderson estate in 1907 and immediately started to enlarge the mansion, added to their acreage, and constructed the many buildings attendant to the operation of such a large enterprise, including homes for many of the employees.

Mr. Lewis showed his sense of humor, when after moving with his family to his new palatial home in 1908, promptly named it "Upagenstit" ("Up Against It") He had been involved with several large corporations and was president and principal stockholder of the Adams Express Company, which was the forerunner of the American Railway Express Company.

Whenever he learned of a family having difficulties, he was quick to respond by furnishing whatever was needed. His method of operation was to do these fine things in such a manner that the recipients never knew who their benefactor was.

Frederic was not a big man in stature, but he more than made up for that in the benevolence that he bestowed on his fellow man.

During the summer months, Mr. Lewis generally wore a stiff-brimmed straw hat, a blue jacket and white flannels that had a pinstripe like the uniforms of the Yankee ball players. He and Mrs. Lewis made a walking tour of their estate every morning. While out for their walk, Mr. Lewis always carried a cane which he twirled as they walked along.

He also whistled constantly, in order that the people working on the estate would know that they were coming. He did not mind if they sat down again after he and Mrs. Lewis had passed by, but felt that they should give the appearance of being industrious while they were passing.

On the northern part of the estate, Mr. Lewis had constructed a huge barn that housed their horses in one end, along with Mrs. Lewis's four little black ponies. On the other end of the barn there were stanchions for their herd of purebred Guernsey cows. There was a platform between the two rows of cows and a large barn door at either end of the platform.

Lawrence Copes and his brothers, Joe and Fred, were the cowmen. One of their duties each morning was to listen for Mr. Lewis's familiar whistle. The whistle was their signal to

unroll a large red rubber carpet that covered the platform between the cows from one door to the other. After the Lewises had passed through the barn, the carpet was rolled up to await the next visit.

Mr. Lewis was a very jovial individual, but for all his good nature, he was known to possess a vocabulary that would match that of a longshoreman, and when he felt that it fitted the occasion, he did not hesitate to use it. This was something that those who had incurred his wrath were to quickly learn.

James Ballantyne was superintendent on the estate when it was in its heyday and he must have been a very busy man. Imagine, if you will, a place in Ridgefield large enough to necessitate the employment of three carpenters, just to keep things in repair, and on a full-time basis.

Edward Minnerly (Frank's father) was the head carpenter and Howard Thomas (Harry's brother) and Edward Findley were his helpers. Frank Minnerly has informed me that their activities were generally relegated to repair work and for any large project, a contractor was brought in to do the work.

When one considers the large number of buildings that had to be taken care of, perhaps the need for the carpenters would be more easily understood. Yet, I would guess that today, one would have to have considerable wealth to employ that many carpenters, even for a short period of time.

Incidentally, the large barn that was just mentioned was located at the end of the extension of what is now Manor Road and has long since been torn down, but parts of the foundation still remain. I feel that it is always sad to see a great structure, such as this building was, suddenly disappear. This is especially true in this instance, as there were two very nice apartments on the second floor for the employees.

The mansion itself stood on the west side of what is now Manor Road and about 50 some odd yards north and east of it was what must have been the largest garage any private family in these parts ever had. It was said that it would hold more than 15 cars. We do know that it was possible, when the garage was empty, to drive in and turn around to come out without ever backing up.

The Lewises did not do everything in threes, but they did have three carpenters. and three cowmen and they had three chauffeurs. In fact, Frank Minnerly said that there was a time when there were 100 people employed on this great estate.

At any rate, Jimmy Richards was the head chauffeur and generally drove for Mrs. Lewis. Tom Egan was the chauffeur for Waddy and Reggy and Bobby Maxwell kind of fit in where he was needed. All of these men were acquired after a lot of screening. In the early days of the automobile, passengers such as the Lewises were considered precious cargo and the drivers must have had training that was comparable to what the airline pilots had later on.

These three men all came with the blessings of the Brewster Automobile Company.

Mrs. Lewis had a Rolls Royce that had two little flower vases on either side that received fresh flowers daily. It also had a little tube through which the passenger could speak to instruct the chauffeur and through which he could answer.

Jimmy Richards said it was the only opportunity he ever had to talk back to Mrs. Lewis. Of course, he said this with a smile.

#138: LOVE STORIES

With your kind permission we will interrupt our story about the F.E. Lewis family for this column and return to them next week. With a name like mine and today being the feast day of the great Saint Valentine, it would seem appropriate that we devote a few lines to the four-letter word, "love."

Love is the word most closely associated with this holy man who was to become a famous martyr because of his love for his fellow man. For that reason, on this day, many people exchange cards as one way of expressing their love for one another. The cards rarely reveal a likeness of Saint Valentine, but generally show Venus's son, Cupid, with his little bow and arrow.

There are many who labor under the impression that we celebrate the birthday of St. Valentine on Feb. 14. However, the fact of the matter is that St. Valentine was a holy priest in Rome and engaged himself in assisting the martyrs, who were being persecuted under Claudius II. While so doing, he was apprehended and when he steadfastly refused to renounce his faith, he was sentenced to death. Therefore, 1715 years ago, on Feb. 14 in the year 207 A.D., this kind and loving man was beheaded.

There are many different kinds of love and numerous ways of expressing it. There is the one on one kind that one person has for another and there is the kind that St. Valentine exhibited, which encompassed all of mankind, even his enemies.

There is the maternal or paternal kind of love that a parent has for his or her children. Many have a genuine love for birds and animals and all of God's little creatures.

Hero worship is sometimes akin to love, for a favorite movie, TV, or sports personality. We have always felt that the adulation expressed by baseball fans for the great Babe Ruth was pretty close to being love. It was not necessary for the Babe to hit a home run to elicit the cheers of his millions of admirers. The applause of his delirious supporters was almost as great when the Babe struck out.

We can remember watching him from a packed grandstand and 75,000 pairs of eyes were trained on him, to the exclusion of the other players. His every move was a cause to cheer. When an inning was completed and Babe trotted in from right field, he never failed to step on second base with his left foot. Just this simple act was enough to cause the stands to erupt in a thunderous ovation.

This could be interpreted as but another act of hero worship, but I always felt that these demonstrations were generated in no small way, by genuine love. Babe loved kids and they returned that love a hundredfold.

Once in a while we read about a person who has given his or her life to save the life of another. This, of course, is the ultimate and was what St. Valentine was trying to teach. Though only a few can be raised to that lofty pinnacle, "Greater Love Hath No Man."

When we were kids it seemed that the most common form of love was that shared by an elderly couple, one or both of whom, devoted much time in caring for the other. We know of some such couples today, but for some reason they are less visible.

We can think of three couples who must have brought a smile to the face of St. Valentine. Though there were more, these three came quickly to mind.

James and Margaret Cumming lived in the green-shingled house on Catoonah Street right next to our new post office. They were Jim and Ma to all who knew them, and just about everyone in Ridgefield did know them. Both Jim and Ma were very active in the war effort in World War I. Two of their sons, Henry and William, were in the armed services.

Bill was the first person from Ridgefield to enlist and he was the first soldier to give his life. It was a sad day in Ridgefield when word was received that Bill had died in a hospital in France. Despite their sadness, Jim and Ma redoubled their efforts in the cause.

During the war, Ridgefield was divided into districts for the purpose of correlating the resources of our farms. Jim Cumming was the town director of this project. He also found time to serve on several committees and was a member of the School Board, as the Board of Education was then known.

Ma was some kind of a little dynamo. She was a detachment commandant in the local Red Cross and she and her group performed yeoman's service. When the local Home Guard was organized, Ma presented the platoon with a flag that she had made. She was the first president of the American Legion Auxiliary and spent countless hours selling poppies to benefit the veterans.

One of our fondest memories is of Jim and Ma, sitting side by side in their rocking chairs on the front porch after their duties for the day were completed. It kind of gave you the feeling that everything would be all right.

Samuel and Elizabeth Snoecks were another venerable old couple. They lived in the first house on the left as you enter Catoonah Street from Main Street. The building now houses Sheer Cookery and John Annesi Tailors. It used to sit on the corner of Main and Catoonah and was moved to its present location 63 years ago when the long brick building, known as the Scott Block was constructed. [The "Scott House," moved to Sunset Lane at the turn of the 21st Century, is now the headquarters of the Ridgefield Historical Society.]

The Snoecks were affectionately called Ma and Pa and they took in boarders. I guess most every school teacher that came to town stayed at some time with the Snoecks. Among them were the highly respected Miss Ruth E. Wills and Miss Eleanor L. Burdick.

We spoke with Miss Wills the other day and she had so many fond memories of this wonderful couple. She said that Ma Snoecks was like a mother to her. As befitting her motherly ways, Ma had an angelic face and she and Pa were a Norman Rockwell picture as they sat on their front porch. Don't people ever sit on the front porch anymore?

At any rate, when Pa got very old Ma took care of all his needs and gave him tender loving care, day and night. When Pa died in 1939, Ma followed him to her just reward in a matter of hours.

Martin and Mary Dolan were another couple in the same category. They lived on the corner of High Ridge and Gilbert Street where Mrs. John Venus now lives.

Martin was an exceptionally handsome man. He was tall, with lots of snow white hair that capped a kindly face with a large white moustache. He was a gardener for Miss Mary Olcott, so you just knew he had lots of patience.

When we got to know the Dolans, Mary was almost 90 and she was about as cantankerous, or perhaps eccentric is a better word, as any person we ever knew. No matter what Mary did to annoy Martin, he never lost his temper. The man was truly a saint and we found it hard to understand how he could be so nice to someone who did so many things to provoke him.

We lived two houses away and my mother did many things for the old couple. Her explanation was that Martin remembered the days when Mary was a much nicer person.

We feel that these are three true love stories and, like the song says, "Love Is What the World Needs Now."

Incidentally, one January night in 1929 Mary died at 11 o'clock. Martin passed on three hours later.

#139: THE FABULOUS FLOWERS OF UPAGENSTIT

One of the features of the F. E. Lewis estate was a large greenhouse that would match the conservatory in New York's Botanical Gardens. It was located at the northern end of what is now Fairfield Court and faced what is now Lewis Drive.

It was said that John W. Smith, who followed James Ballantyne as the superintendent of "Upagenstit" some 65 years ago, was the one who discovered the secret of growing [some species of] orchids in this country.

Jack isolated the orchid plants in a corner of the greenhouse where the humidity was high. Then, instead of just applying water directly to the plants, he sprayed the water into the air around the plants and let them soak it up.

One thing was sure, that fine greenhouse produced some of the most beautiful orchids ever grown. One in particular was named Lewis Cymbidium and it took first honors at the National Flower Show in New York at the old Grand Central Palace year after year.

There were about 16 orchid plants in the original collection. When the estate closed down in the mid 30's, Jack moved to Barry Avenue and constructed his own greenhouse. There he nurtured the original plants for many years and they flourished under his care.

We have heard that after Jack passed on, the plants accompanied Mrs. Smith to Ohio, where she went to live with her daughter. Those plants had a real history and we often wonder if they are still going.

That wonderful greenhouse was home to many exotic flowers and had one of the finest collections of roses to be found anywhere. Alex Roberti, Pompeo Roberti and Peter Serfilippi (there we go with three again) were some of the men who tended the great floral displays.

The Louis Waldarke family were very good friends of mine and I used to visit them on many occasions. They lived in the little house on the corner of West Lane and Golf Lane.

When the market crash came in 1929, the activities at "Upaginstit," like on other large estates, slowed down considerably. It seemed like that just overnight, there was not enough money to go around, many businesses failed, and millions were out of work. Prices dropped drastically; for instance. milk went from 32 cents a quart to 10 cents and still many could not afford to buy the bare necessities. It changed the lifestyle of most everyone.

Louie Waldarke was not really a butler, or a valet. I guess you could call him a house man. or perhaps a major-domo. At any rate, he ran the operations at the mansion and the staff there was reduced, mostly through attrition.

In an economy measure, Mrs. Lewis had the Waldarke family leave their home on West Lane and move into the mansion. They were just like members of the Lewis family, who thought very highly of them.

I remember that Louis had a brace of beautiful meerschaum smoking pipes that were among many things that Mr. Lewis left to Louis when he passed on. The two hand-carved pipes were kept in padded cases about 20 inches long. When Louis showed them he never took them out of their cases and they were such works of art that he never smoked them. They were valued at \$1,500 at the time and one can only imagine what they would be worth today.

The Waldarkes had two children, Dorothy, who was a classmate of mine, and Paul, a very close friend who played saxophone in the band with me for 18 years.

On one of my visits, while this nice family were living in the mansion, they gave me, as they usually did, a bouquet of flowers to take home. It was a very dark night, as I started my walk home. As I walked happily along what is now Lewis Drive, I was clutching a large bunch of beautiful red roses.

My trip was uneventful until I reached the entrance to the greenhouse. Suddenly a gruff voice ordered me to halt and I found the muzzle of a very large revolver that was leveled within inches of my nose.

Needless to say, I was scared out of my wits. Then, as a flashlight was trained on me, there came a loud laugh from behind the gun and I recognized the holder of the weapon as Frank Miller. It was a welcome relief and I was very happy that Frank used his flashlight before pulling the trigger.

Frank Miller had been a neighbor when we lived at what is now 612 Main Street and he and his family lived just around the corner on Danbury Road, where Johnny Tulipani now has his plumbing supply store and showroom. Frank had been a harness maker by trade and he was a good one. However, he found it necessary to make the switch to night watchman for the Lewis estate, when harness-making disappeared with the horse.

Frank's granddaughter called me recently in search of information about him and we were happy to oblige. When just a very little kid, I used to toddle over to the Millers' house and watch at the basement door as Frank cut strips of leather with which he made or repaired a harness.

One of the tools he used was an awl, a sharp pointed instrument with which he made holes in the leather in order to sew it. When I asked Frank what it was and he said that it was an awl. I thought he was putting me on and asked no more questions that day.

The Lewis family owned considerable property in New York City and it was customary for them to spend the cold winter months there. Their family home was at 23 West 52nd Street and they had several other buildings on that street that became noted for its numerous night clubs, including Sherman Billingsly's famous Stork Club.

Through the years much of their property on 52nd Street was disposed of, but Mrs. Lewis refused to sell the family home. It became just about the last family residence on the street.

The house on 52nd Street had many fireplaces and they used up firewood at a very rapid rate. The wood for the fireplaces came from Ridgefield and once a week a truck made the trip to New York.

The truck was a 1915 Federal made by a firm that went out of business many years ago. It was a chain drive and had solid rubber tires. Those hard tires did not improve the riding quality of the vehicle and on a bumpy road (which most of them were), the driver might have had difficulty keeping his seat in the cab. It was also very hard to steer and the little carbide headlights were so dim that the trips to New York started real early in order that the return could be made before dark.

Fred Minnerly was the regular driver of the truck and years later Fred became one of our local policemen.

#140: THE POOL, THE POND, & THE POLICE

Wood was just one of the many products from “Upagenstit” that had to be transported from Ridgefield to the Lewis’s winter home on 52nd Street. There were also such items as milk, cream, butter, ice cream, eggs, meat, and, of course, flowers from the greenhouse.

Each Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, someone made the trip to New York with some of these things, especially the flowers, which went on every trip.

Finding someone to make the delivery to the City was no problem. It was a much-sought-after assignment and was much coveted by the young men who worked on the estate. The trip was made on occasion by auto when there were too many items for the messenger to carry. However, the trip was made, in most instances, by train and Frank Minnerly was generally the lucky one who was selected to make the delivery on three mornings each week.

Frank would take the 8:15 train from our local railroad station (wish we could save that building) hard by the Ridgefield Supply Company. The train, with Frank Seymour at the controls, would arrive at the Branchville Station just in time to be connected with the 8:30 on the main line, which was then a direct to New York City. When Frank arrived at Grand Central at 9:45, a taxi would take him the rest of the way north to 23 West 52nd Street. The trains ran on time in those days.

This was a real fun trip for young Frank and he not only enjoyed the ride to the city, but was treated to a scrumptious lunch at the Lewis residence. To top it all off, Mrs. Lewis always made sure that the lucky lad always received a substantial tip for his efforts. Small wonder that there was such spirited competition, among those who might be selected to make the trip.

One of the features of the great showplace on West Lane was an Olympic-sized swimming pool, which was located just west of Manor Road on Lewis Drive. The pool was built in 1910 and was rather unique in that it was enclosed with glass.

The basement of the bath house contained a furnace that heated the enclosure in cold weather. The glass roof over the pool was so designed that it could be rolled back and opened in warm weather.

The various owners continued to use the pool for a number of years. When the property became a development in the 1950's, the surrounding homeowners all had the privilege of using the pool, which by then no longer had its glass roof, which had fallen into disrepair and was removed.

The plan worked out very well for a while and the residents enjoyed the pool a great deal. However, as time went on, unauthorized swimmers began to appear and some stayed until very late at night and then there was the inevitable vandalism. The result was that like so many good things, the pool came to an end. It was filled in and graded and seeded and another gem of

a luxury item had disappeared forever. The general outline of the pool is still visible as a reminder of the glory days of the past.

Just below the pool and about 100 yards to the west of it a small stream ran through the property. There were also a number of really good springs in the area. Mr. Lewis decided that it would be an ideal place for a pond so he hired a firm to dig the nice pond that sits on the corner of Lewis Drive and Golf Lane.

The pond is probably 175 feet wide and more than 200 feet long. It was here that a little octagon shaped building served as both a boat house and bath house. When World War II started, this building was moved to where the tennis courts are now on East Ridge and housed the airplane spotters at night. After the War, the building was moved again, to Bailey Avenue where it still sits and where it has served as an office for Bacchiochi Inc.

I am not sure whether or not Lewis's pond was good for swimming but it sure made a wonderful place to skate and we skated there both day and night for many winters. It seemed like the ponds froze over much earlier in the winters of years ago and we had some great hockey games on this pond and there was still room for those who just wanted to skate.

An American chain wire fence now encloses the pond, which I believe is now a part of Ward Acres.

It took a lot of houses to shelter families that were employed at "Upagenstit." They were located on Olmstead and South Olmstead Lanes as well as on Silver Spring Road and West Lane. Bart Keeffe was the coachman for the family and lived at 70 West Lane. That would be the second house on your right as you enter West Lane from High Ridge and travel west. As autos gained in popularity, coach horses were phased out, although the draft horses were kept as well as Mrs. Lewis's four little black ponies.

Like many old coachmen, Bart had nothing but contempt for the auto, which in his opinion was an infernal machine. When he informed Mr. Lewis that he had no intention of ever learning to pilot the gasoline monster, Mr. Lewis promptly pensioned him off and gave him life use of the house at 70 West Lane.

Does anyone ever do nice things like that anymore?

Directly across from the Keeffe home, there is a large three-story house at 65 West Lane. It was owned by Charles Hoyt, who also owned the large three-story house on the corner by the fountain, now the home of the Thomas McCues. The Lewis family had many weekend guests and Mr. Lewis felt that he needed more room to house them. He tried unsuccessfully to buy the house at 65 West Lane. However, Charlie Hoyt did lease the house to Lewis and whenever their weekend guests numbered more than eight, they were put up at the Hoyt house.

A few years later, in 1920, the State leased this house and established Station A, the first State Police barracks, Sgt. Buschy was the first commandant. We remember him as a rather

portly individual, with a large but well-trimmed mustache that partly concealed a very stern expression.

Two young troopers who got their start here were John C. Kelly, a local boy who became state liquor commissioner and later state police commissioner and later still, Ridgefield's representative to the General Assembly, and Leo F. Carroll, who became a major and acting Commissioner of State Police and later the State Liquor Commissioner, and later still, Ridgefield's first selectman. John passed on last year and just last week Leo went to his just reward. When coupled, the distinguished careers of these men extended for more than a century.

Later, in the 20's, the State Police moved to East Ridge, where our local police are now located and the Hoyt house was sold to the Boland family who, after some 60 years, are still the owners.

#141: UPAGENSTIT HAD A CHEF & DOCTOR AND HOUSES FOR THEM, TOO

We have been telling of some of the many buildings that were connected with the operation of Frederic E. Lewis's estate, "Upagenstit." One of the most prominent buildings was allocated to the superintendent, whom Mr. Lewis felt should live in a style befitting his station in life. This large house is at 74 West Lane and is now the home of the Joseph Dunworth family.

Just west of the Dunworth residence is the entrance to Manor Estates which earlier served as the elaborate entrance to the Lewis estate. Directly across the street from this entrance is the residence of Dr. James J. O'Toole. at 83 West Lane. It is a very stylish, white house with a sun porch, enclosed with small panes of glass.

So the story goes, Mr. and Mrs. Lewis were having dinner at one of New York's famous hotels and liked the food so well that they hired the chef on the spot. This meant that the chef and his family had to move to Ridgefield.

The family took up residence on Lewis Drive in a rather small house. After a few months. the chef and his family began to get restless and word trickled back to Mr. Lewis that the family were considering a move back to the City.

Mr. Lewis, being a very practical man, bought the nice house at 83 West Lane and moved the unhappy family to the larger quarters. All talk of returning to New York quickly evaporated as soon as the chef's wife had a look at her charming new home.

Lewis sure knew how to satisfy his employees.

Right next door to the house just described there is a cluster of three two family homes. At one time there was a very large, brown-shingled house where these three buildings now stand. It had once been the home of the James Mullen family, among several others.

Mr. Lewis had as his personal physician, a New York doctor named Fiske. Each time the two men met, Dr. Fiske reminded Mr. Lewis of how fortunate he was to have such a lovely town as Ridgefield in which to make his home.

After a while, Mr. Lewis determined that Dr. Fiske would like nothing better than to move his family to Ridgefield so he bought the large house that stood at 89 West Lane.

Dr. Fiske and his family got to enjoy living here and Mr. Lewis was happy to have both his chef and his physician, living side by side directly across from the entrance to "Upaginstit."

No one should have envied Frederic E. Lewis and his great wealth for he sure knew how to use it to benefit others, and he thoroughly enjoyed doing so many nice things.

That large building on the corner of Olmstead and West Lane had kind of an interesting history. In the 1940's it was acquired by Mrs. Eloise Lindsay who proceeded to turn it into a French restaurant, called La Bretagne.

In April of 1947 there was a very bad fire that almost destroyed the building. Damage was estimated at \$40,000 and one can only imagine what it would have been by today's standards.

The necessary repairs were made and the restaurant reopened. On Feb. 27, 1960, there was a fire in a small house on Hayes Lane, just a short distance from La Bretagne. The fire occurred in the late afternoon and it was a hot one, but the firemen with their usual efficiency were successful in saving the house.

Later that evening the firemen were again summoned, this time to a fire at La Bretagne. It was felt that the second fire was caused by sparks from the first.

Whatever the reason, smoke poured from the big building and just as the firemen arrived, the whole place seemed to go up in flames. The efforts of the firemen were seriously hampered by very low water pressure and we can remember Norman Craig holding a hose from which only a trickle of water was emitted.

To add to the problems encountered by the firemen, the weather had become terribly cold and their attempts to operate on the icy roof were fraught with danger. The ladders also quickly became covered with ice and it was indeed very fortunate that no one was seriously injured under these conditions.

This marked the end of La Bretagne and Mrs. Lindsay finally sold the place to William Peatt and soon there were three buildings where the restaurant had formerly stood.

After the Lewis family moved into their mansion on West Lane, Mr. Lewis continued buying additional parcels of land as they became available. One of these parcels was the large field, just west of the Casa-More Store. In recent years this great field has become overgrown with trees and shrubs and it might be difficult to visualize it as an open field of some 15 or 20 acres. Actually it had been several smaller fields and Mr. Lewis had the stone walls that divided it removed. It seemed large enough to have made a small airport.

For many years, Mrs. Lewis had put on a rather spectacular fireworks display on each Fourth of July. It had been the custom to stage the display on the great lawn in back of, and just to the west of, the mansion.

At this juncture this area of the lawn had a considerable slope and in the winter it was the site of a toboggan slide. The slide started at the kitchen of the mansion and went down to Lewis Drive and across the pond, which we have previously described.

Paul Waldarke used to water the slide at night, so that it would freeze to a shiny surface. The following day we would have a real fast trip, down the slide to the pond. I still have a toboggan, but I guess no one now uses them in their winter sports program.

Perhaps because of the slope or because of a need for more room, or because of a safety factor, Mrs. Lewis changed the site for the fireworks display to the large field next to Casa-More.

The fireworks were purchased locally, through Howard Thomas who at that time ran the store that is Casa-More today. They must have been the finest fireworks available and were selected for their beauty rather than the thunderous noise of some of those we see today.

There were the various sky rockets and Roman candles. etc. However, the most spectacular depicted Niagara Falls. the Statue of Liberty and, of course, the American flag. Professionals were imported to handle the setting off of the fireworks and they put on a great show.

The public was invited to attend and did so with enthusiasm. Just about everyone in town turned out for this annual event.

The show made a lot of people happy but none was as happy as Howard Thomas. Howard was once heard to say that the profit he made on the fireworks took care of all his expenses for the year and the rest of his sales were just gravy. He had good reason to be happy.

#142: UPAGENSTIT'S FIELD OF FOOD AND TEAMS OF GRAND HORSES

The large field next to the CasaMore Store had more uses than just a place to set off fireworks. A great portion of the field was allocated to growing hay for the Lewises' livestock.

You can bet that it had the nicest crop of timothy and redtop, with a little alfalfa mixed in. This called for another building in which to store the hay. So. a very large barn was constructed on the southern end of the field. It may still be there but we cannot see it, as through the years the trees have grown to a height that cuts off the view.

If you have been keeping track of the great many buildings that made up the Lewis compound, it is easy to understand why it was necessary to employ three carpenters, full-time, just to keep all these structures in good repair.

The northern end of the field was devoted to the growing of vegetables. It must have been the largest garden of its kind in the area. Just about every kind of vegetable was grown in this great garden. It was here that I first saw a watermelon actually growing.

The size of the garden is understandable when you consider that it supplied not just the Lewis family, but the families of their many employees. The garden was so productive that it developed a surplus and much of the produce was given away. That great field could probably have supplied the entire town with vegetables, at the size Ridgefield was at the time.

John Robinson, Clem Pasquarella Sr., Pat Boland, and Eugeni Fishcialetti were just some of the people that planted and tended the vegetables with loving care. They were all expert in their profession.

The family that lived in the building that is now the CasaMore Store had a good-sized grape arbor from which some very fine wine was produced. As might be expected, it soon became a very popular place for the Lewis employees to have their lunch.

As previously noted, the Lewis family had disposed of their driving horses and coach horses. However, they retained two beautiful teams of draft horses. One was a perfectly matched team of greys.

As anyone who has driven on Manor Road and Lewis Drive knows, these two wide thoroughfares have gutters on either side that are lined with white bricks. Michael Geoghan was the teamster who drove the gray team and twice daily he drove his team the length of the estate. Another employee would sweep the brick gutters and place the debris in Mike's wagon.

Everything was kept very neat at "Upagenstit." After 75 years those white bricks are still pretty much intact except where they have been removed to make entrances to the many homes that now make up the development. [Alas, the brick gutters were removed by the town in the early 2000s.]

Mike Geoghan was a very nice man, with a happy disposition that endeared him to all who knew him. He never appeared to have a worry of any kind. This made it very difficult to understand why he would ever consider taking his own life. However, early one morning, just before Christmas in 1928, Louis and Paul Waldarke were out for a walk and they found Mike hanging from a tree. He left no note and no one in his family could provide any information that would give a clue as to a reason for the tragedy.

It should be noted that there was a fine drainage system along these driveways and catch basins were installed at strategic intervals. The driveways were, of course, well constructed. They had a deep stone base and were topped with the finest blue stone and easily met the specifications when years later the developer offered them to become a part of Ridgefield's public road system.

The roads are plenty wide enough to allow automobiles to pass each other with ease. There were beautiful street lights all along the driveways and they were very similar to the lights that flank either side of the front entrance to the Ridgefield Library. For some reason, these lights were removed when the estate became a development. Someone made a terrible mistake.

John Hobby was another teamster at "Upagenstit." John had a very fancy team of strawberry roans. He had been a driver in the Barnum and Bailey circus and knew all the tricks to make his team look their very best.

As a rule the teamsters thought more of how their horses looked than how they looked themselves. John kept the harness clean and polished the brass ornaments until they gleamed.

He had a way of spreading the horses so that their heads turned outward and they gave the appearance of being so frisky that they were ready to fly. Actually, these horses were very well trained, were quite docile and easy to handle, though they stepped higher than a blind goose walking through rye stubble.

John used to mow the expansive lawns on the estate, with his team of roans. They pulled a series of gang mowers that were very similar to those that are pulled by tractors on the golf links today.

These horses were large and they were heavy, about 1,450 pounds each. They also were fitted with sharp iron shoes. Therefore, care had to be taken to prevent the beautiful lawns from being marked up by the horses' boots. The problem was solved by using leather boots on the horses. The boots fit right over the iron shoes and the grass was protected.

Just a couple of years ago, we saw one of these leather boots hanging in the show window of Young's Feed Store and could not help but wonder if any one of the many people who passed by it, knew what its purpose was.

The mowing did not stop with the lawns. The roadsides were also kept in first-class shape and John with his roans could be seen each week, mowing along West Lane and Golf Lane.

In the ensuing years the roadside on West Lane has become overgrown with trees and bushes to such an extent as to prevent people from walking along what used to be such a very pleasant walkway.

The State of Connecticut owns the property right up to the stone wall but that did not prevent the Lewis family from maintaining it. You may be sure that it was well manicured and there was not a blade of grass out of place.

Our hope is that it will one day again become attractive and a pleasure to walk on. In the past year, of necessity, we have become a born again walker and because of that fact we have become cognizant of the many sidewalks in Ridgefield that are in a sad state of disrepair.

John Hobby liked mowing the roadsides as it gave him an opportunity to show off his classy team to passersby, many of whom stopped to admire them.

When mowing the lawn near the mansion on those warm summer days, John would rest his team under one of the enormous shade trees that dotted the area. He always made sure to stop near the kitchen on the north end of the mansion and almost as on signal, one of the maids would appear with a cool pitcher of lemonade.

#143: AROUND AND INSIDE THE LEWIS CASTLE

Frederic E. Lewis had a reputation as a man who would settle for nothing but the very best. Therefore, when it came to landscaping "Upagengstitt," he made sure that only the choicest trees and shrubs were planted on his lovely estate. Many of the plantings were imported and 75 years later. Some of them are still being enjoyed by residents of Manor Estates.

Along Manor Road and in back of where the garage once stood, there are several clumps of very large white birch trees and they are in good shape, despite their age. Various species of evergreens and pines, both coniferous and deciduous, from the original plantings are still thriving throughout this very fine development.

Most people have a favorite tree and the Lewises were no exception. The favorite for Mr. Lewis was the mulberry tree. We remember how, in the song, it was “Round and Round the Mulberry Bush,” but actually they are a tree. There are still two magnificent specimens of the mulberry tree, just inside the main entrance on Manor Road. The largest of the two can be seen on the lawn of the Knortz family and its size certainly qualifies it as a tree. The graceful limbs of this tree descend to the ground from a height of almost 20 feet. I would say that it is the largest that I can remember ever seeing.

The oriental red maple was the favorite of Mrs. Lewis and she had both the regular and the lacy leafed variety. The regular variety grows rather slowly, but the lacy leaf grows so slow as to make it appear almost dormant. However, they are beautiful and the largest we have ever seen is on the corner of East Ridge and Prospect Street, in front of the former residence of the Ernest Brunetti family. We would hesitate to guess how old that one is.

There are several of these fine trees along Manor Road and one that will quickly catch your eye is right across from where the mansion used to stand. There is a wide turn-around at this point and this pretty lacy leaf sits on the eastern side of the turn-around. Though it is not over seven feet in height we would bet that it is over 100 years old.

All this has brought us to the site of the mansion, so it would seem appropriate that we tell about what was probably the finest structure of its kind. The entire building was encased in solid concrete and one could easily get the impression that it was intended to last forever.

The front entrance was most impressive and was protected by a very large porte-cochère, over which there was a parapet that gave it the effect of a medieval castle — and a castle it was. The massive entrance hall was open to the third floor, in the style of the Capitol, except that it was not rotund. Mr. Lewis liked everything square.

As one might expect, the main dining room was on the right, where there was easy access to the kitchen. They would not have their maids carrying food any farther than was absolutely necessary. As it was, they had to cross two other rooms, one of which was a very large butler's pantry, to reach the dining area.

At the southern end of the building, there was a glass-enclosed sunroom from which one could enjoy watching the sun disappear each evening behind West Mountain. At the northern end of this extraordinary building was a fully equipped dairy room. In between the dairy room and the sunroom were more than 40 magnificent rooms, many of them were very large.

The dairy room had a cream separator, a butter churn, a bottle washing machine and a gigantic ice cream freezer. Mrs. Lewis spent considerable time in the dairy as she had a great interest in its operation.

The milk cows at "Upagenstit" were purebred Guernseys, so the butter always had that golden yellow hue. They also made hard cheese and cottage cheese at the dairy, but the product that had the greatest appeal to Mrs. Lewis was the ice cream.

One could only guess as to how many gallons of ice cream Mrs. Lewis made with Mrs. Waldarke's help. I do know that when the estate was closing down in the early 30's, the dairy herd was sold off. This did not bring the ice cream making to an end. Mrs. Lewis just called the Conklin Dairy and ordered a 40-quart can of heavy cream. When I delivered it, she used to say that she was making the ice cream for the kids in the neighborhood. She was always doing something for someone else.

Right next to the dairy room was the laundry. It was a very large room, probably 30 feet wide and 40 feet long. It had the usual apparatus one would expect to find in a laundry, but one thing made it unique. It had a clothes dryer and this was many years before the sophisticated, automatic dryers of today. This drier was of simple design, but it did the job.

This clothes dryer was located at the west end of the laundry room and was actually a room in itself. It was as though someone had laid a huge chest of drawers on its side. There were probably 20 of these drawers and they extended the full width of the laundry floor.

Each drawer was somewhat larger than a king-size mattress standing on edge and extending from the ceiling to the floor. The end of each drawer that faced the laundry room was covered with a light shiny metal and each drawer had a metal handle, with which the drawer could be pulled out into the laundry room for some 12 feet. The drawers ran on a track that was so well engineered that a child could pull one out and push it back after it was loaded with the wet clothes.

Each drawer had a clothes rack extending from one end to the other. The floor of the dryer had several metal registers that were connected to large air ducts. The ducts carried the warm air from one of the two very large furnaces back to where it circulated through the dryer. The warm air did its job and the clothes were quickly dried. What an energy saver such a dryer would be today.

The mansion had a basement that extended the full length of the building, which must have made it at least 200 feet in length. As stated, there were two enormous furnaces and coal bins that would hold more than 60 tons of coal.

There was still plenty of room in the basement for a wine cellar of such size that it would complement the Lewis castle.

It is worthy of note that the white mansion was topped with a red roof. That large red roof was so easily identified from the air that it was said the pilots of a bygone era often used it as a landmark. Fortunately none ever tried to land on it.

#144: LEWIS HAD MANY FRIENDS, INCLUDING COON HUNTERS

At one time there were beautiful supplies of game in the wooded areas of Ridgefield. For the early settlers, game birds and game animals were actually a means of survival. For well over 200 years, a hunter could roam the woods in Ridgefield, without being overly concerned about the danger of accidentally shooting another person, or being accidentally shot himself, by a stray bullet.

During the Depression years there was a shortage of money with which to buy food and during World War II, food was scarce. During these years many local families, in an effort to make ends meet, used local game as a supplement to their food stuffs.

Ridgefield had a very active Fish and Game Society during the 20's and 30's. I recently came across one of my old membership cards (1934). The card carries the signature of my neighbor Jack O'Keefe. Jack was secretary for the society for many years.

The organization used to meet in the old Odd Fellows Hall and noted sportsmen appeared there as guest speakers. Fred Carley of Danbury, a noted photographer of wildlife, used to show movies of his many hunting expeditions.

Suddenly all this changed, as Ridgefield started to grow and the wooded areas began to disappear. My own days as a hunter ceased abruptly when shots from the guns of other hunters began whistling through the bushes on what is now the development known as Westmoreland.

Some hunters had a greater interest in fur bearing animals than those intended for the table. Edward Minnerly Sr., used to head a party of raccoon hunters that included his sons, Ed, Fred and Frank. When Frederic Lewis learned of this, he asked to accompany them.

Apparently Mr. Lewis found this nocturnal hunting to his liking and on the next hunt, he brought along a friend. On this occasion, when the hounds had treed the coon, the friend climbed the tree and attempted to shake the coon out of the tree. The limb on which he was standing broke under his weight and he landed with an injured back.

After this incident Mr. Lewis hired Walter Crissey, who was a lineman of the Electric Company, to accompany the hunters. Walter did all the climbing as he had the leg irons with the long spur that enables one to climb a utility pole.

Frederic Lewis was a very outgoing person and enjoyed the company of other people. It naturally followed that a wealthy man, with his disposition and generosity, would have a lot of friends, and he had more than his share. It mattered little that he might not know a family or individual personally. If they were in need, Mr. Lewis was right there to help, but without fanfare. If you were a friend of his, there was no length to how far he would go for you.

A town official once disappeared with a sizable amount of the town's money. The person happened to be a friend of Mr. Lewis and to no one's surprise the money was quickly replaced.

One story about Mr. Lewis was to the effect that he offered to build the original school on East Ridge and give it to the town. His affinity for things square came again to the forefront when he added a stipulation that the pillars at either side of the front entrance to the school be square. The school board at the time insisted that the pillars be round. The end result was that the taxpayers paid for the school.

It is interesting to note that there was considerable deterioration of the pillars through the years and during one of several renovations of the building, it became necessary to replace them. You guessed right — the round pillars disappeared and to this day they are square.

My father and Frederic Lewis became good friends. It may have been because of their mutual interest in the Adams Express Company. One as the local agent, the other as an owner. I'm sure that it would not be necessary to say which was which. Then again, it may have been because the two men found that they each had a penchant for bending their right elbows.

At any rate, Old Joe, the express horse, made at least one trip each day to Upaginstit. If it became necessary to make a trip late in the day, Pop would leave his assistant in charge of the office and make that delivery himself, especially if this occurred on a weekend.

It was the custom in those days to do the weekly shopping on Saturday. Most of the stores cooperated by remaining open until nine o'clock.

I was little more than a toddler at the time, but I well remember walking with my mother in front of J.E. Ryan's Store one Saturday evening when we heard the unmistakable "clip clop" of a horse approaching from south Main Street. As we crossed Bailey Avenue to the Town Hall, Mom said "That looks like Old Joe!"

Sure enough, while Pop was visiting with Mr. Lewis, Old Joe got tired of waiting and took off alone for the barn. It was rather fascinating to watch the well-trained horse, without benefit of a driver, execute a perfect left turn in Catoonah Street and, when he reached the fire house, another perfect left turn into B.E. Sperry's Livery Stable. Once safely inside, someone unharnessed him and put him in his stall.

It would be some time later that Pop would arrive home via Mr. Lewis's auto.

There is no end to the stories about Frederic E. Lewis and the nice things that he did for his friends, but one concerning George Kirk and Cyrus Cornen is certainly worthy of mention. Cy and George were good friends of Frederic and one day, just to demonstrate his friendship, he bought them each a brand new Brewster automobile. The Brewster was considered an excellent auto and I think they were made in Bridgeport. [Ed.: While the Brewsters were a Connecticut family and set up their first carriage factory in New Haven around 1810, their cars were made in Long Island City, N.Y.]

Anything as beautiful as Upagenstit should have something to protect its boundaries and to this end, Mr. Lewis decided to build a stone wall. This would be no ordinary wall; it would have to be the best and of course, true to character, he wanted it to be square. Every stone would be cut and only the flat faces would be exposed.

A firm owned by Michael Mattil of New Canaan was engaged to build the wall. Mike had a crew that sometimes numbered as many as 10 and they worked for three years to build a wall that not only enclosed the estate but property on Olmstead and South Olmstead Lane that went with it. It must have a wonderful foundation as after all those years, it is still in excellent shape. So China has its great wall and Ridgefield has its great wall.

Finally came the day when James Ballantyne, superintendent on the estate, informed Mr. Lewis that the wall was completed. He then asked Mr. Lewis if he had anything further for the men to do.

With typical humor, he replied: "Yes, have them move the wall six inches closer to the highway."

#145: REMARKABLE MARY LEWIS WAS IN A CLASS BY HERSELF

Frederic Ellsworth Lewis was considered to be a very smart man. That fact was proven without any doubt when he married the wonderful Mary Russell.

They were certainly the ideal couple. Both were wealthy, each in their own right. Both were philanthropists in the best sense of the word. Both enjoyed doing nice things for others and both loved Ridgefield. I would even bet that they both loved Mary Pickford, "America's Sweetheart." What we are trying to say is that they had similar interests and were well-suited to one another.

One thing was sure: When they arrived in Ridgefield almost 80 years ago, they did not come here seeking their fortune. It seemed that their ambition was to enrich the lifestyle of others and this they proceeded to do with vigor.

There are always the usual cynics, who dismiss the kind deeds of people like the Lewis family by noting that they could well afford to do nice things. Fortunately, they are a distinct minority. Most people are well aware that in a community that had more than its share of wealthy people, only a select few will be remembered for their kindness to the town and its people.

We think that it is a fine thing that people who have been good to Ridgefield receive due recognition for their kindness. It is hoped that the most recent generous benefactor to the Ridgefield Library will soon be made known. Fortunately we still have a few people who are willing to help while shunning the accolades that their benevolence would surely generate.

The contribution of the Lewis family to Ridgefield should not be considered only in a monetary sense. They put their shoulders to the wheel and did their part in a physical sense as well. Any worthwhile venture was sure to attract their attention and receive their support.

Mrs. Lewis lived to be 89 and seemed to possess an extraordinary vitality that allowed her to participate in many of the local activities. Before World War I she helped to organize the local chapter of the American Red Cross and was a tireless worker for that organization. She was its first local chairman and held that post for some 30 years.

Those who worked on the staff of the Red Cross would attest to the great work performed by the chairman. They were kept informed of their duties and the goals of the organization by her personal contact. Her almost daily visits were made many times by use of her four little black ponies, drawing the little black wagon with the red wheels. It was an inspiring sight to see her driving down Main Street to visit Mrs. William H. Allee, Mrs. David Workman, Mrs. James Cumming, or Harvey Lown.

We recall that on one occasion, when one of her ponies had a little black colt, they presented a rather unusual sight. The colt was probably only two or three months old and somehow, within minutes after Mrs. Lewis drove away from the stable, the colt managed to free itself from its stall and took off after its mother.

The colt caught up with the ponies as they entered West Lane and Mrs. Lewis continued on her way, with the colt trotting along, close to its mother's side. Fortunately the mare was on the off side so that the colt was protected from the oncoming traffic. They made an unforgettable picture.

The Red Cross was just one of many organizations to which Mrs. Lewis devoted her time and talents. The Ridgefield District Nursing Association was organized in 1914 and as one of its original organizers, Mrs. Lewis was elected chairman. The first nurse was Miss Ellen Enright and it was Mrs. Lewis who persuaded her to take the position.

Miss Enright was born on Ramapoo Road, just across from Casey Lane, in 1861. She had traveled as a nurse all over the United States and the West Indies. She was noted for her ability and was well loved for her kindly disposition. The house where she was born was once thought to be haunted and is still owned by her family. .

The fact that Mrs. Lewis provided Miss Enright with a Model T Ford coupe with which to make her rounds, may have been an inducement for her to take the job. At any rate, she was an ideal selection and served for many years. She became a household word in Ridgefield as did Miss Irene Hoyt, her very capable and well loved successor.

Mrs. Lewis reported in 1926 that Miss Enright had made 1,043 visits that year. The population at the time had not quite reached 3,000 and this would seem to indicate that in the course of the year, Miss Enright must have visited most of the families in town.

Just to show her versatility, Mrs. Lewis was chairman of a fair that was held in the old town hall to raise funds for the Ridgefield Baseball Team. As you might expect, it was a very successful affair.

Mrs. Lewis was very modest and avoided taking credit for many of the nice things that she did for people. However, though she did not elicit or in any way encourage a thank-you for bestowing a gift, she must have had her own method of keeping track of her acts of kindness.

When they were youngsters, all seven of the Venus boys had their own newspaper route. They also all had the good fortune to have the Lewis family as a customer. Orders were that the papers should be delivered to the front door. On occasion this posed a problem in the spring of the year, when shoes might be muddy.

Despite the mud, it was always necessary for the paper boy to enter and sit in the great hall, while Mrs. Lewis herself served hot cocoa and cookies. She always seemed to get particular enjoyment from this little act of kindness. Then at Christmas there was always a very nice present for the lucky boy.

My brother William left Ridgefield in 1915 to seek his fortune. He went on to become superintendent of the Jewel Alloy and Malleable Steel Company in Buffalo, N.Y. There was a wedding in the family in 1940 and Bill came with his family to attend the event.

On the morning of the wedding, Bill came out of Shorty's Barber Shop (now James of Ridgefield). Mrs. Lewis came out of Harvey Lown's office next door (Craig's Jewelry Store). Bill was overjoyed to see his old friend after 25 years. As he said "good morning," Bill added that he did not expect Mrs. Lewis to remember him.

"Oh yes, you are one of the Venus boys."

Bill said "You certainly would not know which one."

"Yes, you are Willy," said the great lady.

Bill was astonished even more when Mrs. Lewis pointed out that he was wearing a stick pin in his tie that she had given him for Christmas so many years before.

Mrs. Lewis was close to 80 at the time and proved again that this remarkable lady was in a class by herself.

#146: REGGIE AND WADDY AND THE GREAT, OLD BASEBALL GAMES

So we have been telling about some of the nice things that Frederic and Mary Lewis did for Ridgefield and many of its people. As might be expected, their two sons, Reginald Mentourn Lewis and Wadsworth Russell Lewis, were sure to follow in their footsteps. The apple does not fall far from the tree.

We have no specific acts of philanthropy that could be credited to Reggie, as he was still a young man when he moved with his wife and children to Norfolk, Conn. However, we are confident that it was our loss and Norfolk's gain.

Before leaving Ridgefield, Reggie had purchased and developed the former Richard Keeler farm on South Salem Road. This beautiful place was described in previous columns. It

spread over some 100 acres that stretched on the north side of South Salem Road from Cedar Lane west and north to Peaceable Street and east to Golf Lane.

It was a showplace in its own right. Reggie's mansion still stands directly across from Cedar Lane and is now [1985] the home of the Harry Neumann family [at 100 South Salem Road].

Both Reggie and Waddy were early enlistees in World War I. In fact, before enlisting as a yeoman in the Naval Reserve, Reggie had volunteered and performed service in the American Ambulance Corps.

When the Reginald Lewis family moved to Norfolk in the late 20's, the estate was purchased by Robert P. Scripps, of the famous publishing family. In subsequent years, it was the home of the Zinssers, the Wards, the Sosseis and now the Neumanns.

With World War I raging in Europe and the entrance of the United States expected at any time, Wadsworth Lewis donated his yacht to the Navy Department. Later on, this country became a participant and Waddy enlisted in the U.S. Navy. He was given command of his former yacht and put on patrol duty in New York harbor.

In a short time, Waddy lost interest in the routine duties of harbor patrol and requested a transfer to something that would provide more excitement. He was sent to Washington and assigned to the Intelligence Service, serving in the Censoring Department of the War College, with the rank of lieutenant.

Waddy was fond of sports and was an avid golfer. In the mid-20's, he got involved with the Ridgefield baseball team and soon became its sponsor. Bob Richardson was manager of the team and was assisted by Larry "Pudd" Davis and Joe Zwierlein. I was the bat boy for the team and still carry a scar over my left eye as a reminder that hitters, when taking their practice swings, should be given plenty of room.

Bob Richardson was the cashier in the First National Bank (now Union Trust [Wells Fargo]) and was a good friend of Waddy. No doubt it was Bob who got Waddy involved with the baseball club. At any rate, the team was the beneficiary of the support of this kind man.

Waddy bought uniforms for the players as well as the various pieces of equipment that they needed. The larger surrounding towns, such as Danbury and Norwalk, were always sure of intense competition when they played the fine Ridgefield team.

Two members of the great Ridgefield teams of that era are still around. Tabby Carboni and Frank Minnerly were both infielders and both are in excellent shape today.

Tabby (like in cat) was noted for his juggling act before throwing to first base to catch the runner by a half step. He also had the uncanny ability to throw the bat at the ball and bunt a dribbler and then his great speed would enable him to get on base in most instances. Later on Tabby's brothers Peter, Lynce and Reno, would follow in his footsteps.

Frank Minnerly was a fine fielder and a real power hitter and could hit for an extra base more often than not. Like Tabby. Frank came from a family of good baseball players.

Both Ed and Fred Minnerly were fine pitchers and Harry (Tige) Minnerly was famous for roaming left field at East Ridge. That field dropped off so sharply that the crowd could not see whether or not a fly ball was actually caught. We will always remember how convincing Tige was as he charged up the hill with the ball held high in his right hand to indicate that he had caught it. I doubt if he was ever challenged.

In an effort to make the team even better, semi-pro players were hired and added to the local roster. Then toward the end of the season, when players from the big leagues were available, pitchers such as Bots Nekola from the New York Yankees and Buck Weaver from the Washington Senators would appear for the local team.

Danbury would counter with Jimmy Ring from the New York Giants and Roy Sherid from the Yankees. You can bet that just about everyone in town turned out for these games. You can also bet that it was Waddy Lewis who was able to lure these stars to our little town.

We can remember a game at Lee field in Danbury when more than 5,000 fans crowded into the ballpark. Almost half the crowd came from Ridgefield and they traveled by bus, by truck or any other conveyance that would get them to see and cheer for the Ridgefield team. They should have called them Waddy's All Stars.

It is always nice to see a well-pitched ball game and a stolen base adds to the excitement. but a home run seems to be the thing that the fans enjoy most. Perhaps because of that fact, one day at East Ridge, Waddy offered a five dollar bill to each local player that hit a homer.

The offer was only a few minutes old when a conference with the opposing pitcher was held behind the old grandstand. The result was an eruption such as has seldom been seen on any ballfield. Baseballs began to rain on Governor Street and some even reached the lawn of the State Police barracks.

They were not fooling Waddy — he was well aware that he was being taken. However, he enjoyed the demonstration as much as the players and the fans and he had a broad smile as each crack of the bat sent the ball soaring in the air.

Wadsworth R. Lewis, like his parents, was always giving something to one of his many friends. It was Waddy that gave Alex Santini the famous putter that Alex used, not only for putting, but for driving and pitching as well, and was able to beat other good golfers who used a complete set of clubs.

Waddy's greatest gift was to the town that he loved when he left what has come to be known as the Lewis Fund. This remarkable bequest has meant so much to so many worthwhile local organizations.

Probably there are only a few members of these organizations that would remember Waddy, but all must be grateful and so we say “Thank you. Waddy.” He was a fine man and will not be forgotten.

#147: THE REVOLUTIONARY, THE VIOLINIST & THE CHICKEN HOUSE CONCERT

So, to invoke an old cliché that says all good things must come to an end, the days of the palatial showplace known as “Upagenstit” seemed to be numbered. Its demise may have been caused by a number of circumstances.

Mr. Lewis had passed on some 15 years before and Reginald and his family had moved to Norfolk, and then the Great Depression had settled in. Mrs. Lewis courageously kept the beautiful place going during the first five years of those troubled times, but the burden must have been too great.

The place was put on the market and, like so many great estates during this period, “Upagenstit” would bring only a fraction of its real worth. It was sold in 1934 to Ely Culbertson who, as they used to say, “got it for a song.”

Culbertson was a rather controversial character and had received a considerable amount of notoriety for his activities as a revolutionist, as well as a great deal of acclaim for his ability in the game of Contract Bridge.

Ely was born in Romania in 1891, the son of Almon and Xenia. Almon Culbertson was an oil engineer and was born in this country but traveled to the Caucasus to prospect for oil. While there he met Xenia, a Cossack, and married her. It was said the Ely learned the rudiments of revolutionary life shortly after taking his first step.

To Ely’s credit, it should be noted that he was a proponent of world peace. However honorable his intentions were, his methods of achieving that highly desirable goal were questionable. Ely Culbertson spent a considerable amount of time in jail for his activities in the revolutionary field. He plotted revolutions in Russia, Spain, and Mexico as well as several other countries.

His first wife, Nadya, was also a revolutionist and in one of their bouts with the ruling forces she was murdered by The Black Hundreds [an early 20th Century Russian movement that supported the czars].

Ely was jailed again after an unsuccessful attempt to murder a local governor and this activity annoyed his father a great deal. When he was released from jail, Almon decided to send his son to the United States.

Ely attended both Yale and Cornell, for short periods, but failed at both. He turned his attention to the game of bridge as a means of raising money to finance his revolutionary tactics.

True to his accepted lifestyle, he revolutionized the game. His method of bidding in contract bridge was scoffed at by the experts at that time. However, they could not deny his success and soon he became a member of the international bridge team.

His match with Sidney S. Lenz in 1931 lasted for six weeks and made the front pages of newspapers across the country. The famous match was even aired on the radio and became the subject of newsreels. Ely won the match and was on his way to fame and fortune.

Josephine Murphy Dillon was a young widow at the time, and was also an expert bridge player. She and Ely were married and became partners at the card table as well. They proved to be just about unbeatable.

Ely then turned his hand to writing and soon became editor of the periodical, The Bridge World Magazine. He also wrote several books, some of which became best sellers, including The Contract Bridge Blue Book.

The game of bridge requires a player to have considerable skill and up to Culbertson's time had been pretty much relegated to intellectuals. Ely seemed determined to change all that. His prowess at the game and his books on the subject, with all the attendant publicity, caught the public's fancy during those gray depression days. This also made Ely a millionaire.

Culbertson had set his sights on raising money for his international political aspirations but apparently decided to divert some of his fortune for his family's pleasure. Therefore, he purchased "Upaginstit" and moved with his wife Josephine, his daughter Joyce Nadya, his son Bruce Ely and his brother, Sasha, to the great showplace on West Lane.

Sasha was a concert violinist and considered to be a very good one. Bob Scala tells a funny story about Sasha. Bob was just a little boy when the Scala family rented one of the houses on the estate, on Lewis Drive. According to Bob, Sasha encountered difficulties with the acoustics in the mansion.

Sasha's problem was easily understandable because the beautiful tapestries that had once lined the walls of the great house had been removed prior to its sale. Those bare walls were bound to play tricks with the notes that flowed through the house from Sasha's Stradivarius. His music was distorted to such an extent that Sasha flatly refused to perform again in the mansion.

As Bob Scale tells it, there came a time when a dozen or two guests arrived at the mansion for a weekend visit. They had been friends and admirers of Sasha when he lived in New York and after a fine dinner and a few glasses of wine they expressed a desire to hear Sasha and his Stradivarius.

Sasha was always willing to oblige, but informed his friends of the impossibility of performing in the mansion because of its undraped walls. There were exclamations of disappointment from the guests, to such an extent that Sasha offered to play for his friends but there would have to be a change in venue.

After much deliberation Sasha agreed to move his act to a chicken house that was some distance from the mansion. The chicken house was made entirely of wood and could be expected to furnish the complementary acoustics.

The guests readily agreed and were bundled into several automobiles for the ride across the estate to the chicken house. However, once there another problem was encountered. The building was already occupied by some 30 or 40 chickens.

Undaunted, the guests joined hands and herded all the chickens into one end of the large building. They then took turns keeping the chickens from returning to the area where Sasha would perform.

Alas, another problem cropped up, in the person of a large Rhode Island Red rooster. This uncanny bird had the ability to crow about an octave above what Sasha could coax from his fiddle.

Sasha, of course, was outraged at the audacity of this cantankerous fowl and refused to continue. The dilemma was finally solved when one of the guests had the presence of mind to open the door of the chicken house and allow all the chickens to run free.

#148: HOW ELY LOST UPAGENSTIT AND 'CHIEF' HELPED AT WAR

It was only after the Culbertson family moved into the great mansion that they learned that the purchase price did not include the tremendous cost of maintaining such a large estate. This was a common misconception on the part of many people who were buying up large estates, whose former owners had been victims of the Depression.

For example, during that first autumn, Ely Culbertson, in preparation for the coming winter, ordered five tons of coal. What he did not realize was that this amount of coal was little more than enough to just light the two huge furnaces in the basement of the mansion. Before that first winter was over, a great deal more coal would be delivered to satisfy the voracious appetites of those furnaces.

The fact that to maintain an estate such as Upagenstit one must have a considerable amount of capital in reserve was brought home to Ely Culbertson in no uncertain terms.

In an effort to raise the necessary cash to keep the place going, Ely and Josephine continued their bridge matches. Ely also kept on with his writing of books as well as his syndicated newspaper column on his favorite card game. However, domestic problems cropped up as Ely and Josephine agreed to disagree and soon were divorced.

Things continued to go from bad to worse and to augment his income, Ely wrote his autobiography, "The Strange Lives of One Man." He proved to be a rather prolific writer and followed up with "The World Federation Plan," "Total Peace," "Must We Fight Russia," "Hoyle, The New Encyclopedia of Games," and "Point Count Bidding."

Ely had retained an abiding interest in the affairs of state and while in Ridgefield decided that he would enter the political arena. He made a run for the nomination of the Democratic Party

candidate for Congressman at large. His bid was unsuccessful, though he had the support of the local party organization. He was very confident that he had something worthwhile to offer and was very disappointed at his failure to secure the nomination.

Ely's plan for world peace was set forth in several of his books and in some ways it was similar to what later would become the United Nations. His plan called for a general assembly as well as a security council. He also envisioned an international police force, the members of which would be recruited from smaller countries.

In Dispatch 137 we described the huge garage that F. E. Lewis had built just north of the mansion. In the late 30's a fire of suspicious origin broke out in this fine building and the flames were quickly squelched by our ever efficient fire department. A few months later, a second fire seemed to have a much better start and this time the great building was completely destroyed.

Ely's winning ways at bridge had taken a definite downturn to such an extent that feelings were brushed to one side and Josephine returned, at least as his bridge partner. Despite the maneuvering, there was still not a sufficient cash flow to keep the estate going and it finally became necessary for the Lewis family to take back a great portion of Upagenstitt.

The Culbertson family had meanwhile moved into the Dunworth home on West Lane, which they retained after completion of the foreclosure proceedings. This large house must have seemed like a doll house after living in the mansion.

The financial problems that Ely had encountered must have continued to plague him, even after he relinquished more than 90% of the estate. His milk bill at the Conklin Dairy rose until it was out of proportion and I was sent to collect it.

The negotiations with Ely turned out to be a replay of my trade with Mike Massamino, the barber, as related in Dispatch 84. When Ely declared that he just could not pay the bill, we exhibited a willingness to take a partial payment. Soon he was offering some household effects as a means of satisfying a portion of the bill.

A badly worn out Atwater Kent radio did not appear to have much of a monetary value and a copy of his book "The World Federation Plan" did not strike a responsive chord. However, we had noticed a nice young dog tied to a tree.

The dog turned out to be a fine looking, registered German shepherd. She was exceptionally nervous and we learned later that she had been born on a ship on the high seas during a terrible electrical storm and this may have been a reason for her nervous condition.

It may also have been a reason for Ely's willingness to part with her. It was several months before "Queenie" quieted down and began to enjoy life. A year later she was bred to a handsome show dog and the result was two beautiful puppies, Major and Chief.

Major was very good natured, as well as highly intelligent and remained a valued member of our family for some 15 years. We parted with Chief when he was two months old, but never lost track of him.

Chief was rather aggressive and his owner placed him in the Canine Corps while he was still a young dog. Apparently he performed yeoman's service during World War II. The Bridgeport Sunday Post devoted a full page to Chief, describing his exploits while in the service. There was also a picture of him wearing a string of medals around his neck as he stepped from a Liberator bomber that flew him home from Tokyo.

However, Chief's military training made him unfit for civilian life, though several attempts were made to debrief him. Whenever he saw a soldier in uniform, he tried his best to accompany him and would refuse to leave his side. If an airplane should fly over, he would dive for the nearest cover and refuse to emerge until all was clear.

In the meantime, Upagenstit was put back on the market by the Lewis family. In the next few years the great place would change ownership, as well as its personality, several times.

The fine wide roads that were formerly driveways, the white brick gutters, and the beautifully landscaped lawns with some of the remaining exotic shrubbery are gentle reminders of the glory days of this magnificent estate.

#149: WHEN RIDGEFIELD WAS A COLLEGE TOWN

So once again "Upagenstit" was placed on the market and a rare opportunity was repeated. This time the place captured the attention of the directors of a girls school that was operating in nearby Stamford.

Jessie Callum Gray had founded the school about the time of World War I as a college preparatory school for girls. The school was named for its foundress and proved to be very successful. Soon more room was needed.

The need to expand was satisfied when Upagenstit became available, and Gray Court College was established in Ridgefield. The school was considered a welcome addition to Ridgefield as it seemed an ideal use for the large estate.

The school purchased only a portion of what had been the Lewis estate. Its holdings would include the mansion and some 40 acres, along with many of the outbuildings and the pond.

Gray Court College opened in May of 1941 and a bunch of very happy girls moved into the old mansion to enjoy the luxuries it had to offer. The faculty turned out to be quite innovative. As an example, it is doubtful if classrooms had ever before been held under the glass of a conservatory, or study halls conducted in a glass-covered swimming pool. One thing was for sure, the girls would not lack for vitamin D.

The mansion was dubbed Lewis Hall and it served as a dormitory, a library, a lounge for the students, a dining room, as well as furnishing offices for the President and the dean and other administrators. The converted conservatory was called Crystal Hall and the former greenhouse

became Cummings Hall. As well as classrooms, Cummings Hall also furnished the students a very unusual art studio.

Baker Hall was a portion of the greenhouse devoted to the study of science. No name was assigned to the swimming pool. It was just known as "The Pool," but what fun it must have been to use this most unique study hall. Fifteen minutes of study and twenty in the water may not produce a Madame Curie, but there was always the possibility of another Esther Williams.

The house on West Lane where the Dunworth family now lives was called Culbertson House and was reserved for the family use of the college president.

The pleasant environment at Gray Court College was enjoyed by both the students and the faculty. They had fine tennis and basketball courts, an open expanse suitable for field hockey, baseball, soccer and badminton, as well as an archery range. The skating pond was popular during the winter months and of course The Pool was used in all seasons of the year.

The Silver Spring Country Club had recently been constructed and was available for girls interested in golf. Bill Patten started a riding stable on the nearby farm that had been built by Reggie Lewis. Many of the girls were interested in riding and it was great to see them with their horses in groups of three or four. Traffic was not heavy as it is today and they used the main highways as well as the bridle trails that had been built.

Much to the delight of the boys of Ridgefield, students were permitted to visit the business area of town at regular scheduled intervals. Their appearance on Main Street always caused a big stir and there were just not enough boys to go around.

Our dance band played for one of their proms and it was a very gala affair. On this occasion, boys were imported from such exclusive schools as Choate and Canterbury. However, some of the girls insisted on inviting boys they had met on their visits to town.

From all this, it would seem reasonable to assume that the student body at Gray Court came from families that were not really concerned about where their next meal would come from. It is interesting to note that the charge of \$875 [about \$14,100 in 2021] for the school year included tuition in all departments, a furnished room, meals and use of the facilities, such as the library, athletic fields and the swimming pool.

For all the things furnished, the price may seem so low as to be ridiculous. However, the year was 1941 and the country was still feeling the effects of the Depression.

Alas, the fine school enjoyed only a relatively short life and probably encountered difficulty in operating because of restrictions brought on by World War II. Whatever the reason, we lost something that could have been nice for Ridgefield.

Once again "Upaginstit" was put on the market and once again, its character would change. This time, the grand old mansion would become an exclusive inn and restaurant.

It seemed an ideal purpose for the great building. There were an ample number of fine bedrooms, a large and beautiful dining hall and a kitchen that was as well equipped as the very finest of hotels.

An important part of that kitchen equipment was a young chef named Walter Tode. Walter had mastered the culinary arts and was starting a reputation that would take him to one of the major airlines (TWA) as the director of food preparation.

Along the way Walter discovered and developed a very special sauce. This sauce was so good that when it was poured over any old piece of meat, that meat was transformed into a dish fit for a king.

Despite Walter's growing popularity and the euphoniousness of the name "Ridgefield Country Club," business was not of sufficient volume to keep the place going. The idea for this type of hostelry was a good one. However, it was apparently just a little bit ahead of its time. One can only imagine the impact that such an inn would have in Ridgefield today.

No doubt, the fact that the effects of World War II were still being felt was an impediment to the successful operation of such a large enterprise. At any rate, the day finally came when Ridgefield Country Club ceased to exist and the big house looked very sad again. Perhaps when he named it "Upagenstit" so many years before, Frederic Lewis was looking into the future. The mansion had seen many happy days, but without people to fill the rooms it took on a very depressed appearance.

So the club closed and Chef Tode took over the former Ingersoll house on West Lane that Chris Kane had been operating as the Kane Inn. It was renamed Tode's Inn and today it is known as The Inn at Ridgefield [Bernard's].

#150: ESPIONAGE AND EXPLOSIONS MARKED END OF UPAGENSTIT

Some folks like to speculate on what might have been. Before all the numerous changes of ownership and the varied roles played by "Upagenstit," two friends of ours were offered the opportunity to purchase the great estate. The price was so very attractive, they gave it serious consideration. However, their available cash had been invested in a business venture. Added to that was the problem of what to do with that great expanse of real estate.

It was with great reluctance that the young men decided to devote their energies and resources to the business in which they were already engaged. Had they taken the plunge, it was agreed that the mansion would be retained for some useful purpose. The word "condominium" had not yet achieved common usage as it has today, perhaps because it sounded so much like condemn.

At any rate, after serving as a home for the Lewis family and the Culbertson family, as a college for girls, as The Ridgefield Inn, as the Ridgefield Country Club and The Ridgefield Health Resort, it was now on the market again. The news at its availability spread for miles

around and a group that called itself The Jewish Fraternal Order became the new owners of what was left of the great showplace.

Very little was known about this organization and stories about its plans for use of the place ran rampant around the town. Some had it connected with the Garment Workers Union. Others had it serving as a base for a network of espionage activities. At the least, there was an aura of mystery about the new owners that many local people found to be very intriguing.

Young people, who had been accustomed to playing on the spacious lawns that surrounded the empty mansion, now found that they must find other places for their games. A guard patrolled the premises and his demeanor was not of the variety that would attract the little ones to his side.

One of our children wrote an essay for his English class concerning the activities around the mansion. The teacher said that it would compare favorably with the best of Ellery Queen.

Most of the supplies used at the mansion were imported from New York City. The few deliveries made by local merchants brought fresh stories that just added to the perplexing puzzle that was rapidly forming. The deliverymen were always met at the service entrance and none gained admittance to areas that had been so familiar in years past.

One person who had the temerity to make his call at the main entrance returned with the story that when the door opened he could see a picture of Josef Stalin hanging in the entrance hall. The story created renewed speculation as to the intentions of the organization and it was substantiated by others who were employed on the place. One thing was sure: The traffic to the mansion was several times greater after dark than during the daylight hours.

As huge as the mansion was, it apparently was not big enough to suit the plans of the new owners. Soon they were seeking approval of a plan to erect a very large addition to the southern end of the building. This was in March of 1953.

The proposed addition was to serve as a kind of convalescent home for members of the organization. It caused quite a stir in the community.

Since the request was actually for an extension of a nonconforming use, it was properly turned down by the Zoning Commission. The case was then referred to the Zoning Board of Appeals, and I happened to be secretary of that august board at the time.

Though there was great interest among the townspeople, I think they were outnumbered at the public hearing on the matter by the battery of high-powered attorneys that represented the applicants.

Some members at the Board of Appeals appeared to be duly impressed by the large delegation of legal beagles. However, a decision on this important matter was wisely deferred for a week. By the time the week had elapsed and members of the board had given the proposal sufficient thought, the application was denied by unanimous vote. It is with pride that I still carry a scar from that incident.

There was some talk of an appeal, but the matter was settled rather permanently when the applicants were judged to be a subversive organization and it was disbanded by court order.

So once more “Upagennit” was up for sale. It seemed as though the saga of the great place was a reminder of Anna Sewall’s excellent novel about Black Beauty and we kept hoping that a kindly owner would come along and restore it.

In the 1950’s, Ridgefield was in the process of being rediscovered. The demand for additional housing was rapidly rising. Developments were springing up in various parts of town and homes were being purchased as fast as they appeared.

A development group came to town and promptly labeled itself Ridgefield Manor Estates. The president of the group was Harold F. Benel and the vice president was Howard J. Viele. They could see the great potential offered by the beautiful estate on West Lane and quickly acquired the ownership. The group brought with them a good reputation for building quality homes and attracting families of more than a moderate income.

When the subdivision plans of this organization were presented to town authorities, they experienced little difficulty in having them accepted. Home buyers welcomed the idea of living in such a beautifully landscaped area, and doesn't everyone want to live in Ridgefield?

The great pool was theirs to share with their neighbors, though the glass top had been removed by now.

The problem of what to do with the mansion remained, and after some time it was decided to tear it down. This was a sad day for Ridgefield.

Eliminating the great mansion would prove to be more difficult than anticipated. F.E. Lewis built things that were intended to last.

A firm from Mt. Kisco was engaged to remove the building and they had the salvage rights. I remember that huge machine with the long boom and the long cable and steel ball that were suspended from it. The ball was swung with terrific force time and again against the side of the building and it failed to even crack it. Finally, in desperation, many charges of dynamite had to be used and Fredric Lewis must have smiled at the efforts of the wreckers.

At any rate, this fine development is a credit to the town.

#151: THE WEALTH AND ELEGANCE OF HIGH RIDGE AVENUE

Ridgefield’s Main Street is known all over this country because of its beauty and its contribution to our nation's history. The majestic and graceful elms that lined the famous street are gone but thoughtful and caring people have made sure that they were replaced by maples and other shade trees.

With few notable exceptions, attempts to change the appearance and the character of Main Street have been stymied by the righteous indignation of those who love Ridgefield and wish to preserve it for future generations. We earnestly trust that there will always be those who will continue to guard this irreplaceable asset with vigor and justified militancy.

Almost as famous, and worthy of preservation, is High Ridge Avenue. Today it extends from West Lane on the south to Gilbert Street on the north. At one time the stretch from West Lane to Peaceable Street was known as just plain High Ridge. The word Avenue was added by those who lived between Peaceable Street and Catoonah Street. There were those who called the area from Catoonah Street to Gilbert Street Maple Avenue. There was even a time when some people living between High Ridge Avenue and Greenfield Street used Maple Avenue rather than Barry Avenue as their mailing address.

It mattered little as street labels were not so important years ago when the mailman all knew everyone in town. Most letters were simply addressed to the individual and just Ridgefield, Conn. We still have some of those letters so addressed, and they were delivered without any problem. Life was a great deal less complicated in those days.

That portion of High Ridge from West Lane to Peaceable Street was at various times labeled Publishers Row, as well as Millionaires Row. The street is a short one, less than a quarter mile long. All of the residents were not publishers but they sure were millionaires.

Ridgefield probably has more millionaires today than it had when High Ridge was known in some quarters as the wealthiest street in the wealthiest county in the wealthiest state in the union. However, for sheer wealth and for genuine elegance, this short but very impressive street was in a class by itself. It still is.

With the passing of Mrs. Gerardus P. Herrick a couple of years ago, the families that made High Ridge famous around the turn of the century are now all gone. That great lady was so civic-minded that she spent untold hours walking along the street, picking up beer cans and other refuse.

When I was a kid all of the buildings were on the western side of High Ridge with the exception of the house with the silo effect and bubble top where the Miller family lives now. It was a much smaller house at the time, several additions having been made through the years.

Elmer Boutan lived in that little house [28 High Ridge Avenue] when he was superintendent for the estate across the street. Elmer was a fine man who always used to plant peas in his garden on St. Patrick's Day regardless of the weather. If the frost was not out of the ground, he would use a crowbar to make the holes to drop the seeds in. He must have had the right formula as no one had a better pea patch.

Elmer was a great sport and excelled at trap shooting. When he was in his late seventies he still bowled a very good game. Elmer always drove Dodge cars which he always bought from his friend George Tator.

The only other house on the eastern side of High Ridge was the large white house that is now the home of the Calhoun family [50 High Ridge Avenue]. It had belonged to Andrew Benedict and A. Barton Hepburn bought it for protective purposes. Hepburn lived across the street and he was fussy about who lived near him. He must have checked out Louisa W. Gray

and found her to be suitable, as the very next year he sold the place to her. Louisa and her two children, Tunney and Geraldine, moved from New York City to Ridgefield and my mother was her modiste.

Much of the property on the eastern side of High Ridge belonged to people who lived on Main Street. For example, there was a fine open field just north of the Calhouns' that belonged to Mrs. Johnston L. dePeyster who lived in the house now owned by the Patrick Crehan family. I was once set to plow the field with a team of horses. Both horses were just colts, the field was very stony and it turned out to be quite an experience. The field was plowed, the stones all picked off and lime and fertilizer were applied. It was seeded to winter wheat, which grew to an enormous height and was then plowed under to enrich the soil.

Again the stones were picked and again more fertilizer and lime. That spring it was seeded to buckwheat and when it blossomed the field was just a sea of white. Beekeepers must have had a bumper crop of buckwheat honey that year as millions of hardworking bees came from miles around to feast on the buckwheat and gather the nectar. The humming of the bees as they worked could easily be heard as far away as Main Street.

The bees must have been terribly disappointed if they thought this would be an annual event. That fall, after more fertilizer and lime, the field was seeded to alfalfa and it yielded the finest crop of this nutritious legume this side of the Mississippi River. The Stanley Lewises now make their home on what must be the richest soil in Ridgefield.

The oldest house on High Ridge is, of course, the Peter Parley House. This venerable old structure was built by the Rev. Samuel G. Goodrich in 1797. This was not the first house on High Ridge. One had been constructed just north of the Peter Parley house. However, it was burned to the ground by the British forces as they retreated to Saugatuck Shores after the Battle of Ridgefield, April 27, 1777.

As every child in school must know, Samuel G. Goodrich, Jr. was the famous Peter Parley who wrote *Recollections of A Lifetime*, excerpts of which appear each week on this page of *The Press*. The Goodrich family had lived on West Lane close by the Little Red Schoolhouse where Samuel Jr. first attended school in 1799. His first teacher had a delightful name. She was called Aunt Delight Benedict.

Perhaps it was she who instilled in young Samuel the delightful sense of humor that accompanies his wonderful writing. That wonderful humor is recognized in his selection of the word Parley, from the French word "Parler," in his nom de plume. It also shows in his answer when questioned as to what college he had graduated from and he would reply "West Lane" in such a manner as to make it sound like "Wesleyan." He must have been an exceptional person.

#152: THE BEAUTIFUL STONE COMPOUND OF THE WEALTHY HYDE SISTERS

The road that is now known as High Ridge had not been built when the Rev. Samuel Griswold Goodrich, Sr. constructed what we have come to know as the Peter Parley house. Access to the family's new home was made from West Lane, by way of the very short street that later became Parley Lane.

Mr. Goodrich used a portion of his new home as a school and had students from surrounding towns as well as local youngsters. Some came from as far away as New Haven.

Apparently the place was well adapted for the teaching of young children and in later years, Hugh S. Banks used it as a school. Later still, William O. Seymour conducted a school in this famous old house.

It must have been the atmosphere in which the building was steeped that caused Samuel Jr. to write all those school books and stories that young people found to be of interest. One can easily imagine the effect his writings may have had on a young Samuel Clemens. The pen name, Peter Parley, may have influenced Clemens in the adoption of his own pseudonym.

It is to be regretted that the present owner of the Peter Parley House did not continue the old house as a seat of learning. We could all have learned a lot from the highly esteemed and very intelligent Preston R. Bassett. Ridgefield is deeply indebted to the Bassetts for their careful preservation of their historical landmark.

Prior to the Bassett family, the grand old place was owned by a prominent New York banker, Harris Dunscombe Colt. His wife, Elizabeth Browne Colt, was the daughter of Walter R. Browne, a former mayor of New York City.

The Colt family also owned the Bluebird Apartments on West Lane. They bought the place from Ida M. Smith who had been the manager of the famous Port of Missing Men.

After the passing of Mr. Colt, his wife suffered very severe depression and became pretty much of a recluse. She moved to the Hotel Roosevelt in New York City where she maintained an apartment. Mrs. Colt lived alone and no one was allowed to visit with her. Food was brought to her daily along with fresh linen but this was done without the maid ever entering the room.

Harris D. Colt Jr. and his wife, Theresa Strickland Colt, took over the Peter Parley House after the senior Mrs. Colt passed away in 1929. Harris was a noted archeologist and spent much time in traveling about the world. During his travels Harris met and married Theresa, a native of Malta. In his archeological pursuits Harris did considerable exploring of the pyramids in Egypt.

When the senior Colts bought the property, it extended all the way west to Shadow Lane. That was changed in 1920 when two sisters, Elizabeth Alvina Hyde and Mabel Lillia Hyde, left their family home in Wildwood, N.J. The sisters had visited friends in Ridgefield and like so many others, they were struck by the beauty and tranquility of the town. The Colts were persuaded to part with the corner property on which there was a small yellow building. So the small wooden building quickly disappeared and in its place there was built the several attractive stone buildings with the stylish old English cobblestone courtyard.

Each stone had to be cut and faced properly and when completed the buildings were a vision of substantiality. The cobblestones in the courtyard became so polished with use that we were concerned about the possibility of the express horse slipping on them while deliveries were being made.

On the right side of the service entrance is the garage, also of matching stone. The chauffeur William Anderson had a nice apartment above the garage. To the left of the service entrance is the nice stone house that was once the home of the superintendent, William Weinberger.

Billie, a navy veteran of World War I, had a very pleasant disposition, and a sense of humor that was matched by that of wife, Ingeborg. This couple were just full of fun and when they attended a party, their presence was enough to assure its success. The Weinbergers had a daughter, Marion, who attended local schools but then we lost track of her. We were quite pleased to learn that she lives in New Jersey and that her mother lives with her.

Three of the very popular flowering shrubs were featured in the original plantings on the Hyde estate. They always bloomed in rotation and seemed to have some kind of an agreement among themselves that guaranteed they would not vie for attention at the same time.

First there was the brilliant-yellow of the forsythia that tells us the winter is behind us. Then came the wisteria with its long purple or lavender blooms to announce that spring is really here. As the gentle blooms of the wisteria started to fade, the red, pink or white buds of the weigela were ready to burst on the scene. By this time you had better have your vegetable garden all planted.

One of the finest displays of wisteria that we have ever seen is hanging from an arbor on the corner of High Ridge and Shadow Lane. They were planted by Billy Weinberger more than sixty years ago and can easily be seen as you enter the street from West Lane.

Along with the large wooden gates at the main entrance, two large and very old rhododendrons stand guard and they are also products of Billy's original plantings. These priceless shrubs receive the necessary attention of the Mortimer Schwartz family, the present owners, as well as the tender loving care provided by Bill Boland.

I believe that in all those years Billy Weinberger and Bill Boland are the only ones to whom was entrusted the care of this Ridgefield landmark. The two Bills remained as ownership of the estate went from the Hyde sisters to Mrs. Howard Lapsley Thomas, to the Robert Englers and the Schwartz family.

Another feature of this exceptional estate is the old-fashioned formal garden that is protected by the white wooden fence that fronts on both streets. It has just about every perennial that can provide constant bloom during the spring, summer and fall.

The Hyde sisters spared nothing in the construction of this fine estate. It was said that they really could well afford it. There was a story that each sister was worth forty million. At any rate they were never observed standing in the bread lines of the Depression years.

#153: A GRAND, OLD HOUSE THAT'S GONE

Last week we mentioned three spring flowering shrubs — forsythia, wisteria and weigela. There were immediate phone calls, reminding us that we failed to list many other spring flowering shrubs, such as spiraea and the multi-colored azaleas. I hastened to explain that our reference was made to shrubs that flourished on the former Hyde estate on High Ridge and Billy Weinberger's story that the three mentioned were the only ones he could get to agree on blooming each year in proper rotation.

The other shrubs were of a more capricious nature, and according to Billy, chose to bloom on occasion at a time when their brilliant colors could steal the show. They refused to sign a non-aggression pact that would guarantee their blooming at a precise date, in the spring.

At any rate, it was nice to learn that someone reads this column and we were happy to receive the calls. It should be noted that in keeping with its agreement, the weigela, in colors white, red and pink, is at this moment bursting into bloom, as the graceful wisteria fades from the scene until next year.

Just north of the Peter Parley House on High Ridge, there is the very impressive residence of the James Ettinger family. The land on which this building sits once belonged to the John A. King family. It was purchased by the Morris family in the past century. It seems as if the King family owned most of the land on what we now call High Ridge.

A very ornate mansion once stood on this property, about where the present mansion now rests. It was once the home of A. Newbold Morris, a man who was very prominent in the affairs of Ridgefield. He contributed greatly to the welfare of this community.

His daughter, Eva V.C. Morris, married McDougall Hawkes and they also made this their home for many years.

This great mansion was an excellent example of Victorian architecture. It is a shame that we do not have a picture of this house, as it was a classic and it is doubtful that the beautiful woodwork could be duplicated today. [Note: The accompanying rendering was discovered long after Dick wrote this column in 1985.]

McDougall Hawkes was also a very prominent man in Ridgefield and fit nicely into Millionaires Row. He was a civil engineer and was considered by many as the outstanding authority on bridges. He was a member of the New York State Bridge and Tunnel Commission and at one time was the New York City Dock Commissioner.

Mr. Hawkes' great-great grandfather was John Lawrence, who in colonial days was widely known for his legal ability. John Lawrence had the title of Advocate General of the colonies and officiated at the trial of the master spy, Major John Andre.

As every student knows, or should know, Andre was captured at Tarrytown and incarcerated in nearby South Salem, under the watchful eye of our own Lt. Joshua King. Lt. King was later to become Ridgefield's first postmaster and it was he who successfully penetrated Andre's clever disguise. [Note: This is the same King who established the King family, mentioned above, largely responsible for the development of High Ridge into mansions.]

McDougall Hawkes had a daughter, Eva, who died at a young age and soon after that, the family moved away, but retained ownership of the great house. The place was put out to rent or lease and different families used it as their summer residence. One of the families to use it was the John E. Davis Sr. family. Their son, John E. Jr., was the husband of the present Mrs. [Maude Bouvier] Davis, who still makes her summer home in Ridgefield. Mrs. Davis has a niece who was once our nation's First Lady, when she was Mrs. John F. Kennedy.

The senior Davis family had a chauffeur named John Lietel. John, according to the junior Mrs. Davis, used to double as nursemaid for the family's dog, a very large Airedale, who always rode with him on the front seat of the big limousine. Whenever the dog was ill, or got upset for any reason, John was called and had to stay overnight with him.

The Lietels had a very beautiful daughter, Tish. She was every bit as pretty as Brooke Shields. Our sax player in the old Mayflower Swing Band, fell for Tish, head over heels, and that was easy to understand. Paul and Tish used to accompany us when we went out for an evening. In the early evening there was no problem driving down the long driveway that led to the garage, over which the Lietels lived. However, getting Tish back home in the wee hours of the morning was an entirely different matter.

After dark, nothing was supposed to move on that estate and everyone was in bed early. There was no night watchman armed with a shotgun, but they did have that large Airedale, and his hearing was uncanny. The least noise would set him off and any kind of fuss was enough to cause John to be called to the mansion to take care of him.

It was a bluestone driveway and the stones made a lot of noise that was rather pleasant to hear during the daytime, but had a different effect after dark. It was a time for caution to be used as Tish's father did not relish being called to the mansion in the middle of the night to administer to a very healthy dog.

So Paul used to park his Model A Ford roadster out on the highway and walk Tish down that long driveway to the garage apartment. Sometimes it seemed as though it took forever for them to say goodnight, which I guess was also understandable. However, it was always a great relief to hear Paul's light footsteps as he made his way back to the car.

The senior Davis family leased many different places during the summer months, including our present Community Center and, one time, the mansion at Casagmo when Miss Mary Olcott was away. When they no longer used the Hawkes place, it was placed on the market by Mrs. Eva Van Cortland Hawkes.

Col. Rousseau, a retired army officer, purchased the estate in the mid-40's. The Rousseau family apparently did not share my admiration for the beauty of the grand, old house and proceeded to tear it down.

It seemed incredible that anyone would consider destroying a building that could never be replaced, but that is exactly what happened. The mansion disappeared quickly and almost as quickly, the present large white mansion arose in its place.

Reed and Audrey Shields made this place their home, when the Rousseau family left Ridgefield and for the past 18 years, it has been home to the Ettinger family. I still miss seeing that ornate old wooden building.

#154: FAVORITE HIGH RIDGE MANSION — YOU COULD SEE THE CITY!

Of all the lovely homes on High Ridge, I guess my favorite would have to be the one that is now owned by the Albert D. Swanson family. It is of graceful design and there is something very livable about this fine house.

Just north of the Ettinger mansion, this excellent example of late 19th century architecture sits on what we believe is the highest point of land in the village area. Because of its elevation, the view to the west is just magnificent.

It is a real treat to witness the sunset from the rear of this fine, old, brown-shingled house. In the years before pollution descended on us, it was possible, with the use of field glasses, to make out the form of the Empire State Building 55 miles away.

William A. Jenner bought the land for his home from John A. King, and proceeded to build this great mansion. He named it "Overlook," a name that seemed quite appropriate.

At the time, like other people on the Ridge, Mr. Jenner expected to use his place as only a summer residence. Therefore, a central heating plant was not included in his plans. He did have a lot of fireplaces, which were used to take the chill out of the air on weekend visits during spring and fall. It was many years later before the house was winterized for year-round use.

Mr. Jenner was an eminent attorney and a senior member of one of New York's oldest law firms, Spring and Wetmore. While staying at his summer home, he commuted to the City as did his neighbors on the Ridge. Each morning, at the appointed hour, a beautiful chestnut driving horse, with George Bennett holding the reins, would appear at the front door of the Jenner mansion. George was Jenner's superintendent and among many other things, it was his duty to see that the boss did not miss the 7:30 train. So each morning George would pull up to

Ridgefield's railroad station at 7:20. That would just about guarantee Jenner's arrival at 9 in the City as trains ran on time in those days.

Besides the chestnut, there were three fine bays in the Jenner's horse stable. They were all good drivers, but the chestnut was Mr. Jenner's favorite. This fine horse drew a neat little rubber-tired cart that had one seat that was wide enough to accommodate two passengers. This wagon was equipped with such fine springs that a ride, even over a rough surface, was like floating on a cloud.

The Jenners' property ran west from High Ridge a considerable distance beyond what we now call Shadow Lane, which was just a cow path at the time. The entire estate must have measured more than eight acres.

There was the superintendent's cottage, the horse barn and two other large barns. In later years, Romeo Petroni developed this back acreage into a nice little community. A very steep driveway connected the main house to the buildings in the rear. Signs of this driveway are still visible although it has not been used in many years.

Mrs. Jenner (Josephine) took an active interest in the young people of Ridgefield. She seemed especially determined that each school boy and girl would have a working knowledge of plant life and botany in general. When we were in the lower elementary grades, Mrs. Jenner would invite an entire class to her home, where we would be shown picture slides on the proper method of planting a vegetable or flower garden. Following the slide presentation we were continued on a tour of her excellent gardens, to view first hand what she wanted us to learn.

The Jenner daughter, Anne, shared her mother's interest in youth. In fact, after Mrs. Jenner passed on, Anne continued to invite the school children and I think they looked forward to the trip and the hot chocolate and cookies.

We have fond memories of that very pleasant house, especially the game room with its valuable billiard table and the large, colorful chandelier (probably a Tiffany) that hovered majestically over the bright green cushions of the table.

Anne married Sterling Foote and they lived at Overlook for many years. My Marie's father, Forester Foote Bishop, was a cousin of Sterling Foote. Sterling was a philologist and a noted collector of books. He was a 1902 graduate of Yale and taught for some time at the great seat of learning.

The Foote children were a very prominent part of Ridgefield's social life in the 20's and early 30's. Hope shared her grandfather's love for driving a fancy horse and presented a nice picture as she drove by with a spirited trotter, drawing that same neat little cart.

She married James Gibbons and for some time lived on Donnelly Drive. Hastings and Sterling Jr., were more interested in gasoline-powered vehicles, especially motorcycles, which they rode at tremendous speeds. When they left town, they left behind an old cycle and a couple of old cars. The machines were stored for many years in a large barn on the western end of the

property. I believe the building has since been converted into a dwelling. The cars and the cycle would be very valuable today as they were real antiques.

The elevation of this estate was a cause for the Ridgefield Water Supply Company to purchase the property, some 30 odd years ago. It was the company's intention to erect a standpipe at the highest point of land.

At the time property values were very low and several of the great mansions, including Overlook, were available. They could be bought for what many people in Ridgefield today are paying in yearly rental fees. They could be acquired, as the saying used to go, "for a song."

The song, in this particular instance, may have been "I Guess I'll Have to Change My Plans." There was a considerable amount of music on High Ridge and it was not coming from the many songbirds that inhabited the area. The neighbors had organized their own chorus and the upshot was that the sanctity of historic High Ridge had been preserved and the standpipe failed to materialize.

#155: INTERESTING HIGH RIDGE PEOPLE WHO LIVED ON THE 'EAST SIDE'

Across the street from the Albert Swanson residence at 35 High Ridge, are two houses that are of more recent vintage than their neighbors'. They were both built in the early 1950's, just as the population explosion in Ridgefield was getting under way.

One of these fine homes was built by Judge John Edward Dowling at 32 High Ridge. He had returned from Chicago to be Ridgefield's Judge of Probate. Ed, as he is more popularly known by friends, had been with the Federal Bureau of Investigation in the Windy City.

Because of the untimely death of Judge Ralph E. Cramp, it was necessary to hold a special election. Attorney Dowling, a Ridgefield native, was the winner over Attorney Michael E. Bruno in a spirited election campaign.

It is interesting to note that our present Judge of Probate, Romeo G. Petroni, was once a law partner of Attorney Dowling. Albert Arvay now owns and lives in the house at 36 High Ridge.

The other attractive house, at 42 High Ridge, is now home to two of our favorite people. We affectionately call them the Marys — Lindeke and Parry. They have been a decided asset to the town and they are right at home on the famous street. Their fine house was built by Bacchiochi Inc. for the retiring Rev. William Browne Lusk. That fact in itself assured a well-constructed building.

Mr. Lusk had served as rector of Saint Stephen's Episcopal Church from 1915 to 1950. That 35-year span probably made him second only to the later Rev. Richard E. Shortell [of St. Mary's] in years of service to a parish in Ridgefield.

Mr. Lusk came to Ridgefield just about the time the present Saint Stephen's Church was being completed. He quickly endeared himself to the parishioners of his new church and in later years was affectionately called Daddy Lusk.

Both the Reverend and Mrs. Lusk were natives of Ireland, having emigrated from County Antrim. Following World War I, Mr. Lusk paid a return visit to his native country. On his arrival back in Ridgefield he used the Town Hall auditorium to give a lecture on his travels and observations. One of those attending the lecture was the Rev. Richard E. Shortell, whose parents had come from Ireland. To say that he disagreed with what he heard is putting it mildly.

The following week the pages of The Ridgefield Press actually quivered as they carried Father Shortell's sharp rebuttal to Mr. Lusk's opinions and assessments as well as his analysis of the role played by the Emerald Isle in World War I.

The public debate continued for some time on the pages of this newspaper. As these two men of the cloth were both strong-willed as well as very learned, the comments made were not particularly coated with sugar. One thing was sure, a lot of Presses were sold during those summer months.

The upshot of the whole thing was that the two fine gentlemen became very close friends. As a matter of fact, when Father Shortell was in the twilight years of his pastorate, Mr. Lusk was almost a daily visitor at Saint Mary's rectory.

On many occasions, while making my delivery of newspapers to the rectory I would find the two old friends side by side in rocking chairs on the porch. Except for intermittent bits of conversation, each of the clergymen would sit there reading their breviaries.

All this would not seem so very unusual today. However, at the time the spirit of ecumenism was not as prevalent as it is now and it was something very nice to see.

Unfortunately, but as so often happens, Mr. Lusk did not stay with us long enough to enjoy his retirement in his new home on High Ridge. It seemed as if it was less than two years when he was called to his just reward.

The next house north of the eastern side of the street was noted in a previous column. It was built in the early 1900's by Mrs. Louisa Gray after her impressive credentials had been carefully scrutinized by the neighbors. This fine old house is the present residence of the Michael Calhoun family at 50 High Ridge.

Mrs. Gray's daughter, Geraldine, married Robert Teviot Livingston. When Mrs. Gray passed on, the Livingstons took over the large house.

Robert Livingston was a big man, with a kind of sad face that masked a delightful sense of humor. He was considered to be a very intelligent gentleman and carried several significant titles. Two of them were Professor Emeritus of Industrial Engineering of Columbia University and President of Livingston Institute. He also operated his own consulting firm.

Professor Livingston was associated with Columbia for more than 40 years. During that time he received the very prestigious Freedom Foundation Award in 1951, the Gilbreth Award and Medallion in 1965 and the Management Science Marquis Award just a few months before he passed away in January 1968.

Robert Livingston lived very quietly on High Ridge for many years. He apparently devoted most of his time to his studies of management and he was rarely seen, even by his neighbors.

That all changed rather suddenly and he began to take an active interest in local affairs. Soon he began to attend town meetings and did not hesitate to speak his mind. It was a joy to hear him at these meetings when he would expound on management, which, of course, was his favorite subject.

He also made several contributions to this newspaper on various subjects. His letters of complaint concerning the neighborhood dogs that continually knocked over his garbage cans were classics. His description of how he combatted this most annoying nuisance was little short of hilarious.

Robert Livingston was a direct descendant of the Third Lord of Livingston Manor. This esteemed gentleman was very prominent in the colonial history of New York and was mayor of that city from 1784 to 1789.

So far on this rather short but very famous street we have found a world-famous writer, a descendant of the Advocate General of the original colonies, a noted Columbia professor and two descendants of former mayors of New York City.

#156: BANKER A. BARTON HEPBURN AND HIS STATELY ALTNACRAIG

Continuing our journey along Millionaires' Row, we must cross High Ridge Avenue in order to view the most majestic of all the great mansions on this famous street.

Before the turn of the century Alonzo Barton Hepburn purchased a large tract of land from John A. King [now 55 High Ridge]. It is just north of the Jenner property with which it shares its great elevation and spectacular view of the west. He also acquired more acreage for his back property from Henry B. Anderson.

The back property bordered the old Ridgefield Country Club — now Ward Acres. This property extended north to Peaceable Street and along with the High Ridge site amounted to more than 20 acres. Mr. Hepburn later sold a great portion of the back property to his close friend and protege, Albert H. Wiggin. On this property Mr. Wiggin built the large mansion that is now the home of the Raymond Bessette family at 47 Peaceable Street.

Alonzo Barton Hepburn was probably best known as A. Barton, but his friends called him plain Barton. Whatever he was called, he was born in relative poverty on a farm in Ogdensburg, N.Y., in 1847. As a lad he worked on the farm and the laborious farm work must have made him

determined to shed a life of poverty. However, he loved farm life and after reaching the pinnacle of success in the financial world, he owned his own farm but that is another story. Mr. Hepburn was a very modest man and never forgot his humble beginning. His rise to prominence reads like a Horatio Alger story about Ragged Dick. His goal must have been to have the most pretentious of the stately mansions on High Ridge. After viewing the great house with its enormous columns on either side of the front entrance, we would have to agree that his efforts in this connection were quite successful.

The best architects and the finest tradesmen were assembled to put the Hepburn mansion together and it took more than two years to build it. When finally completed, this magnificent structure was called Altnacraig, a name that it has carried for almost a century.

I believe that in all those years there have been only three owners of this historic property. After Mr. Hepburn's death from an accident in the early 1920's, Mrs. Hepburn (Emily) kept the place going to some degree until the mid-40's. At that time Lillian Benka bought Altnacraig but kept it only a couple of years. It was then acquired by Mrs. Helen Karlonas who has since that time operated it as the Altnacraig Convalescent Hospital.

Mr. Hepburn spared nothing in the construction of his fine home and even added a nice little swimming pool which may still be there at the rear of the mansion. It must have been the very first swimming pool in town. The acreage in the rear of the mansion was developed into a very neat little farm, complete with cows, horses, and chickens. Several of the buildings that housed the farm animals are still standing, complete with housing units for those who worked on the estate. Several families lived in these apartments, including the Forsyths, the Scalas, and the Unwins. I believe the late Edward Unwin was the last superintendent for the Hepburns. There was also a fine conservatory, the frame of which may still be standing.

On either side of the driveway between the farm buildings were some of the finest gardens in Ridgefield. The black soil was so rich from the years of fertilizing that you could just throw the seeds out and then listen to the plants grow.

There were absolutely no stones in these gardens. I discovered that when, many years ago, I was sent to plow the gardens with a fine old team of horses. Lady and Jim were mother and son and were known as an honest team. They never dogged it and never quit when the going got tough. It was not a very warm day, but soon the horses were puffing and perspiring to an alarming degree but they continued on and on.

It suddenly dawned on me that the reason Lady and Jim were in such a state was because there were no stones in the garden and the soil was exceptionally heavy. In stony ground numerous stops were necessary while the plow was maneuvered around the obstacles. This would give the horses a respite from their steady pulling of the plow. The little black horses were very grateful when adjustments were made to compensate for their accustomed rest periods.

A. Barton Hepburn was probably best known as a financial genius but he was also a noted philanthropist. He was a very kindly man and was always ready to help those in need. He made many large contributions to various colleges and schools.

The Hepburns had two daughters, Beulah and Cordelia, but there was no son to carry on the family name. That may have been the reason why Barton Hepburn continually searched for young men who he felt were worthy of a college education but did not have the funds to acquire one. When such a boy was brought to his attention, that lucky boy would get the necessary help from this kindly benefactor.

Mr. Hepburn was an exceptional student himself. As a young man he made a study of banking and by the age of 30 was recognized as an outstanding authority in the financial world.

In the late 1800's banks were failing to an alarming degree. Someone was needed to keep this important part of the economy on an even keel. Because of his banking experience, Barton Hepburn was made superintendent of the Banking Department of the State of New York. His calm and level-headed approach to these bank failures helped to rectify the chaotic conditions.

Mr. Hepburn also served several terms as comptroller of currency for New York State. During World War I he was called on to raise money that was needed to carry on the war effort. That he was eminently successful in raising the necessary money was recognized not only in New York but in Washington by President Woodrow Wilson. His prowess in financial circles was brought to the forefront when as a comparatively young man he was made president and chairman of the board of the great Chase National Bank.

#157: A VET-CHASING HEIFER AND AN ACTRESS WHO LANDED IN ALFALFA

Salmon Portland Chase reached great prominence as chief justice of the United States Supreme Court at the end of the Civil War. However, his greatest contribution to this nation was made while he served as the secretary of the treasury during that terrible war between the states.

During that dark period of our country's history, Secretary Chase faced the monumental task of maintaining the national credit and supplying the funds needed by the Union to prosecute the war. While successfully accomplishing these things, Chase was able to develop a national banking system. To this day, the great bank that carries his name is a leader in the world of finance.

It is said that, as a young student of banking, A. Barton Hepburn was fascinated by the exploits of Salmon Chase. Perhaps reading about the great financier kindled the fires of ambition that carried Hepburn to leadership in the world of finance.

It must have been too much to expect that this poor farm boy from the most northern part of New York State would one day become a master banker, as head of the great Chase National.

When Barton Hepburn attained his lofty position as head of the bank, he remained the modest gentleman that his associates knew him to be. Love for the land and for life on the farm must have remained strong in this great man.

While his hankering for farm life was partly satisfied by the establishment of the little “gentleman’s farm” at the rear of his mansion on High Ridge, his real ambition was for something that would be considerably larger. Within a few years after completion of his fine estate on the Ridge, Mr. Hepburn could be seen driving his horse and buggy around the back roads of Ridgefield. He was searching for a tract of land that would have the acreage for the kind of farm he had envisioned, while his keen mind rested from wrestling with financial matters.

He finally found what he was looking for about a mile from his home on the Ridge. It is located on Whipstick Road and had been used as a farm, though not as extensively as it would be by Barton Hepburn.

The original farm house, built by Joseph Benedict in 1790, is still standing and is the residence of Mrs. Francis W. Collins. It is in excellent condition as are the houses for the farm workers and the barns that Mr. Hepburn built.

The large barn housed both the horses and the cows and huge hay mows. There was a silo at the end of the barn that held 50 tons of corn silage. Near the barn a large windmill pumped an abundant supply of clean fresh water from a very fine well.

After acquiring the original tract, Mr. Hepburn proceeded to purchase surrounding property until he had more than 150 acres. The farm, which he promptly named Whipstick Farm, extended from Wilton Road East, almost to Nod Road and ran south to what is now the Landegger estate.

Mr. Hepburn took an active role in overseeing the construction of the buildings, the clearing of the fields and building of the fences. He made regular visits to the farm and the workers were duly impressed by his ideas and his knowledge of the operation of a farm.

Henry Greene, grandfather of Sgt. William Greene of our local police department, was one of the last farm workers to live on the farm. George Mulvaney (Bob’s father), was Hepburn’s teamster and drove the last team that Hepburn had.

The horses were both bay in color, but the similarity between the two ended right there. One was long in body but short in height and would eat more oats than three horses. The other stood much taller but was short in length and was known as an easy keeper and ate much less than his long-ribbed partner.

We asked Mr. Mulvaney why they were so mismatched. He laughed and said that rather than being mismatched, they were actually a perfect team. He added that it was more important that they worked well together rather than that they just looked pretty together and then said: “You know, it’s the same way with people. They don’t have to look pretty to work well together.”

George was right about the horses, for they sure worked well as a team.

About five years after Mr. Hepburn passed on, Mrs. Hepburn sold the farm to Francis W. Collins, who had just purchased the Ridgefield Water Supply Company. Emily was more interested in her flower gardens than she was in the farm.

The Collins family made no attempt to run the farm. Francis Collins' definition of a gentleman farmer was "one who made his money in the city and came to the country to spend it." He did not wish to be placed in that category so he rented the farm out to Irving Conklin, who used the eastern section of the farm for pasturing his dry stock, and about 20 heifers.

One day while inspecting this herd, we observed several heifers acting in a peculiar manner. We advised Irving Conklin, who called Dr. Knapp, the grand old veterinarian. As the three of us approached the pasture it was noted that the eyes of the heifers seemed to be glazed and some were staggering.

As soon as Irving opened the gate, one of the heifers charged him and it was necessary for him to climb a tree to escape. The heifer stood at the tree, weaving back and forth. Dr. Knapp asked me to crawl along the fence and attract the heifer's attention by barking like a dog. The heifer charged in the direction of the barking and as she neared the fence, the old doctor threw a lasso over her head and snubbed her down.

This heifer and one other died the next day and it was discovered that they had consumed some locoweed.

Across the lane from the pasture were five nice hay fields that ran along a ridge all the way to the present Landegger estate, then the residence of Townsend B. Martin.

We were assigned to remove the stone walls and make just one big 20-acre field and this was all done with three teams of horses. We recall that all those who worked on this project wore gloves as there was considerable poison ivy. Just one man, George Seelig, refused the gloves. He contracted the worst case of poison ivy that I have ever seen. Every inch of his body was covered and we had to carry him in a sheet. Dr. Woodford took care of him and he survived, but it was very serious for a while.

When the big field was completed, it was seeded to alfalfa and it was a beauty.

T.B. Martin was a famous sportsman and owned a stable of racehorses. He also had a friend who was one of the real great movie stars of the day. This beautiful lady had many talents, one of which was the ability to fly an airplane.

One day she came to call and it was not by limousine. We were inspecting the progress of the newly seeded alfalfa when we noticed a small plane flying low over the field.

After circling the field a few times, it became apparent that the pilot intended to land. We all had visions of the newly seeded field being torn up by the wheels of the plane.

At any rate, the plane made a perfect landing and as we approached it, ready to scold the pilot, a very elegant lady emerged from the cockpit. Needless to say, all feelings toward admonishment quickly faded under Jean's dazzling smile.

#158: THE HAY-TOP KIDS WHO TOPPLED, THE WASPED HORSES WHO FLED

With your kind permission we have detoured from our trip along High Ridge. as it was felt that a few anecdotes relating to A. Barton Hepburn's Whipstick Farm might be of interest.

As pointed out earlier, the buildings on the farm have been well cared for by both the Hepburn and Collins families and are still in excellent condition today. One small house that was home for one of the farm workers has since been removed and the windmill that pumped so well has disappeared.

The Windmill pumped water into a wooden tank that was raised about 40 feet above the ground and had a capacity of about 500 gallons. It had a mechanism that turned the pump off at about 400 gallons while still allowing the fan to turn.

When the water had receded to the 300 gallon level, the pump would re-engage with the fan and raise the water level back to 400 gallons.

During the 30's, the system had begun to age and there were occasions when the pump would fail to shut off. The end result was that after the tank reached capacity, the water would cascade to the ground through an overflow pipe at the top of the tank.

At the time, the owner of the farm was also the owner of the Ridgefield Water Supply Company. Therefore, he had a real sense of value where water was concerned.

This was especially true if the water being wasted was not running through someone's water meter. It was understandable that such examples of waste as an overflowing windmill did little to improve his disposition.

Inside the gate to the pasture was a large barrel under a faucet where the dry stock came to drink. From time to time, the faucet would be found turned on and the barrel overflowing. This would cause Mr. Collins to have considerable distress and various people were blamed for not turning off the faucet. On one occasion, one of our crew, dear old Mr. Overfield, was accused of having left the water running on the previous day.

As he was suffering the brunt of Mr. Collins's wrath, we noticed a nice little Guernsey heifer as she approached the water barrel. Before taking a drink, the heifer rubbed the top of her head on the handle of the faucet. Sure enough, the water started to flow as we called the attention of the two men to the culprit who was responsible for turning on the water.

Perhaps the heifer was just scratching an itch, but it sure looked as though she knew what she was doing. At any rate, the problem was solved by removing the handle of the faucet.

In the mid-30's, Mr. Collins acquired several hundred little pine trees. They were just seedlings and measured no more than a foot in height. Irving Conklin sent Percy Humphrys and

me to plant the trees. Fifty years later the trees are enormous and stand in a grove on the south side of Whipstick Road at the bottom of the hill below the farm house.

We recall an incident that occurred while bringing in the hay from that great hay field that was previously described. In order to get to the hay barn it was necessary to climb a steep hill. About half way up the hill there was a curve that was difficult to negotiate. To add to the difficulty, the surface of the road at that point was made very slippery by the protrusion of a large layer of rock. The rock surface had been polished by traffic over the years until it was very smooth.

One of the hay wagons was much larger than the others and was a tough pull even when empty. When fully loaded, even the Budweiser team would have to strain to pull it up that hill.

On this particular day, the wagon was loaded to capacity and though the team was a good one, we anticipated trouble. As expected, when they reached the corner, the iron shoes of the horses were as skates, as they slipped and slid on the smooth surface of the rock.

Another team was brought forward and hooked in front of the first team. About this time, Mr. Collins appeared with his two children and expressed the desire to take pictures of the huge load of hay. To make the pictures more interesting, Anne and Junior were put up on top of the hay. Then to safeguard the children, I was added to the overloaded wagon, though at the time I guess my weight was not considered a factor.

When we were all settled, the driver attempted to start the teams. They tried several times and then quit.

At this point the teamster reached forward with a pitchfork and touched the rump of the pole horses. Things began to happen rapidly as the horses violently objected to this method of starting them. They backed the wagon right down to the bottom of the hill where it struck an obstacle and turned over.

It was a soft landing and no one was injured and the pictures of the whole proceeding must have furnished a graphic illustration of what you should not do to a horse.

It should be noted that it took three separate loads to get the original up to the barn.

There was another exciting day when the men were busily engaged in getting the hay from the field where the Don Allan family now reside at 286 Wilton Road East.

A team of grays, Major and Dick, were being used to rake the hay with a two-wheeled machine called a dump rake. As the hay was raked into windrows, the men rolled it into hay cocks. It was then pitched by hand onto the hay wagon. At the time, much of the farm work was still done by hand.

When the raking was completed, the team was allowed to munch hay from a hay cock while the teamster helped load the wagon. Unfortunately there was a nest of yellow jackets under the hay cock. The ferocious insects did not like being disturbed and started to attack the horses. '

The horses were walking away when the teamster noticed them. He yelled at the team and they then started to trot toward Wilton Road East. The pace increased as they reached the highway with a frantic and very embarrassed teamster in hot pursuit. The driverless team was now racing toward town at a full gallop!

As they flew by Charley Russell's house, the horses became separated from the hay rake. As they went by Curtiss Leighton's, the wiffletrees fell free and as they reached Main Street, they were held together only by the neck yoke.

The terrified horses fled up the sidewalk in front of T.C. Jessup's where one went on one side of a tree and the other went the opposite way. The impact threw both horses to the ground where they thrashed around till the men arrived.

Runaways were quite dangerous and very frightening and this one was probably the last to occur in Ridgefield.

#159: THE PASSING OF THE HEPBURNS AND THEIR ELEGANT ALTNACRAIG

We have been relating some of the anecdotes concerning the operation of Whipstick Farm. The farm is comprised of a great many very desirable acres and we feel that the temptation to develop this fine property must have been stoutly resisted by the owners over the years.

For some years now, the great fields have just been allowed to grow and growth in the wooded areas has been quite dense. However, in recent weeks, breaks have been made in the excellent stone wall along Whipstick Road as you near Nod Road. Inside the walls, the soil is being moved around and indications are that at least some of Whipstick Farm is about to succumb to the bulldozer of a developer.

At the point where this activity is taking place, the woods have an abundance of mountain laurel. For many years these shrubs, with their white and pink blossoms, have put on a spectacular show each spring. Mountain laurel was designated our state flower in 1907 and we were always cautioned not to cut it.

The shrub has a long and interesting history; it even attracted the attention of Captain John Smith and he mentioned it in his General History of Virginia, New England and the Summer Isles, which he wrote in 1624. I guess the bulldozer would have no way of knowing about that.

Our hope is that this new development will be worthy of this beautiful area. Perhaps we will be lucky and the developer will pattern his venture after neighboring Twin Ridge.

So it's back to High Ridge and the grandeur of A. Barton Hepburn's palatial "Altnacraig." We have a great appreciation for the painstaking manner in which the great estates on this famous street were put together. Surely nothing was spared in the construction of the buildings or in the developing of the properties and their great sweeping lawns.

This is especially interesting when one considers most of these places were originally intended to be used as just “summer cottages.” That the owners were meticulous is quite evident to anyone who has visited at one of the fine mansions, as they are all classics.

Even the concrete gutters and curbing on the west side of the street were all supplied by the property owners. They have recently been covered over by the town, after installation of a new storm drainage system. Perhaps they will be rediscovered by some future generation that will no doubt marvel at their excellent construction.

Mr. Hepburn even had steps placed in the bank on the highway in front of his home along with a little platform to aid those who would be climbing into a carriage. He also had a nice concrete sidewalk built across the front of his property. There are a few places where the sidewalk has lost the battle with the roots of the large trees that line the street, but it is still in fairly good condition after all those years. [Alas, all of the sidewalk that once lined the west side of High Ridge has all been removed, and pedestrians today walk in the road.]

A. Barton Hepburn once served as chairman of the Advisory Board of the Chase National. In that position he succeeded the legendary John Pierpont Morgan. Morgan was quick to recognize his unusual ability and became one of his great boosters.

Mr. Hepburn reached the pinnacle of success when he became president and board chairman of the great Chase banking enterprise. Though his greatest fame was achieved in that exalted position in the world of finance, he became an international figure when, after World War I, he was made the chairman of the League to Enforce Peace. His hard work and devotion to duty had paid off and made him a winner all the way.

For more than a quarter of a century, A. Barton Hepburn enjoyed his beloved “Altnacraig” before passing on in 1922. He was 75 when tragedy struck him on the streets of New York. As he was crossing Fifth Avenue at 23rd Street, he was knocked to the pavement by a Fifth Avenue bus.

He suffered a concussion of the brain and injuries to the right knee and ankle. At first there seemed to be hope for his recovery, but he took a turn for the worse and died three days later. Just before the fatal accident, Mr. Hepburn had said that his old age was blessed by “love, reverence and troops of friends.”

This great man had come from poverty to the highest position in the world of finance, but he never lost the common touch. He remembered his birthplace on the Canadian border in the town of Ogdensburg, N.Y. There are schools in that town that were made possible by the generosity of Mr. Hepburn. There is even a hospital in that town that bears his name.

He would not have been happy to know that the A. Barton Hepburn Hospital was fined \$34,000 a couple of years ago. The fine was imposed by the New York State Department of Health. It seems that the hospital was in error in allowing surgeon John Bongiovanni to perform eight operations.

The operations were to correct disorders connected with the urinary tract, the bladder and the prostate. The report of the investigating group found no fault with the quality of the surgery performed. There was no mention of any dissatisfaction among the patients. Therefore, it is assumed that the operations were successful.

However, it was revealed that the good doctor was blind at the time he performed the operations. He had lost his sight in an auto accident four years prior to his surgical performance. The board also barred the 53-year-old doctor's six-year-old guide dog from the patients' area.

Though Mr. Hepburn would have been unhappy about the judgment against his hospital, he would certainly have been happy to know that his great home on High Ridge is still considered one of the finest of Ridgefield's mansions. No doubt he would also be happy to know that his beautiful home is now being used to care for people who are unwell.

Emily L. Hepburn kept Altnacraig going for 25 years after her husband's tragic accident. She shared Barton's love for their stately edifice and did her best to preserve it.

Mrs. Hepburn was a busy lady, but found time to take an active part in organizations which she thought would benefit Ridgefield. She was instrumental in 1914 in getting the Ridgefield Garden Club Started. She was a charter member of that worthy organization that had much to do with preserving the natural beauty of the town in the list of the Garden Club's original officers. Mrs. Hepburn's name appears as a vice president.

We hope that the elegant mansion will continue to grace High Ridge for many years to come and trust that the many trees on the lawn will not hide its majestic facade. [Sad to say, Altnacraig burned to the ground in a suspicious fire in the winter of 1994.]

#160: THE HOUSE THAT MOVED ACROSS THE STREET

There is an empty lot just north of Altnacraig where another great house once stood. The lot is now a part of Altnacraig's expansive and beautifully landscaped lawn. [A house was built on this lot, 61 High Ridge, in 1998.]

The fine house that rested on this precious piece of real estate was the residence of Charles Alfred Hamilton and his family. Mr. Hamilton had purchased this land from his close friend, A.B. Hepburn, in March of 1899.

Mr. Hamilton was vice president and chairman of the Board of International Silver in New York City and like most of his famous neighbors, he was a daily commuter to that city during the summer months. In the winter the Hamilton family lived in the city at West End Avenue.

Each morning his coachman, Charles Stannard, appeared at the front door in time to transport Mr. Hamilton to the old Ridgefield railroad station (still standing) where he would board the 7:30 train. Considering the great wealth of most of the passengers on that train, the New York, New Haven and Hartford might have labeled one car as the Millionaire Express.

Charles Hamilton's interest in metals extended to brass as well as silver and he became a director of The Bridgeport Brass Company. His son, Burgoyne Hamilton, ignored silver and gave his entire attention to brass.

At an early age Burgoyne joined the staff at Bridgeport Brass and learned the business from the bottom to the top. His efforts helped make the company a standout in the brass industry. He was rewarded by being named Chairman of the Board of that great manufacturing enterprise.

After the passing of his father in 1919, Burgoyne and his wife maintained the High Ridge estate for only a short time and then moved with their daughter Florence and son Charles to Greens Farms. Florence later married Martin Fraser Carey

Charles, who was always called "Sonny" by his friends, married a daughter of Owen Josephus Roberts. Roberts, an eminent jurist, was appointed a special prosecutor in the notorious Teapot Dome oil scandal in 1924 by President Calvin Coolidge and was later appointed an associate justice of the United States Supreme Court by President Herbert Hoover. He was known as a leading exponent of conservatism in jurisprudence.

"Sonny," probably so-called to distinguish him from his grandfather, is remembered as a friendly person. He was tall and slender and wore great horn-rimmed glasses.

After the family moved, Sonny retained close ties with his Ridgefield friends, especially the Kilcoyne family. He was an avid sportsman and loved to hunt. He never failed to return to Ridgefield each fall to hunt in his favorite wooded areas with Luke Kilcoyne, whose father had been superintendent on the Hamilton's High Ridge estate. The Kilcoyne family had lived on the estate and their home along with the barns was destroyed by fire.

Burgoyne Hamilton shared the honors of owning one of the first automobiles in Ridgefield with Doctor Russell W. Lowe, Samuel S. Denton and Harvey P. Bissell. Fred Lund, who had been specially trained in the operation of a motor vehicle, became the chauffeur for the Hamilton family.

As befitting a family of their stature, the Hamilton family had some fine horses. Margaret Kilcoyne remembers that the names of the coach horses were Jumbo and Sambo.

As the automobile took over from the horses, the great carriages began to disappear as a means of transportation. This left Charley Stannard in a dilemma as he stoutly refused to change with the times, as did many of the old coachmen. They wanted no part of a gasoline powered vehicle.

Draft horses were still being used for hauling purposes so Charley doffed his fancy coachman's livery for the somewhat subdued clothing of the teamster. Draft horses lingered on for a few years after the coach horses were retired but as gasoline powered trucks began to appear, their numbers began to dwindle until their use in the 20's was pretty much relegated to farm work.

With the advent of the farm tractor in the 30's, even the farms were no longer a haven for the big draft horses. Some of the last teams in Ridgefield were owned by Frank Bloomer, Clifford Seymour, Edwin Smith, Mrs. John H. Lynch, Joe Pinchbeck, George Doubleday, and Irving Conklin, who had four teams at one time.

Two of the Conklin teams were engaged for a couple of years in the very early 30's in the construction of the Silver Spring Country Club. That was just before the bulldozer began moving the earth as it had not been moved since the Ice Age and the glaciers began sliding.

When Irving Conklin purchased a large John Deere tractor in the mid-30's, we all began to realize that the use of the draft horse for farming was at an end.

So Hamilton's horses were gone and the outbuildings were gone. Soon the family would be gone to Greens Farms and the mansion would take on a rather forlorn look that most homes seem to acquire when they are empty.

It was a fine building and with its great wrap-around porch, fielded a style that was just a little bit different from others on the Ridge. The lawns were well kept and the numerous flower gardens made it a very attractive place.

It should be noted that the millionaires, when building their great homes on High Ridge, were like the ladies who, when selecting a dress to wear to an important function, used care to avoid using attire that would be similar to that of their friends. No two of the fine mansions were alike.

The Hepburns and the Hamiltons were very good friends and as pointed out earlier, Charles Hamilton had purchased his tract of land from A. Barton Hepburn. The two homes were quite close together for such large structures. That was fine for families that were good friends.

Now, however, the Hamilton mansion was empty and Emily Hepburn was concerned about who would be her next neighbor. Problems of this kind are easily solved, if you can afford it. So Mrs. Hepburn simply repurchased the land next door and its mansion.

The Hepburns owned several acres across the street and since the fine building was too valuable to destroy, Mrs. Hepburn decided to move it to the eastern side of the Ridge. Therefore, she called on Caro Northrop for his assistance. Caro was a genius at moving buildings and assured Emily that he could do the job without disturbing the dining table or any dishes left on it.

Soon Caro and his trusted team, King and Jerry, were sliding the great building to where it now serves as the lovely home of the Jack Sherry family [at 72 High Ridge].

#161: HOW CARO NORTHROP AND TWO HORSES MOVED A MANSION

In preparation for the trip across High Ridge Avenue, an awful lot of work had to be performed. Caro Northrop's method of moving a house was probably no different from that employed by other building movers. Caro's secret was probably the meticulous manner in which

he made the building ready for its trip. To be sure, it was no idle boast when he declared that he could move a house without disturbing any articles left on the dining room table.

Perhaps the confidence that seemed to exude from this fine man was generated to some extent by the many years of experience in a business that he obviously enjoyed to the utmost.

After jacking up the Hamilton mansion, he placed under it the great wooden beams on which the wooden rollers would carry the house to its destination. Caro then set up his many units of block and tackle that would lessen the amount of energy needed to pull the large building.

A block, in this instance, is not a city block or a child's building block. Rather, as the name implies, it is a block of wood in the middle of which is a grooved pulley. He used miles of rope that passed through the series of blocks and over the pulleys until an assemblage of blocks and ropes made it relatively easy to draw the great mansion across the street.

When all was in readiness, Caro's trusted team, King and Jerry, were hitched to the lead set of block and tackle. They would pull the rope almost to Main Street and then return for another hitch. That long pull probably moved the house about one foot. As can well be imagined this was a rather slow process. However, it was a safe one.

When the journey was completed, Caro had set the house perfectly on the large foundation that had been previously built to receive it. He was as good as his word and the whole operation was completed without a crack appearing in any of the walls or ceilings.

When someone suggested that it had been a hard pull for the horses, Caro said he did not think so as it was a downhill pull all the way. There was a twinkle in his eye when he said that as no one was more aware than he that the building had to be kept perfectly level during the trip, even though in its new resting place, the building was probably 25 feet lower than it had been on its original foundation.

The great wrap-around porch had been removed from the house prior to moving it. Upon arrival at the new location, additions were made as well as various alterations that made it difficult to recognize as the house that once sat on the western side of High Ridge Avenue.

Mrs. Elvine Richard was the first owner of the former Hamilton house at its new location. She bought it from Emily Hepburn in the mid-20's. Mrs. Richard enlarged her holdings by purchasing land south of her new home from the Hosmer Martin estate. It had been the backland of what is now the Main Street residence of Pat and Diane Crehan and family. This property was described in Dispatch No. 151 so we just say that Stanley and Helen Lewis used great foresight: when they built their nice home at this very desirable location. High Ridge is really the place to be.

Mrs. Richard's new home quickly took shape and in appearance it could hold its own with the other nice estates on High Ridge. Another change was an attractive garage built on the

northeastern edge of the property. The place was beautifully landscaped and Mike Paccadolmi did a great job of tending the spacious lawns and gardens.

After some 15 years, Mrs. Richard passed on and Constance Ladd bought the place from the estate of Mrs. Richard. For some reason the Ladds stayed only a very short time and in the early 40's the place was again sold, this time to Adelaide Brownlee. Mrs. Brownlee had come from Danbury where her husband had been a prominent physician.

In the mid 40's, the place again changed hands and this time the owner was Blanche Wheaton. Like the Ladds, Blanche stayed only a short time and Frank Dain, who owned a lumber company in Katonah, became the new owner of the fine home at 72 High Ridge Avenue.

Frank also had an interest in our local lumber company. He and his wife, Margaret, kept the place for about 10 years and then sold it to the Charles Scotts. It seemed a little strange that in all the families of the numerous owners of this nice place, there were very few children and this is a very large house.

The Scotts kept the place for a dozen years and then sold it to Noel and Gloria Regney. The Regneys were both musically talented and they wrote and had published the best-selling Christmas song "Do You Hear What I Hear?" Noel can still be heard at the tinkling piano as he entertains at the Elms Inn.

Just a dozen years ago the place was sold again, this time to Robert Martin. The Martin children grew up quite rapidly and as they did, that big house began to look a lot bigger. So Bob very sensibly put a very attractive addition on the garage and put the big house on the market block again. This time it was purchased by the Jack Sherrys and they are the present owners of 72 High Ridge.

So, in 60 years, this nice place has had 10 different owners. To their great credit, even those who did not stay so long, all gave the place excellent care and its fine condition today attests to that fact.

There is only one more house on the east side of High Ridge. It rests on the corner of High Ridge and King Lane on a lot that was once a part of the Hawley estate and later the Sanford Freund estate. Norman and Elsie Craig built this very attractive house 25 years ago. It is the very newest of the fine homes on the ridge and as there does not appear to be any more available land probably will be the last home built in that very desirable area for many years to come. As Karen, Bill and Laurie Craig reached maturity, the house seemed to grow with them. So five years ago the Craigs bought a smaller place and sold their nice High Ridge home to the James R. Fraser family. The Fraser children must have grown even faster than the others as after only three years they sold to Alfred E. Steinhaus, the present owner. [This house at 82 High Ridge was replaced in 2008 by a larger brick mansion called High Ridge Hall.]

Did you ever notice how almost every new house in town is so much larger than the average home of 25 years ago and at a time when they tell us that people are not having children any more?

#162: THE DREAM HOUSE OF E.P. DUTTON

Of all the great mansions on historic High Ridge Avenue, the one closest to me is the one that stands just north of Altnacraig. There is a valid reason for my feeling about this great place, as it was under my care for 30 years. It is my firm belief that this beautiful example of Victorian architecture is the most substantial wooden structure that I have ever seen.

Many men, in the course of their lifetime, have had a dream of how one day they would build a house for their family that would contain every conceivable idea that would make it comfortable, practical and livable. Nothing would be spared in making this dream house attractive to all members of the family. Money would be no object in the fantasy of putting together a house that would satisfy the most severe critic.

Many years ago, Edward Payson Dutton had such a dream and he was fortunate enough to see that dream come true.

E. P. Dutton was born in Keene, N.H. in 1831. His father owned and operated a dry goods store in that town. When Edward was only two, his family moved to Boston where the young lad would spend his formative years.

After attending local elementary schools, he was enrolled in The Boston Latin School, from which he graduated. His father had established a much larger dry goods store in Boston and after graduation Edward went to work for his father.

While he was still a young man, Edward's health broke down and he was sent to France to recuperate. It was expected that it would take several years for him to regain his health. However, by some stroke of good fortune, his health improved rapidly and within six months he was declared completely cured.

Edward took advantage of the opportunity of seeing some of Europe and traveled extensively in France and Switzerland. By the time he returned to the United States, he was fit as a fiddle and anxious to resume his career in the dry goods business.

However, his father had a friend who had become quite successful in the publishing business and the friend took an interest in the young man. He advised Edward that he seemed to have a particular aptitude that would prove to be useful in the publishing field.

The friend took Edward on a tour of his establishment and urged him to get involved. He needed little urging as his interest in publishing grew quite rapidly and he made a thorough study of it.

When only 21, Edward and a Mr. Ide formed the Boston publishing firm of Ide and Dutton. The business proved to be successful and six years later Dutton bought out Ide's interest

in the firm. That was the start of the E. P. Dutton Company that was destined to become one of the world's great publishing houses.

It was not long before the name E.P. Dutton spread far beyond the limits of Boston. He bought out several small publishing houses and then in 1869, moved his business to New York City. The company's first New York address was at 718 Broadway and after just a few years, it moved uptown to 681 Fifth Avenue and finally to 201 Park Avenue where it is still doing a flourishing business today.

Before leaving Boston, Edward Dutton met and married Julia Sleeper. Julia was a member of an old and prominent Boston family. To the best of my knowledge, the Duttons had no children. I saw Mr. Dutton only once and that was when I was very young and he was very old.

My memory of Mr. Dutton is that a long, white and very full beard partially concealed a kind and friendly face. At the time, he was driving his horse, a beautiful mahogany bay, while seated in a buckboard, with a wide leather belt across his lap. I learned later that the strap was to prevent him from falling from the wagon, for even at his advanced age, he drove at a very fast pace. Come to think of it, he must have pioneered the use of the seat belt!

On this occasion, he was just out for a pleasure ride. However, years before, he had participated along with his friends, George Haven, Barton Hepburn, and Dr. Edwin Van Saun in races on Main Street that were popular around the turn of the century. Like his friends, Edward Dutton was an avid horseman and his horses were considered to be among the very best.

Those must have been exciting times and the races must have been much more fun to watch than the races we witness daily on Main Street today.

My father and my older brothers knew Mr. Dutton quite well, and they told me of how he used to drive his horse and buggy into the wooded areas of town, especially on West Mountain. There in quiet solitude, he would read his breviary and do his meditation. I have his breviary and it is one of my prized possessions. The name E. P. Dutton is emblazoned in gold on the cover of this fine book and you just know who the publisher was.

The breviary has a preface, written by the publisher himself. In it he gives freely of his views on Christianity and the positive effect that it had on the formation of this great country.

If by now you have gained the impression that E. P. Dutton was a deeply religious man, you are assured that your impression is correct. A great part of his life was spent in religious work for the Protestant Episcopal Church. In fact, a great portion of the business of the E. P. Dutton Publishing Company was devoted to the printing of religious and children's books, as well as publications connected with that church.

Edward Payson Dutton was not only a gifted writer and great publisher, he was also an excellent businessman. It naturally followed that he would accumulate a considerable amount of wealth.

It was in the very early 1890's when Dutton felt that he was ready to build his dream house. It would seem that he must have retained some of the enthusiasm of his youth, for by this time he was no longer a young man, when he purchased the property at 63 High Ridge Avenue on which his great mansion would be erected. The land, like most of that on High Ridge, had belonged to the King family.

The newly acquired tract of land would extend from High Ridge west to the land of A.B. Hepburn that bordered the new Ridgefield Country Club and consisted of more than eight acres of exceptionally fine property. There was a right of way from Peaceable Street that furnished an entrance to the back property where he would build two large barns, one for horses and one for cows, as well as living quarters for Dutton's employees.

#163: PUBLISHER DUTTON'S MAGNIFICENT MANSION

When Edward Payson Dutton was ready to build his dream house, he hired a fine architect. The agreement between the two men contained a proviso that allowed Mr. Dutton to take an active part in putting the plans together.

Among Dutton's many talents was the ability to do the work of a draftsman and a certain knowledge of architecture. Perhaps his greatest contribution came from the fact that he had spent years thinking about what the house should look like and it was relatively easy for him to put his ideas on paper.

At this point, the smartest move made by Edward Dutton was in the selection of a general contractor. While visiting various construction sites he was introduced to James F. Kennedy. "Big Jim," as he was known, had earned an excellent reputation in the construction business. He was also well known for his complete honesty and this made a big hit with Mr. Dutton.

Just five years earlier, Jim Kennedy had done the stone work on the Congregational Church and had only recently completed Saint Mary's Church in Norwalk.

After viewing these fine structures, Mr. Dutton was convinced that he had found his man. The great mansion at 63 High Ridge attests to the fact that he did not make a mistake.

The great roof on the mansion is almost the size of a football field and has a series of peaks and valleys. The original shingles on this roof were wooden and they lasted more than half a century as an indication of the kind of materials that were used. The wooden shingles on the sides of the great building are the same ones that were nailed there almost 100 years ago.

The tremendous stone foundation that Jim Kennedy built could have easily supported a much larger structure. A dozen years ago, just for curiosity's sake, the level of the house was sighted from the back door to the front door. There was less than a quarter of an inch difference, despite the enormous weight of the great mansion. Wonder how long the new houses today will stay on such an even keel?

It required a little over two years to complete the mansion, but when finished, it contained every idea that the fertile mind of Edward Dutton could fabricate. Nothing was left to the imagination, it was all quite real.

The kitchen, the maids' dining room and the butler's pantry were encircled with wainscoting up to chair rail height and after all those years, it was still in excellent condition the last time I saw it. I doubt very much that the wainscoting could be replaced today.

The beautiful hardwood floors were laid with very narrow boards and the library and living room had parquet flooring.

There were two large oak tables, one in the kitchen and one in the maids' dining room. They were so heavy, it would take a strong man to lift just one end of them. The drain boards and the china closets in the butler's pantry were also made of solid oak.

The sink in the butler's pantry had two marvelous faucets. They were more than a foot apart and extended over the sink to a height of two feet. There was an enormous loop in each faucet top that brought the dispensing end of the faucet out over the sink, creating a laboratory effect. The inner working parts of the faucet were so well machined that no washer was required, and apparently they were meant to last forever.

Between the faucets was a rather unique gadget that may be worth describing. It was a shiny metal tank, the top of which had a lid with a handle that stood a little higher than the faucets. On the front of the little tank there was a tiny faucet, similar to the ones that could be found on electric coffee percolators.

E.P. Dutton did not overlook any possibilities and though he had an excellent artesian well, he wanted to make sure the water was safe. The little tank was filled periodically with charcoal, through which the drinking water was filtered before emerging from the little faucet.

The ceilings in the mansion were well over 10 feet from the floor level and we often thought of how ideal this house would be for some of the basketball players of today — and they could afford to heat it.

The doors to each room swung on hinges so huge they could have easily supported 400 pounds. The oaken doors were at least three inches thick and it would take a strong man to lift one of these doors as they were more than three feet wide and eight feet in height.

The upper section of the walls in the dining room was covered with black leather, down to chair-rail height. The leather was kept in place by large decorative nails, the heads of which were the size of a half dollar.

The lower part of the walls in this room was done in solid mahogany. There were also strips of solid mahogany, laced in designs across the ceiling.

A huge chandelier hung over the dining room table and where it emerged from the ceiling there was a design in the ceiling itself that was made of plaster. Today, patterns of this kind are made with paper and then glued to the ceiling for effect.

The beautiful fireplace in the dining room has glossy tile on either side across the top and in the apron on the floor in front of it. This was topped off with a mantle which, of course, was made from solid mahogany, and in the center of which is a flawless mirror.

On the opposite end of the dining room are two china closets. As you might expect, they are also mahogany and, as an added attraction, have leaded glass in a fancy design.

On the west side of the dining room, there is what must have been considered one of the early picture windows. It is probably five feet in width and eight feet in length and the plate glass in this window must be close to half an inch thick. We remember how on one occasion this great window was struck by a partridge in full flight. The impact was terrific and no doubt most windows would have shattered, but this one did not even crack.

As previously pointed out, Edward P. Dutton was a deeply religious man and in designing his dream house he included some things that were mindful of that fact. Stained glass windows are placed strategically through the house and four small ones are directly over the great picture window.

Mr. Dutton must have enjoyed the exceptional view from his picture window. The foothills of the Catskills can be seen in the distance and no doubt they reminded him of the mountainous area around his birthplace at Keene, N.H.

#164: A DOG IN THE CEILING, A TOILET IN THE BEDROOM

A great deal of space in mansions that were built in the 1890's and early 1900's was devoted to large entrance halls. E.P. Dutton's great house was no exception and his hallway was as large as most living rooms. Right off the hall and just inside the front door is a little foyer, with a wooden bench, above which there was a large mirror.

The fine woodwork in the hallway is made of white oak and is as hard as iron. The stairway to the second floor and the balusters that line one side of it are also made from oak.

Eddie Holt once told me that his father, who was one of Jim Kennedy's carpenters, had made the balusters with a lathe that had to be turned by hand. He said that the wood was so hard, the cutters on the lathe had to be changed constantly.

Underneath the stairway, there was a cute little powder room. It had a sink that was made of highly polished granite. Like the other sinks in the house, it was made in such a manner that water did not just flow out of it, but rather made its exit in a swirl and went around and around as it disappeared down the drain pipe.

The little powder room also had a rather unique toilet. It must have been one of the last of its kind, with a pull chain and the large copper-lined wooden tank, way up near the ceiling. It operated perfectly and never caused any trouble. Apparently it was made to last forever.

The library is also of white oak, including the strips that lace across the ceiling and the numerous bookcases.

In the center of this room there is a very large desk. Of course, it is made of oak and designed by Mr. Dutton himself. It has drawers on both sides and two people could easily work at this desk at the same time. The story is that the desk was made by hand, right there in the room where it has stood all those years.

The beautiful parquet flooring in the library has, unfortunately, been covered with wall to wall carpeting. I would bet that when the carpeting wears out, it will not be replaced, once that flooring is revealed.

The mantel over the fireplace was also oak and had a fancy hand-carved design on either side. The woodwork in the living room, or parlor, was also made of oak. However, unlike the library, where the woodwork was done with a clear varnish, the woodwork in this room was painted white with a delicate bead of gold leaf threaded through it at just the right places.

The original ceiling in the living room had a very fancy design in each corner. The design was made of plaster and of course was hand-made. The plaster was at least an inch thick and must have been very heavy.

One winter the house was closed without heat and this caused a section of the ceiling to fall. One of the owners decided to replace the entire ceiling with plasterboard. This meant that the fancy design was lost forever and the molding had to be raised as the new ceiling was less than half the thickness of the original.

Each fireplace had a different design and the one in the living room had a pretty little cabinet on either side, with small panes of leaded glass. Speaking of fireplaces, there was one in each room, including the bedrooms. This was all made possible by four enormous stone chimneys, located at just the right places around the house. It must have taken a truckload of wood each day during cold weather to satisfy the appetites of all those fireplaces.

The stairway leading to the second floor was made of oak with the aforementioned balusters on one side and oak paneling on the other. The stairway had a landing with a little alcove, complete with a cushioned series of window seats. The top of the seats were on perfect hinges and could be opened to provide storage space. The main purpose of the seats may have been their use as a resting place on the long climb to the second floor.

The climb was made longer than in most houses because of the ceiling heights and the fact that for some reason, there was a space of more than two feet between the first floor ceiling and the next floor.

The same was true of the space between the ceiling of the second floor and the floor of the attic. There were hundreds of wooden struts between ceilings and the floors above them. I have often thought that there must have been enough lumber used in the construction of these floors to build two ordinary homes.

The roof of the great house was equipped with box gutters. This meant that the gutters were recessed about ten inches back into the roof, rather than hanging from the edge of the eaves as the conventional type gutters did.

Box gutters were lined with metal and worked very well as long as they were kept in good repair. However, if the metal rusted out, the rain water had easy access into the house and could result in a great deal of damage.

Deterioration of the gutters, or the metal lining, also afforded easy entrance to various little wildlife creatures. One time a family of squirrels found a small hole in the metal lining and they proceeded to work diligently to enlarge it. Once inside, it seemed they could travel miles in back of the walls and under the floors. So the squirrels declared “squatters’ rights” and evicting them from their expansive quarters would prove to be difficult.

Several methods were employed to entice the squirrels to move to another location. None was completely successful. However, the one that seemed to work best was when a couple of boards were removed from the attic floor and a little hound dog was inserted between the floor and the ceiling below.

The squirrels had been making a considerable amount of noise as they roamed and played in their cavernous new home. That noise was as nothing compared to the absolute bedlam that existed as the squirrels led the dog on a merry chase at great speeds through the struts and across the ceiling.

It was some time before the squirrels agreed to vacate the premises and it was later still when a very tired dog finally made his way back to where he had entered the chasm. There would be repeat performances, as the squirrels returned on several occasions, until their entrance was discovered.

There were three large bedrooms on the second floor and three smaller ones. Mr. Dutton’s bedroom had an excellent view to the west. It had a series of windows that were just above the picture window in the dining room that was previously described.

An unusual thing about Mr. Dutton's bedroom was that it had a toilet set right in the middle of the floor. It was said that Mr. Dutton never tired of looking out those windows at the rolling countryside.

#165: THE BEAUTY AND THE BANE OF DUTTON’S WATER SYSTEM

There were two areas at E.P. Dutton’s mansion that seemed to have natural, built-in air conditioning units. One was on the south end of the large porch where there was always a gentle breeze. The mercury could climb to 90 degrees or more on Main Street, but on that great porch it never got to be more than 75.

The other thoroughly enjoyable spot was the guest room on the north side of the second floor. There were large windows all around this room except for the south side. When the

windows on the east and the west were open, the soothing air that passed between them was so cool and pleasant that it was hard to believe that it could be stifling just a block away.

Not all of the second floor was used for bedrooms and baths. One room was used as a linen closet. The lower part of this room was lined with chests that had large oaken drawers up to about four feet above the floor. From the top of the drawers to the high ceiling there were white oak closets. The drawers and the doors to the closets worked so well that a small child could have opened and closed them easily.

Of course everything in this grand house fitted perfectly and only the finest hardware was used. Still, I always marveled at how tightly the doors and windows fit and yet how easily they opened and closed after all those years.

There were three small rooms in the attic, one of which was finished off with plastered walls and ceiling. The turret that can be seen on the south west corner of the building is a part of this room.

I do not believe that this room was ever used for living purposes. It was more like a stateroom. The view from the two lower floors was excellent but the view from the attic was spectacular. As well as the view to the west and over the Hudson Valley that was afforded by the other floors, this floor provided a view to the south of Long Island and the Sound. Foliage on the tall trees interferes with this view today.

The other two rooms which were finished in wainscoting were used primarily for storage.

In one of these rooms there was a very large wooden tank, a storage place for water probably holding 500 gallons.

A powerful pump that sat in the garage, directly over a fine artesian well, pumped the water up into the tank. The pump was powered by a gasoline engine. It was a rather ingenious operation.

My brother Jack told me how the tank, which was located near a window, was clearly visible from the garage. On the surface of the water in the tank was a large float that was attached to a board that traveled up and down the side of the tank. The board could be seen from the garage and when it neared the top of the tank it was the signal that the tank was in need of a refill.

One of Dutton's employees would start up the gasoline engine and watch as the board descended from the top of the tank. When it reached a certain point that would indicate that the tank was full and the engine would be shut off.

The water would then filter out through many pipes as it traveled its way to the bathrooms, kitchen and laundry. The question was asked as to what would happen if the employee failed to turn off the engine in time. Jack went on to explain that in case of an overflow, a copper gutter that encircled the tank would carry off the excess water to a pipe that extended outside the building.

It was a very efficient system at the time but eventually it was abandoned in favor of the public water supply that was to be installed on High Ridge. When this occurred the tank was dismantled and stored in the same room where it had been operating. Perhaps the owners of the house were not confident that the water company would be able to continue to supply the water. For 75 years after the switch to the public water supply, the tank was still stored where it could be reactivated if need be.

A further indication of their lack of confidence was the fact that when the public water supply was brought into the house the old pipes were left intact and the water still traveled all the way up to the attic and then came back down to the various faucets, etc.

The decision to use the same old pipes was to cause problems in the future. The great mansion had originally been intended for use as a "summer cottage." When the Duttons returned to their city home during the winter months, the house was closed up and the pipes were drained of water. In later years the place was used year round and while there was heat on the first two floors, it got pretty cold up in that attic. The pipes that traveled to and from the tank were still there and full of water.

The pipes were laid between the attic floor and the ceiling of the second floor. They were laid in channels made of copper that was intended to carry off the water that might result from a leaky pipe.

The theory was a good one and everything worked well during a mild winter. However, during one exceptionally cold winter, one of the pipes froze and broke. There was no one in the house at the time and the water ran for several hours before the problem was discovered.

It was about 15 below zero and although the water made its way through the channel, when it reached the end of the pipe outside the building, it froze again and backed up and over the channel.

The result was that the beautiful mahogany dining room received most of the descending water and it looked like a complete disaster.

Once the water was shut off and the place was completely dried out, Ernest Sturges and his men went to work. When they were through with their cleaning and painting there was no evidence of what we had considered a major catastrophe.

One thing that had to be changed was the leather that had been on the walls of the dining room since the house was built. When the leather was dried out it had shrunk to half its original size. Therefore, on the walls today, there is conventional wallpaper rather than the black leather which had given the room a medieval touch.

After that painful experience all pipes were removed from the attic floor where they had served no useful purpose.

All three rooms in the attic were in the western portion of that expansive area. The rest of the attic was wide open like an auditorium. I guess that it would accommodate one hundred

dancers with plenty of room for the orchestra. The peak of the roof was probably 20 feet above the attic floor.

#166: DUTTON'S MASSIVE TOP AND BOTTOM; AN EXPLOSION NEARBY

The large attic in Edward Payson Dutton's grand old mansion went through some drastic changes a couple of years ago. Much of the great open space that was previously described was converted into several rooms. In the process some excellent woodwork was concealed under plaster board.

The rafters used in the roof of this building were not rough-hewn with an axe. They were cut with a saw but were not finished by a plane. Therefore, they were full-sized and the great three by 14 rafters measured exactly that. For example, a two by four purchased today is planed down to one-and-one-half inches by three-and-one-half inches and is smooth to handle but not as strong as before it was planed.

The fine builder, James F. Kennedy, was not one to skimp on materials that he used and Mr. Dutton's roof should last forever.

Each weekend during the two years that the mansion was under construction, Dutton would travel to Ridgefield to see first-hand how the job was progressing. As noted earlier he had taken an active role in planning the building and was very knowledgeable concerning the plans and blueprints. As he examined the work being done and compared it with the blueprints, he noticed several instances where the plans called for a two-by-four and Kennedy would use a two-by-six, or a two-by-eight would be used in place of a two-by-six.

One day as the job was nearing completion, so the story goes, Dutton approached Kennedy and said, "Jim, I'm afraid you are losing money on this job." Without any hesitation Kennedy said, "If I am, it's me own business."

The story ends with Dutton's giving Kennedy a bonus of \$5,000 [about \$160,000 today] because he was so pleased with the finished product. It is very doubtful that today's contractors are the recipients of such generosity.

It should be mentioned before leaving the attic area, that a copper gutter was placed around each of the great chimneys, about three feet above the attic floor. Each gutter had a little drain pipe that extended to the outside of the house. The purpose of the gutters was for them to carry off any condensation that might occur. What E.P. Dutton did not think of, Jim Kennedy did. They sure made a great team.

No description of Dutton's mansion would be complete without a trip to the huge basement. It was more than just huge and perhaps enormous would be more descriptive.

There were two coal bins and each was large enough to hold 20 tons of coal. There was a storeroom and a wine cellar as well as a room that was used as a repair shop. There was also a complete bathroom that had a marble sink like the others in the house. One corner of the basement was used as a laundry and despite all these uses there was still a lot of open space.

The first thing that would attract one's attention on entering the basement was the massive stone foundation that Jim Kennedy felt was necessary to support the very heavy structure. The stone work is still intact today and you can be sure there has been no shift in any portion of it.

Other than the windows, each of which is protected by large metal bars similar to those used in a jail, the only break in the walls of the foundation is in its northern end. At this point there is a door which allows passage to the area under the porch on that end of the building.

There was a great furnace, which I believe was a Burnham. It had a steam boiler and its size caused one to quickly understand the need for two coal bins. In 1951 the furnace was converted from coal to oil and it proved to be very efficient. probably because the house was so well built and all of the doors and windows fit so well. One thing was sure: Once the house was warmed up, it stayed warm, even in the coldest weather.

Despite the proven efficiency of the furnace, it was destroyed a couple of years ago in favor of electric heat. We are not sure why the fine boiler was broken up, but it did have a design on its face that may have been objectionable. In the metal just over the door to the furnace was an unmistakable swastika, or fylfot. The design was of Greek origin and that furnace was in the basement years before Hitler and the Nazis adopted it as their symbol. This symbol of the sun had arms that were bent backward, counterclockwise, unlike the one used by the Nazis. At any rate it is now gone.

When the mansion was new, cooking was done with gas and gas was also used to illuminate the large house. The walls of the building seemed to be full of water pipes and gas pipes.

The gas was not furnished by the Ridgefield Illuminating Company as that short-lived firm was not formed until after the turn of the century. Dutton produced his own gas with a machine in his basement that is well worth describing, as it is very doubtful that more than a real few have ever seen one.

A compound was used to produce the gas and it was inserted into the machine by means of a vial located on its side. On the other side of the machine was a water wheel that was about four feet in diameter. After the compound had been inserted, a faucet just above the water wheel was opened and as the wheel turned, the gas was forced into a tank atop the machine. The tank would then rise and pressure the gas into the pipes that would carry it throughout the house.

I still have one of the gas lamps and the globe which enclosed the flame. A battery-operated gadget in the lamp produced a spark that would light the lamp when a switch was turned.

This unique machine still rests in the basement of the mansion and on the wall next to it, in a picture frame, are the directions for operating it. Also just outside where the machine is located there is a small underground storage tank.

Gas that settles in that tank could remain there for many years and as it is very explosive it could be quite dangerous.

I believe that the machine just described is the last one in Ridgefield. There was one in the home of Albert H. Storer on Main Street where the Lance Ballou family now lives and there was one in the Albert H. Wiggin home on Peaceable Street where the Raymond Bessette family now lives.

Some years ago there was a fire in the former Wiggin home. It was then being operated as a hotel by the Meisners. The firemen brought the fire under control and confined it to the basement. Before leaving they decided to shake down a small coal stove that was used to heat hot water. This was done as a precautionary measure but it did not turn out that way.

Unbeknown to the firemen, a storage tank was located just outside the basement where the gas machine had stood many years before. A significant amount of residue had remained in the tank since the people had stopped using the gas machine in the distant past.

As one of the firemen shook down the little coal stove, hot coals from the grates dropped into the ash pit. They were just hot enough to set off the gas that had been seeping in from the storage tank. It was as if the gas had been waiting all those years for just such a moment, and there was a tremendous explosion.

Some of those who were in the basement at the time were our present fire marshal, Francis Moylan, Dino Giardini, Jack Leary, Earl Sturges, and Bob Mulvaney. The resulting blast did not blow them from the basement. It just seemed that way from the manner in which they flew out the door.

#167: THE GENEROSITY OF E.P. DUTTON, WHO LOVED BOOKS AND HORSES

The great E.P. Dutton estate, on fabulous High Ridge, in its original form consisted of more than eight acres of very fine land. Its three outbuildings were built with the same high-class workmanship that was employed in the construction of Dutton's mansion.

The smallest of the three buildings is located directly behind the main house and is now used as some kind of garage. Its original purpose was to provide a nearby stable for Mr. Dutton's favorite horse and the buckboard on which he traveled Ridgefield's country roads. Dutton was a great lover of horses and always kept six or seven good driving horses.

In his younger days Mr. Dutton favored the sleek speedsters that he used to race on Main Street in contests with his horsey friends. However, in his twilight years his favorite was a beautiful mahogany bay Morgan that provided the steadiness that a man of his advanced years required.

Along with the horse and buckboard, the little building also housed the pump for Dutton's deep artesian well. There is a trap door in the roof of the building directly over the pump. It

provided a place to withdraw the casing from the well in case it developed any problems. As I have said before, Dutton and Jim Kennedy thought of everything.

The other two buildings were very large barns, one for Dutton's other horses and one for his cows. Each building also had living quarters for Dutton's employees. These buildings were located at least six or seven hundred feet to the west of the main house and have since been converted into very fine homes.

Once a driveway ran from High Ridge past the mansion and the little barn to the large barns and then out onto Peaceable Street. The remnants of a pipe fence that lined either side of this driveway are still visible in several places.

Now that these buildings have become residences, the entrance is from Peaceable Street and they carry the street numbers 39 and 45. The two lovely homes have very stylish gambrel roofs and they are at least 200 feet back from Peaceable Street.

The entrance from Peaceable Street is probably 30 feet in width. It is lined on either side by a perfect stone wall while overhead enormous trees provide an archway that creates a picture of an old and very tranquil country lane.

It would be easy to envision a pair of prancing coach horses coming down this lane. They would be driven by a liveried coachman and they would be drawing a fine carriage. Mr. and Mrs. Dutton would be seated while enjoying a pleasant summer afternoon ride.

All four of Dutton's buildings were equipped with lightning rods. Huge glass petticoat insulators carried the extra-large ribbon wires to where the protective system was grounded.

The lightning rods did well in protecting the buildings from the elements that produced fire from the sky. However, they were quite vulnerable to the evil intentions of a man on the ground.

In the early and mid 20's a fire bug was operating in the area. There had been several fires of questionable origin, and one had destroyed a barn right next door that belonged to Charles Hamilton. People lived in fear of where the bug would strike next, but that's another story.

A pile of hay on the floor of one of Dutton's barns became ignited but fortunately it was quickly discovered by one of his employees. With the prompt assistance of our Volunteer Fire Department, the fire was extinguished before any great damage was done and the efforts of the firebug were thwarted on this occasion.

Some of the old timers will remember that his name was synonymous with what is felt when one has a toothache. He himself was a fireman and, as so often happens in incidents of this kind, he helped put out the fire.

E.P. Duttons' attention was not limited to his buildings. Both he and his good friend and neighbor, Barton Hepburn, were firm believers in feeding the soil with a natural fertilizer that was produced on their estates. The result was that their land became exceptionally rich and still is to this day.

When the time came to seed the lawn and the terraces, Mr. Dutton imported the very finest grass seed available. Much of that very fine grass still flourishes in that vast lawn and we hope that the newly planted trees will not hide it from the view of an admiring public traveling over the Ridge.

Edward Payson Dutton's elegant place on High Ridge must be considered as reflecting to a great degree the outstanding character of this very fine man. Evidence of his love for Ridgefield can be found in the many efforts that he put forth on behalf of his adopted town.

He was generous with his money, his time and his talents and never hesitated when an opportunity came about to be of service. Since his business was publishing, it seemed natural that his interest would turn to the establishment of a first class library for Ridgefield.

Everyone knows that in 1901 James N. Morris built the original part of our present library in memory of his wife Elizabeth. It is probably not so well-known that Edward R. Dutton was a member of the committee that raised \$9,000 [\$284,000 in 2022] with which to purchase the property for the library. The land was bought from Evelyn Smith and included that now owned by the Village Bank [The Prospector site today].

As well as being a charter member of the Ridgefield Library and Historical Association, he was one of its incorporators. Mr. Dutton was vice-president of the library and when his advanced age prevented him from taking an active part in the operation, he was voted honorary vice-president for life.

This very kindly man gave many books to the library and no doubt many of them still line the shelves of that excellent institution.

E.P. Dutton was a great advocate of education and when the need arose for a new school he was quick to join with others to raise money to purchase a lot on which to build it. That is the former school on East Ridge, now occupied by Boehringer Ingelheim [Chef's Warehouse in 2022].

The records show that at a Town Meeting on Oct. 7, 1912, a couple of resolutions were adopted. One was that the gift of E.P. Dutton and others be accepted with the condition that the town should erect a suitable school building on the property. The school was to contain not less than 10 rooms and the cost would not exceed \$40,000.

I guess we can agree that Edward Payson Dutton was quite a man and when he died at age 92, on Sept. 6, 1923, it was a great loss for Ridgefield.

#168: THE CELEBRITY AUCTION AND THE MAN WHO WON

Fannie V. Dutton had been married to Edward P. Dutton for more than 60 years when she passed on in February 1920. When three years later Mr. Dutton followed to his just reward at age 92, there were no close family members to take over the great mansion.

To settle the estate, the mansion and the High Ridge property were sold at public auction on June 29, 1924. This was no ordinary auction for the fame of this place had spread for many miles around as did the news that it would be sold at auction.

To handle a sale of this magnitude, the services of the noted auctioneer Arthur C. Sheridan were employed. People came from great distances, some to actually place a bid on the property and some, of course, just to see and be seen. It was a gala event and it was estimated that more than 500 attended.

The actual sale took place in the living room but the crowd was scattered throughout the house and onto the great porch as well as on the lawns. More than 50 bids were received by mail as well as those that were made at the sale. Some of those who placed bids on this very desirable property were considered to be quite prominent and some were even household names at the time.

For example, the famous American statesman and United States Senator from New York, Elihu Root, was one of those who not only placed a bid but came to Ridgefield to present the bid in person. The records show that Root was unusual in that he was Secretary of War under one president and Secretary of State under another. Root resigned his secretaryship in 1909 and was elected to the United States Senate. The Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to him in 1912.

Among the bidders were some very prominent Ridgefielders, such as Harvey P. Bissell. Charles Holt and John Hampton Lynch. H.P. Bissell was the owner and operator of the famous Bissell Drug Store and also owned and lived in the fine building that is now The West Lane Inn. Mr. Bissell had just completed his term as comptroller of the State of Connecticut. He was recognized as a power in the Republican party throughout the state.

Charles Hamilton was also a publisher and his residence on the western corner of High Ridge and Peaceable Street, helped to justify the name Publisher's Row for that famous street. His place with its red brick mansion, terraced lawns and exotic shrubbery was considered a showplace in its own right.

John Hampton Lynch owned one of the very largest and one of the most beautiful of all the great estates. He built his mansion on West Mountain and it is now the home of the Congregation of Notre Dame.

Because of the fine places that these gentlemen already owned, it is very doubtful that any of them really planned on occupying the Dutton mansion. It is more probable that their interest stemmed from a desire to be in a position to have a say as to which lucky person would move to the hallowed ground at the top of High Ridge.

At any rate, when the bidding stopped and the auction came to a close, Auctioneer Sheridan declared that the successful bidder was the grandson of another publisher. His name was James G. Blaine III and his winning bid was in the amount of \$32,500. Even 61 years ago

this would have been considered a steal. This is especially true when one realizes that the property consisted of twice as much land as it now has.

Blaine was the grandson of James Gillespie Blaine, a very well-known American statesman of the late 1800's. The elder Blaine, early in his career, had been editor and part owner of the Kennebec Journal, a newspaper published in Augusta, Maine. He was later elected to the United States Congress from Maine and served for six years as Speaker of the House. Later still President James Garfield appointed him Secretary of State.

It was just 101 years ago that James G. Blaine won the nomination of the Republican Party for President. The Democrat, Grover Stephen Cleveland, won the election in what was one of the most fiercely conducted campaigns in the history of this country.

There were those who blamed Blaine's defeat on a speech, made in his behalf by a clergyman, the Rev. Samuel Dickinson Burchard. In the speech Mr. Burchard blasted the Democratic Party and labeled it the party of Rum, Romanism and Rebellion. It turned out to be one of the all-time boo-boos. Blaine, whose sister was mother superior in a convent, was not considered to be anti-Catholic. However, many political historians believe the fact that he permitted this phrase to be used in his presence convinced many voters that his party was anti-Catholic. It was felt that this cost him many votes.

James G. Blaine III used the former Dutton mansion only on weekends but kept the place for some 25 years. Unlike Dutton, Blaine did not get involved to any extent in local affairs. However, he did enjoy his mansion and did much of the work himself on weekends.

He used to mow the lawn with a set of gang mowers that were similar to those used on a golf course. The idea was fine except that instead of drawing the mowers with a tractor equipped with large soft tires, he used an old Chevrolet with narrow tires.

Blaine drove the old Chevy at great speeds around the lawn and the wheels of the light weight car would spin each time it started up and each time it turned a corner. This, of course, played havoc with the fine grass that E.P. Dutton had planted at great expense. Some of the neighbors used to say that each time the wheels on the Chevy spun, Mr. Dutton did likewise.

So, a greenskeeper Mr. Blaine was not. However, he knew what to do when he realized that he had much more land than he needed and probably much more than he was capable of taking care of. He solved this problem by selling off the back property with two large barns that were previously described. The barns, of course, have since become very fine homes and the original tract of land was reduced to about three and one-half acres.

The High Ridge property was put into the hands of his sister, Jennie Blaine Schmalholz. Jennie never actually used the place and soon it was again placed on the market. In 1950 and 1951 large mansions, such as those on High Ridge, were just not selling readily.

#169: THE BIG MAN ON A SMALL HORSE

By 1951, the 57-year-old mansion at 64 High Ridge had had just two owners, Edward P. Dutton and James G. Blaine. In that year the great place would have its third owner and he would prove to be just as famous as the others.

To properly describe the new owner, it will be necessary to go back to the mid-1930's. Therefore, with your kind permission, we will leave High Ridge for a while and journey a mile or so to the south.

It was a typical Saturday afternoon in October and the leaves were taking on the beautiful colors that we will be enjoying again in just a couple of weeks. I was driving a red Ford pickup truck on the doors of which was printed "Conklin Dairy Telephone 50."

The truck was loaded with stock feed that was to be delivered to Hillscroft Farm. The feed was produced by a cooperative known as The Eastern States Farmers Exchange and Irving B. Conklin was the local distributor.

As I turned into Saint Johns Road from Wilton Road West, a horse and rider were approaching from the west. As we neared each other, it quickly became apparent that this was no ordinary horse, as it had a gait, a quickness and a style that were the hallmark of good breeding.

We would one day find that the rider was no ordinary man either. However, at the time our attention was riveted on that magnificent gray saddle horse.

For the moment we failed to notice that the rider was a veritable giant of a man. He actually stood well over six feet and must have weighed at least 230 pounds. I was to learn that the horse's name was Kathleen Mavourneen and she was an Irish thoroughbred. The mare had once belonged to Tommy Hitchcock, who, as was noted in an earlier column, was America's top polo player back in the 20's.

It should be noted that the gallant mare carried all that weight without a word of protest. As a matter of fact she gave the impression that she thoroughly enjoyed carrying the big man. This man had a way of bringing out the best in anyone and could easily convince a person that hard work could be quite enjoyable.

As the horse and rider drew near, we slowed down in order better to observe the fine mare. It was easy to see that she was all class and we stopped as we came alongside. The rider suddenly asked if we were on our way to Hillscroft Farm. We answered in the affirmative and without another word he started the mare off again. It was only then that we noticed that the rider was really too big for the horse.

At any rate that was how I met Dr. Royal C. Van Etten for the very first time.

He turned out to be the owner of Hillscroft Farm but we felt that his abruptness of this occasion was really uncalled for. We had not intended to admonish him that his great weight was too much for the mare to carry. We would only have liked to tell him how fortunate he was to have such a horse.

It would be several years later before we learned that the good doctor's brusque manner was engendered to a great extent by his rather hectic lifestyle. He was on the staff of five of New York City's largest hospitals. He was chief of staff at Lenox Hill Hospital and he taught at Columbia Medical.

Doctors Inkster, Safford, Wagner, and Von Posnak were some of the Ridgefield physicians who came under the tutelage of Dr. Van Etten. It was said that in any large city hospital, when his name was mentioned, there would surely be someone to step forward and say that they knew the great man.

Many of Dr. Van Etten's patients were among the rich and famous. One who depended on him for her medical needs was the beautiful Mary Pickford who, for the benefit of some of the younger readers, was known as "America's Sweetheart" in the days of the silent films. I once had the pleasure of listening to the doctor converse with Mary when she called him from Hollywood. An autographed picture of Mary stood on the mantel over the fireplace in the doctor's dining room.

Upon being made aware of all these impressive credentials, it became easier for me to understand why the great man did not just fall off his horse in appreciation of my feeble efforts to voice my approval of Mavourneen.

At any rate it would not be our last meeting. Perhaps encounter would be a more descriptive word of how I first met Dr. Royal C. Van Etten. Ten years would elapse before we would meet for a second time. That meeting would take place in our nice little apartment at 148 (now 613) Main Street.

On that occasion, Dr. and Mrs. Van Etten came to see us about the possibility of our taking a position as superintendent of his Hillscroft Farm estate. He turned out to be a most charming individual with a very persuasive personality. It just seemed to follow naturally that when he made an offer that we could not refuse, an excellent relationship was established that would exist until the good doctor passed on more than 37 years later.

My tour of duty at Hillscroft started on May 1 and it was a hectic time as there was much to do at that time of the year. The previous super had retired and his assistant had gone to another job, so it was obvious that this would be no picnic.

Perhaps I should describe Hillscroft as it was really one of Ridgefield's finest estates. It consisted of more than 87 acres, about 10 of which were devoted to apple orchards. The elevation was great and the view to the southeast was superb. Long Island and many miles of its coastline could easily be seen from almost any place on the estate.

At night, the Sound looked so close that one would feel that a stone tossed in its direction would surely make a splash. The lights on the little boats that plied the waters of the Sound at night were clearly visible.

At the turn of the century, Hillscroft was owned by Charles T. Root and his superintendent was John Regan, father of Mary and Elizabeth Regan. The Regans are cousins of Marie (Mrs. Richard E. Venus) and they lived in the same little cottage that would be our home so many years later. I have a brochure that was put out when the place was on sale in 1900. It has pictures that show the highway, the orchards and the superintendent's cottage. They are much the same today except that additions have been made to the cottage.

The mansion is entirely different as this fine structure was not built until the mid 20's. In the early 20's the place had been rented to the Joseph Conron family while their place of West Mountain was being constructed.

#170: THE PEOPLE AND FIRES OF HILLSCROFT

There were two quite disastrous fires at Hillscroft Farm on St. Johns Road. One of unknown origin occurred just before the turn of the century and it destroyed the main house. Charles T. Root then purchased Hillscroft and built a fine mansion to replace the original farm house.

A young writer of humorous prose and verse came along and became very interested in the Roots' daughter. The daughter was receptive to the attention being paid her and she married the young writer. He turned out to be Franklin P. Adams and his friends called him F.P.A.

It probably was of no consequence but it is interesting to note that Adams was educated at the Armour Scientific Academy in Chicago as well as at the University of Michigan. The Armour Academy was founded by the Armour family that owned the famous Chicago meat packing company. This great company would later be headed by Joseph Conron, a future occupant of the Roots' mansion at Hillscroft.

Adams was probably best known for "The Conning Tower," his column, which first appeared in *The New York Tribune*. He wrote several books and the last hit that he had was the *F.P.A. Book of Quotations*, which he wrote in 1952.

Some may remember him as the sharp-witted member of the staff of experts on the popular radio program, "Information Please," in the late 30's and the 40's.

At any rate, to continue our description of Hillscroft, we would point out that the farm started just about where South Olmstead Lane enters St. Johns Road. It then ran south and west on both sides of the road to where Donnelly Drive is now. It extended on the west to Silver Spring Road and on the east, almost to Wilton Road West.

For some unknown reason, the Root family left Ridgefield. I have never been able to understand how anyone could leave this wonderful town, especially if you had a place like lovely Hillscroft.

It would be rather difficult to explain to the many families that now live at Hillscroft and its environs just how splendid the estate was. The many changes that were made in the past 15 years leave few reminders of how it used to look.

The mansion is pretty much the same and the cottage have been added to but the nice orchard in front of the cottage is the same and the little ice house that we later used for a dairy is still there.

The grape arbor that we built 40 years ago with telephone poles has withstood the test of time but the great barns have all disappeared, some to be converted into dwellings.

We have a little brochure that was printed when the place was for sale in 1900. It notes that anyone who would purchase Hillscroft, could move in and bring with them only matches to light the fire. The farm would produce anything else that was needed. This attractive style of Hillscroft was still in vogue a half century later, when the great place was again on the market.

After the departure of the Root family, Hillscroft was rented to various families, including the Morgans and the Conrons. It was while the Conron family occupied the Root mansion that it burned for the second time. During a terrible thunderstorm, it was hit by a bolt of lightning and the resulting fire completely destroyed the great house.

We have previously noted that Joseph Conron, his wife, Kate, their son, Raymond, and their daughter lived at Hillscroft while their home on West Mountain was being constructed. The Conrons' new mansion was where Dr. and Mrs. Henry D. Minot now live at 4 West Mountain Road. It was kind of a Spanish style of white masonry with a red tile roof that was visible for miles around.

Because of its prominence on a bluff of the mountainside, the mansion with its red roof was used as a guide for airplanes in the early days of aviation. We always thought it looked very pretty, up there on its lofty perch and that roof poking through the trees was very reassuring.

Some years after the Conron mansion was built, a very attractive ballroom was added to it in anticipation of a wedding that never materialized.

James Doubleday apparently did not share my feelings for the Conron mansion. When it came into his possession in the late 40's, he immediately tore it down, and replaced it with the house where the Minots now live. Jimmy had a penchant for tearing houses down and replacing them. Jimmy and his lovely wife, Betty, lived there several years before moving on.

At any rate, the fire at Hillscroft that was the result of a direct hit by a bolt of lightning, was to cause great changes in this fine estate. Hillscroft was purchased by Edward W. Simone and he built the present fine mansion that is now the home of the Robert Soloff family at 133 St. Johns Road.

When his new home was completed Simone added the protection of an excellent lightning rod system. Rods were placed on the mansion, the cottage, the many barns and the tall trees that stood near these buildings.

We once witnessed a bolt of lightning hitting a lightning rod in the top of one of the tall pine trees. The resulting ball of fire that followed the wire down the side of the tree and into the

ground at the base of the tree would have been a persuasive selling point for a lightning rod salesman.

Edward Simons spent a lot of money in rebuilding the mansion and in refurbishing the cottage, the cow barns, home barns and garages. All of these buildings were equipped with telephones that were a part of an intercommunication system that must have been quite novel in the 20's.

The main house had one of the most beautiful staircases that we have ever seen. In addition to the intercom system, this house had a buzzer system for summoning the maids.

The very attractive, sunken living room had rather unusual wallpaper. It was actually a mural of tropical scenery and was said to have cost \$60 a strip, from the ceiling to the chair rail. Of course, the view from this great house was just magnificent.

A massive stone wall on the eastern side of the mansion separates it from a very large perennial flower garden and just east of this fine garden was a fine rose garden, made up of four large beds of tea roses.

Just beyond the rose gardens was an excellent asparagus bed that was 25 feet wide and 40 feet long. Asparagus is a heavy feeder and the farm had plenty of fertilizer and the result was that you never saw such asparagus. The stalks were almost as big around as a baseball bat and they were as tender as marshmallows.

There was also an enormous vegetable garden, in which just about every variety of vegetable was grown. These gardens were protected by a privet hedge. You may be sure that it was no ordinary hedge.

#171: THE MAD DASH WITH THE SUPERMAN DOC

The hedges at Hillscroft Farm were at least 300 feet long and most of them stood at least six feet in height. Wherever a gateway was encountered between the gardens, the hedge was allowed to grow to a height of nine feet and then it was trimmed into a graceful arch over the gate.

Trimming these hedges was a real chore, not only because of the length and the height but because most of the hedges were about eight feet in width. It was necessary to stand on planks that were suspended across saw horses in order for the one doing the trimming to be able to reach the center of the hedge.

Electric clippers had not yet come on the market at the time so the trimming was done by hand. It was such a long-drawn-out process that when the trimmer finally reached the end of the hedge, he could go back to the other end and start again.

When Edward W. Simons owned Hillscroft in the early 20's, his superintendent was J. Ebert Anderson, and Gottlob Riede was Bert's assistant. In the mid-20's Bert transferred to

Casagmo, Miss Mary Olcott's great showplace on Main Street, and Mr. Riede became the super and stayed on when Dr. Van Etten bought Hillscroft.

Milo Holub was Simons' chauffeur and he and his wife Jenny and their son Eddie, lived upstairs in a very nice apartment over the horse barn. Just a few years ago that large barn and the hay barn were moved out nearer St. Johns Road where they were converted into two quite beautiful dwellings.

Mr. Simons is remembered as a very kindly man. He did not stay in Ridgefield very long but he sure was active and made a big impact while he was here. It seemed that he had hardly arrived in town when he became associated with several organizations. In no time he became a member of the Board of Directors of the Ridgefield Library and Historical Association. Soon he was elected president of the First National Bank and Trust Company. This bank later became the Fairfield County Trust Company and later still the name changed again to Union Trust Company [now Wells Fargo].

At any rate, when the Simons family moved from Ridgefield in the late 20's, it signaled the entrance of Dr. Royal C. Van Etten, his wife Louise and their son, Royal C. Jr.

Years ago the large mansions on High Ridge were often referred to as summer cottages. By contrast, Mrs. Van Etten and her son used Hillscroft during the summer months but the doctor used it only on weekends.

He never took a vacation but considered a weekend at Hillscroft and an hour or two on a Wednesday afternoon as a real treat. It seemed that he was always on call and his trips to the farm were interrupted more often than not and he would dash back to New York.

Dr. Van Etten was the nearest thing to superman that I have ever seen. He must have been a pioneer in the use of a beeper. One Wednesday in the mid-40's he took the afternoon off and came up from the city to help with the haying. He loved to be a part of the farm life and was thoroughly enjoying the work in the hayfield. We noted that he had a little black object in his shirt pocket from which a wire protruded some six inches out of the top.

We had never seen a beeper before and had no idea of what its purpose was. The doctor had only been in the hayfield for a half hour when we heard an unmistakable beep emanating from the little contraption. He was more than 60 years old at the time, but the way he ran for the house, one would think he was half that age. In less than ten minutes the doctor had changed his clothes and had gone roaring out the driveway on his way to Lenox Hill Hospital.

He told us later how he had just purchased the beeper and that was the very first time it had been used to summon him to the hospital. Of course, he was very proud of his new gadget that would keep him close to his patients.

Traffic conditions permitting, the doctor would allow himself just one hour to make the trip to the city. He was absolutely the fastest driver we have ever come across. We used to say

that the bluestone from the driveway would still be falling for several minutes after he left the farm.

To ride with Dr. Van Etten was truly an experience, even when he was out for a leisurely drive. To ride with him when he was in a hurry was a real hair-raising incident.

On one occasion the doctor had to travel by train. He had a timetable but could not find the time he could get a train out of Branchville station. The doctor's low boiling point had long since been passed when he sought my assistance. His fury was directed against those who had drawn up the timetable and had neglected to include Branchville.

I suggested that his chances were much better at the Norwalk station. My suggestion was almost immediately regretted as he found a train leaving at 5 p.m. He asked if I would go with him to drive the car back and when the answer was in the affirmative, he actually leaped into the driver's seat. It was then 4:45 and since the trains ran pretty much on time, I felt that there was no chance of making that 5 o'clock train.

My family watched as we flew out the driveway and later they told me that they never expected to see me again. It should be noted that Dr. Van Etten was the best-natured man with the worst temper that I have ever met. Now he is driving down St. Johns Road with one hand on the wheel while banging on the dashboard with the other and all the time damning the Vanderbilts and any other family that had any connections with a railroad.

He had to slow a bit to make the corner from Silver Hill onto Wilton Road West and I considered jumping from the vehicle at that point. It was not bravery that kept me in the seat: we were just going too fast.

As we sailed over the Wilton town line, I was reminded of the doctor's tremendous reflexes and tried to reassure myself, but as he started passing every other vehicle, even on the corners, my confidence quickly evaporated.

We passed four cars in a row when Orem's Diner appeared on our right. One of the cars, parked at the diner had a tall antenna, indicating that it was a policeman's vehicle. The banging on the dashboard stopped for a second as the doctor pointed at the antenna and inquired as to whether the cop was a friend of ours. No answer was forthcoming as at that point my furtive glance at the speedometer showed that it was registering just above 85.

You should know that as he wheeled that car into the Norwalk station, his train was just approaching the platform. With a big smile of satisfaction, the good doctor grabbed his bag from the back seat and with a wave of his arm, ran to make his train.

#172: THE CARE AND FEEDING OF 50,000 BEES

There were those who used to say that spring was the busiest time on the farm. Then there were others who felt that the busiest time on the farm was in the fall of the year. Actually, on a well-run farm, a person is kept real busy during all four seasons.

I can remember one spring that was especially busy. It was the first day of May when I started at Hillscroft Farm and there were a number of things that had to be done at once. The vegetable garden had not yet been planted. Plants in the hotbed were straining against the glass to get out in the open where they could finish growing. The flower gardens were in need of attention and fields had to be plowed so that corn could be planted.

These things, coupled with the regular chores, such as the milking of the cows and the feeding and care of the livestock, made it all look like an almost insurmountable task. This was especially true because at the time no help was available.

If that were not enough to contend with, we discovered one more thing that required our immediate attention. That happened to be 11 hives of honey bees. They were essential to the wellbeing of the orchards.

We had a considerable amount of experience in the operation of a farm but most of it was gained in the care of livestock, rather than in the diversified duties that the operation of a gentleman's farm involved.

One thing was sure: I had never been any closer to a bee than was absolutely necessary, and now I would have to care for more than 50,000 of them. There was only one thing to do and that was to study the lifestyle of a bee and establish a crash course in the operation of an apiary. It was with a severe lack of enthusiasm that I approached this new and unforeseen challenge.

Whereas the book told me that my new little flying charges were good-natured, I was very skeptical and our initial meeting was delayed while my studies continued. However, the meeting had to come about shortly as the time for putting the supers on the hive bodies had already passed. Supers were the box-like affairs in which the bees made the honey for human consumption.

I guess it would help to know that cows give milk, not for distribution to the dairy cases of your favorite grocery store. No, the cows really intend all that milk for their calves. Chickens actually lay eggs as a means of perpetuating their breed rather than to be packed, 12 in a box, and sold as a popular breakfast food.

Bees do not really care whether or not their honey ever gets into the little bottles that grace the shelves of the grocery stores. They produce the honey in the hive body as food that will sustain them during the cold winter months. They even work themselves to death doing this.

By putting the supers on top of the hive body, we are providing a place for the bees to continue the manufacture of honey after the hive body has been filled. So we take advantage of them just as we do with the cows and chickens.

Along the way we learned that the wax, which the bees make to hold the honey, is a very valuable commodity to the military. The beeswax is used to coat the bullets used in rifles and also the larger shells for the use in cannons.

So these little creatures are really quite valuable, not only for sweetening with their honey, or for the wax used by manufacturers of munitions, but also for their ability to pollinate various fruit trees and flowers.

After reading everything I could find on bee culture, I still did not feel qualified for the job of putting the supers on the hives. One thing that I did not need to learn from the book was that given a proper cause, a bee had the ability to inflict a rather painful sting.

On the day selected for putting on the supers, we placed the supers on the ground near the hives as part of the preparation for opening the hives. Lest anyone get the false impression that this would be an exhibition of bravery on my part, I would hasten to say that I wore the conventional beekeeper's headgear and both my sleeves and my pant legs were tied tightly. Also, as an added precaution, I carried a smoker, which was in some way supposed to give me the necessary confidence.

Despite the preparation and the protective equipment, my approach to the hives on that first occasion was made as gingerly as possible. The book told how bees, when they are busily engaged in their work, pay very little attention to anything other than just the job they are performing. On this fine sunny day, it was reassuring to see that the bees seemed to be quite busy. In fact as I stood next to the hive, watching them scooting in and out of the hive body, I thought that I felt a flicker of courage returning.

The roof cover of the first hive was removed without incident. Then a light frame filled with sawdust that acted as insulation during the winter was retrieved.

Now, a tool similar to a screwdriver was used to pry up and remove a flat cap that kept the bees from climbing through the top of the hive body. When the cap was removed, I was hardly prepared for the sight of several thousand bees, crawling furiously around inside their home.

Fortunately the book was correct and the bees were so busy that they did not seem to notice my presence. However, you may be sure that no time was wasted in placing the supers on top of the hive body. Even so, as the roof of the hive was being put back in place, the little insects were swarming up into the supers. They seemed anxious to start making honey for us.

This act was repeated until the supers had been placed on all 11 hives. Just a week before, no one would have been able to convince me that I would be capable of performing this task, so I was naturally quite proud of myself.

I was especially pleased that while bees had crawled all over me during the performance, not one of the little creatures had stung me.

Hillcroft Farm had two great orchards in which just about every variety of apple was represented. There were Baldwins, Russets, Wolf's River, Red and Yellow Delicious, McIntosh, Northern Spy, Greenings, Fall Pippins, and Sheepnose. It is the only place in Ridgefield that I

saw the Sheepnose, which is an old-fashioned apple. It greatly resembles the Red Delicious but is not the least bit juicy. When these trees were in blossom, the place was like a fairyland.

Now it was time to check the beehives again. This time the weather was different as it was a very hot and very humid day. I found out, without any help from the book, that on this kind of day, you stay away from the bees. I was stung no less than seven times before I reached the first hive.

#173: BOUTONNIERES, BEETLES AND BANTAMS AT HILLCROFT

Our “education” in beekeeping progressed rapidly and we came to have a genuine respect for these little creatures. The sharp sting that accompanied each mistake was guaranteed to keep our attention.

Among other things we learned that bees are quite valuable both as a producer of food and as an enhancement of plant life. The old saying, “busy as a bee,” is not an idle expression. Weather permitting, they are just about the busiest of living things and much can be learned from them.

The vegetable garden at Hillscroft Farm covered well over a third of an acre. Just about every vegetable known was grown in the very rich soil of this large garden. Today people find it much easier to buy their vegetables at the store rather than growing them. Forty years ago most every home in town had a vegetable garden and it was considered a necessity.

We had two 100-foot rows of peas at Hillscroft and we had to cut brush for the pea vines to climb on. It was a lot of work but the reward was that great taste of luscious fresh peas and that is something that everyone should experience. Many people liked to eat them, just as they came from the garden, while others felt that cooking them made them even more flavorful.

On the lower, or eastern side of the garden, there were three rows of strawberry plants. one, two and three years old. The oldest row was replaced each year in order to keep this ratio, as the most productive was always the second year. One year the three rows produced 120 quarts of the most delicious red berries.

Sweet potatoes are generally considered as being grown in a warmer climate but we grew them at Hillscroft. After harvesting the sweet potatoes, they were packed in sand and they kept well all winter long. That farm could produce just about anything a person would need.

Mrs. Van Etten had a penchant for mixing flowers in with the vegetables. There were many flower gardens on the place but it seemed she always wanted more.

On either side of the walkway from the garden gate to the mansion were more than 700 little lobelia plants. Their tiny blossoms of that shade of blue that no artist has ever been able to capture brightened the whole area and flourished throughout the summer months.

Dr. Van Etten was not as enthusiastic about flowers as he was about other aspects of farm life. However, he did have a couple of favorites and you may be assured that they received our full attention.

One was a fine carnation called “Enfant De Nice” and we had two rows of them across the garden. They were tiny and made an ideal boutonniere, with a fragrance that was really delightful. After a gentle rain, the aroma that emanated from these flowers was overpowering.

Speaking of boutonnieres, Jackie Gleason wore one the other night on his TV program and that is the first one I have seen in a long time. There was a time when a gentleman was not really dressed without one. I know that the doctor always looked real handsome with a carnation in his buttonhole. Come to think of it, I guess they do not even make button holes in jackets any more.

One other flower that Dr. Van Etten always felt brightened up the area was red salvia, which was popular along the towns that lined the Hudson River. At the race track in Saratoga. bright red cannas, surrounded by red salvia have been a fixture for many years. So we had two such flower beds at Hillscroft and the doctor called the cheery display his Hudson River beds. We became very fond of these flowers and 40 years later still have two of the beds.

There were two quite lengthy grape arbors at Hillscroft. One had white grapes and the other had the purple Concord grapes. They were fine to eat and they made great wine but they became heavily infested with Japanese beetles. These pests became a genuine cause for concern and many ideas were concocted for containing them.

The spray D.D.T. was coming on the market at the time but its deadliness was a double-edged sword and many were afraid to use it. One of the many ways suggested as a means of combating the beetles came from a friend of Mrs. Van Etten. Beth Komble Widmer lived at the eastern end of Hillscroft Farm on Wilton Road West. She was one of the fine people who believed that the invasion of beetles could be stemmed by finding something that would prove to be a mortal enemy of the perpetrators.

Therefore, when the Widmers noticed their bantam chickens eating the beetles, they felt that they had discovered the perfect antidote. On her next visit to Hillscroft, Beth Widmer brought along a black cochin bantam rooster and two little black hens. They were very cute bantams with glossy black feathers, bright red combs and wattles and a small white dot on either side of their heads.

The rooster was a real fashion plate with a tail that was so long it appeared to be disproportionate to the rest of his tiny body. That rooster was very proud of himself and strutted around like a drum major.

The miniature chickens had voracious appetites that were far in excess of their capacity and after an hour or so they had to take a rest. The way they went after the beetles was something

to behold. They were like three little black jumping jacks as they hopped from vine to vine. It looked as though the beetle population was about to diminish for the first time since the invasion.

The bantams made great pets and unlike the rest of the farm population they were allowed to roam at will. They always remained together and if you saw one you could be sure that the other two were close by. If a threat was posed by a dog or a cat, they presented a united front that made any adversary think twice about bothering them.

They were, of course, the conventional-sized chickens at Hillscroft. We used to keep 100 Barred Rocks for egg production and each spring 100 roosters were raised to broiler size and then put in the freezer. Incidentally we used the public freezer which was located on Danbury Road in the building that now houses the Town Spirit Shop. Most everyone has his own freezer nowadays.

#174: A VERITABLE PARADISE ON ST. JOHNS ROAD

We have mentioned that two kinds of grapes flourished at Hillscroft Farm. There were also numerous kinds of edible berries.

Just north of our cottage were two rows of currant bushes. The currants were complemented by two nearby quince trees. I would say that you have never really tasted good jelly until you have sampled the results of combining currents and quinces. The quince is very smooth and tasty while the little red currants supply the necessary tang that sets this jelly apart.

Just beyond the currant bushes were 50 high producing raspberry bushes. Raspberries are generally susceptible to mildew but because of the elevation at Hillscroft and the almost constant circulation of air, this was not a serious problem.

There were also gooseberries, wineberries and elderberries, as well as a grove of blueberries and in the back pasture lots there were blackberries and they were my favorites.

In front of our cottage three fine peach trees provided the best tasting fruit imaginable. Just think of how nice it was to be able to walk out the front door at breakfast time and pick yourself a fresh and luscious peach.

If you are not impressed by all of these wonderful, natural foods that would tickle anyone's palate, how about the fresh eggs, fresh milk (unpasteurized), and cream and butter and cheese? If that is not enough, then also consider your own steer with all those roasts of beef and steaks, stashed away in the freezer along with 100 broilers and pork loins and hams and Canadian bacon and pork chops and regular bacon, plus all those fresh vegetables, and all those wonderful foods that were produced on this veritable paradise on St. John's Road.

It is doubtful that Ridgefield will ever again see a farm where so many different food stuffs were produced. In a little brochure that was put out in 1900 when Hillscroft was for sale, it was noted that a person purchasing the place would need only a match to light the fire in the stove and all the foods that are needed could be produced right there on the farm. This was

equally true when Hillscroft was for sale in the 20's and again when Dr. Van Etten sold it in 1951.

When one considers all the things that Hillscroft provided, as well as the sheer beauty of its setting, one must wonder how anyone could willingly leave such a genuine Utopia. Sometimes people sell their homes on impulse.

In 1951 Dr. Van Etten really had no idea of selling the farm that he loved so much. Then one evening he and Mrs. Van Etten attended a dinner party at the home of the Wheadon Grants on West Lane, where the Ralph Delli-Bovis now [1985] live. During the meal, the Grants made the startling announcement that they had placed their beautiful estate on the market.

There were several other large estates on the market at the time and the Van Ettens were assured that it was the thing to do. The doctor was more than a bit skeptical about making such a move but Mrs. Van Etten thought it would be exciting to find out how much their great place was worth. Dr. Van Etten finally gave in to all the coaxing and Hillscroft was listed with Previews, one of the real large real estate operators.

Dr. Van Etten placed what he felt was the exorbitant price of \$120,000 on the place that he loved so well. He told me that he was confident that no one would ever pay such a price. However, he was wrong. Can anyone imagine what that beautiful place would bring on today's market?

At any rate, it was years before, on that May 1 in the early 40's, when I arrived at Hillscroft. There were all of those things that I have been telling about to care for. There were the gardens to plant, the fields to plow and plant, the hedges to trim, and the livestock, consisting of the cows, the chickens, the horse and the hogs to be attended to. In addition there were the storm windows and porch enclosures on the mansion and the cottage that had to be removed and stored until fall.

Then there were the spacious lawns that needed immediate attention, and I was all alone at the farm. Even my family had not arrived as the cottage was being painted inside and out.

This all looked like a real challenge and the prospect of securing any additional help was rather discouraging. Then we got lucky and about the middle of the month Fred Williams came to our rescue. We kept everything going till Fred arrived, but boy were we glad to see him. Then a couple of weeks later, dear old Clifford Seymour came over to help and we were finally in business.

The following year, during the haying season, the three little Scott boys — Harold, Francis and Donald — became members of our team and they were very good workers and still are today. A few years later Fred Williams retired and Richard Bennett replaced him. These are very good men that we are talking about and we have seldom seen their equal.

Ernest Sturges had only worked a couple of days at painting our cottage when Dr. Van Etten came for a visit. He wanted to know if I had paid anything to the painters and I replied that

they were only just getting started. With that he made out a check and handed it to me, saying that he liked to keep ahead on such things and besides he noted that Ernest had his men to pay every week. Ernie was not surprised to receive the check as he had worked for the doctor before and knew of his habit of paying in advance.

That was Dr. Van Etten's "modus operandi": he always had to be ahead. Arthur Carnall, when he was Ridgefield's tax collector, once told me that the very next day after he mailed out the tax bills, Dr. Van Etten would drive up from New York City to pay his bill. We got to know that he was the same with any bill that he owed. It was as if he was afraid that he might die and leave something unpaid.

Taxes were something else though. Arthur Carnall said that the doctor told him that he considered it a privilege to live in Ridgefield and was quite happy to pay for it. As usual the good doctor had to be the first to pay so he made out the check the minute he received the bill. The local tradesmen and businessmen were happy to have Dr. Van Etten as a customer, for they knew they would never have to wait to be paid. He was a very unusual man.

Dr. Van Etten made it a habit to be first. He was first in his class at Deerfield Academy in 1902. He was Phi Beta Kappa and first in his class at Amherst when he graduated at age 20 in 1906, and he was cum laude when he graduated — again first — from Columbia's College of Physicians and Surgeons.

#175: THE DEMAND FOR HIGH-FAT RAW MILK BOOMS WITH A BULL

The little dairy herd at Hillscroft when we arrived there consisted of four milk cows and two heifers. It was destined to grow and it was decided that, since the cows were purebred Guernseys, as each heifer calf arrived, we would raise it to maturity.

The bull calves were sold for veal with one exception. The dam of this little bull calf was a remarkable cow and had produced over 13,000 lbs. of milk in her first lactation. It was very rich milk and tested more than 5% butterfat. Therefore we were anxious to raise what we hoped would turn out to be a very valuable sire.

This handsome little red bull calf was born on election night in 1948 and was appropriately named Hillscroft's Harry S. Truman. He was so registered with the American Guernsey Cattle Club.

It should be noted that the little calf arrived just about midnight and at the time Tom Dewey was leading Harry Truman in the balloting.

The worth of any bull is measured by the production of the heifers that he sires. This one looked like a sure winner as each of his first heifers out-produced its dam, both in pounds of milk and in butterfat content. This was in the days before the skim milk diet craze and butterfat was a desired item, rather than something to be shunned.

At any rate, as the herd grew, so did the amount of milk that the herd produced. We made butter, cheese and ice cream and still had a surplus of that rich Guernsey milk.

When people found out that this milk was available, they began stopping at the farm to buy it. Soon others were calling and asking for us to make delivery. It just naturally followed that a milk route was established and the list of customers kept right on growing until it was impossible to take care of them all.

Those who have never enjoyed fresh raw milk from the farm and have never seen the golden cream rise to the top of the milk bottle have really missed a great experience.

There were two major objections to the use of raw milk. There was the possibility that a person could contract either tuberculosis or undulant fever. Both of these diseases were of a very serious nature, so it is understandable that there was just cause for concern.

A cow that was infected with TB could pass that germ along to anyone using her milk and a cow that carried the bacteria of the Brucella group could cause anyone using her milk to have undulant fever.

A test was devised which identified cows that carried the TB germ. Those found to have it were branded on their right cheek with the letters TB. They were separated from the rest of the herd and destroyed. A blood test revealed any cow that might be carrying Brucellosis and they too were separated and destroyed. In such instances the government would pay the farmer a nominal price for any cow that he lost.

Of course, the great Louis Pasteur took care of both problems with his method that was aptly named pasteurization.

We asked Dr. Russell W. Lowe one time what he thought about pasteurization. His answer was: "You can throw a handful of mud in a pail of water, then boil the water and it is safe to drink. But who wants to do that?"

In other words he felt that the proper thing to do was to keep the milk clean by proper testing and then pasteurization would not be necessary.

It was great when Ridgefield had raw milk from tested cows and we always enjoyed it. However, it is easy to understand how difficult it is to bring milk into the cities from farms all over the countryside without pasteurizing it. It was the only way that one could be reasonably sure that the milk was safe for human consumption.

The large dairies quickly learned that pasteurization was also a means of preserving the milk. Pasteurized milk will not go sour nearly as quickly as raw milk. In fact, it never really does sour in the true sense of the word. Not only that but it can be pasteurized more than once.

However, since it is necessary for milk to sour before it is thoroughly digested, it seems proper to assume that raw milk is easier to digest.

So the little herd at Hillscroft grew from four to ten cows and if we had had 100 cows, we could not have been able to supply all the people who wanted raw milk right from the farm.

The demand for raw milk increased greatly when Irving Conklin sold his farm and retail milk business. Irv sold practically all the milk in Ridgefield and the milk from Conklin's Dairy was unpasteurized. There were a number of people who just did not want the pasteurized milk that the big dairies started bringing into town.

We bottled most of the milk and tried to supply those who wanted fresh raw milk. However, we could not meet the demand and always had a long waiting list.

As our little milk business expanded we converted an old ice house into a fine dairy building where we processed the milk. The ice house had become obsolete for the storage of ice with the advent of the electric refrigerator but it was ideal for the purposes we had in mind.

Some of the barns at Hillscroft have been destroyed, as was the large silo that had the word Hillscroft painted across the top in letters that were four feet in height.

Two of the largest barns were moved out into the orchard in recent years and have been made over into fine dwellings along St. Johns Road. However, the little old dairy that had been an ice house is still standing in the same spot where it was constructed so many years ago.

Dr. Van Etten was quite pleased to see the revenue from the farm grow as the dairy herd increased. It helped to offset the many expenses of operating a large estate. He expected the farm revenue to be only an assist, but after a couple of years, the farm started to break even and after a couple of more years it began to show a profit.

We were quite proud of our contribution, but apparently it was not the thing to do. Our government had encouraged people to engage in farming by rigging tax laws in their favor. Suddenly the tax laws were changed and only those farms that lost money would benefit from the operation. This caused a dramatic change in attitude among those who had worked to make their farms productive.

#176: THE FATE OF THE PIGLET RUNT AND DOWNEY

There were many interesting farm animals at Hillscroft Farm, not the least of which was the hogs. We had two great Chester white sows that were kept for breeding purposes. Every spring, each sow would have anywhere from 10 to 16 little white pigs.

I guess everyone is familiar with the stories that have unfairly pictured pigs as being slovenly in their habits. It has been my experience that, given the opportunity, they will keep themselves as clean or cleaner than many other animals.

It is easy to generate a lot of affection for puppies, kittens, and baby chicks, as well as little calves and young colts, but we think that baby pigs are as cute as any of them. They are also highly intelligent and are great fun to watch as they run hither and thither.

One typically wet and cold day in March, a litter of 15 litter pigs was born to one of the sows. A few days before, because of the severe cold, we had moved the sow into a box stall in the horse barn, where it was much warmer.

Despite our precautions, little number 15 (the runt) was very weak and his chances of surviving did not look very good, as he could not stand up to nurse. We called a hurried meeting of our family and a vote was taken. When they saw the pitiful condition of the little pig and the ballots were counted, "Whitey" had won himself a place right next to the kitchen stove, without a dissenting vote.

A wooden box, stuffed with straw for bedding, was prepared for little Whitey. A nursing bottle, complete with rubber nipple and full of that good warm Guernsey milk, was soon being force fed to the little fellow.

Several attempts were necessary before Whitey's hunger caused him to act like a little pig. However, with everyone's tender loving care he was soon enjoying the substitute for what his brothers and sisters were getting from their mother.

After only two days in the infirmary, little Whitey had improved to where the wooden box would no longer confine him. When he climbed over the side of his box and started running around the kitchen floor, it was the signal to return him to his family.

Our kids would have liked to keep him right where he was and they roared with laughter as Whitey skidded around as he raced across the smooth tile of the kitchen floor.

The big question was whether or not the sow would accepted Whitey back into the fold. Sows are rather unpredictable and can be very cantankerous at times. With Whitey being absent for two days and 14 others to care for, there was the possibility that the little fellow might be regarded as a stranger in his own family.

It was with considerable trepidation that we opened the door to the box stall and put little Whitey inside. It was mealtime and the sow was laying full length and facing the other direction, as Whitey joined his brothers and sisters.

It is not easy to understand how the sow knew that an addition had been made to all those at the supper table. Perhaps she was good at arithmetic. At any rate, she was immediately aware that there was now another mouth to feed.

The other little pigs squealed as the sow scrambled to her feet to face the intruder. She presented an awesome picture with her huge 350-pound bulk and her large mouth half open and ready to do battle.

It was with a great feeling of relief that we heard the sow emit a couple of contented grunts as she resumed a position, satisfactory to 15 little white pigs. So, it was "welcome home" for Whitey and it is worthy of note that the little fellow soon caught up to the others in the litter in size, but we could always tell him from his brothers.

It was just a few weeks later that we encountered an unforgettable experience that concerned one of the cows. It was the first week in May and late one afternoon a cold rain started to fall. Dick Bennett put the cows in the barn and then informed me that one cow was missing. It turned out to be one that we called Downey and she was a very valuable cow.

We went looking for her and found her in a pasture, almost over to Wilton Road West. Downey stood there in the rain with her back humped up and it was obvious that she was not feeling well.

We encouraged her to get back to the barn and she responded, but with apparent difficulty. It was uphill most of the way to the barn and as we neared it, Downey seemed to be in agony.

We took Downey's temperature as soon as we got her inside and it was 106. This was not as bad as it seems as the normal temperature of a cow is 102.5. However, we were very concerned about this fine cow, who up to this time had never shown any sign of having a problem.

Our first inclination was that Downey had somehow contracted pneumonia. With that in mind we prepared and applied a mustard plaster along her ribs. We covered the plaster with paper and covered the paper with a blanket. Then we called Dr. Walter Holcomb.

Dr. Holcomb was a young veterinarian and had taken over the practice of Dr. Knapp on New Street in Danbury. He and Mrs. Holcomb were on their way out to dinner but when we explained our problem to him he said he would be right down.

He was as good as his word and it seemed only a matter of minutes before he and Mrs. Holcomb in their Packard were flying into the barnyard. He was all dressed up but that did not deter him as he hurried to the cow barn.

Dr. Holcomb was very athletic, with a powerful physique and very muscular arms. The first thing that he did was to take off the mustard plaster and inform me that it very definitely was not pneumonia. He was the picture of self confidence, but I was not so sure. Then he announced that he felt it was hardware and I really had no idea of what he was talking about.

The next thing he did, still fully dressed, was to get down on hands and knees and crawl along with his right ear pressed against the lower left side of the cow's rib cage. Suddenly he stopped and asked me to pass his stethoscope to him. With the aid of this listening device he again traversed Downey's rib cage and stopped just before reaching her left front leg.

Now things really began to happen. The good doctor quickly made a small incision with his scalpel, after first giving Downey a local anesthetic. He then used a little saw to open a tiny window on the side of the cow.

I was then invited to look in the window, while Dr. Holcomb used his forceps to withdraw a two-inch length of old barbed wire that had traveled almost to the heart of the cow. So the wire was the hardware referred to and it apparently had been in her system a long time.

Downey could not tell us where her pain was and we will always feel that this was the greatest exhibition of the art of diagnosing an ailment that we have ever witnessed. My respect for Dr. Holcomb can best be described as immeasurable.

#177: LOVE FOR A SAD AND ANGRY LITTLE PONY

It would be my guess that most every kid would just love to have a pony. When I was a kid, it certainly was true in my case, but it never happened.

The Carl Stolle family in Farmingville had a real nice pony and we walked over there many times to visit him. In the early 20's the Walter Scott family moved to North Street, just north of St. Mary's Cemetery. Along with a couple of cows and some chickens, they brought with them two fine little ponies.

As it was just a short walk to the Scotts' new home, this was considered a very important event in my young life. All this probably kindled my determination to see that our children would someday have a pony if at all possible.

In the mid-40's Bill Patton had a number of ponies at the farm on Old South Salem Road that we once operated as Waldee Farms. When we learned that Patton was selling out, we hurried to the farm and purchased one of the ponies.

The little pony had apparently lived a rather hard existence and as a result she was not very good-natured. In fact she would not hesitate to bite or kick anyone or anything that crossed her path. Because of her very snappy disposition the pony was promptly named Ginger.

One thing about ponies and horses is that on the first day in their new home they are generally on their best behavior. Even when the horse or pony is quite ill-natured, the new environment seems to have a pacifying effect. However, after that first day everything is downhill as they quickly revert to their former bad disposition.

Under Ginger's bedraggled red and white coat, there was a good little animal, and it was up to us to bring it out by earning her confidence.

On Ginger's first day at Hillscroft Farm, there was no indication that years of frustration, spitefulness and mistrust had been stored up between those pointed little ears. It soon came out, however, and it would be some time before we felt it safe to let the children handle her. When that day finally arrived, we were very proud as Lizzie rode Ginger out of the barn for the first time.

We credit ourself with changing the pony's very disagreeable nature to one that became quite placid and amiable. At the same time we have always felt that we were aided to a great extent by Dr. Van Etten's beautiful horse, Kathleen Mavourneen, for even ponies can learn by example.

Mavourneen had the very finest disposition and her excellent manners were apparently contagious. She and Ginger became great friends and they were just about inseparable. It was great fun to see them cavorting around the paddock or racing the entire length of the fields on the western side of St. Johns Road. Several very nice homes now occupy that fine long pasture.

The Scott boys had a little stud pony and after a couple of years Ginger was bred to him. The night the little colt was foaled, there was a terrible electrical storm but since it was such an

important event to our family, we all went out to the barn to see the new arrival. Ginger had become so friendly that she allowed our children to enter the box stall and put their arms around the cute little fellow when he was only a few minutes old.

Because of the electrical storm and the fact that there was a jagged white line the length of his face, the colt was aptly named "Lightning." Now Mavourneen had two little pals and when they all raced across the fields, the colt had no trouble in keeping up, as he was as fast as his name would indicate.

Dr. Van Etten used to ride Mavourneen at least once a week and we are sorry to say that we probably caused him to stop taking the rides that he enjoyed so much. However, the mare was in her mid-twenties and he rode her as if she were young and strong. She was not a big strong horse but she was full of nervous energy and loved to go at full speed and never needed any urging. She just had a great big heart and too much ambition for her size.

The doctor weighed at least 250 pounds but we did not mention that; we just noted that the mare was getting older and suggested that it would be much safer for all concerned if a slower pace were selected. However, he rode his horse at top speed, just as he drove his car, so our words fell on deaf ears.

One day without the doctor's knowledge, we took moving pictures of him and Mavourneen as they sped across the fields. The grass was high and somehow we got them at an angle that made it appear as though her belly was touching the ground. It emphasized not only his great weight but the smallness of the mare.

When the opportunity presented itself, we set up our movie projector and then invited the doctor in to see a film about the farm. He thoroughly enjoyed the pictures of the livestock but was totally unprepared for that portion of the film that was devoted to his riding habits. It seemed to have the desired effect as it was plain that there was real danger that the mare could fall. This could have disastrous results and the possibility was graphically illustrated when we pointed out that she had stumbled slightly.

For the next few months Dr. Van Etten rode at a much slower pace and we felt that our point had been well-taken.

A much more drastic step came about one day when the doctor was present and the blacksmith came to shoe Mavourneen. During the many meetings with the blacksmith, the mare had developed a habit of standing in a rather peculiar stance while being shod. When the blacksmith worked on her left rear hoof, she would lean the right side of her butt against the side of the box stall. The procedure was reversed when the right rear hoof was being shod.

We must admit that a person seeing Mavourneen leaning in this manner for the first time might get the impression that the mare was too tired to stand. This was the first time that Dr. Van Etten had been around at shoeing time and the effect of seeing the horse leaning against the stall for support was devastating. He was so upset that he never rode Mavourneen again.

We felt very bad about his decision not to ride again because the mare was safe enough to ride at a moderate speed and the doctor always enjoyed it so much. I had the feeling that he thought I had staged the whole shoeing episode for his benefit. We encouraged him to resume his riding but once he made up his mind, there was no changing it.

Mavourneen knew the sound of the doctor's car and never failed to whinny when he drove into the farm and he never failed to visit with her and give her some sugar. She was a great mare and had won blue ribbons at several of the area horse shows. We still have one of her trophies and several of her ribbons as well as a real nice picture of her.

#178: HOW NASTY P.T. WAS REPLACED WITH RAYMOND MASSEY'S HORSE

We have been telling about the horses and ponies at Hillscroft Farm and there are a couple more stories that may prove to be of interest. They were draft horses and though not the heavy type, they were heavier than the coach horses.

There was a gasoline-powered cultivator available on the farm for use in the garden or in the cornfield but somehow it was not as satisfactory as a horse. Dr. Van Etten was a very progressive man so it would be up to me to convince him that the old-fashioned way of cultivating was superior to the modern.

Joe Donnelly and his family lived on Wilton Road West at the time and had a little farm that adjoined Hillscroft. Among other farm animals, Joe had a nice bay horse, so we borrowed him for the experiment. After cultivating only a few rows, we proved our point and got the approval to buy a horse.

Charley Sheridan had a horse in New Canaan that we felt would fill the bill and soon he was occupying the stall next to Mavourneen. The new horse was spotted brown and white and Dr. Van Etten suggested that we call him P.T. after the great P.T. Barnum, as he reminded him of a circus horse.

As it turned out, P.T. could very well have put in a shift in the circus, for he sure knew a lot of tricks. The horse was quite intelligent and there were things that he seemed to enjoy doing and there were other things that caused him to show great annoyance when he was asked to do them.

Clifford Seymour had a horse that was almost a twin of P.T. in appearance. So we got a double harness from Irving Conklin and used the two spotted horses as a team. They worked well together but when used alone P.T. sometimes lived up to his name and performed some tricks that were more adaptable to a circus performance.

When used as part of a team P.T. was a master at getting the other horse to do the greater portion of the pulling. It was a different story when he was used alone and had to do the whole job. He would pull a cultivator but when hooked to a barrow that required a stronger pull, P.T. would balk and no amount of urging or pleading would cause him to move forward.

P.T. would offer no objections to pulling any kind of sleigh, either a cutter or a wood shod sled, but he did not like drawing a wagon at all.

A wood shod sled is one that, as the name suggests, has runners made of wood. It is a low-slung vehicle, the bed of which would not be much over a foot high. It would be a little over

four feet in width and probably 10 feet long, and of very solid construction as it was meant to carry real heavy loads.

To make the runners for such a sled, a young tree, preferably a hard maple about six inches in diameter, would be cut and then split along its length as perfectly as possible. The runners were then cut to proper length and three holes were bored through them and wooden pegs were fitted through the holes and driven into the runner holders on the bottom of the sled. Of course, the curved side of the runners was put on the bottom so that it would make contact with the surface over which the sled would be drawn.

This all sounds like a rather primitive conveyance, but you may be assured that it was a very efficient method of moving heavy loads during the winter. The only problem was getting it started after it had set for a while. The runners had a habit of sticking to the ice or snow, so it was necessary to carry a little crowbar along. Once the sled was shifted the slightest bit by the crowbar, the horse could easily draw an enormous load. It actually seemed that P.T. enjoyed pulling the loaded sled.

P.T. kept coming up with new tricks which we were as tolerant of as could be possible. He had an intense dislike for other horses and one day when Joe Donnelly's horse was visiting, P.T. showed the worst manners ever by kicking the other horse on the rump. It left a very jagged wound and just about sealed P.T.'s future at Hillscroft Farm.

We called Dr. Holcomb and as luck would have it, he came just about the same time as Dr. Van Etten arrived to spend the weekend. I told Dr. Van Etten what had happened and suggested that he come over to witness a fine veterinary at work. A few minutes later he came into the horse barn, just as Dr. Holcomb was about to start stitching the large gash on the horse's rump.

Dr. Van Etten stood quietly in the background as the sutures were uniting the edges of the wound and it was obvious that the great surgeon was impressed. Dr. Holcomb, of course, did a first class job and a broad smile flashed across his face, when Dr. Van Etten said that it was as neat a bit of stitching as he had seen in a long time.

It was not long after this incident that P.T. with his cantankerous ways departed from Hillscroft and we wished him well and hoped that he would catch on with some traveling circus where he belonged.

Those who dealt in cattle and horses had a way of knowing when anyone was in need of a horse or a cow and we had several cattle dealers that used to stop at Hillscroft quite often. Early one morning Charley Slapin stopped by and asked me to look at something that he had in the back of his truck.

It turned out to be a beautiful black horse. Charley told of how he had picked up the horse the night before over on Route 7. The fine animal had belonged to Raymond Massey, the celebrated actor. Massey was moving from the area and had no further use for the horse.

When we asked what he was going to do with the horse, Charley said that he guessed the horse would wind up in a glue factory. It was apparent that he was well aware of my feelings about horses and after only a few minutes of bargaining, I had purchased another horse.

We called him Thunder and we were quite pleased with the transaction that brought him to Hillscroft.

Though Thunder was a horse of great spirit, he was a very gentle animal with a disposition the exact opposite of our former horse. He performed every duty that he was called on to accomplish and never rebelled. We soon found that as well as being a willing worker, he was also an excellent road horse and could trot like the wind. Thunder was truly a gem.

When the winter snows came we decided to see how good he was on a sleigh. The Scott boys had a fine black horse and they also had a beautiful two-seated sleigh. The two horses proved to be perfectly matched and they were just as great as could be when hitched to the big sleigh.

We had (still have) a set of sleigh bells for each horse and driving them on a moonlight ride was about as great a thrill as can be imagined. One famous evening ride included Norman and Elsie Craig, Jim and Gloria Bacchioni and Marie and me. It was just zero when we left the barn but we never noticed the cold on that moonlight night.

When Hillscroft was sold we had to part with Thunder but found a good home for him at the Holy Ghost Fathers where our Board of Education is now located [Prospect Ridge Congregate Housing in 2022].

#179: THE AMBITIOUS DOCTOR GETS A BLACK EYE

In an earlier article we characterized Dr. Royal C. Van Etten as being the best-natured person, with the worst temper that we have ever seen. He could be smiling one moment and a raging bull the next.

By the same token, he could be a raging bull and in the flick of an eyelid, change to a very charming and friendly person. It has always been my feeling that the reason he was able to live all those years was because he had discovered the secret of letting off steam. One thing was sure, he used to loosen that pressure valve at least once or twice every day.

From the earliest part of our long association, the doctor used to warn me about his terrible temper. He always told me to try and overlook things that he might say while in a temper tantrum. He did spend a considerable amount of time telling people that he was sorry for what he had said.

His admonition was accepted and I countered by informing him that no matter how annoyed I might become I never said anything that I did not mean, so he could expect no apologies from me. This seemed a rather strange way to start out.

However, we quickly came to a real good understanding and there were only one or two serious confrontations and they appeared early in a relationship that was to last 37 years. During all of that time, we were very good friends and he was a lot of fun to be with.

The doctor was a very determined man and once his mind was made up, there was no changing it. We were completely unaware that he had long harbored a secret ambition to climb to the top of the Hillscroft Farm silo. When the silo was empty in late spring, there was an open space from its top to its bottom. This space was on the barn side of the silo and through it the corn silage was forked to be fed to the cows.

As the silo was in the process of being filled in the autumn, small doors that were some fit two feet square were placed in the open space. They were locked in place by a round metal rod that also served as a step for climbing up the silo, as each little door was secured, one atop the other.

One year after the silo had been filled, Dr. Van Etten seemed to be paying more than his usual number of visits to the cow barn and after only a few minutes, he would disappear. A little later on, in the same mysterious manner, he would reappear. This happened a number of times and our curiosity was aroused.

On one occasion we happened to meet him just as he emerged from the passageway that led to the silo. He seemed to be greatly animated and though he had a broad smile, he was breathing rather heavily, as from some kind of exertion, and it was obvious that something unusual had taken place.

When he saw my concern, the doctor explained that each time he came into the barn he practiced climbing the silo. He had progressed a little each time and on this particular day he had finally succeeded in climbing all the way to the top of the 40-foot structure.

Perhaps this does not seem to be such an outstanding accomplishment for a man who was capable of performing real delicate surgery. However, to the doctor it probably seemed as if he had scaled Mount Everest and he was elated.

When one considers the size of the man and the fact that he was in his 60s at the time, it is easier to understand why he was so proud of his achievement. As for me, I shuddered every time I think of all that weight on the little round metal steps of the silo's ladder. It was probably just as well that he had kept his desire to perform such a feat a secret.

It was with considerable relief that we received the doctor's assurance that he would rest on his laurels and not try climbing that ladder again. The whole matter just points out the tremendous determination of this man to be an achiever. It was a trait that he never lost.

There were occasions where Dr. Van Etten's penchant for performing daring feats could have had serious consequences. When the silo was being filled we used to place a 40-foot wooden ladder against its outside. The ladder was there in order that we might make any necessary repairs or adjustments to the long blower pipe through which the ensilage was blown into the silo.

One day a problem developed and I had to climb to the very top of the ladder. The problem was resolved and I was about to make my descent when I felt the ladder start to sway — I looked down and there was the doctor coming up the ladder. He wanted to see for himself just what the problem was.

The top of the ladder was tied to the top of the silo, so I reasoned that if the ladder broke in two (which I was sure it would do), I could hang on to the upper half until I was rescued.

Those on the ground said that the ladder swayed so much that its middle came right against the silo. They pleaded with the doctor to come down off the ladder and he finally did but not before I had the scare of my life.

He later explained his indiscretion by saying that he had only promised not to climb the inside ladder. With that we immediately elicited his pledge to stay away from all ladders, inside and out.

On another occasion we were gathering the hay on Mrs. John H. Lynch's estate (now the Cnngregation of Notre Dame). The doctor took one afternoon off to help with the haying. This was great fun for him and we were happy that he found so much enjoyment in what most people considered very hard work.

However, we took a dim view of his expressed desire to ride back to Hillscroft on the top of the load of hay. We pointed out all the dangers inherent to riding on a public highway atop a load of hay.

He was just as insistent and declared that he was determined to fulfill what he said was his boyhood ambition. We argued our points but to no avail and the big man clambered up on top of the load of hay.

The ride back to Hillscroft was made without incident and Dr. Van Etten was exhilarated over achieving another of his goals and we hoped that. He did not have any more that were dangerous.

We also hoped that he was satisfied and would not insist on any more rides. This was not to be, however, and as we were getting the last load of hay, he again climbed back to the perch on the top of the hay. Unfortunately this was a much larger load and on the way home to Hillscroft a low hanging limb caught the doctor in the right eye.

He did not fall from the load but we felt terrible when upon reaching Hillscroft we discovered his badly discolored eye. Actually he was lucky that he was not knocked down to the highway.

The eye became black and blue and we asked him a few days later how he explained it to his patients and to the other doctors. He said that he did not even try to explain what happened for he felt that no one would have believed him anyhow.

#180: THE DOC AND HIS TEMPER TANTRUMS

We had seen several examples of Dr. Van Etten's temper tantrums and there always seemed to be a question of whether or not they were genuine. We had a feeling that they may just have been put on for effect. This was especially true when he would go from a great show of anger to a smiling pleasantness.

There was a large oxheart cherry tree along the western side of St. Johns Road. It was so large that it extended over the entire width of the roadway and each summer it was loaded with those large, dark and delicious cherries.

The tree stood about 40 feet from the gate to the field where we used to pasture the horses. One afternoon as we were taking Mavourneen across the road to her pasture, we heard the doctor yelling at someone in a very loud voice.

It turned out that as he was walking along the road, an auto with out-of-state markers came along. There were several people in the car and as the car stopped they got out and began picking and eating the cherries that they could reach from the roadway.

This infuriated the doctor and he ordered the people to get back in their car and get out of there. He was in such a state of agitation that we became concerned about him. Apparently he had made such an impression that the people scurried back into their car and drove off, though it was our feeling that they had a perfect right to pick any cherries that hung over the roadway.

We turned the horse loose in the pasture and then approached the scene of the recent altercation, just as the car started off. When Dr. Van Etten saw me, he apparently thought I was one of the cherry pickers and continued his tirade, only now it was directed at me.

The incident had so affected him that his vision was distorted to such an extent that he failed to recognize me. It was not until I was only a few feet from him that the doctor realized whom he was shouting at and, of course, he was very embarrassed. However, in a few minutes he was smiling again, even though still denouncing those who had been eating fruit from his tree.

As for me, it must be said that this episode in our relationship served to dispel any doubts about the sincerity of his display of temper. It was for real.

When the doctor had regained his composure, I attempted to explain that the people actually had a perfect right to pick the cherries as long as they did not enter his property to do so. My remonstrances fell on deaf ears and he let me know in no uncertain terms that he knew how to deal with these obnoxious people as I did not.

Faith Venus is a niece of ours and lived in Pawling, N.Y. Faith enrolled as a student nurse at the Lenox Hill School of Nursing as she understood it to be just about the finest school of its kind.

One weekend that Dr. Van Etten spent at Hillscroft, we were discussing the operation of the estate when suddenly he said that he had noticed a student nurse at the hospital who had the name Venus on her name tag. He wondered if it was possible that she could be a relative of mine.

We informed him that Faith was a daughter of my brother Charley. We did not tell him that she had been at the hospital for several months, but kept out of his way as she, like the other students, was scared to death of him.

Dr. Van Etten had met Charley several times at Hillscroft, and was quite fond of him. As soon as he got back to the hospital he looked for Faith and when he found her, walked down the hospital hallway with his arm around her.

This was a side of the doctor that the nurses had not seen and they stared in amazement at this sudden display of affection. He has really stepped out of character in this instance, and Faith blushed profusely in surprise.

It was some time later that Faith told me about the incident and how it had made such an impression on everyone because the doctor was held in such awe by all concerned. To prove her point, Faith produced a little brochure that was put out by the nurses at Lenox Hill. On the cover of this particular issue was a cartoon which pictured a very scared nurse, fleeing from the operating room while the air around her was filled with all sorts of surgical instruments.

Obviously they had been thrown at the nurse because of some indiscretion. It could have been any one of a number of nurses, but there was no question as to who the huge doctor was who stood scowling in the doorway.

We still have the feeling that Dr. Van Etten had the capacity to use a certain amount of restraint when the occasion demanded. Knowing of his skill as a surgeon, we often wondered how he could have possibly operated if his ability was ever impaired by a sudden burst of temper.

This question was answered to a certain extent by a very prominent doctor who, during his days in training, had been assigned to assist Dr. Van Etten in an operation. He told me the story of how on the night before this particular operation, he had not had enough sleep.

On this occasion the young doctor told of how it was his duty to hold one of the clamps that kept the . incision open during the operation. Because of his lack of sleep, he may have moved ever so slightly as the operation was proceeding. He said that Dr. Van Etten did not stop his work or even look up but without showing any emotion said from the corner of his mouth: "One more move like that, Theodore, and you will be minus one finger."

For all his great size, the doctor was extremely quick. This was especially true of his mind and his hands. When you talked with him, you would find your own mind racing, just to keep up with him. He was always way ahead.

His hands were unusually small for such a big man, but they were very strong and very sure as well as being so very quick. Sometimes they were a little too quick. During the war, coal was in short supply and it was being used to heat the doctor's home at 121 East 62nd Street. During this period he called the firm from which he purchased coal and ordered five tons.

When the truck arrived he was waiting for it and he found that it was carrying only one ton. He questioned the driver as to why he brought only one ton and then quickly two mistakes were made.

The first mistake was made by the driver of the coal truck for in a very insolent manner he informed the doctor that he was lucky to get even one ton. The second mistake was made by the doctor when he reached up into the cab of the truck, pulled the driver out. and smacked him in the nose.

This caused an awful lot of trouble as the truck driver had the doctor arrested. The doctor was well aware of the trouble he was in and got a very eminent attorney, James Madison Blackwell, who was a relative of Mrs. Van Etten.

The lawyer soon recognized that his biggest problem was with the doctor himself who still felt that he was right in what he had done and would have welcomed a return engagement. The courtroom proceedings must have amounted to a classic and they strained the attorney's physical as well as mental capacity in just keeping the antagonists apart.

#181: A BUS CRASH AND PATIENT SUNBURN

It would be fair to say that Hillscroft Farm was the essence of tranquility and served as a restful haven for a big-city surgeon from the pressures of his profession. This fact was well known to Dr. Royal C. Van Etten and he thoroughly appreciated the serene atmosphere of this beautiful estate.

It was the perfect place for the doctor to unwind and twice a week he would drive up from New York City to do just that. There were many times when the visit would be a short one. It was not unusual for him to drive in and then get a call that would send him flying back to the hospital.

When he came to Hillscroft, he was never more than an hour from his patients. He was the most dedicated man that I have ever met.

The mansion at Hillscroft was closed down each year on Nov. 1 and the only thing left working within it was the telephone. Until the house was again opened on April 15, the doctor would use the chauffeur's apartment over the horse barn. He had long since dispensed with the use of a chauffeur, as he could never find one that could drive fast enough for him.

The apartment over the horse barn had steam heat that was furnished by a coal fired furnace and it was really quite cozy. Before he would go out for his walk, the doctor would use the apartment to change his clothes and don his felt boots and when his walk was completed he could use the place to shower.

Probably there are not very many who remember felt boots. They were quite heavy and cumbersome, but they were very warm and were great for anyone who had to be out in the snow and cold. The doctor knew well the importance of avoiding cold feet and he still had a pair of Ball-Band felt boots when he passed on many years later.

The doctor loved that walk around the farm and he would always make it regardless of the weather. To breathe in the fresh unpolluted air was a real treat for him. The weather never kept him away and I can attest to that.

On one occasion, during Christmas week in 1947, we had a real heavy snow that actually was of blizzard proportions. Somehow the doctor drove all the way from New York, under terrible driving conditions. When he got to St. Johns Road he found that it had not been plowed.

So he called me from Wilton Road West and I used the large farm tractor to tow him through the snow drifts on the remaining half mile of his trip.

This time he stayed only a few minutes and then I towed him back to Wilton Road West. The important thing was that he was determined to make that trip and to him it was just another achievement.

On another occasion, he and Mrs. Van Etten arrived late one January afternoon. It was one of those cold rainy days and the temperature was dropping rapidly. As they started back for New York it was apparent that the roads were just a sheet of ice.

At the time, New York state was not noted for sanding its highways and about an hour after they left, our telephone rang. As you have already guessed, it was Dr. Van Etten. He had been involved in an accident over in Bedford and would I come over and see what could be done. We had company and we were just sitting down to our evening meal and I did not relish the idea of driving over the state line on those terrible roads.

Of course I started out, but with an incredible display of good common sense, I first called Louis DeVantery and asked that he bring his wrecker and meet me in Bedford. Louis operated the garage where Pamby Motors is now located, on the corner of Danbury Road and Grove Street.

Louis was a very dependable soul and we both arrived about the same time at the scene of the accident. It was then revealed that the doctor had tangled with a Greyhound bus almost head on. His left front fender was bent back over the left front wheel in such a manner as to prevent the wheel from turning.

Fortunately no one was injured and Louis, by using the hoist on his tow truck, was able to straighten out the fender. Louis was very practical and things were so much more simple to correct in those days.

As always, Dr. Van Etten's major concern was for a patient that he must visit in the hospital. When he was assured that the car was capable of continuing on its journey, he sped off in a flood of unheeded warnings about the dangerous conditions of the highways. The doctor really did live for his patients and they were always uppermost in his mind.

There was another snowy Sunday when he started out for Ridgefield and while he was en route, we received a phone call and a request that he call the hospital when he arrived. We delivered the message when he drove in a few minutes later and he ran to our cottage to make the call.

The conversation went like this. "I want to speak to the nurse in charge."

"You are speaking to the nurse in charge."

"Oh no, no one would go away and leave a d—— fool like you in charge. Now get me someone else."

I have always felt that there was something about a telephone that seemed to irritate the doctor. It sure brought out the worst in him and the girls who worked as Ridgefield telephone operators lived in fear of his thundering voice and sharp tongue. That was in the days when the telephone office was on the second floor over where the Roma Pizzeria is now.

There were occasions when the doctor was entirely justified in blowing his top. We can recall a bitter cold Sunday afternoon when he arrived and told me he had only time for a quick walk as he had to visit a patient at the hospital. He rushed up to the apartment and changed his clothes and we saw him trudging through the snow at the far end of the farm. He always walked rapidly and soon was back at the apartment.

He rushed up the stairs and disrobed before jumping into the shower. Suddenly Marie called out that someone wanted the doctor on the phone right away. It appeared to be an emergency and the doctor did not even bother to dry himself but simply wrapped a huge towel around himself and came bounding down the stairway.

It was necessary for him to cross more than 100 feet of open space between the horse barn and the cottage. This would have been no problem if he had been properly dressed. However, the temperature at the time was just minus five degrees and he was nearly naked as he raced across the lawn.

The phone call turned out to be from a patient who had gone on vacation to Miami, against his wishes. Now she was on the phone to complain that she had contracted a slight case of sunburn.

Her sunburn was nothing compared to the burn that the doctor did. His remarks cannot be printed here but suffice to say that it was one of the rare occasions that I ever heard him dress down a patient.

#182: ONE LAST TEMPER TANTRUM

One more example of Dr. Van Etten's remarkable temper is offered for your consideration and then we will rest our case.

On this occasion the doctor sailed in the driveway as we were closing up the mansion for the winter. He jumped out of his car and ran pell-mell through the house to the telephone in the sunroom and attempted to make a call.

This was in the days before the dialing system was put into use, which meant that you must furnish the operator with a number and she (or he) would then make the necessary connection to complete your call.

It soon became apparent that he was having difficulty in making connection and he was so intent on what he was doing that he did not see me just outside the room. Several times he went through the rudiments of making the call without success. With each attempt, the doctor's attention would rise and it soon became obvious that there would be an explosion.

The telephone at this time was one that stood quite erect and an integral part of the system was a black box, about eight inches wide, ten inches in length and about four inches deep. The phone was connected to the box and the box was secured to the wall of the room near the phone.

Suddenly, with his patience exhausted, the doctor ripped the telephone and the black box right off the wall. Then to complete this display of physical force, he hurled both the phone and box against the wall and stormed out of the room.

I walked around to the door of the house just as the enraged doctor, with a scowl on his face, emerged. When he saw me, his countenance went through a complete transformation and with a big smile, he said. "Richard, I guess that I will have to use your telephone."

"I think not," I answered. "I may need to use it myself."

With that I offered to take him into town where he could use a pay phone and he readily agreed. Along the way to town, he told of how it was imperative that he make this phone call and the stupid operator kept connecting him with a funeral parlor.

We stopped at the Benjamin Franklin 5 & 10 cent store, where the Allan Brothers store is now, at 440 Main Street. The doctor had written down the telephone number and he handed it to me with the request that I place the call for him.

I gave the number to the operator, just as he had recorded it and as you have probably already guessed, found myself talking to a funeral director. Yes. that "stupid" operator had goofed again. Then, by use of the telephone directory, we finally got the correct number.

The doctor had another side which surfaced on a few occasions. They were instances in which he seemed to have less confidence in himself than others who knew him well did.

One time he came alone to Hillscroft and he seemed to be deeply troubled about something. He walked around, completely absorbed in his thoughts and did not speak to anyone.

I was bursting with inquisitiveness but knew that it was best to hide it. Finally he came over and asked if I remembered him speaking of Miss Richardson, who was head of the Nursing School at Lenox Hill Hospital. When I answered in the affirmative, he told me of how a cancer had developed and she needed an operation in a matter of days. The problem was that she had asked that Dr. Van Etten perform the operation.

He then reminded me of how he had always said that, if people who were close to him needed surgery, he would get the very best surgeon for them rather than do the operation himself. My only comment was that I was completely surprised that a thing like that would upset him. He whirled around and snapped "and what is that supposed to mean?"

I hurriedly explained that he must know that a person of Miss Richardson's stature provided her with the luxury of being able to select the best surgeon in the country and that he should be proud and consider it a great honor that this great lady wanted him to do the job.

The good doctor looked at me and the perplexed expression vanished from his face and he said, “Richard, I never thought of it that way.”

With that the doctor jumped into his old car and roared off on his way back to the city. The operation must have been quite successful, for Miss Richardson lived many more years.

Of course there was no charge for the operation, but the well-known lady gave the doctor a beautiful Atmos clock. The clock passed on to his grandchildren, but they are unaware of the nice story of how their grandfather acquired the clock.

We referred to his car as being “old.” because he would never buy a new car. For many years, the new cars carried on their dashboards a brass plate that warned of the perils of exceeding 35 miles per hour for the first 500 miles.

There was just no way that the doctor could restrict himself to such a pace for that period of time, so he bought cars that were, in his words, “well broken in.” He kept his cars in excellent running condition, changing to new tires every 7,000 miles and a new battery every six months.

Many are the stories about the speed at which the doctor sailed over the highways. My favorite was about the time that a policeman stopped him in New Canaan.

He was on his way for a brief visit to Hillscroft and as usual he was racing along the Merritt Parkway. The exit at New Canaan was a perfect spot for police to apprehend those who had become accustomed to the high speeds of the parkway. Then that long straight stretch into New Canaan looked so inviting.

There was a drastic reduction in the speed limit as one exited from the parkway and no doubt the doctor failed to slow down. So the officer had him dead to rights and the MD on his license plate was not going to help him this time. Nor would the numerous excuses that he must have collected through the years. The preliminary questions were asked and license and registration were examined and the policeman was preparing to write out a ticket.

The officer’s car was parked some distance from the doctor’s car and suddenly, the radio in the police car started to crackle. The officer, who incidentally wore badge number 11, apparently could not hear the message, but the doctor heard something about a brush fire on Smith Ridge.

The cop asked the doctor what he heard and, without any hesitation, Dr. Van Etten said, “There is an armed robbery in progress at New Canaan National Bank.”

Needless to say the officer never completed the ticket and as he sped off to what he felt was a much more serious crime, the agile-minded old doctor had a good laugh for himself.

#183: WHEN CHARLIE WAS SANTA

His name was Charles, and most everyone called him Uncle Charlie — that is, except at this time of the year when he became a very famous character, in a bright red suit, and a long white beard. Of course, we are referring to the one and only, Uncle Charlie Ashbee.

More than 60 years ago, Charlie and his wife, the former Ida Smith, lived at 3050 Grand Concourse, in The Bronx. They used to come to Ridgefield quite often to visit the James Smith family on North Salem Road and later at the Smiths' farm on Barry Avenue. Big Jim Smith was Ida's brother.

Like everyone else who came to visit in Ridgefield, the Ashbees grew to love our favorite town. Charlie made up his mind and Ida agreed, that when he retired, they would buy a lot and build a home in Ridgefield.

Charlie had been an executive for some 30 years with a large insurance company. The Ashbees were so anxious to get to Ridgefield that Charlie took an early retirement in 1928 at age 55. In those days early retirements were not common, but then Charlie was not common either.

The Ashbees bought a good-sized lot from Arthur Carnall on Wilton Road West. The lot was where the old Ridgefield Fair and Cattle Show took place more than 100 years ago. Then they built what must have been their dream house and it shows that they must have put a lot of thought to it. It is a very attractive house and few, if any, in our town, are like it.

After living in The Bronx, the place on Wilton Road West must have seemed like a spacious ranch to the Ashbees, when they moved into their new home in early 1929. Both Charlie and Ida were friendly, outgoing people and they fit right into the social life of their adopted town.

Charlie wasted no time in getting involved in local affairs. About the time he arrived in town, the Promoters Club was being reorganized as the Ridgefield Lions Club. Charlie jumped right in and became one of the original members of the new club. Thirty years later, the Lions Club had a big party at the Inn at Ridgefield. They called it Uncle Charlie's Night and it was a well deserved tribute to this fine gentleman, for his years of service to the club, the community as a whole and especially the kids whose lives were made brighter by his annual visits.

It was at a Lions Club Christmas party that Charlie's role as the man in the red suit began. Someone was needed to act as the man with the long white beard and as usual Charlie volunteered. Little did he, or anyone else, realize that this would develop into a tradition, in a town noted for traditions. He certainly must have been the longest running show in Ridgefield's history.

Charlie got to be such an important part of the Christmas season that letters addressed to the man at the North Pole were rerouted to him. He would never fail to visit the home of the little kid that wrote the letter. In many cases he was able to locate a toy that a youngster had asked for. When he did he would take it along with him and leave it with the parents, to be put under the tree. Bill Sturges was a great help in this connection as all year long he collected and repaired toys.

To say that the kids loved Charlie would be a gross understatement. Not only the kids, but grownups as well thought that he was just the greatest. Many people who are grandparents today, were visited by Charlie when they themselves were little ones. These people all have fond memories of him.

It was quite a distance from the Ashbee home on Wilton Road West to the business area and when we saw Charlie walking to town each day, we suspected that it was a part of his health program. Such was not the case. What we did not know was that Charlie had never learned to drive a car.

Charlie's brother-in-law, Big Jim Smith, was a rural mail carrier and when Jim wanted to take some time off, he asked Charlie if he would substitute for him on the mail route. Charlie, agreeable as always, said that he was willing to learn to operate Jim's old Dodge. The Smiths lived on Barry Avenue where Paul Korker lives now and they had a farm on which there was an orchard. Jim acted as Charlie's tutor and helped him familiarize himself with the brakes, the steering apparatus, etc., and then took him out into the orchard where he charted a course among the apple trees. Charlie soon mastered the operation of the vehicle and announced that he was ready to deliver the mail.

Jim Smith's mail route was in the northern section of town and included the Ridgebury area. The houses were a considerable distance apart as this was some time before developments started to spring up. The people along the mail route liked Big Jim, but they considered it a rare treat whenever Charlie filled in for him. Charlie's personality would be best described as effervescent and the people looked forward to his visits.

Jim Smith had a sideline in which he dealt in furs and collected the hides of foxes, skunks, muskrats, raccoons, and rabbits. All of these animals were in abundance along Jim's mail route. Therefore, he established a trap line and set steel traps under each of the many bridges along the way. Jim would check the traps each day anything that he caught was put in the trunk of his car. Charlie was expected to check the traps when he did the mail route. He did stop and examine each one but after doing the route several times, it was noted that he did not bring back any game.

The reason was quite simple. Charlie could not stand the thought of trapping any animal. If he found anything in a trap, he would release it. If there was nothing in the trap, Charlie would spring it so that nothing would be caught in it. He was a kind man.

Charlie never ran for any major elected office in town government. If he had he would have been a shoo-in, because of his popularity. He did serve several terms as registrar of voters. Charlie served for many years as a valued vestryman at St. Stephen's Church.

In his younger days, Charlie, who was a great lover of sports, was a very good left-handed pitcher. He used to umpire the baseball games and he was exceptionally good at settling disputes. His word was always taken as the players had a lot of respect for him.

He also used to keep score at the Congregational Church Bowling Alleys for the big pin bowling league. We well remember one occasion when a violent dispute erupted between two very angry, very big and very tough bowlers.

As they were about to tear each other apart, Charlie jumped from behind the bench on which he was keeping score. He threw his cap on the floor and jumped between the huge gladiators and announced that if there was going to be any fighting, he would do it. No doubt he saved someone from serious injury, as the sight of this great little man serving as a buffer between the big fellows, caused everyone to laugh. All agreed that his quick action had quelled a potentially dangerous situation.

Charlie developed several nice hobbies during his long life span. He had a real fine stamp collection but his greatest collection was of autographs and especially those of Presidents of the United States. He had them all, with the exception of George Washington. He also had the autographs of Civil War Generals, missing only J.E.B. Stuart and Stonewall Jackson.

The Ashbees sold their home on Wilton Road West in 1946 to Elmer Q. Oliphant. In case you never heard of Ollie, he was the greatest athlete ever to graduate from West Point. He was on everyone's All-Time All American Football Team.

Charles Francis Ashbee received many tributes and he deserved every one. He was the first to receive the Citizen of the Year Award from the Ridgefield Rotary Club.

One year after his passing in 1962, the road Ashbee Lane, off Route 7 was named in his memory.

Uncle Charlie continued his role of the man in the red suit, at this time of year, until his 88th birthday. At that time he was a patient at Altnacraig on High Ridge and felt bad that he could not go out to visit his kids. So the procedures were reversed and his kids all came to see him. It was a great tribute to a great man.

#184: THE NIGHT THAT MUSICIANS LIVE FOR

The boys in the dance band will tell you that they play for peanuts all year and then New Year's comes along and that makes it all worthwhile. This is the night that musicians live for and for the people who go out to dance on that night, the sky is the limit.

A musician who does not have a job on New Year's Eve is a very unhappy one. To him, New Year's Eve is like the World Series is to a baseball player or like the Super Bowl is to a football player.

We can remember a lot of New Year's Eves and some of them could possibly be of some interest. There was the one in 1934, when we played at the I.A.M.A.S. Hall on Prospect Street. The building is much bigger today as a couple of additions have been made to it since that time.

There was a tremendous crowd that night and there was very little room to dance. Popular songs at the time were Star Dust, Time on My Hands and Moonglow. Aldo Casagrande (Gene's Dad) led the band that night. He was an excellent cornetist and played several other instruments as well.

Aldo was right at home, no matter what kind of music the affair called for. When we played at Miller's Hall, the call was for Polish music and at Vasa Hall, it would be Swedish. Of course the favorite music in the hall on Prospect Street was Italian and in this field no one could hold a candle to Aldo Casagrande and he knew all that music by heart.

At some time during that particular New Year's celebration, the crowd suddenly pushed back and made a circle on the dance floor. Then, out of the crowd stepped Benvenuto Carboni and his wife, Assunta. As if on signal, Aldo started to play Farlanda, a traditional Italian folk song and the couple went into their dance.

The theme of this folk dance was to depict the courting procedures of a bull and a cow. It was a very lively dance and the gestures of the dancers were very expressive as they whirled around each other.

Assunta could outdance several partners and when the dance finally ended, the applause was deafening. It was all great fun, for both the dancers and the audience.

Another New Year's, we played with Jim Bacchiochi, Andy Bloomer and Paul Waldarke at a place on High Ridge Road. between Pound Ridge and Stamford. It was a nightclub named Laurel Lodge and it was rumored that the owner was a gangster. His name was Moll and perhaps that gave it the connotation.

At any rate this was a very modern nightclub and it was decorated in a very ornate manner. One of its unusual features was that much of it was built below ground level. I well remember the eerie feeling that came over us when we descended into the lower area of the club. That feeling was not alleviated by the huge tanks of exotic fish that lined the walls. I found myself wondering if one of those tanks might harbor some piranha.

While we were playing a snow storm was raging outside and when we started for home at four in the morning, it looked like trouble ahead. Paul and I chose to try it up Tator's Hill and after a lot of pushing, we finally made it. Jim and Andy decided to pass up that route and tried going over West Mountain. They got stuck and did not get home until noon.

One New Year's we played at the Gothic House in Westport. This place was right where Manero's Steak House is today. It was a fine old mansion and no doubt had a great history. It must have had a charmed life as it ran all through the Prohibition era.

On this New Year's, Prohibition had only recently been repealed and the owner must have still stocked some of what they used to call bathtub gin. After we had played a few numbers, the owner came over and asked if we would play a popular song, Annie Doesn't Live Here Any More. It just so happened that his wife's name was Annie and she worked at the Gothic Club. Annie was an exceptionally large woman and when we finished playing the request. she lumbered over to us carrying a tray with glasses that looked as if they contained water. With a flourish Annie announced that the glasses contained gin and the drinks were on the house.

We were not quite sure whether the gin was being tendered in appreciation for playing the song, or whether she disapproved of it. Our feelings leaned toward the latter for as Annie set the tray on the piano, one of the glasses tipped over and splashed onto the piano. In a matter of minutes the veneer on that piano started to curl up! It was a sure deterrent for any young fellow who had contemplated the sampling of gin that night.

Several years later, we were furnishing the music at the Mayflower Grille in Danbury. Actually, the Mayflower was our home base and we played there Friday, Saturday and Sunday for nine years.

Each year I made eggnog for the boys in the band to enjoy at midnight on New Year's Eve until it became sort of a ritual. This eggnog was made from a recipe that I got from Louis Courtney, Sr. He called it Virginia Eggnog and it was different from any we ever had.

The recipe called for a dozen eggs, a can of condensed milk, a quart of heavy cream, a quart of "hard" cider, a pint of rye whiskey, and a pint of Jamaican rum. It was seasoned with

some brown sugar and nutmeg. When this was all properly put together it made a very pleasing, albeit a very potent, drink. The boys all seemed to look forward to having a taste of this eggnog.

On this New Year's Eve complications arose early in the evening when our first little daughter began sending signals that she was getting ready to make a grand entrance into the world. Dr. Joseph Bell was called and it was his decision that Marie spend the night in Norwalk Hospital even though he was confident that the baby would not arrive until the next day. It was a wise move because of the holiday traffic and the fact that a storm was brewing.

While Marie made ready for the trip to Norwalk. I began to make the eggnog. I became so engrossed in what I was doing that I failed to see Marie as she returned and sat watching the proceedings. I was in the middle of breaking the eggs when a noise caused me to look up and I could see by the look on her face that there was nothing appetizing in the picture that was presented.

The fathers were not allowed in the delivery room in those days; in fact, the less the doctors and nurses saw of them, the better. So after getting things settled at the hospital there was a race to Danbury and the Mayflower. The boys had their eggnog and we played until 3 am. I was home by 3:30 and just a few minutes later the phone rang and you just know that it was Dr. Bell, telling me that things were about to happen.

So there was another wild ride to Norwalk at 4:20. Elizabeth Ann became the very first baby born at Norwalk Hospital that year.

There can be no question that this was our most exciting and most eventful and the happiest of New Years.

#185: SONNY BLOWS IT AS A FARMER

It was some weeks ago that we interrupted our story about the upper part of High Ridge Avenue to tell about one person who would own the place that was built by E. P. Dutton. Our story about Dr. Royal C. Van Etten and his Hillscroft Farm was just about concluded when we again interrupted to do a couple of columns that were in keeping with the holiday season.

So now we are back to the year 1951 and Hillscroft is up for sale. The price was \$120,000 and included 89 acres that stretched along both sides of St. Johns Road, a large horse barn, with an apartment over it, a hay barn, a fine dairy building, a three-car garage, a very modern chicken house, numerous sheds, a fine superintendent's cottage, an excellent mansion, and several formal gardens.

As might be expected, a great number of people came to see Hillscroft. Most of them came out of curiosity, but all seemed to admire the beautiful place and its commanding view of Long Island Sound and the Island itself.

Finally a man came from Cleveland. His name was Samuel Tell and he was an importer of bananas and coffee. Sam walked in the front door of the mansion and walked out the back door. In less than five minutes he made up his mind to buy Hillscroft.

We found this to be little short of amazing as he still had not seen the many wonderful things the place had to offer in addition to the mansion. Mrs. Tell seemed to concur in the decision.

The Tells had a daughter who had only recently married and we soon got the impression that Sam's hasty decision to buy Hillscroft was motivated to a great extent by the fact that it would provide an opportunity for the son-in-law to unleash his super-abundant store of energy.

This young man had done some farming in Ohio and the overall plan called for him to operate Hillscroft as a working farm.

It was arranged for me to stay for a month and show the son-in-law, whom we will call "Sonny," the ropes. He seemed like a pleasant young man but fancied himself as an expert in the field of agriculture. I gave up my teaching chores when it became apparent that he placed no value whatever on the advice that was offered.

The very first day on the job, Sonny got off on the wrong foot. He took the large Allis Chalmers farm tractor and proceeded to plow up the very finest asparagus bed that I have ever seen. The bed was just three years old and it had received a lot of tender, loving care that would guarantee top production for many years to come. It seemed like a very senseless act and Sony was made aware of our feelings on the matter.

It was fall plowing time, so the very next day Sonny decided to plow the large field on the north end of the farm. Perhaps there were no stones in the Ohio fields that he was accustomed to. At any rate, he had not gone far before he had wrecked the plows and had to quit while additional plow shares were purchased. There would be many more broken shares before that field was plowed.

The final straw was Sonny's decision to sell the registered Guernsey bull that we were so proud of. This bull had sired some beautiful heifers and we had great hopes for the future. We had good reason to believe that in just a short time, the bull would be worth several thousand dollars. However, he was sold to a cattle dealer, to be used for beef.

So the bull brought a grand total of \$50. The cattle dealer was astounded but managed to hide a big smile as he drove away with his prize.

The dealer told me later of how he was well aware of the value of the animal, and had no intentions of taking him to the slaughter house. Instead, the bull was sold to a farmer on Mill Plain Road in Danbury for some 15 times what the dealer had paid for him. So the farmer was elated over his acquisition and it is a good deal that makes everyone happy. It was years later that we learned that the bull had proven himself and was actually more valuable than we had supposed.

In retrospect, I guess that such things that transpired made it a little easier to leave Hillscroft. We sure did not want to be around for the actual demise of that beautiful estate. It was my feeling that the farm would not last a year under the new owners.

It was 11 months later that the place was again sold, this time to the William Phillips family. Bill, his wife, and three children appeared to be just what Hillscroft needed. He had been an executive with a large frozen foods company and perhaps was attracted by the very rich soil at Hillscroft, as well as the sheer beauty of the place.

The dairying part of the farm did not seem to interest Bill Phillips, so he wisely engaged William Royal to operate that part of the enterprise. They did well for a while but values were rapidly changing and I guess the land had become so much more valuable for development purposes that the farm had to go.

It certainly became a very fine development and many of the builders are reminders of past glories. We were happy to see that some of the orchard was preserved and it brings back fond memories of the fine cider we used to make. We used Fall Pippins to give it smoothness and Russets to give it sparkle.

Two barrels were made, one of which was purchased each year from the bakery. It would be one that brought jelly to the bakers for the jelly doughnuts. The jelly would be extracted from the barrel by use of a giant syringe, which then was used to inject the jelly into the doughnuts.

It was impossible to remove all the jelly so there would be a good coating left inside the barrel. This jelly blended nicely with the cider as it aged, and the result was a very pleasant drink that was very much like champagne.

Back to 1951. With the arrival of the Tells from Cleveland, the Venus family and the Van Etten had to move. Dr. Van Etten had become interested in several local places, as he did not want to leave Ridgefield, which is easy to understand. His favorite place was the former Dutton estate next to Altnacraig at 63 High Ridge.

These large mansions were not selling at the time and this substantial structure with its garage and three and one half lovely acres was offered to Dr. Van, Etten for \$21,000 [\$227,000 in 2022 dollars]. Actually he could have bought it for less, but he did not quibble; he placed a binder on it even before he had a chance to tour the mansion.

These prices may seem ridiculous when weighed against what people must pay today, but they just go to show what 35 years can do.

Dr. Van Etten asked me to accompany him on his visit to the Dutton mansion and produced a key that was to give us entrance. However, a screen door that was hooked on the inside prevented our access to the door in which the key would be used.

#186: HOW THE DOCTOR HANDLED A YOUNG REPORTER

On a very nice September afternoon in 1951, Dr. Royal C. Van Etten placed a binder on the Dutton mansion at 63 High Ridge. He did this without ever setting foot inside the old house and received a key for the front door so that he could further examine the place that had caught his fancy.

Apparently the last person to leave the house had hooked the screen door from the inside and then departed by way of another door. The key that we had would not fit any of the other doors and the doctor, who was always in a hurry, was becoming quite agitated.

Suddenly I remembered a very thin screwdriver that was in a tool box in our car. It was almost as slender as an ice pick and bent only a couple of the tiny wire squares as it was being inserted through the screen. The screwdriver slid easily under the hook which when lifted, gave us access to the door. In later years, the doctor had great fun giving his version of how we gained entrance to the mansion for the first time.

The doctor was delighted with the simple beauty of the great mansion and immediately decided to complete the purchase. It would be his home for the next 30 years, and no one else ever owned it for that length of time.

It seemed like an awfully large house for just the two of them. He explained this away by stating that it was his intention to use every bit of the house. He did this by taking off his tie in one room, his shirt in another, etc. My own feeling was that he enjoyed the big house because it made him a little more difficult to find.

As soon as ownership passed into his hands, Dr. Van Etten had the toilet that sat in the middle of his bedroom, as described in Dispatch #164, removed. The very next thing he did was to visit Lovell's store in Newtown, where he purchased a Farmall Cub tractor. With the tractor he got a set of three reel lawnmowers, a snow plow, a land plow and a disk harrow. The whole outfit cost \$900 and had to be one of the best deals ever.

That little tractor was to last until the doctor passed away 30 years later and was as good as new after all those years. It must have traveled a good many miles on that big three acre lawn and the doctor drove it himself, until he was 88 years of age and he always went at top speed.

He really was a remarkable man. Up to that time his movements were still quick and he still possessed that great energy that was the envy of those much younger than he. It was said that when he breezed down the corridors of the hospital, the tails of his white jacket stood out so straight behind him that you could have played a game of checkers on them.

Dr. Van Etten's youthful enthusiasm was fueled by an abiding interest in just about everything that went on around him. He never stopped learning and even after he retired he continued to read his medical books and kept abreast of new developments in the field of research. While he never had time for TV while conducting his practice, in later years he made good use of it.

The doctor's interest in the exploration of outer space was so intense that even in his 90's he would arise early in the morning hours to watch the launching of a spaceship.

Not all of his interests were so lofty and some were even quite earthy. When I had the retail milk business that operated under the name Dic-Rie Dairy, he delighted in riding in the milk truck and exploring parts of Ridgefield and the surrounding towns that he had not seen.

This was especially true of the Silvermine area where some of his patients resided, although he would caution me not to tell them that he was in the truck.

Most doctors will refuse to talk about their relationship with a patient and Dr. Van Etten was no exception. However, on occasion he would offer some information, especially if it had to do with a former patient.

In the 40's the star hitter and famous first baseman of the Detroit Tigers baseball team married an equally famous New York girl, who happened to be a patient of Dr. Van Etten's. The good doctor had never had much time to spend watching sporting events. However, in no time he became a Tiger fan and could reel off league standings and batting averages with ease.

The young couple had their first child and it turned out to be a girl. This was rather disappointing as it was expected that the little one would follow in the father's footsteps and become a baseball star.

The couple moved to Detroit and when the next baby was expected they went to a Detroit doctor. We expressed the feeling that the reason the couple switched to a Detroit doctor was to avoid commuting to New York.

Dr. Van Etten did not look at it that way and always felt that it was because he did not produce a boy on the first try. Needless to say he became a New York Yankee fan and remained one.

Jack Sanders found out first hand how reluctant the doctor was to talk about his medical practice or his patients. Jack came to the mansion to interview the fine old gentleman on his 90th birthday.

The three of us sat on the front porch that Aug. 2, 1976, amidst congratulatory messages from the President, the senators, the governor and many others. Jack employed his ample expertise as he manfully tried to elicit from the doctor an interesting story about some of his famous patients. Each time a name was mentioned, such as Tina Louise, the agile-minded old doctor would direct the conversation in another direction.

When Jack asked about America's Sweetheart, Mary Pickford, the doctor went off on a tangent. Turning to Jack he asked "Did I ever tell you about the house that used to stand between this house and Altnacraig?" Without waiting for an answer he launched into a story that I had told him years before. However, he gave it the most unbelievable twist.

The correct story appeared in Dispatch #160 and concerned the lovely house now owned by the Jack Sherrys at 72 High Ridge. It told of the monumental task performed by Caro Northrup, his men and his horses.

The doctor not only had a rare sense of humor, he had the knack of telling a story in such a manner as to turn a routine subject into a matter of earthshaking importance. Knowing the doctor, I guessed what was coming. Jack, however, in anticipation of a sensational story, was listening and writing furiously.

The old doctor said that Mrs. Hepburn, who lived and owned Altnacraig at the time, did not like the house standing so close to her house so she waited until the family had gone out shopping one day and got two of her men with ropes and pulled it across the street.

I will never forget the look of incredulousness on Jack's face as he stopped writing and then put his pencil away.

It would take several books to tell the great story of Dr. Royal C. Van Etten, but he left nothing but the gigantic files on his patients to assist one in writing it.

#187: THE YOUNG DOCTOR'S FABULOUS JOURNEY

In a previous column, concerning the famous people who have lived on High Ridge Avenue, we noted that Dr. Royal C. Van Etten had graduated *cum laude*, first in his class, from Columbia Medical, in 1910. Four years previously he had graduated with the same honors from Amherst. So now he was a young doctor, going out to face the world and he was well prepared.

At the time, it was not unusual for the very wealthy families to engage a physician for just about their exclusive use. It so happened that shortly after Dr. Van Etten graduated, Arthur Curtiss James was planning a trip around the world on his fabulous yacht, the Aloha.

Dr. Van Etten's credentials were very impressive and the fact that he was a 1906 graduate of Amherst did not hurt a bit. Mr. James was a loyal son of Amherst, class of 1889.

The doctor was anxious to broaden his knowledge of the world at large but did not feel that he could spare the time for the whole trip. When he was approached by Mr. James, the doctor explained his feelings on the matter and James quickly offered to solve the problem by employing a second doctor to complete the last stages of the trip.

Just in case you never heard of Arthur Curtiss James, and chances are very good that you have not, he was one of the ten richest men in the country. Born in New York City in 1867, into a wealthy family that had always maintained a low profile, young Arthur was not one to rest on the laurels of his father and grandfather, both of whom had been very successful businessmen.

The grandfather, Daniel James, was a founder of Phelps, Dodge & Company in 1834. His son, Arthur's father, joined Daniel and expanded the company's interest in the mining of copper and railroading.

Arthur, upon graduating, jumped right into the family enterprises and three years later became one of the partners in Phelps, Dodge. Fifteen years later, in 1907, on the death of his father, Arthur became the largest stockholder in the company.

He then started to devote much of his time to railroading and acquired interests in such rail lines as El Paso & South Western, Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific, Northern Pacific, The Great Northern, Chicago, Burlington & Quincy, Southern Pacific, Western Pacific, and Rio Grand Western.

Linking together these various rail lines had become a passion with Arthur James and by the early 30's he had major interest in more than 40,000 miles of railroad.

Men of much less influence than Arthur Curtiss James would become household names but his activities were always rather subdued as far as publicity was concerned. This was especially true of his many philanthropic ventures. It appeared that he intended it to be that way.

Mr. James and his wife, the former Harriet Eddy Parsons, had no children, so without any fanfare their great wealth was distributed among several, very fortunate beneficiaries. He gave away more than \$20 million during his lifetime. When he died in 1941, James left \$25 million to create the James Foundation, for the purpose of aiding several institutions that he had helped during his lifetime. In 1965 that foundation had disbursed more than \$144 million.

We had a friend, Philip P. Masterson, who lived just over the line on West Lane. Phil was an appraiser, and in fact the biggest of the professional appraisers. He appraised the J.P. Morgan, the Marshall Field and Vanderbilt estates, but it was with glowing terms that he described the Arthur Curtiss James estates, in New York City, Newport, Miami and Tarrytown. You quickly got the impression that he thought they were just the greatest.

Along with all this wealth, James was described by Dr. Van Etten as being gregarious and just good fun to be with.

The young doctor was the adventurous type and when presented with an opportunity to explore southern Europe and northern Africa, while receiving generous compensation for his services, he must have considered it an offer that he could not refuse. The trip would serve as the nearest thing to a vacation that the busy doctor would ever find time for in the years to come.

It was not until his 90th birthday that we ever heard anything about the fabulous trip on the Aloha. At that time the doctor revealed the story about the memorable voyage and produced four huge and beautifully bound volumes of photographs that graphically illustrated points of interest along the way.

It must have cost a small fortune to compile these books as there were at least 300 photos in each book and each volume had an index, explaining the subject matter. Mr. James had thoughtfully retained the services of a top photographer for the trip. Of special interest were pictures of Egypt, the pyramids, the sphinx at Giza, and of the trip up the Nile.

When the Aloha reached what was then Persia, Dr. Van Etten's tour of duty came to an end and he took a steamer for the return to the U.S.A. He thoroughly enjoyed the voyage on the Aloha and I am sure that he must have had some misgivings at not having agreed to continue the trip around the world.

The four great picture albums must have a real historic value and they are now owned by the doctor's grandchildren. We hope that they will some day grace the shelves of some deserving library.

On his return to the states, Dr. Van Etten started a medical practice that was to span the next 60 years. Somehow he found time to serve as chief of staff at Lenox Hill Hospital and become a part of the teaching staff at The College of Physicians and Surgeons.

At one time he was associated with a Dr. Voorhees, who had achieved prominence in the field of gynecology.

Dr. Voorhees received considerable notice when he invented the Voorhees Bag, which was a process that induced labor in pregnant women. Dr. Van Etten never had much to say on the subject, but it was obvious that he did not entirely approve of this method. This is not to say that he was not progressive. It was just that he had a built-in suspicion of anything that might be considered unnatural.

Dr. H. Harlan Stone, a surgeon and chief of surgery at the University of Maryland Hospital, has been featured in a recent newspaper article as recommending the use of zippers when it is anticipated that surgery will follow surgery in the same area. Dr. Stone has substituted ordinary skirt zippers for stitches in 28 pancreas operations. By using the 7 inch, 60 cent zipper, just like the type used on women's polyester skirts, he was able to avoid repeated operations to change internal bandages and lowered the death rate dramatically.

We can recall Dr. Van Etten saying, more than 40 years ago, that a women who had required a cesarean section and planned to have more children, should have a zipper installed to facilitate delivery.

#188: THE DEDICATED DOC AND HIS ODDITIES

There were several things in the makeup of Dr. Royal C. Van Etten that would attract me, not the least of which was his great love for Ridgefield. He lived in our town for more than half a century. During all those years he was a model citizen and asked no favors, other than what he considered the privilege of living here.

The doctor favored local tradesmen and paid them well. He paid his taxes without complaint and was never a burden, in any way, to his adopted town. In fact, I do not believe that the town was ever charged with the responsibility of educating the children of the various owners of either Hillscroft or the great mansion at 63 High Ridge Avenue.

Despite our characterizing him as a good-natured person, with the worst temper we have ever seen, the doctor was basically a quiet person and might even have been considered a little on the shy side. He sure avoided parties as though they were a plague and this caused him to be almost unknown in party-loving Ridgefield.

On those rare occasions when he accepted an invitation to a party, the doctor's personality went through a dramatic change, as quickly as a chameleon changes his color. When he finally got into the spirit of the thing, his delightful mannerisms drew people like a magnet and invariably he became the life of the party.

One of his fears about attending parties was that, just as the party got to be enjoyable, he would receive a phone call. He did not like being singled out on such occasions, as there were always those who felt that being paged at these affairs was a form of advertising one's business or profession.

We recall a party that the doctor and Mrs. Van Etten attended on a Saturday afternoon at the home of the late Anne S. Richardson. His reason for accepting the invitation was that he felt everything was well under control and there were no patients in the hospital that required his constant attention.

The nice lawn party was in full swing when the phone rang and as you have already surmised, it was for Dr. Van Etten. The person taking the call was full of the spirit of the occasion and made a commotion in getting the doctor to the phone. As might be expected, it was a long time before he attended another such affair.

Dr. Van Etten had a strong sense of self-discipline and some of his living habits were almost Spartan-like. Yet he enjoyed junk food almost as much as a gourmet meal.

While he encouraged his patients to have the best in health care, he himself suffered with a hernia during the last half of his life and would not have it taken care of. It proved to be a tremendous burden in his later years.

He believed in plenty of exercise and devoted much of his spare time to it. He did a lot of walking and used to ask that sticks that fell on the big lawn be left for him to pick up, as he felt the bending was good for him. He could really walk and it would take a Harry Thomas (Dispatch #120) to keep ahead of him.

We would not say that the doctor was superstitious, but most things that happened had a deeper meaning, a warning or perhaps a prophecy, and he was very observant to what they seemed to indicate.

When we were at Hillscroft, there was a neighbor who lived in the Caro Northrop house. The neighbor left his home one day and drove north on Silver Spring Road. Something caused him to look back and when he did he saw that his large barn was on fire.

From that time on, when Dr. Van Etten left Hillscroft for New York, no matter how much of a hurry he might be in, he'd always drive south to Silver Hill Road, turned around and drove by the farm once more to make sure that everything was all right.

The same procedure prevailed after he had moved to High Ridge. When leaving for New York, he would drive down the hill to King Lane, then turn and come back by the mansion for one last look before continuing on his journey.

These little oddities were treated quite seriously and we never joked about them. He was so cautious that before leaving the house, he would go to the fuse box in the basement and take out all the fuses, except the one that controlled the light on the back porch.

This procedure was followed even when he and Mrs. Van Etten was just going out for a ride. When he had surgery scheduled and something happened that could be interpreted as a warning, the operation was canceled. That he was eminently successful, there can be no question, so we will not argue with success.

With Dr. Van Etten, his patients always came first. There would be a tendency to feel that the wealthy patients would receive more attention than those of lesser means. Not true as far as he was concerned as we firmly believe that no one could have received better care than this fine doctor furnished to his charity patients.

When it came to charging his patients, the matter was handled by a nurse who also served as his secretary. We enjoyed listening to her stories of how the patients would attempt to influence the fees charged by appearing to live in a lifestyle that was entirely different than what it actually was.

This very sharp lady had her desk situated near a window where she could see down the street for a couple of blocks. When she observed a wealthy lady get out of her Cadillac and change from a mink coat to a plain cloth coat before entering the office, an asterisk was placed in the records just before her name.

“Dedicated” is a word that is greatly overworked; however, it is the one word which best describes Dr. Royal C. Van Etten. He lived for his patients and they greatly appreciated him.

When he passed away five years ago, we received letters from all over the country from former patients. In fact, just a week ago, a letter arrived with a New Orleans postmark from a former patient who requested a copy of his obituary.

In Dispatch No. 170 we described the staircase at Hillscroft and how very beautiful it was. A story that had to do with that staircase was once told to us by Dr. Francis B. Woodford. He said that one morning about 5 o’clock, back in the early 30's, he was called to Hillscroft.

Dr. Van Etten had been awakened that morning by the ringing of the telephone in the next room. As usual he jumped out of bed and ran to the phone. In so doing he slipped on a throw rug and went sailing over the stair rail. He was just regaining consciousness when Dr. Woodford arrived. He brushed aside any suggestions about being hospitalized and a few minutes later was on his way to a patient at Lenox Hill Hospital.

#189: ONE LAST COLUMN ABOUT A GOOD FRIEND

Marie has expressed the feeling that I should start writing about something, or someone, other than my old friend, Dr. Royal C. Van Etten. I have an idea that her suggestion was prompted, to some extent, by the fact that she has heard all these stories about the good doctor so many times before.

On the other hand, people constantly tell me that they enjoy reading about the fine old gentleman. So, we will offer one more column concerning the doctor and then move on down High Ridge Avenue.

As previously pointed out, the soil at 63 High Ridge was extremely rich and just about everything grew well there. The doctor liked vegetables and Mrs. Van Etten liked flowers, so we had lots of both. At one time we had no less than 12 large flower beds and a vegetable garden that measured 35 feet in width and 50 feet in length. All this for two people.

We used to grow a lot of sweet corn and when hybrid corn came into prominence, we were one of the first to grow it. Across from us on Olmstead Lane, in a house that is now the residence of Ed Dowling [#93], lived Lillian Gilkes and Louise Davidson. These ladies were good friends of former Vice-President Henry A. Wallace, who lived at the time just over the state line in South Salem.

Henry had been secretary of agriculture in FDR's first cabinet before becoming the Vice-President and retained a keen interest in the crossbreeding of corn and did considerable experimenting with it.

Golden bantam had long been the favorite sweet corn. It had small ears but a delightful taste. When this corn was successfully crossed with the larger varieties, it resulted in the retention of the fine quality of golden bantam while producing ears that were much larger. The new corn was called Golden Cross Bantam.

Henry Wallace gave some of the seed of this new variety of corn to Lillian Gilkes, who promptly passed it along to me. We had a lot of fun with this new corn and made a lot of people happy with its great taste.

Then two things happened: first, the crows agreed that the new corn was vastly superior to anything they had ever tasted, and then the raccoons concurred in the opinion expressed by the crows.

It seemed incredible that the big black birds and the masked nocturnal villains could always tell when the corn had reached perfection. They would then clean out the entire corn patch in one night.

We tried many tricks in an effort to thwart the thieves, but to no avail. Shiny pieces of tin, hung in the corn patch, flashed in the sunlight and kept the crows away. However, they were useless at night, or on cloudy days.

A radio planted in the middle of the patch scared the marauders away for a day or two and then they got used to the music. The doctor said that he felt they enjoyed the music of Glen Miller, with their meals.

When he looked out the window one morning and saw a large crow standing on top of the radio, we capitulated and a decision was made to give up trying to grow sweet corn.

Little pleasures that many people took for granted could be considered a great treat by the old doctor. For example, a trip to the Danbury Fair was to him an event that he looked forward to. We always went on a Sunday morning at 10 o'clock as he felt that there would be fewer people there at that time. It would be a whirlwind trip and by noontime we would be on the way home.

During that short space of time, he would have surveyed every exhibit at the Fair and I would have to trot on occasion to keep up with him. He did not miss anything, and when we got home he would describe in detail to Mrs. Van Etten every display and note whether any had been added since the previous year.

The doctor loved the Big Top and never failed to buy some Vermont cheddar cheese, some salt water taffy, and some gourds. As we would leave the Big Top there was a cider mill just outside and we always had a glass of sweet cider.

The pleasure that he derived from this little ritual is really indescribable. It would be fair to say that no one visiting the mall that will replace the Great Danbury Fair will ever have as much real fun as the doctor did.

Sometimes our little girl, Mary Madeline (Moo Moo), would accompany us and on one occasion we sat for a few minutes to watch the oxen pull those great loads on a stone boat. The men handling the oxen can be quite rough at times and one in particular used both the lash and the butt of his whip without mercy on one poor ox that did not move quick enough to suit him.

Suddenly, Mary Madeline, who was about six at the time, began to laugh gleefully. When the doctor asked her what was so funny, she pointed to one of the cloven hoofs of the huge ox. The large beast had planted the hoof firmly on the foot of the unhappy drover who, with a pained expression on his face, was attempting to get the ox to release him.

We all enjoyed the plight of the drover and it was one of the few times that I ever heard the doctor enjoy a real belly laugh. He could not stand anyone who was unkind to an animal.

The following little anecdote will best describe the kind of man that the doctor was. The first time I ran for public office, he saw it to change his voting residence from New York City to Ridgefield. That same year, as usual, we made plans to attend the fair on Sunday morning. He always drove back to the city on Sunday afternoon. This time, however, he told me that he planned to stay over on Sunday night and return to the city after voting for me on Monday.

On Sunday morning, as I approached the old mansion, I saw that a note had been pinned to the door. It read: "Sorry, Richard, I got called back at 3 a.m., but I will be back to vote for you tomorrow." I could almost feel his disappointment at not getting to see the fair.

In those days the voting was done in the town hall. It was a cold and rainy Monday but as Marie and I crossed Catoonah Street, we saw the doctor's old black Cadillac as he pulled into a parking space near the town hall. The fine old gentleman had kept his word, and he jumped out of his car and ran into the voting place. We crossed the street to meet him as he emerged from the back door of the town hall, still on a run.

He had a big smile as he approached and with a pat on my back said, "Good luck Richard, told you I would be back to vote for you, got to get back." With that, he jumped back in his car and drove right back to the City.

It was several months later that I learned that the phone call that spoiled his weekend had brought him back to hospital to care for a charity patient.

He certainly was some kind of man and when Dr. Royal C. Van Etten passed on at age 94 on July 24, 1980, Ridgefield lost an exemplary citizen and I lost a very good friend.

#190: THE HERRICKS OF HIGH RIDGE

Many places get to be known by the name of the family that originally lived in that particular location. Then there are times when the place is named after the family that lived there the longest. For many years the old estate at 63 High Ridge Road was known as the Dutton place as it was built by the publisher, Edward Payson Dutton.

However, Dr. Royal C. Van Etten lived in the great mansion longer than anyone else, so I guess to me it will always be the Van Etten place. After the doctor died in 1980, the place was put up for sale.

At the time, Gary Harris, who had formerly lived in Ridgefield, was residing in California. He knew first hand what a great place Ridgefield was and like everyone who ever lived in our town, Gary harbored a strong urge to return. So the Harris family sold their home in California and soon they were busy remodeling the old mansion on High Ridge.

The basic structure remained pretty much the same as there was really no way to improve on that. The greatest change in the exterior was the enclosing of the back porch and then combining it with the kitchen and the butler's pantry into one huge kitchen.

Notable changes in the interior of the house, other than painting, were the addition of several rooms in the large attic and the removal of the great steam heating system that was previously described. It was, for some reason with which I am unfamiliar, replaced by electric heating.

Just a few years ago the grand old place was sold again and now Alice McKnight and Jean Kirksey are enjoying that particular kind of grandeur, found only on High Ridge.

The very next place, traveling north on the Ridge, was constructed by Helen Minturn Post on land that she acquired from John A. King. Shortly after World War I, Mr. A. Bolton Hall purchased this very nice place from the estate of Mrs. Post.

Mr. Hall renovated the house to such an extent that when he was through it bore little resemblance to the original structure. In the early 20's the Halls' daughter, Lois, married Gerardus P. Herrick and for the next 60 years this fine estate was known as the Herrick place.

Just as their neighbors did, the Herricks used their High Ridge mansion as a "summer cottage." They closed up the house each fall and with their children, Susan and Scott, they would spend the winter in their New York apartment. The family owned considerable property in New York City.

Mr. Herrick had several interests, but seemed to enjoy experimental work best of all. He had a great ambition to produce an airplane that could land and take off in a very small area. He experimented with the autogyro before Sikorsky came along with his helicopter.

Herrick understood the principle of a rotating propeller that would lift an object into the air. He was finally successful and invented a plane that would take off vertically, by use of a propeller on its top.

This gyroplane had wings that folded back like the wings of a bird. When the plane reached the desired height, the wings snapped forward into place and the plane then flew off horizontally. It was stored in a hanger that still stands at the rear of the High Ridge property.

Mrs. Wilfred Weaver's father, Albert Benninger, was superintendent for the Herricks. I am sure that Al played some part in the construction of the gyroplane as he was an expert mechanic and could fix just about anything.

The Herrick family had an ocean-going yacht in addition to several automobiles. As well as taking care of the buildings and the property, Al Benninger was kept busy keeping all the machines in good running condition.

One of the family autos was a gigantic Packard touring car. Somehow, the idea surfaced that this great car should have a Cadillac engine. Al was equal to the challenge and in no time he had removed the Packard engine, installed the Cadillac engine and had the classic 'hybrid' car back on the road. The actual reason for changing the engines was never clear to me.

Mrs. Herrick passed on just a few years ago and many items that the family had accumulated through the years were put on sale. Charley Dougherty bought a spinning wheel that must have come over on the Mayflower. It must have been the buy of the year.

While the sale was in progress, I noted the biggest propeller that I have ever seen, lying on the floor of the garage. No doubt this enormous thing could lift a house right off the ground, if you had a machine with the energy to turn it.

There was no price tag on it so I came to the conclusion that it was part of Mr. Herrick's gyroplane. Perhaps it was a spare propeller, as the plane itself had already been transported to a museum in Pennsylvania, where it is still on display at this time. [A Herrick propeller, perhaps this one, was given to the Ridgefield Historical Society and is today hanging on the wall over the entrance to the vault in the Town Clerk's Office in the Town Hall.]

Mrs. Herrick was very community-minded and took an active part in anything which she thought would benefit Ridgefield. She was a member and an officer in the Ridgefield Garden Club and took her duties in this organization quite seriously.

In 1936 she was selected to represent the Ridgefield Garden Club at the international convention of Garden Clubs. The event was in Paris that year and with a big send-off from her fellow club members, she set sail on the Normandy Saturday, June 20, of that year.

Like most of us, Mrs. Herrick had a few of her own little idiosyncrasies. One was her penchant for feeling that it was her solemn duty to keep the streets clear of debris.

On her daily walks she would carry a large bag and her attention would be attracted in particular to beer cans and bottles that thoughtless people had deposited along High Ridge and King Lane. She must have picked up tons of this offending type of litter in the many years that she engaged in this admirable activity.

Ridgefield was not the only place that benefited from Mrs. Herrick's dedication for keeping the streets attractive. We recall a story and a picture of this fine lady that appeared in one of the large New York daily newspapers about ten years ago. It showed Mrs. Herrick in her favorite pastime, picking up the litter from the street in front of her New York apartment.

Mrs. Herrick also had another habit that was a trifle different. That was the place she chose to keep her money, whether for convenience or security reasons. The matter was well known to local storekeepers, especially to the boys in Bissell's, such as "Squash," Freddy, or Johnny.

However, one day a new young clerk was starting his first day On the job and one of his first customers was Mrs. Herrick.

She made several purchases and the young clerk totaled them for her and handed her the tab. Without hesitation she deftly lifted her skirt and pulled a wad of bills from her stocking, as a young clerk with a deep crimson complexion slowly slid to the floor in back of the counter.

#191: HOW SPIKE TOOK A FLYING LEAP

There is a stand of stately pine trees at the rear of the former Herrick place on High Ridge Avenue. Mrs. G.P. Herrick once told me an interesting story as to how those trees came to be on her back lawn.

According to Mrs. Herrick, she learned through the Fairfield County Farm Bureau that the government would furnish pine trees to anyone who was willing to plant them. This was all a part of the reforestation program.

An application on which to order the trees was secured by Mrs. Herrick from the County Agent. She filled out the application, intending to order 12 pine trees. Actually she was ordering 12 bundles of tnees and they came 12 to the bundle. Therefore instead of ordering a dozen trees, her order was for a whole gross of trees.

It was several months later that the shipment of trees arrived at the local freight station, which was in the building new occupied by The Woodworks at 32 Bailey Avenue. There came a phone call from the station agent, George House, asking Mrs. Herrick to make arrangements to pick up the trees. At George's announcement that there were 144 trees rather than the 12 which Mrs. Herrick expected, she apparently voiced considerable surprise.

We described George House in Dispatch No. 47 as a very jovial, though rather mischievous individual. He was always very alert and could recognize an opportunity to play a prank with great ease.

Therefore, when Mrs. Herrick inquired as to the size of the trees, George assured her that they were a very good size and would make fine Christmas trees in no time at all. Then to add to the deviltry for which he was noted, George offered to lend a hand to the men who would be loading the trees on the truck.

This all began to sound to Mrs. Herrick like a great deal more than she had bargained for. Her thoughts turned to her many friends and she began to figure on which ones would be willing to take some of the trees off her hands. It looked like a very big project and she enlisted the help of Charley Elliott and his big truck.

That afternoon Charley came by the Herrick place with what appeared to be an empty truck. Mrs. Herrick went out to meet Charley, thinking that he was making a dry run to see where to unload the large shipment of trees.

Charley dismounted from his vehicle, then turned around and reached into the cab of the truck and withdrew a medium sized package. The package contained 12 little bundles, each containing 12 little pine trees. The trees were only a few inches in height and all 144 of them could have been easily carried by a young boy.

Mrs. Herrick was a good sport about the whole thing, as evidenced by her willingness to tell the story about herself and have a good laugh about it.

Today, some of those trees must be at least 40 feet in height and they surround a cute little swimming pool at the rear of the residence. Except for one small, four legged individual, the pool did not receive much use in the past few years.

I once had a little black dog and his name was "Spike." He was a real character and the name seemed to suit him well.

Spike used to accompany me each day when I went next door to the Van Ettens'. As time went on, Spike showed an increasing interest in the daily visits. It got to a point where he could hardly wait to be let out of the car when we arrived at the Van Ettens'.

As soon as he was released, Spike would make a beeline for the Herrick mansion next door. Knowing of Mrs. Herrick's fondness for animals, I assumed that Spike was being attracted by goodies that she was giving him. As it turned out, the goodies were a factor but there was still another.

One time, when Mrs. Herrick was visiting the Van Ettens, she asked me if I knew who owned the black dog that came to visit her each day. When I admitted ownership and informed her that his name was Spike, Mrs. Herrick laughed heartily. Then she told me of a regular routine that the dog went through each time he went over to see her.

First, Spike would climb the steps to the porch just off the kitchen. Then he would scratch at the kitchen door until she appeared with a cookie for him.

When he had finished his snack he would race across the lawn to the pool. Mrs. Herrick said that when Spike was within 10 feet of the pool he would make a tremendous leap that would make him airborne to the very center of the pool.

She said that Spike would luxuriate as he swam about the pool for four or five minutes. He would then climb out of the pool and after a few vigorous shakes that sent sprays of water in every direction, he would return to the kitchen door for another cookie. It was Mrs. Herrick's opinion that Spike considered this to be proper payment for the performance, which she apparently enjoyed.

I had to see Spike's routine for myself, so I watched one day from a discreet vantage point. He performed all the antics, just as Mrs. Herrick described them, but his leap into the pool

was performed with such abandon that you would think the dog had caused a tidal wave. He was a real actor and I really believe he thought that the pool had been constructed for him.

The Herricks took over the operation of the estate from Lois Herrick's father, A. Bolton Hall, in the mid-20's. Mr. Hall made substantial changes to the outward appearance of the mansion when he acquired the place a few years earlier, from the estate of Helen Minturn Post. The Herricks also made some changes until the house bore little resemblance to the original house.

The changes were not limited to the house itself. There were changes made to the contour of the lawns and in the location of the driveways. It was while this work was being done in 1925 that a cannon ball was unearthed. The cannon ball had been fired during the Battle of Ridgefield on Main Street, April 27, 1777.

Though buried in the ground for 148 years, the cannon ball was in good condition. In those days a cannon ball was solid and since it contained no explosive, it was used as a conversation piece.

Whether the projectile came from the throat of a British cannon or one that belonged to the Continental Army has not been determined. We would prefer to believe that this glaring example of poor marksmanship was displayed by the British. The patriots would have known at that time that there was nothing on High Ridge to direct a cannon at. It would be more than 100 years before the millionaires would provide something for an invader to shoot at.

#192: A GREAT MANSION AND A FUN MONKEY

Sometimes we write a column and when it is completed we feel that it is really not so very good. Then when it comes out it turns out to be one of the better ones. By the same token, we write one that has all the necessary ingredients to make the column one to be proud of and it turns out to be a dud.

A couple of weeks ago, we wrote Dispatch No. 190 and it seemed to touch all the bases, so we felt pretty good about it. However, in paragraph six there was a misspelled word. It was much more than just a misspelled word: It was the name of a nice lady.

We identified the present owners of the Dutton-Van Etten mansion at 63 High Ridge Avenue, as Alice McKnight and Jean Kirtley. Actually it should have read Alice McKnight and Jean Kirksey.

Having had my own name misspelled on occasion, we are aware of how it feels. Therefore, Jean, I will accept ten strokes with a lash of your choosing.

We have been writing about the Herrick estate at 77 High Ridge Avenue. The most interesting personage connected with this place is Lois Herrick (Mrs. Gerardus P. Herrick). Her determination to keep the area around her place and the roads leading to it, neat and clean, are legendary. She never left her home without a large bag in which all kinds of debris was deposited.

Mrs. Herrick was a prolific writer and The Press carried many Letters to the Editors, the contents of which ranged from political opinions to the large number of cans and bottles that she collected while on her daily walks.

Physical fitness must have been one of Lois Herrick's many attributes. To be sure, she was always trim and never overweight.

A distant cousin, L.P., who was very fond of her, told me how they went out to dinner one time and Lois took along a little plastic box. After eating sparingly, she placed the leftovers in the box. Perhaps it was a forerunner of today's doggy bag, although I am not sure she had a dog at the time.

Mrs. Herrick, like so many of her neighbors, lived to a ripe old age. The life spans of the Duttons and the Van Ettens, as well as Lois Herrick all exceeded four score and ten.

A contributing factor could have been the rarefied atmosphere of lofty High Ridge, but we kind of feel that of equal importance was the tender loving nursing care that was administered by some very dedicated ladies.

There was that period after World War II when there was genuine fear that the great mansions on High Ridge might fall into a state of disrepair. People were just not interested at the time in these large structures, even though they were available at bargain-basement prices.

Ridgefield is very fortunate that they finally were sold to families that were sincerely interested in maintaining these architectural and historical gems. They came along at the right time to preserve and restore them for future generations and they have now retained their place as the most desirable real estate.

When Bill and Tina Bradt acquired the Herrick estate, we knew that it was in good hands. They have exhibited very good taste in the restoration of this fine old mansion. Like the Albert Swansons farther down the street, the Bradts apparently knew what they were doing.

The next estate on the Ridge, before crossing Peaceable Street, is 87 High Ridge Avenue. It was built by the Holts, Charles Henry and Ellen Ives, just before World War I.

Charles was another noted publisher and his presence on the Ridge added yet another reason for applying the name "Publishers Row" to the southerly section of the famous street.

This very attractive red brick building, with its beautifully landscaped lawns, exotic shrubbery and graceful terraces is of excellent construction. My father worked on the place when it was being built and never tired of telling how nothing was spared in putting this great building together.

To the best of my knowledge, the Holts never affixed a name to their beautiful estate [Note: They called it Grovellen.]. However, after Mr. Holt passed on in the mid 20's, the place was acquired by Miss Amy Low Huntington, who promptly named the place "Aloha." The name was simply transferred from the place that she had previously leased from Dr. George G. Shelton, just across the street from his own mansion, just over the state line on West Lane.

We would think that the name was given because of the similarity to her own rather than because to any connection with our 50th state.

John Lane was Miss Huntington's chauffeur and he and his family lived in a garage apartment at what is now 19 Peaceable Street. For some reason the Lanes moved, after a few years, to a house in Bryon Park, but John continued as chauffeur.

After John retired Elmer Anderson became a kind of combination chauffeur and groundskeeper. This may have been an economy move fostered by the Great Depression, which was in full swing at the time.

At any rate when the Lanes moved from the garage apartment, Charles Larrabee, who had been superintendent for A. Barton Hepburn, moved in with his family. Mr. Hepburn had passed on and Mrs. Hepburn had sold Hepburn's farm on Whipstick Road.

The Larrabees became newspaper customers of mine and I got to know them quite well. Charles was a very nice man and he wore a straw hat most of the time. The hat had an enormous brim and when I asked why he merely said that he was allergic to the sun.

We always liked the name Larrabee as we found it to be not only euphonious but rather unusual as well. In fact this is the only family that we ever knew by that name and even today, there is none listed in our telephone directory.

The only other time we ever heard the name, it was applied to a jitney bus. Dave Rich bought a Larrabee in 1925 and used the jitney to provide transportation back and forth to Danbury.

The little jitney only held about 15 people but that was plenty big enough at that time. Mr. Scribner bought one a few years later but it was larger and he used it as a school bus. Scribner's bus and Mortimer Keeler's hard-rubber-tired Barker were the only school buses we had during that period.

The Larrabees had a very beautiful daughter named Hazel and I am sure that those who attended local schools in the late 20's and early 30's will fondly remember her.

The Larrabees also had a monkey, which was a great attraction to me. It was never quite clear why the family had settled on a monkey for a pet, but that little animal provided us with a lot of fun.

#193: THE FAMILIES OF ALOHA AND ITS GARAGE

We have been telling about the very beautiful estate that sits on the southwest corner of High Ridge Avenue and Peaceable Street. Built by Charles Holt during the teens of this century, this very attractive place is now the home of Francis and Helaine Zarro and their family.

We feel that it is nice to know that young people will get to enjoy life in a High Ridge mansion. Many years have passed since Sue and Scott Herrick, Hope, Hastings, and Sterling Foote used the Ridge as their playground. Even then they were only here during the summer months, in their great "summer cottages."

We have always felt that it was too bad that many of the older mansions were never really used as a place to bring up children. Of course, there are those who would point to the unmarked woodwork in structures such as the Dutton-Van Etten mansion and say that the beautiful woodwork would never have remained unscathed if children had been reared there.

We really do not think that these fine families refrained from having children in order to preserve all that extraordinary woodwork. More than likely they were not financially able to build those great houses until late in life, at which time their children were fully grown.

One thing is sure about the grand "Aloha," the Holts' children were all grown when this great estate was built on High Ridge. The next owner, Miss Amy Low Huntington, certainly had no children and we never saw any around the next owners, Herbert and Cora Parm, or the ones who brought it from the Parms, George R. and Ellen Jane Halpern.

So we say three cheers for the Zarros, who with their children, Mariam and Mathew, have changed this all around and the building has gone from a mansion to a house and then to a home, which is really what the great place was intended to be.

There have been happy occasions associated with Aloha and there have also been a couple of tragedies. One was the death of Miss Huntington's superintendent back in the very early 30's. The other was the death of a later owner a half century later.

Both deaths were due to gunshot wounds and were said to have been self-inflicted. James Sweeney had been superintendent for several years and was known as a good-natured, happy-go-lucky kind of man. However, Jim had gone through a personality change that many of his friends felt had been brought on by the Great Depression. It was at a time in our history when these things happened with considerable frequency.

Miss Huntington had been a semi-invalid for many years. When she passed on in 1950, she had no immediate survivors, but several nieces and nephews. She was very wealthy and left a large estate. At the time it was listed as more than \$200,000. It seemed they had a habit of doing this and then they listed bequests of well over a million.

One notable gift was an electric organ, which Miss Huntington left to the Methodist Church, in memory of her cousin Ethelbest Ide Low. There was also an outright gift of \$20,000 to the church as well as a trust fund of \$400,000 for the church.

Her housekeeper, Margaret Hutchinson, received \$15,000 and John Voss, her superintendent, was left \$10,000. There were many other smaller bequests.

Herbert Parm, the next owner, will be remembered as the one who made some drastic changes to the appearance of Aloha. Whether the changes added or detracted from the beauty of Aloha is debatable. One thing is sure, with today's regulations, it is extremely doubtful that the changes would have ever taken place.

The house at 19 Peaceable Street, currently the home of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Scott, was once a part of Aloha. It served as a garage and it had a nice apartment. The garage doors faced

Peaceable Street and there was a wide concrete ramp that carried the vehicles from the street to the garage.

After the Parms took over Aloha, Coleman Murray and his family lived in this comfortable apartment. Coleman is fondly remembered by all who knew him. He was a gentle giant of a man and served the Parms as chauffeur, gardener, handyman or whatever.

He was also a clergyman and had a parish of Blacks in White Plains.

When we call Coleman a giant of a man, we feel that it describes both his character and his physical appearance, as he was more than six and one half feet tall.

Despite a problem that he had with his knees, Coleman was able to get in and out of his little foreign car without difficulty. He would open the car door and then back up to it, where he appeared to fold himself several times, then with a few deft maneuvers, he made it appear as though the car was devouring him as he landed in the driver's seat.

Oh yes, Coleman had another car: A large black Cadillac, the use of which was restricted to when the whole family traveled together, such as on Sunday morning, when the family traveled to church services in White Plains.

The Murray family was large and its makeup was liberally sprinkled with foster children. Those kids were very lucky to have parents like Coleman and Mrs. Murray, who ran a tight ship. but were generous with their loving care. That family earned the respect of all who knew them.

For some reason, Herbert Parm decided that he wanted the garage to be closer to the mansion. Perhaps it was to cut down on the size of the estate. At any rate he sold off the garage and the lot on which it sat and then built the existing garage, which sits just to the east of the mansion.

The new building is of red brick like the main house and we are sure that the apartment within is very comfortable. However, we thought it was better the way it was and apparently the Murrays felt likewise, for they refused to move to their new quarters. Though Coleman continued his association with the Parms, he and his family moved to the corner of Route 7 and Great Pond Road, where the golf driving range is now.

So the building that had served for so many years as a garage as well as an apartment, became strictly a residence. Of course, it then became necessary to add a garage, in order to complete the little compound. I think it was Mary Luke who turned the operation at 19 Peaceable into the very attractive place that it is today.

#194: TALES OF SPORT AND LARRABEE'S MONKEY

In order to complete our story about the building at 19 Peaceable St., we must tell about Charley Larrabee's monkey. In order to tell about the monkey, we must tell about another dog that I had, so we will have to start back even before the little ape landed in Ridgefield.

My cousin Eddie Sullivan was a very kind man and when I was five years of age, he gave me a Marine Band Hohner harmonica for Christmas. It was one of the very nicest presents that I

ever received and much to everyone's surprise, including my own. I quickly learned to play the little instrument.

The harmonica was of such a size as to make it fit easily into my pocket and so, along with my little dog Sport, it became my constant companion. Yes, his name was Sport and he was pure white, as opposed to Spike. who was black and came along many years later.

Sport was mostly bull terrier and though he probably did not weigh more than 20 pounds, he was all solid muscle. He was exceptionally good natured, but when he was annoyed at another dog, he was a most ferocious fighter.

Frances Mahoney. who lived on Bryon Avenue and worked in Brundage and Benedict's store (where Fitzgerald & Hastings is now), gave Sport to me one day while I was delivering my newspapers. I never could figure out why anyone would part with such a wonderful dog. The only thing that may have caused this may have been Sport's capacity for fighting. It could have caused trouble.

At any rate, Sport and I hit it off immediately and though I have had many fine dogs, none could ever replace him in my affections. He loved to go with me on my paper route and in no time at all, he had learned to very carefully take the newspaper in his teeth and deposit it on the doorstep of a customer.

Watching Sport as he trotted along the street, you got the impression that he knew everyone in town, and just about everyone knew him. He used to walk into town each morning with my father and wait for the car that came to take him to work.

The men used to assemble in front of Pop Crouchley's plumbing store, where Liberta's Liquor Store is now. After Pop had gone off to work, Sport would retrace his steps to what is now 612 Main Street and then he would walk to school with me.

He was always very good about returning home after school had started. That is except for one day, when I was in seventh grade in Ridgefield's first junior high school — in the addition on the south end of the building that now houses Boehringer Ingelheim.

For some reason, perhaps because of curiosity in the new classrooms, at any rate, on this particular day Sport decided to stay around the door until someone came along and opened it. He then scooted into the building and after locating me in Miss Yates' classroom, he began to frantically scratch at the door. Miss Yates opened the door and much to the delight of my classmates, Sport made a grand entrance like a miniature cyclone into the classroom.

It was the one and only time that Sport ever committed such an indiscretion and a very understanding teacher allowed me to remove him from the school building. Not only that but Gertrude Witlock (Mrs. Fred Smith), a classmate was allowed to record the event for posterity, with her little camera. More than 55 years later, Gertrude was kind enough to give me that picture.

At various places along my paper route, it was customary for some of my customers to request that I play them a tune on the harmonica. This always brought out the very best in Sport. At the first note, he would sit down, throw back his head and emit the most mournful howl you ever heard.

I was never sure whether the people were interested in my ability to play the mouth organ or whether they enjoyed hearing Sport “sing” along with me. One thing was sure, the little dog was well aware of his acting ability and never failed to put on a good show for his admiring audience. He was such a ham that when he realized he could make people laugh, he really got in the spirit of the thing.

A few weeks ago, The Press carried a picture of a 1926 minstrel show. The night that the show opened Sport caused a mild sensation when he wandered in backstage at the old town hall, just as I began to play a harmonica solo. From in back of all those curtains came the unmistakable sound of Sport’s wailing and except for quick action by Carl Gustafson, he would have completed his act on center stage.

Sport was absolutely fearless, as far as other dogs were concerned. However, when it came to monkeys, it was a different matter. He would carry the paper to the doorstep of each customer. but when we got to 19 Peaceable Street, Sport would sit by the side of the road until I made the delivery. He just wanted no part of Mr. Larrabee’s monkey.

One day Mr. Larrabee, with the monkey in his arms, was standing in the garage with the door open. I climbed the concrete ramp to the door of the garage, handed the paper to Mr. Larrabee, patted the monkey on his head, and started back to where Sport patiently waited.

As I rejoined the little dog, I started to play the harmonica and as usual Sport commenced his outlandish singing. We were just not prepared for what happened next.

The monkey bolted out the garage door and clambered up a trellis that was attached to the east side of the building. With a quick leap, he went from the trellis to a nearby tree, all the time screeching very aloud monkey language.

No amount of urging would convince the little animal to descend from his lofty perch. He was not even tempted by a bunch of bananas offered by his master.

I am not sure that the little ape had a proper name, other than monkey or just plain monk. One thing for sure, on that day Mr. Larrabee coined a few names that will not be reprinted here.

Our theory that the music from the harmonica had caused the flight of the monkey, was disproved a few days later, when Mr. Larrabee and the monkey appeared at Harry Thomas’ blacksmith shop.

For some reason or other, Sport was not with me on this occasion and Mr. Lsrrabee was in the process of telling the story of the effect that we had on the monkey. There were five or six teamsters listening intently to the story when Harry Thomas expressed his opinion that it was Sport’s singing that spooked the monkey. All seemed to agree that I give it another try.

At the first notes from the harmonica, the little ape sauntered over and started to climb up my pant leg. When he reached my shoulder, he removed my little round hat and after climbing down he went to each of the men and held out the hat in an obvious attempt to take up a collection.

The men roared with laughter at the capers of the street-wise little urchin. Unfortunately, the Larrabees moved away before the monkey and I were able to forge a business alliance.

#195: SOME NAMES OF OLD MANSIONS

It would seem appropriate that as we conclude our trip along Publishers' Row, or Millionaires' Row, as some called it, we reveal the names that the owners had affixed to their great estates. This little area could be (take your pick) either the upper or the lower part of High Ridge Avenue.

The choice is offered by the fact that the southerly section of a street is generally portrayed as the lower. Just as the lower section of Main Street is considered by most people to be south Main.

Somehow, that theory does not work so well when considering High Ridge as the southern end of this famous street is considerably higher in elevation than the northern end. Those who would label the southern ends of these streets as the lower sections would be aided and abetted by the fact that the lower house numbers were assigned to the homes on the southern end of the streets.

We have always found intriguing the way people use the words upper and lower or up or down in describing their travel from one place to another. In my family when someone went to Danbury, it was always up to Danbury. Yet, we know many people who always said that they went down to Danbury. It seemed natural to me that since Ridgefield is actually located south of Danbury that, to get to that city, we had to go up. I suppose that those who used the adverb "down to Danbury" did so because of the fact that Ridgefield's elevation above sea level is much greater than that of Danbury.

One thing is sure, if you are going by water from here to New Orleans, it's like the grand old song says, "Down the Mississippi, Down to New Orleans." I'm not sure how we got off on this track, but I guess it just proves that the flu bug can cause a person to think kind of flaky.

I guess what I started out to say was that we had just about completed our trip from the southern end of High Ridge Avenue to where it intersects with King Lane and Peaceable Street.

One of the interesting traits of the very wealthy families was their habit of selecting a name that they felt best befitted' their own particular estate. The name could be descriptive as to the geographical location of the mansion, its color or physical characteristics or even the direction it faced.

It could have a gentle touch of humor, such as Frederic E. Lewis' "Upagansit" or it could have little or no meaning to the general public, such as "Felsenberg," which may have had

personal meaning for William Harrison Bradley when he named his great estate on West Mountain. [Editor's note: Felsenberg is German for "rock hill," a most appropriate name for many locales in Ridgefield.]

Another name which may have had an important meaning that was known only to George H. Newton was "Naranauto" which he applied to his historic mansion at 563 Main Street. Mrs. Newton drove a specially designed Franklin automobile but we cannot see any connection.

Across the street from George Newton's, George M. Olcott built the very beautiful estate that became one of Ridgefield's real showplaces. When the work was finished and he named it "Casagmo," there was no question but that it stood for: home of George M. Olcott.

The manner in which this great mansion and its surrounding historical acres fell victim to human greed in the name of progress is another story. Enough to say, in passing, that the person who would eventually demolish the mansion and "develop" what needed no developing, stopped by the post office to assure me that I would be very proud of what he would do to Casagmo. He was informed in no uncertain terms that it was our considered opinion that there was nothing he could do to improve that great place.

Back to Millionaires Row where most of the families in that section of High Ridge managed to come through with suitable names for their beautiful homes. It should be understood that when these names were applied in the early part of the century, they were registered with the post office and became a very definite part of the address. Of course, the town was much smaller then but it did seem nice that a letter addressed to John Doe and just Casagmo, Ridgefield, Conn., would reach its destination without being impeded in any way.

One of the few homes on High Ridge that did not have a moniker, as far as we know, was home of the Hyde sisters, Elizabeth and Mabel, and it would have been so easy to find a suitable name for that place with all the stonework and the old English courtyard. It was one of the very last of the mansions to be built and perhaps that had something to do with their reticence to name the very attractive estate that is now the home of the Mortimer V. Schwartz family.

There is no question about a fitting name for the next house for it is known for many miles around as the Peter Parley House. The Preston Bassetts now give this famous place their tender, loving care. Of course, it was in this grand old house that Samuel Goodrich grew up and we have been so fortunate to have his weekly columns in The Press. They are a delight to read.

Next we come to the rather modern home of the James Ettingers and we are not sure that they have a name for their place. However, the original and very ornate structure that stood on this site was owned by MacDougall Hawkes at one time and he called it "Caudatowa." This, of course, was the name that the Indians had given Ridgefield because of its lofty elevation. Therefore, it would be entirely suitable for this very imposing location.

The name "Overlook" was given the next place by its builder, William A. Jenner, and we are sure that the present owners, the Albert Swansons, agree on it.

It may come as a surprise to some that the name of the next elegant mansion was “Breezy Nook.” Yes, that was the name selected by the very conservative Alonzo Barton Hepburn for what we all know now to be “Altnacraig.” It carried the name Breezy Nook for several years, but apparently proved to be unsuitable for the home of the president of the Chase National Bank.

Right next door was Edward Payson Dutton, a man of simple tastes as well as one of a direct approach. He called his place “On-the-Ridge.” Years later Mrs. Van Etten called the place “Four Chimneys,” but after one set of printed stationery, allowed it to revert to the Dutton or Van Etten place.

Mrs. Gerard Herrick called her place “Gray Shingles” but it was a name that never seemed to catch on and most everyone referred to it as the “Herrick Place.”

Of course, Miss Huntington named the beautiful red brick house on the corner “Aloha.” The only other house at the time we are covering is also the only one at that time on the eastern side of High Ridge. It was called “Bent Garth” by Mrs. Gerald Gray, perhaps because the large garden on the place was built on an angle.

#196: THE PEOPLE OF PEACEABLE ACRES

Just west of 19 Peaceable Street in the teens and early 20’s, there was a great open field. There must have been four or five acres in that well-kept field and it pastured some of the very finest horses to be found anywhere. These proud animals belonged to E.P. Dutton and he settled for nothing but the very best.

Mr. Dutton had coach horses and riding horses, but his favorites were four mahogany bay Morgans. They were the true American breed that got its start in nearby Vermont. These horses were fine to ride, but it was as driving horses that they became really famous. They were just a natural when drawing a buckboard or a buggy and that was Mr. Dutton’s favorite sport.

At the western side of the field there was, still is, a lane bordered by stone walls, as described in Dispatch #167. It was the very dignified entrance to Dutton’s barns and now serves as the driveway to the homes at 39 and 45 Peaceable Street.

Mr. Dutton was a true lover of horses and it was not unusual to see him perched on the stone wall along the lane as he enjoyed watching the spirited animals cavorting around the pasture.

To the west just beyond the lane was a much smaller field that also served as a pasture. In just a few years this smaller field would become the site of a home for Henry Steele Roberts and his beautiful bride, Mary Seldon Roberts. Later still, it would be the home of Edson K. Green and his bride, the former Carolyn Roberts. I believe it is now 45 Peaceable Street.

At the turn of the century, the noted international banker, Alonzo Barton Hepburn, was preparing to retire from his post as president of the Chase National Bank. Mr. Hepburn had

completed his very imposing mansion, Altnacraig, on High Ridge and was looking forward to enjoying the peace and quiet that the great place had to offer.

In planning for his retirement, Hepburn had brought into the management circles of the bank a young man named Albert H. Wiggin. There was some grumbling among some members of the board that Wiggin was too young to have a seat on the board.

Mr. Hepburn was aware of the resentment concerning the newcomer, but he did not let that interfere with his plan to groom the young man that he had selected to succeed him.

A. Barton Hepburn proved to be a man of great persuasion. When the day came and he stepped down as president of the Chase, his favorite, Albert H. Wiggin was installed as president of that great banking institution. Wiggin must have thought it prudent to stay near his predecessor, for in April of 1903, he purchased the property of William Loomis at what is now 51 Peaceable Street.

The Loomis property was not nearly large enough to satisfy the very ambitious plans that Mr. Wiggin had for his budding country estate. Soon he enlisted the help of his benefactor, Barton Hepburn. Edward P. Dutton was a good friend and neighbor and Hepburn persuaded him to part with several more choice acres that would round out the Wiggin show place.

There were an awful lot of buildings involved in the operation of the Wiggin estate. Living quarters for the help, garages for the autos and barns for the horses seemed to spring up as if by magic. These buildings and the elegant courtyard and driveways all contributed to a very picturesque setting.

The mansion, which is now the home of Ray and Doris Bessette [the house sold in July 2022 to Peaceable Acres LLC for \$920,000], does not have the spectacular view offered by some of the homes on High Ridge, but it is an ideal place to watch a sunset and at the time it was built, it bordered the very pretty old Ridgefield Country Club. Just the fact that the golf course was next door made it a very desirable location.

So the development of the Wiggin estate was in high gear and it was the scene of a great deal of bustling activity...

The Wiggin family retained ownership of their great estate until June of 1921. At that time along came the noted surgeon Dr. Dudley D. Roberts, his wife Carrie S., and their children, Dudley D. Jr., Henry Steele and Carolyn Roberts. This was a very handsome family and it fit nicely into a neighborhood that included the equally handsome Doubleday and Chisolm families.

A very descriptive name "Peaceable Acres" had been chosen by the Wiggin family for their beautiful new home. The name must have had a pleasing sound for Dr. Roberts and his family and they quickly adopted it when they moved into their new home.

The ladies of Ridgefield, like the town itself, have always been noted for their beauty. This fact becomes increasingly clear when a person returns to town after having traveled extensively. Mary Seldon did nothing to sully this reputation when she married Henry Steele

Roberts. When you saw this young couple, you just knew that you were seeing something special.

Steele, as his friends called him, decided that he and Mary should have their own mansion and in the mid 30's, they started tramping through the surrounding wooded areas, looking for a suitable site. They did not have to travel very far from the old family compound.

The young couple just traveled down Peaceable Street, past the old Ridgefield Country Club, where C. Chandler Ross had just transformed that acreage into his residence. They crossed Golf Lane and there they found what they had been looking for.

So Steele and Mary purchased some 40 acres from Frank Pavey. The land stretched back to the Scripps property on Old South Salem Road and to Peaceable Hill Road.

The story should have a very happy ending, but it did not work out that way [as we will see in the next Dispatch].

#197: A DREAM REDUCED TO ASHES

It just seemed as though Steele and Mary Roberts and their family had about everything possible going for them. They were handsome as well as young. They were off financially and the beautiful new home that they had just built was in every sense a real dream house.

Just beyond where Marshall Road is now and high above lower Peaceable Street, the new mansion had a commanding view of the entire area. There were no corners cut in putting this great house together. It had everything, including a woodworking shop, where Steele could work at his favorite hobby.

There was plenty of privacy and the 40 odd acres stretched from Peaceable Street to the Robert P. Scripps estate and from Golf Lane to the corner of Peaceable Hill Road.

Alas, the family had hardly gotten used to their new home when a great misfortune occurred.

It was 1938 and scars of the Great Depression were still quite visible. War clouds were gathering in Europe with increasing intensity, and people needed something to lift their spirits. It seemed that every night, radio commentators got some kind of kick out of telling tales of woe.

It could have been a move to counteract the gloom that hung over the land. Perhaps it was just an effort to provide a temporary respite from the dreary part of a bitter, but fading winter. Whatever the reason, on the morning of Tuesday, March 1, 1938, the young Steele Roberts family, along with the household help, took off for a visit to New York City.

It was just afternoon when Henry Gay, who was the caretaker for Steele's father at Peaceable Acres, drove over to look after the dogs at Steele Roberts' new home. Henry could smell smoke before he reached the house. When he opened the door, he was met with a sheet of flame that sent him flying to the nearest telephone.

As usual, our volunteer fire department, under Chief Horace Walker; was on the scene in a matter of minutes. However, the terrible fire had made such headway that the firemen never had a chance.

March, on its very first day, had come in like a lion and a stiff wind fanned the blaze into a gigantic inferno. The gallant firemen made one dramatic foray into the burning building and succeeded in removing a few pieces of kitchen furniture, but that was it. Everything else was totally consumed, including many personal belongings that could never be replaced and the woodworking shop, with all its valuable machinery.

Crowds of people from far and near gathered to watch the spectacular blaze that had spread even into the wooded areas nearby.

Among those who had responded to the wail of the fire siren was former Fire Chief Joseph Bacchiochi. Joe was an amateur photographer and made it a point to always carry his camera with him.

Just at the moment when the entire burning building collapsed, with a tremendous crash, Joe snapped a most dramatic picture. The picture was so action-packed and so vivid in detail that it was featured in the very next issue of Life Magazine.

So, the very beautiful 21-room mansion, just four months old, was reduced to a pile of ashes.

There was much speculation as to the cause of the disastrous fire, but investigations carried on by the fire department, the state and the insurance company failed to provide a definite clue as to what had started the conflagration.

A phone call to New York City brought the very sad Roberts family back to Ridgefield. Steele and Mary Roberts were the picture of dejection as they viewed the scene of the disaster.

Their great loss had its depressing effect and they just could not bring themselves to consider rebuilding the mansion. The place was allowed to lay as it was and for many years the only reminder of the once splendid estate, was its very forlorn looking foundation.

The Steele Roberts family once again called Peaceable Acres their home. The mansion was large enough to house them and many others as well. In just a couple of years, Dr. Dudley D. Roberts passed on and the family began to disappear from this area.

With the entrance of this country into World War II, the lifestyle of many people went through some dramatic changes. This was especially true of those who lived on the large estates.

Luxurious living habits had to be curtailed and with the manpower shortage, many of the activities that had been considered routine just came to a standstill. Soon the stables that housed those beautiful horses became empty as did the dog kennels.

In the early 40's, the beautiful Peaceable Acres was sold to Paul and Sadye Meisner. The Meisners were experienced in the operation of hotels and felt that the large mansion offered great

possibility for this type of enterprise. They were quite successful and provided employment for a number of Ridgefield people in what they had transformed into an exclusive hotel.

The Meisners kept their hotel going for some 16 years and it was during this time, as related in Dispatch 166, that a fire in the basement of the mansion caused an explosion that blew several firemen right out of the basement. Fortunately none of the men were seriously injured.

Once again, Peaceable Acres was placed on the market and in 1960, it was sold to J. Louis and Assunta Read. The Reads had lived for some time on Country Club Road and so were familiar with this area. They also had experience in the operation of a hostelry and Louis had been a purchasing agent.

For some reason the hotel business did not pan out so well for the Reads and soon the great house was being leased or rented to various families. Then bits of the estate were sold off with the many buildings that were a part of Peaceable Acres.

One family that lived in the mansion for a short time during this period was the Raymond Sawyers. Ray will be best remembered by his Ridgefield friends for the part he played with the Columbia expedition, in locating the "Thresher," the submarine that sank off the coast of New England. Ray and Margaret hosted some great parties at 51 Peaceable Street.

In the late 60's the Sawyer family moved to Denver and the Reads sold Peaceable Acres to the present owners, Ray and Doris Bessette.

#198: WARD ACRES ARISES FROM GOLF CLUB

It was not our intention to bypass Ward Acres Farm. It just so happened that to tell the story about the Roberts family, it was necessary to keep them together by hopping over what is, at this time, Ridgefield's greatest showplace.

There is little today to remind anyone that Ward Acres was once Ridgefield's only golf course. It served its purpose well for some 40 years and provided a place for the wealthy of our town. to get their much needed exercise. In the days when the Ridgefield Country Club flourished, only the well-to-do played the game of golf.

The golf course was ideally located for those on Peaceable Street, West Lane, Golf Lane and "Millionaires Row." The estates where these people lived just about surrounded the golf course.

Old timers will remember Bill Rimple as the pro at Ridgefield Country Club. Of course there were no electric golf carts in those days and a caddy was an absolute necessity as these were not the kind of people who carried their own clubs.

Just a few of those who carried the golf bags of Ridgefield's famous summer people were Tom Kilcoyne, Al Girolmetti, Gene Casagrande, Dwino Pierandri, and the Romeo boys. I think Mike Romeo was the caddy master later on at the new [Silver Spring] golf course.

The old Ridgefield Country Club extended west and south from Dr. Roberts' Peaceable Acres and crossed Golf Lane almost to where Mead Ridge is now. Despite its size, the course

had only nine holes and when the sons and daughters of the original builders of the course came along, they wanted something bigger. So in the late 20's they started looking for a place with acreage enough to support an 18-hole course.

They found what they were looking for on the west side of Silver Spring Road, and by 1930 they were ready to start construction of the present Silver Spring Country Club and the old Ridgefield Country Club was abandoned.

In the mid 30s, the noted artist C. Chandler Ross visited Ridgefield and like everyone else, he fell in love with the town and wanted to make his home here. Mr. Ross thought that owning a golf course was a rather novel idea and moved quickly to purchase the Peaceable Street property.

Francis Martin, always on top of things, was aware that the old clubhouse would not fit into Mr. Ross's plans so he purchased the building and had it dismantled. Marty then had the former clubhouse reconstructed as a home for his goats on Grove Street near Danbury Road.

The little goats were very appreciative of the sumptuous home that Marty had provided them with. They returned the favor by cleaning up the entire surrounding acreage, thereby increasing its value to a great degree. The goats ate everything but the stones and then, as an added bonus, they gave milk, which you could buy if you were lucky enough to get on Marty's list of customers.

The goat barn became a home for the Ridgefield Silversmiths and served in that capacity for several years. Then it became the laboratory and office for The New England Medical Research, under the direction of Dr. John Heller. Of course, everyone knows that the old building was completely gutted in a disastrous fire last year. The debris has been cleared from the property and new owners are in the process of erecting a colossal office building on the site [90 Grove Street].

Chandler Ross wasted no time in preparing the construction of his beautiful new mansion and he hired the very best tradesmen to put it together. There were a great many men employed in the project and I used to stop each day with milk for them. In delivering the milk, it was necessary to walk through the building, room for room, as it was taking shape.

One of the things that intrigued me was a group of Scandinavian carpenters that laid the floors in the mansion. They probably were very good at any kind of carpenter work, but their specialty was laying those narrow oaken boards that made such a superb floor.

These men were so mechanical in doing their job that there was no lost motion whatsoever. They laid a pile of loose boards in front of them and then drew the boards to them, with the claw of their hammers. The tongue and grooves were fitted neatly together and with only a couple of blows with their hammers. The special nails were driven home.

They did this with such precision, such accuracy and such speed that you could get the impression that the floor was actually flowing into place.

There was also a garage and a superintendent's cottage that were built at the same time. Henry Jankowski was Rose's superintendent and he and his family moved into their quarters before the Ross family arrived.

The golf course had been perfectly landscaped for its purpose but considerable alteration was needed to make it suitable for use as a private estate. Some of the tees were left pretty much as they were but the greens had a special kind of grass that did not blend with lawn grass and the bunkers and sand traps had to be filled.

Another task for Henry Jankowski was placing the many fine shrubs that grace the landscape on such an estate. Henry was a man who took his responsibilities very seriously and when he began to find the leaves on some of his rhododendrons turning yellow, he became very concerned. The matter was thoroughly investigated and it was determined that the blight was not caused by the fertilizer that was used. The expert services of Fairfield County Farm Bureau agent LeRoy Chapman were employed. Chappie, as he was called, quickly diagnosed the problem as having been caused by roving animals, probably large dogs.

Henry told me of the trouble he was having and how he had narrowed the cause down to a huge great dane and an equally large St. Bernard that belonged to next door neighbor Dr. Dudley D. Roberts. Every morning Henry would see, at just a few minutes after 8 o'clock, the two dogs as they slowly trotted across what had been the third fairway and make their first stop at the very expensive shrubbery.

#199: THE DOGS WHO WENT SHOPPING AND LEG-LIFTING

Dr. Roberts' two great dogs probably should be listed with the many characters that Ridgefield had such a propensity for bringing forward. The dogs had no way of knowing that most people recognized them immediately, but because they were so large, once seen they were not easily forgotten.

That, coupled with the fact that they were never confined except at night, which allowed them to roam at will, caused them to be readily recognized as they trotted along side by side on Main Street.

Fortunately, both the Great Dane and the St. Bernard had excellent dispositions and any trouble they caused was not intentional. Actually the dogs were so polite that as they ambled along the sidewalk and someone approached, they would turn out to allow the pedestrian to pass. It was good that they did as their size was such that they took up the whole sidewalk.

The big dogs were well disciplined and it was apparent that someone had spent a considerable amount of time in training them.

Walter Stewart had taken over the store that had been operated by Samuel D. Keeler for many years. This old store, next to [today's] Ridgefield Hardware, was later operated by Sam Perry and later still by the Gristede chain and now houses the Ridgefield Auto Parts Store [Deborah Ann's sweets in 2022] on the south end. The store on the north end is now vacant.

At the time we are referring to, it was all one store with groceries on one side and a butcher market on the other. If you could afford it, this was the store to trade in as it carried the very finest products.

The customers were mostly wealthy, like the Roberts family. Sam Keeler may have been a little vain, for when he owned the building he had his initials, SDK, emblazoned in brass, in the sidewalk in front of his store. The letters must have been close to three feet in height and two feet in width. As a kid we were greatly impressed by the large shiny letters that have now been covered with several layers of asphalt.

At any rate, believe it or not, Dr. Roberts' large dogs were trusted with carrying parcels home to Peaceable Street from the store. They would perform this little chore without tearing the paper or damaging the parcel in any way. We often wondered if any of the parcels they carried contained meat.

This question was answered one day when the dogs appeared at the store and no one came out to offer the parcel to bring home. After waiting a few minutes, the two dogs took matters into their own hands, or perhaps jaws would be more appropriate.

One of Walter Stewart's delivery vehicles was in the process of being loaded. The rear doors of the truck were open and several parcels were in full view. The dogs each selected a parcel. One contained several chops and the other a large steak.

On the side of one, the name E.L. Ballard was printed and on the other, the name S.L. Pierrepont. The dogs had not yet learned to read and there was much embarrassment when the dogs dutifully delivered the parcels to the cook at Dr. Roberts' mansion.

When it was established that the two dogs were responsible for the yellow leaves that were dropping from Chandler Ross's rhododendrons, the situation quickly became serious. Henry Jankowski, the superintendent for Mr. Ross, told me he had tried every method to repulse the neighboring dogs. He was stymied to some degree by Mr. Ross's reluctance to the use of a weapon and even felt that as a new neighbor, he should not complain to the owner of the dogs.

We informed Henry of a new product that had just come on the market called an electric fence. He wanted to know all about it and how it worked as he had to contend with both his own boss and his neighbor.

It was explained to Henry that the rather simple gadget consisted of a strand of wire, attached by insulators to posts set at desired intervals and at a desired height. A six-volt hotshot battery supplied the current that passed through a transformer that turned the current on and off, creating a kind of pulsation rather than a steady flow of electricity. This kind of fence would supply protection while its single strand of wire would not be unsightly, or even attract attention.

The current would flow for a second and then be off for a second. If a person were to touch the wire while the current was flowing through it and the person was wearing rubber-soled

footwear, the shock would be very light. However, if that person happened to be barefoot, the jolt could curl his hair.

The purpose of the electric fence was to control the movements of horses, cattle and hogs. It worked well except that horses with their iron-shod hooves got such a jolt that it caused them to jump into the fence rather than away from it.

Hogs on the other hand would touch the wire only once and after the initial experience always stayed a couple of feet from it.

Henry thought about the fence for a few days but when the leaves continued to turn yellow and fall, he decided it was time for action. He explained the proposition to Mr. Ross, who was not quite sure that he wanted to get involved in something that could cause trouble in the neighborhood. He finally gave in when Henry explained that the trouble was already there and this was an opportunity to get rid of the trouble.

The superintendent's cottage had a garage attached and as I made a delivery one morning about eight o'clock, Henry came out and asked me to come into the garage. He explained that he had purchased an electric fence and had it all set up.

The window of the garage offered a fine view of the eastern side of the property and the Roberts estate. Henry asked me to wait as the dogs made their trip across the open field at the same time each morning and they would be on their way at any moment.

Sure enough, it seemed only a minute or two and from the far side of the old fairway, the two huge dogs began their early morning trek toward the shrubbery, some 100 yards distant. The Great Dane led the way as the two enormous dogs lumbered along toward their daily destination. They seemed to be very slow, but that was probably because of our anticipation of what would happen when they reached the electric fence.

The tableau unfolded as though it had been rehearsed as Henry and I watched from the shelter of the garage. Each dog selected his favorite shrub and as if on signal each raised his right rear leg. Apparently both dogs scored a direct hit with the wire and they left the premises at a much greater speed than they arrived even, though much of the distance was covered on three legs. Henry was a very happy man and told me later that the dogs never returned again.

#200: THE MASTER OF WARD ACRES

You may recall that in Dispatch 196, I told about a fine book that I once had. It was written by Albert H. Wiggin's daughter and that dutiful girl had used the book as a stirring defense of her father. A number of years ago, the book was loaned out to someone and we have not seen it since. The book, entitled *New England Son*, was published by Dodd Mead & Company of New York and the author was Marjorie Wiggin Prescott. It told some very interesting stories about her childhood in Ridgefield during the very first years of this century.

At any rate, Marie and I recently returned from a trip to find that a book had been left at our home in our absence. The book is not the one we loaned out, but an exact duplicate.

Unfortunately the person who left the book did not leave his name, so we had no way of thanking him. However, a week later we received a phone call that revealed the very thoughtful person to be George Davis.

We have known George for many years and are deeply grateful for his kindness. George found the very interesting book at a local tag sale and we assure him it will be returned after we have renewed our acquaintance with some of its anecdotes. One cannot read this warm portrayal of a father by his admiring daughter without gaining a large amount of respect for one of the most famous bankers that this nation ever produced

...

We have been telling of the difficulties encountered in protecting the shrubbery at the C. Chandler Ross estate on Peaceable Street. Rhododendrons and other valuable shrubs were suffering from the daily visits of Dr. Dudley Roberts' Great Dane and St. Bernard. Mr. Ross was quite pleased with the resurgence of his shrubs, but I do not think he was ever made aware of just how the two huge dogs were persuaded to stay away.

It was Chandler Ross who had purchased the old Ridgefield Golf Course in the mid 30's and after building the mansion, named the place "Shallow Brook Farm."

Chandler and his wife, Mayte, for some reason unknown to me, left their fine estate after about 10 years and it then became the home of Lyle B. Torrey and his family.

It is interesting to note that the Torreys retained the name Shallow Brook for their estate. The shallow brook was one that flowed across the property and made a fine hazard when the place had been used as a golf course. However, it would prove to be not so shallow and a real problem in later years.

Actually the brook could be dry during certain periods but a raging torrent during others. This was especially true after a heavy rain and a flow of water which originated on High Ridge in the vicinity of Altnacraig came rushing down High Ridge and then down Peaceable Street to a culvert that directed the water onto the former golf course.

Lyle Torrey was a big friendly man, with a voice to match his size. He shied away from direct involvement in the political arena and would not run for public office. However, he did accept appointment to Ridgefield's Board of Finance, on which he served with distinction for several years. Lyle had a reputation as a tough but fair financier and when budget time rolled around, the heads of various town departments had better be prepared to defend their budget requests. Lyle always used a pencil that was sharp.

The Torrey family moved on in the latter part of the 50's and by a stroke of exceptional good fortune, the present owner of what we have come to know as Ward Acres Farm was attracted to our town. We say good fortune for in our humble opinion, the Frederic E. Lewis family had been Ridgefield's most generous benefactors. Since the demise of the great Lewis family no one had appeared on the scene who was willing and able to assist various town

organizations that had struggled through and were just emerging from the throes of the Depression, and the adverse effects of World War II.

That all was to change with the arrival of Jack B. Ward and his mother at Ward Acres Farm. Mrs. Ward has long since passed on but Jack has been with us for almost 30 years and many institutions in this area are so much better for it.

Interestingly enough, Jack has been considered an "old timer" almost since he first moved here and well he might. When the Wards first came to Ridgefield, the great Peaceable Showplace consisted of the mansion, a garage and a superintendent's cottage.

It would take a number of additional buildings to house the many things that would accompany Jack Ward to his new home. That would be solved by the arrival on the scene of Primo Baldaserini, accompanied by his hammer and saw.

Primo, a fine carpenter, was engaged to provide the stylish stables that would house Jack Ward's beautiful horses. Along with the stables, a museum was added to the compound that would shelter what was probably the finest collection of horse-drawn equipment ever assembled under one roof. It would include great carriages, a tallyho for a four-in-hand, surreys, buckboards, show carts with their shiny chrome spoked wheels, training carts, as well as several sleighs with hand carvings that made them collectors items.

Julius Tulipani headed a group that took care of the outside operations and Pompeo Roberti assisted him. Julius's nephew Joseph Tulipani is still on the job at Ward Acres. The fact that all of the above-mentioned gentlemen are all local people should not be overlooked. It should also be noted that they were all well-versed in caring for such a private estate as they had each experienced many years in the care of various local estates of Ridgefield's wealthy people.

The graceful trees and beautiful shrubs at Ward Acres grace a landscape that is manicured to perfection. The stately maples that line the very impressive driveway stand as sentinels as one approaches the mansion. Everything is laid out in such a manner that is befitting the home of a country gentleman.

The mansion itself has received a substantial addition, during the years since it has become the home of the master of Ward Acres. The whole lovely place is in such a peaceful setting that it would surely satisfy the most meticulous of critics. This grand estate has everything a person could ask for and certainly would be very difficult to duplicate.

There have been times when Jack toyed with the idea of relocating but we are confident he realizes that he could never be happy anywhere else. After all those years, Ridgefield and Ward Acres have a special meaning for him.

#201: JACK WARD, CITIZEN OF THE CENTURY

A visit to Ward Acres Farm would, without a doubt, be listed as one “of the more memorable” events in a person’s life. The beauty of the grounds and the grandeur (if the mansion are just cause for anyone to just stare in admiration.

Then as you talk to Jack Boyd Ward, you quickly get the idea that the most important part of this lovely estate is its product. The product, of course, is just about the finest stable of beautiful horses to be found anywhere in this country.

There seems to be a great fondness among most people for the word “farm.” Many select a pet name for their home and then add the word farm to it. The appellation does not necessarily guarantee that the place harbors any number of domesticated animals. There may be a few chickens, a stand of fruit trees, or perhaps a hive of bees, maybe a small vegetable garden.

Then there are the places where the owner considers his place a farm, without actually having any of these things that were once a part of the family farm.

To those moving here from a crowded city to a half-acre lot, probably adding the word farm to the name of their place makes it seem more liveable.

If the spacious acres at Jack Ward’s showplace have not earned the word farm, then certainly his great horses have. They have also earned a reputation that is well known all over, not just this country, but Europe as well.

Passing through his trophy room, Jack will point with justifiable pride to a picture that hangs among the hundreds in his gallery. It is a picture of a little three-gaited mare with a blue ribbon attached to the side of her bridle. Astride the mare is a serious looking young man.

The picture was taken many years ago but the young rider, with the look of intense pride, is readily recognized as Jack B. Ward.

Jack had every reason to feel proud as this was to be the first of many championships for Ward Acres Farm. The mare’s name was Mi-Nute Mystery.

Jack had been winning ribbons since he was a lad of ten, but winning the championship at the Devon Horse Show was equivalent to a racehorse winning the Kentucky Derby, a ball team winning the World Series or a football team winning the Super Bowl.

The picture of Jack and Mi-Nute Mystery carries the caption, “The Pony Who Started It All.”

The mare really did start something, for until you win a championship at the Devon show, you have not as yet joined the elite in horse circles. It has been said that a win at this show is the dream of every horseman. To have a repeat winner is a dreamer’s dream.

Ward Acres has won a mind-boggling 22 championships at the very prestigious Devon show. It has won just about every major championship that this fine show has to offer. In the opinion of veteran horsemen, this is a record that will never be broken.

Jack Ward was reaching the top in the field of great horse breeders when World War II came along. Jack entered the US. Air Force and went overseas. When he returned he had an aggravated back injury that would prevent him from riding in the show ring again.

However, his enthusiasm was as great as ever and he was still able to drive and show his hackney ponies and horses.

Ward Acres Stonehenge Carousel is the present Devon Champion. This elegant hackney horse is of international fame and well he might be as he is unbeatable. Until you have seen a top flight hackney showing his wares, you have not witnessed the beauty of the zenith of the animal kingdom.

Stonehenge Carousel is rather difficult to describe as you will quickly run out of superlatives. However, picture, if you will, this magnificent hackney as he steps by with hoofs barely touching the ground and muscles rippling under a hide that you can easily imagine as enclosing the combined power of Thor and Zeus, you will begin to get an understanding of what you are viewing.

It is obvious that Carousel enjoys performing for the onlookers and his hoofs are not just lifted, they are snapped up in perfect unison and placed back down in the same manner.

This great horse is like a finely tuned violin, except that you do not have to listen for the music, it is right before your eyes. To watch the hackney is to see perfection in action. No other animal can match the hackney as it exhibits its tremendous pride and style.

We must also note that Ward Acres has been rounded out through the years with some of this country's finest racing thoroughbreds. It is interesting to note that of all the many great horses that Jack Ward has owned, the one that seems to be his favorite, is the one that cost him the most. That horse was named Evening Cloud and Jack bought him at the sales in Lexington, Ky., for \$35,000 [about \$560,000 in 2022] many years ago.

Up to that time, it was the highest price ever paid for a Saddlebred. Jack says he was well worth the price.

Great credit was given by Jack to the handlers and trainers that he has had through the years and is especially proud of his present manager, George Mink, who has been with Ward Acres for over 40 year

Olaf Olsen has been Jack's friend and companion for many years. Olaf is an excellent photographer and as a former actor has spent considerable time on both sides of the camera.

His favorite diversion is showing moving pictures to shut-ins who would otherwise never have the opportunity to enjoy his beautiful films. Olaf has shown his pictures to patients at Southbury Training School and at Fairfield Hills as well as other surrounding institutions.

Though his efforts have brought much happiness to these people, the picture showing has not been without some risk from patients with mental problems. Olaf takes these things all in stride as he relishes the satisfaction that he derives from making these unfortunate people happy.

Jack Ward is in a class by himself when it comes to kind acts that will benefit his fellow man. I can recall that when he first came to town, he noted that our ambulance was a well-worn Ford. It was not long before the Board of Selectmen received his kind offer to replace the vehicle with a brand-new Cadillac. That was almost 30 years ago and Jack is still giving another one which we will presently receive.

Soon Jack was elected an incorporator of Danbury Hospital. When the local American Legion Post was in need of assistance he donated more than \$5,000.

Ward Acres was the scene of a fundraiser for the DNA and shortly thereafter he again opened his home to the children from Southbury. After making a very substantial gift to Jesse Lee Memorial Church for landscaping the grounds for the new church, he then gave \$150,000 for a new unit at Danbury Hospital.

The Ridgefield Volunteer Fire Department made Jack an honorary chief at a party which be hosted at the Farm, for 95 paid and volunteer firemen. Danbury Hospital was again the recipient of a gift of \$100,000 that paid for a cobalt unit, in memory of Jack's mother, Mrs. Ethel Ward. Jack Ward has been especially good to the DNA and on one occasion gave a new car to the District nurse.

After he had spread several hundred thousands of dollars to worthy recipients in this area, Jack was named "Citizen of the Year" by the Ridgefield Rotary Club. Perhaps the inscription should read: "Citizen of the Century."

#202: WHEN POLO PONIES GALLOPED AT WESTMORELAND

Across the street from the entrance to Ward Acres, there is a rather level tract of land that supports a highway known as Westmoreland Road. The name of the road is, of course, derived from the name of the great estate of which this area was an important part.

The flat surface was the site of the polo field more than 50 years ago. I guess that it was the only polo field that Ridgefield ever had.

We used to have great fun watching Jim and Chester Doubleday and their friends as they raced across the field with their horses at full gallop, and their mallets raised on high. They were closely following a little white ball which they attempted to knock between goal posts at either end of the field.

Polo does not seem to be quite as popular as it once was. One of the reasons may be the cost of maintaining a stable of horses.

Polo is a very rough game and it is hard on both the horse and the rider. Therefore, it was necessary for each player to have a spare horse. They used to call them polo ponies but any that I ever saw were big enough to classify as horses.

The horse had to be considered a competitor as well as the rider. He had to learn to follow the ball with little guidance as the rider would have to concentrate on hitting the ball.

Chester Doubleday had a horse named Warrior and he was well named as he was a real competitor. Warrior was absolutely fearless and despite the frantic swinging of the players' mallets that no doubt hit the horses more often than they hit the ball, he seemed to revel in the game.

Though he was a nice dark bay, Warrior would never be mistaken for a show horse. He had a hammer head and a Roman nose and in general looked like the warrior that he was.

Jerry McCarthy was the horseman at Westmoreland and he had a half dozen charges that included Alice Doubleday's "Gaileon" and her father George's stocky black mare "Water Witch."

George Doubleday used to bring his wife Alice Moffitt Doubleday and their three children to Ridgefield to spend each summer in the early 1900's. At first the family would stay in a house that they rented or leased for the summer months. There was one house on West Lane and another at the end of South Main Street near the blinker light

It was not long before the Doubleday family became enraptured with Ridgefield and decided to call it home. George, who was by now a rising young executive with Ingersoll-Rand,

began to look for a more permanent place for his family. He made a fine choice when he selected the Francis D. Bacon place on Peaceable Street.

The mansion had been built by Mr. Bacon in 1896 and was a rather pretentious building. It became even more so as George Doubleday climbed the corporate ladder to success in his company. The end result, as far as the mansion is concerned, is the fine manor house that is now home to Temple Shearith Israel [Congregation Shir Shalom] at 46 Peaceable Street.

George grew quickly in the ranks and became president and board chairman of Ingersoll-Rand. The company itself grew to a point where it was considered one of the very largest manufacturers of road machinery at the time. The Doubleday estate kept pace with the rapid growth of Ingersoll-Rand.

Mr. Doubleday proceeded to buy up just about every available piece of land that adjoined his home. While he was at his office in the city, he would have his superintendent, Frank Girolmetti, keep a lookout for additional land. There was no available acreage to the south or to the east and very little to the north.

It just naturally followed that any expansion was going to be to the west, hence the name Westmoreland. Francis Bacon had originally called his place "Nutholme."

The Doubledays took an active part in town affairs. George was president of the Ridgefield Golf Club for many years and Mrs. Doubleday was active in the Garden Club. She also had a great singing voice and sang in St. Mary's choir.

Her sister was Mrs. John H. Lynch, who lived where the Congregation of Notre Dame [Ridgefield Academy] is now located on West Mountain.

By the time the U.S. had entered World War I, Westmoreland had grown to more than 100 acres.

The War brought with it the terrible flu bug and a great many civilians as well as members of the military succumbed to it during the epidemic that it caused. Among the victims of the flu was Frank Girolmetti, who had helped to put Westmoreland together. Ciro Montanari became superintendent and remained for many years until succeeded by Varisto Costanzi, who had been associated with Westmoreland since its early days.

In the year following the War, Mrs. Doubleday entered the mansion on an inspection tour. It was the month of March and the place had been closed up since the previous fall. Unless you have actually experienced the terrible cold that seems to sink into an unheated building during the winter months, you can never understand the deathly, penetrating chill it creates.

Though only in the house a short time, Mrs. Doubleday contracted the dreaded flu and failed to survive.

In later days, George Doubleday married his secretary, Mary May White, and the saga of Westmoreland continued. The second Mrs. Doubleday was equally as active in the Garden Club and was one of the fine women who started the Ridgefield Boys' Club.

To put Westmoreland together, George Doubleday purchased land from C.P. Anderson, Mr. Bacon, George Pratt Ingersoll and Charles Carey among others. Mr. and Mrs. Fred Gabel have made their home on Peaceable Hill in the house that was once Charles Carey's farm house.

Westmoreland extended to where Holmes Road, Webster Road, Remington Road, Conant Road, and Hamilton Road are now. It reached west from 46 Peaceable Street to Peaceable Hill Road and north to Barry Avenue and Bryan Avenue.

Mr. Doubleday was at an advanced age when Steele Roberts decided to sell his property following the disastrous fire previously described. George never hesitated and, in buying the Roberts place, added 43 more acres to his large estate.

It is now about 20 [55] years since Jerry Tuccio developed what is still called Westmoreland.

#203: B.O., HIS COTTAGE AND PRISONS

During the 15-year period, 1895 to 1910, a great number of wealthy families decided to make Ridgefield their home.

At the time, city people were seeking a place for their families that would afford them more space in which to raise their children. It seems that today, they still want to escape the confines of city life. However, the bountiful open space no longer exists and soon we will be almost as crowded as those in the city.

For many who came in the early part of the century, our town was just their summer home. Hence the term "summer cottage" was applied to the large mansions that began to appear along the shady, tree-lined streets as well as in the sparsely settled outskirts of the town.

Taxes were almost nil, land was not expensive and help could be hired for very little. Another growth factor was that train service from Ridgefield to New York City was good and commuters found it to their liking.

Ridgefield, with its 35 square miles and a population of only 2,700 at the time, offered not only the desired space, but an ideal setting for lovers of pure natural beauty. Some of that beauty has fallen victim to the onslaught of developers and the numerous condominiums that have appeared.

There is no question but that Ridgefield made an ideal haven for the wealthy families. However, it was also a great place for just ordinary folks, and their children could grow up with every expectation of finding a place to live in their hometown. Today, only those who are really very fortunate among the young can look forward to remaining in Ridgefield.

It seems generally agreed that ever-increasing taxes, both federal and local, have had a profound effect on the large estates in Ridgefield. As the great estates disappeared, they were replaced in most instances by developments.

The resulting tremendous growth during the 60's and 70's made Ridgefield for several years the "fastest growing community." percentage wise, in the State of Connecticut. Today it is ten times the size in population than it was at the turn of the century.

Those who commuted to the city each day were, for the most part, young or approaching middle age. As they began to grow older and presumably more prosperous, many considered converting the "summer cottages" to year-round residences.

This was a great boon to the local plumbers. Coal was the main source of energy, so a half dozen coal dealers were made very happy.

Some, like Miss Mary Olcott, the Ballards, the Bulkleys and the Doubledays, used their new heating systems in the fall and early spring as a means of extending their stay in Ridgefield. However, when the real cold weather came along, they closed their mansions and their gates and

escaped the ravages of winter by moving to their city apartments or traveling to a warmer climate.

Another who continued to use his mansion as a “summer cottage” was Benjamin Ogden Chisolm. He had an excellent heating system and storm windows as well as a great storm enclosure for the large front porch, but when it got real cold, everything was shut down for the winter.

B.O., as Mr. Chisolm insisted on being called, and his wife, Bessie, bought land on Peaceable Street in 1902 from Christine Beckwith. Like the King family that owned so much land on High Ridge, the Beckwiths at one time owned a great deal of the valuable land along Peaceable Street. The Chisolms continued to buy more land on Peaceable Street and High Ridge and in Bryon Park until they had amassed a sizable estate.

The great white clapboard mansion was built at what is now 38 Peaceable Street. It was bordered on the west by Westmoreland (now Temple Shearith Israel [Congregation Shir Shalom]) and ran north to Bryon Avenue as well as east to High Ridge where the garage and stables along with the superintendent’s cottage are located.

There were several outbuildings at the rear of the mansion including a very nice conservatory. There was an entrance on all three streets mentioned.

Mr. Chisolm was an international inspector of prisons. He was appointed to represent the United States on that commission by President Calvin Coolidge and spent a considerable amount of time traveling in foreign lands on tours of inspection. He was a prolific writer and authored several books on his travels and findings.

B.O. was the speaker at Ridgefield High School’s graduating exercises in 1929. The title of his talk was “Scaling the Wall.” He gave the graduates an inspirational talk during which he exhorted them to climb over anything that stood between them and success. Then he told of how he had found a poem entitled “Scaling the Wall” and it impressed him so much that he had cards printed with the main features of the poem and mailed them out at Christmas.

One of the cards went to a friend who happened to be a prison warden. The warden wrote right back and said that he hoped the poem would not give any ideas to the inmates.

B.O. Chisolm was born at College Point, N.Y., in the family mansion that later became New York City’s Summer City Hall. He served for 41 years as secretary and treasurer of New York’s Greenwich Savings Bank.

Mrs. Chisolm became an invalid after a very unfortunate fall. In order to facilitate her getting around with her wheelchair, an elevator was installed in the mansion.

Two specially made Buick convertibles were ordered. The red one, was called the Red Bird and the blue, the Blue Bird. The doors were made extra wide and the roofs extra high. This made it easy for the chauffeur who appeared each afternoon at 3 to take Mr. and Mrs. Chisolm for a ride around the town that they were so fond of.

In later years, Paul Laszig became the owner of the Red Bird. Paul was rather a little man and somehow he did not look just right when he drove that big car.

For many years, Louis DeVantry was the chauffeur for the Chisolm family. Louis was a throw-back to the days when it was necessary for a chauffeur to also be a mechanic and capable of making any necessary repairs.

In the 1930s Louis DeVantry left his job as chauffeur and took over the Socony service station that had been run by John Moeer. This is the present Mobil station.

After a short time Louis moved across the street to where Pamby Motors is now and established Central Garage. His son-in-law, Charley Cain, moved in to the quarters he had vacated and gave Louis some real competition.

#204: B.O. CHISOLM'S MANY INTERESTS INCLUDING THE 'GRAND HOTEL'

When Louis DeVantry decided to go into the garage business, Thomas Salter replaced him as chauffeur for the Chisolm family. Tommy had been the horseman for the family for several years so the transition was easy.

This is not to make it sound as though someone was always in the wings ready to succeed the one just ahead. However, the cook in the Chisolm household was named Julia and she had a niece named Bridget. Bridget was a very pretty girl with bright red hair, and she served as Julia's assistant. It just seemed to naturally follow when Julia retired, Bridget became the cook.

You can bet that when Bridget came to town, the local boys paid her plenty of attention. The lucky boy was Fritz Loetterle who worked for John Franzmann at the A&P Store when it was located where Brunetti's Market is now.

So Fritz married Bridget and they had five children, all of whom graduated from college. Fritz has passed on but Bridget still resides in Brooklyn.

Pompeo Roberti was the houseman for the Chisolm family, or perhaps butler would be more appropriate. Pompy, as he was called, always had a pompadour, which kind of went along with his name.

He was very good at a lot of things, which was a requirement for a man in his position. Pompy also found time to work in the conservatory where he always had roses or some other romantic flower in bloom. Every evening at dinner time B.O. would go to the conservatory to pick a flower for his wife, Bessie Rhoades.

Joseph Kasper (father of Ralph) was the superintendent on the Chisolm estate for many years. Joe was very interested in the Boy Scout movement and I believe that he was Ridgefield's first scoutmaster.

Julius Tulipani followed Joe Kasper as superintendent on the estate. Mrs. Tulipani still resides in the super's cottage at 137 High Ridge Avenue. Julius himself was a real success story and that is a story in itself.

B.O. Chisolm was a man of many interests, but one of the things that he enjoyed the most was a good game of billiards or pool. He had two very fine tables in an excellent game room that was the envy of local sportsmen.

B.O. was very good at both billiards and pool and was constantly on the lookout for an opponent worthy of testing his skills. Many of the local "pool sharks" were invited to play in his elaborate game room.

Of the ones who accepted the challenge, Tabby Carboni turned out to be B.O.'s favorite. Tabby was a great competitor and they had many rousing sessions.

The Chisolm estate had been called Wickopee Cottage but with the arrival of the Chisolm family the name was changed to Wickopee Farm. The word farm was justified by the fact that the place supported several beautiful saddle horses and a couple of cows.

The word Wickopee may have been derived from Wickiup which the Algonquin Indians called the huts in which they lived. One thing was sure, the Chisolm mansion was no mere hut.

Speaking of the saddle horses, one of my greatest delights was seeing Priscilla Chisolm and her sisters, as they rode by in elegant style. They always carried soft riding crops with long silky tendrils. The crops were carried for the sole purpose of brushing aside any pesky fly that might have the temerity to land on the glossy hides of their favorite steed.

Neville Davis, who later married Priscilla, used to ride with her and when they rode by they were just about the most handsome couple that you could imagine. It was really a great treat to see them.

Priscilla still lives over on Nod Road and is just as pretty as ever. She was always a favorite of everyone who knew her and spent much of her life doing nice things for people. Just a few of the many organizations that she belonged to, most of which she headed at one time or another, were the Village Improvement Society, the Ridgefield Garden Club, The District Nursing Association, the American Women's Voluntary Service, the Ridgefield Boys Club and the Wadsworth Lewis Fund.

There were also those acts of charity that she did on her own and many unfortunates benefited from her kindness. In recognition of her many years of service to the community, Priscilla was named Citizen of the Year by the Ridgefield Rotary Club [in 1975].

B.O. Chisolm was a man of varied interests and he was always willing to contribute to any worthwhile cause. He was particularly fond of moving pictures more than 60 years ago, when they were shown in St. Stephen's parish house and in the old Town Hall auditorium.

Those were the days of the silent movies. They were shown in the Town Hall each Saturday night and Arthur Ferry was the proprietor.

B.O. rarely missed a show and there were times when the proceeds were not enough to cover the expenses. On such an occasion Mr. Ferry could always expect a bill large enough to cover expenses, which Mr. Chisolm would slip to him in a very discreet manner.

As the silent movies passed into oblivion, Arthur Carnall started to beat the drums for a new movie theater in which the talking pictures could be shown. One of his greatest supporters was B.O. Chisolm. As a result of their great efforts, the fine theater that now houses the Village Bank and Trust Co. was built and opened in 1940.

Up to that time, it was necessary to drive to New Canaan or Norwalk, or to Danbury which boasted three movie houses: The Capitol, The Empress and the Palace. All these places did a booming business before television interfered.

B.O. helped financially and wrote a series of columns for The Ridgefield Press which was an excellent public relations vehicle for the new theater. His last column was published the week that the new Ridgefield Playhouse was opened to the public and it was entitled "The Last Roundup."

Mr. Chisolm had great compassion for those who were suffering through the Great Depression and felt that he should do something to furnish employment for those who were unable to find it. In the mid-30's he hit on the idea of building a new barn. It should be said that

the last thing he needed at that time was another barn. However, he felt that in doing this he was doing his part, as he phrased it, “to drive the depression blues away.”

The result of his planning was the huge barn that still stands at 137 High Ridge Avenue which was later converted into a very nice home for Si and Phyllis (Tulipani) Franceschini, who still reside there. [The building was torn down in the 1990s to make way for several large houses.]

The project was most welcome as it furnished considerable employment for some very happy tradesmen.

When the great barn was complete B.O. had a huge sign erected on the front of the building that read: GRAND HOTEL.

#205: BEATING THE DEPRESSION BLUES WITH B.O.’s ‘GRAND HOTEL’

Benjamin Ogden Chisolm had two very good purposes in mind when he built the huge red barn that still stands at 137 High Ridge Avenue [razed for new houses at the turn of 21st Century]. The most important, of course, was that it provided employment for building tradesmen that were having rather tough going at the time. As Mr. Chisolm himself put it, “It will help to drive the Depression blues away.”

Of great importance to me was the fact that completion of the building was just cause for Mr. Chisolm to have a party. It can be truly said that no one enjoyed a good party any more than B.O. Chisolm.

The reason that the party was important to me was that B.O. called and asked me to furnish the music for the affair. Ballroom dancing was at its heyday at the time (mid 30’s) and Benny Goodman and other big bands were popularizing swing music.

The party was originally intended for the people who worked on putting the building together, and their families. However, once word got around that a party would be held, it was necessary to add the names of many of the neighbors and local dignitaries to the guest list.

The great barn was made ready for the festive occasion by the use of appropriate decorations that included very pretty Japanese lanterns. A huge sign with gold lettering was hung across the front of the building. It announced to all the world that the name of the spanking new building was Grand Hotel.

We suspect that the name was a reflection of B.O.’s feeling for a movie of that name that was very popular at the time.

The barn had several straight horse stalls and two box stalls. One of the box stalls was as large as most living rooms. There were also two straight stalls with stanchions for cows as well as a box stall for a cow that served as a maternity room on occasion.

There was still a large space for vehicles that were removed on that memorable evening in order to provide space for the guests to dance.

Mr. Chisolm certainly knew how to put on a party and he thought of just about everything that would make it a success. He had the large box stall transformed into a bandstand and even had a piano imported for Jim Bacchiochi to play.

The stall had ample room for Jim and the piano, Paul Waldarke and his sax, Gene Casagrande and his violin, Val Roberti and his trumpet, and me and my drums. A dance band performing in a horse's box stall was unique.

By now you must have recognized this as a rather unusual party. The manner in which the host greeted his guests was in keeping with the happy mood of the occasion. Mr. Chisolm stood in the doorway as the people arrived. He had a bottle of milk in one hand and a bottle of champagne in the other.

After greeting his guests and exchanging pleasantries, he would then ask "Which will you have, milk or champagne, they both cost me the same."

At that time, one man was supposed to easily take care of 20 cows and at Wickopee Farm there were two men to care for two cows, so B.O.'s greeting can be considered to contain more truth than poetry.

As previously noted, B.O. Chisolm was a prolific writer and authored several books dealing with prison life and prison conditions in various parts of the world. Not all of his travels were made as an International Inspector of Prisons. He had a great love for his own country and did much traveling, especially through the western part of the U.S.

Many of his trips were recorded in book form and were detailed reports of the great open country. One little book that he gave me was entitled, "The Western Travelogue." Once again I made the mistake of letting someone borrow it.

Mr. Chisolm's love for his country was equaled by his feeling for Ridgefield. He could always be counted on to contribute to or participate in any worthwhile endeavor that would benefit our town.

That house that now sits at 38 Peaceable Street is a lovely modern home. However, the great white mansion that previously stood on this site was a real classic and we feel bad that it is gone forever. It is especially sad that the young people of today will not have the opportunity of viewing the graceful architecture or the chance to enjoy its elegant atmosphere.

When Benjamin Ogden Chieolm passed away in the mid 40's, the George Doubleday family lived next door where Temple Shearith Israel is now. The Doubledays wasted no time in purchasing Wickopee Farm and some thought that they just wanted something to say about who would live next door. It was more than that, however, and Jimmy Doubleday, as was his wont, tore down the great white mansion. The present structure then served as a home for the senior Mrs. Doubleday.

One of my very early meetings with Mr. Chisolm might be of interest. I was just a lad when sent by Irving Conklin with my team, Kit and Lady, to plow a field that was a part of Wickopee Farm. It was a large field that ran almost the length of the south side of Bryon Avenue. The field is now overgrown with trees and was recently much in the news as a proposed development.

A very picturesque lane, which served as the back entrance to Wickopee Farm, passed through the center of the field. The nice gateway is still visible from Bryon Avenue [the old gate has been removed during development of the "Village Park" neighborhood].

Kit and Lady were a fine pair of black percheron mares that I had the pleasure of breaking and training. They were full sisters, just a year apart, and each had a white blaze from

her ear to her nose. They were identical except that Lady weighed 1,450 pounds while Kit tipped the scales at 1,500.

Orders were to back furrow the field. This meant that rather than plow around the outer edges of the field and work toward the center, I must start in the center and plow out to the edges. The procedure was to first pace off the opposite side of the field and when the center was found, a marker, generally a handkerchief attached to a stick, was used to mark the exact center. The starting point was then found by pacing off the other side of the field.

When the exact center is found, the plow is placed in the ground and the team is headed for the fluttering handkerchief across the field. If the team keeps on a straight line, both outer edges of the field will be reached at the same time. Kit and Lady were so good at this that they could almost do this without guidance.

As I started across the field Mr. and Mrs. Chisolm rode into the lane behind me and stopped to watch. When I plowed back across the field, B.O. left his car and said to me, "Boy you sure plow a straight furrow."

That was one of the finest compliments that this boy had ever received. I in turn passed the kind words along to my horses.

#206: THE ARRIVAL OF THE BIDDLE SISTERS

The very nice house at 30 Peaceable Street has undergone several face lifting jobs in the last 65 years. The original owners probably would not recognize the house as it is today.

The place was once owned by the Beckwith family. The Beckwiths must have become wealthy from the large amount of land that they sold. on or around Peaceable Street.

Lucy S. Overton bought this particular place from Christine Beckwith in 1921. The mansion was built in the style of the times but through the years it did not stand the weather as well as it might have. Then it seems that the place was vacant for some time after the passing of the Overtons. By 1939 the house was empty and somewhat the worse for wear.

In the 40's and 50's, large places such as the Overtons' were going begging. They cost too much to keep up and people were looking for smaller homes. Somehow things got turned around and now the exact opposite seems to be true.

Several of these wonderful houses became in such a state of disrepair that it was necessary to tear them down and it was feared that this could be the fate of this fine old mansion. However, help was on the way in the form of three elderly but lovely sisters. Soon the old place would smile again.

In the early 1900's Edward R. and Harriet W. Biddle lived in an area of New Jersey that they felt was becoming a little too congested for them. They had four children — Harriet, Christine, Edna, and Henry W. — and they needed more room as they enjoyed the open spaces.

The Biddles were of an old and very prestigious American family and like so many others, while visiting friends in Ridgefield, they just fell in love with the town. It offered them the room they were looking for plus the natural beauty and charm and friendly atmosphere, much of which is still evident today.

The family was particularly interested in and attracted to a farm on Branchville Road. It is now the very impressive home of Ralph E. Ablon and his family at 306 Branchville Road.

In the year 1907, this farm belonged to Fred Studwell. Fred had acquired the place six years earlier from the estate of Ebenezer W. Keeler. Eben, a noted farmer and politician, had passed on right at the turn of the century.

Farming in Ridgefield was never considered the easiest way of making a living. In fact it was not unusual to find references to a farm family in which it is stated that they eked out a living. The soil was fertile enough but Ridgefield's hills and stones and ledges were a real impediment to those hardy souls that followed the agricultural route. There were fields that were level and devoid of ledges but they were the exception and most of the farms were a real challenge to the farmer.

Fred Studwell had six years in which he learned how difficult it was to operate a local farm. Following Eben Keeler was no easy task, for he was an extraordinary man. Keeler, of course, is an old Ridgefield name and Eben was a descendant of the original settlers, a family of which we have precious few left today.

Ebenezer Keeler approached the operation of his farm with the same tenacity of his forebears and he could make that farm work where others just could not make it go. This same rugged spirit must have spilled over into his political life.

Eben was elected first selectman of Ridgefield back in the days when it was necessary to elect a board of selectmen each and every year. He won in 1877 in 1878 and again in 1879. After losing in 1880 and in 1881, he came back to win in 1882, in 1883, and in 1884. He lost again in 1885 but came right back and was returned to office in 1886 and 1887.

Once again he lost in 1888 and by so doing missed the "pleasure" of serving the town during the great blizzard of that year. However, Eben stormed back to win in 1889 and again in 1890, truly a remarkable man. By the time he was elected for the last time, he was an old man and just a few years later passed on to his just reward.

Fred Studwell took over the operation of the farm in 1901 and put a great effort into making it work. However, he must have been overjoyed when, after six years of struggling, Edward Biddle appeared with a fistful of cash and he was freed of the hard life on the farm.

Mr. Biddle started at once to add to the acreage of the farm by purchasing land from Benjamin Corlies and the Greims family. He then had the presence of mind to engage the services of Edward Sweeney to supervise the farm activities.

The extensive acreage of the farm covered both the side where the nice mansion is now and the area across the highway [Branchville Road] where Nutmeg Ridge is today. The steep hill with the sweeping curve became known as Biddle's Hill and is still so called today.

In a blizzard in the 20's, my brother Jack was walking home from Branchville Station one night and as he neared the top of the hill, he felt something solid underfoot. It was a dark night but he swept away the snow and discovered that he was standing atop a New England bus. The bus had been used to replace the commuter train that brought passengers back and forth from Branchville Station. Fortunately, the passengers had been removed.

In 1939, the three Biddle sisters had tired of operating the large estate that their father had put together. In looking for a smaller place they came upon the Overton mansion and it seemed to be just what they wanted. After acquiring the place they engaged Nelson Breed, an outstanding architect from neighboring Wilton, and a smile returned to the face of the Overton house.

Cortland Emlaw was a retired New York fireman who lived on the lower end of Peaceable Street and he was engaged as chauffeur for the sisters. When Cort passed on the sisters drove themselves around town.

They were very active in church work for St. Stephen's as well as in the Garden Club. The sisters worked hard in supporting our armed services in both World War I and II. One of their favorite pastimes was instructing children in the proper care of a vegetable garden.

Ed Sweeney retired before the sisters moved to Peaceable Street and he was replaced by Edward Allan. Ed was a carpenter by trade and he made a scale model of the mansion as a mailbox. It was such an exact replica that people stopped to see and admire it. There was a trick to opening it and each new mailman had to learn it. Can't help but wonder how long the box would have lasted with the vandals of today to contend with.

#207: MAYNARD MANSION MYSTERY: THE STRANGE DISAPPEARING FAMILY

On our trip west. along Peaceable Street, we described the stately old homes and some of the people who lived on the south side of that lovely street. On our return trip we have told of the interesting people and the mansions on the north side of that street.

As we approach the corner of High Ridge Avenue and Peaceable Street, we arrive at one of the largest and one of the most imposing mansions in Ridgefield. It is doubtful that anyone could possibly drive by this place for the first time without slowing down for a closer look, stopping altogether or perhaps even turning around to drive by a second time.

The mere size of this "summer cottage" is enough to attract your attention. Its imposing entrance and the four, large, perfect, Corinthian columns present a fine example of the elegance that was Ridgefield in the early part of this century.

Effingham T. Maynard bought this choice corner property from the estate of J. Howard King in 1900. The story is that he then engaged the very famous architect, Stanford White, to design the great structure that would serve as a refuge during the summer months from the family's Lexington Avenue domicile.

White's participation in the construction of the mansion has never been confirmed, as far as we know. However, we feel that the net result was certainly worthy of his widely recognized ability.

The great mansion is now the home of Dr. John J. Benusis and his family. It is indeed fortunate that someone with his love for such a place and the ability and talent to care for it, came along at the right time.

There had been several owners since the last of the Maynards passed on some 30 years ago. The appearance of the place did not improve with age and with each new owner the large house seemed to be losing ground.

One family lived in the mansion only a short time and then, for reasons best known to themselves, took off for Europe. Their departure was rather strange, in that it was made very quickly, quietly, and without fanfare.

The family left their young daughter behind, apparently to take care of the place until their return. However, they never came back and no one that we know ever saw them again.

There were people who came to my office to inquire as to the whereabouts of these people. When the daughter came in to pick up the mail, we would ask where her parents were but she would never divulge her secret.

Then came the time when the daughter also disappeared and left several cats and dogs locked inside the building. Needless to say, the animals did nothing to improve the appearance — or the aroma — of the great house.

Eventually, it was necessary to have Deputy Sheriff Joseph McManus break down the door in order to release the very distraught household pets. They were in terrible condition, as a result of this very inhumane treatment.

The bank that held the mortgage on the property at 2 Peaceable Street spent a considerable amount of money in restoring the mansion and making it salable. Dr. Benusis provided the finishing touches that brought the cosmetics of the place back up to their present excellent condition.

Much of the acreage was sold off by one of the previous owners and smaller homes began to dot the landscape around the mansion. It was during this period that the superintendent's cottage and the large garage were sold off separately from the estate. They are located on High Ridge Avenue and are both private residences today.

Parts of the great gardens at the rear of the mansion remain with the two acres that presently make up the Benusis estate. These gardens once featured many exotic shrubs and flowers as well as rows of pergolas for the Wisteria and other vines to climb on.

Although the Maynards were reputed to be millionaires many times over, they were never successfully accused of just throwing their money around. However, one area in which cost was no object was in providing the necessary ingredients that would produce a successful garden.

Back in their days they would think nothing of purchasing 65 tons of manure each year for topdressing the soil. The very rich, black earth on this place must have been at least two feet deep. The fertilizer was purchased from Irving B. Conklin Sr. and I was employed by Mr. Conklin at that time.

(Incidentally this may be a good time to correct a misconception that may have been gained through a picture that appeared with column 205. The picture was of a beautiful team of black mares and I was depicted as their owner, whereas they were actually owned by Irving Conklin. In a sense they were my team since I trained them and was their teamster. I would guess that Kit and Lady were always referred to as my team, in much the same way that jockey Willie Shoemaker, after winning the Kentucky Derby, labeled Ferdinand as his horse.)

Kit and Lady did a lot of work around the Maynard estate. One of the many jobs they performed was the semi-annual moving of eight citrus trees to and from the porch of the mansion. They were lime, orange, and lemon trees and were quite decorative on the large porch.

The trees were growing out of boxes and were stored during the winter months in a greenhouse at the rear of the superintendent's cottage. The first time I was sent with Kit and Lady to move the trees was in the spring of 1933. The trees were so small that they could easily be carried by two men. They were placed on a stone boat for transportation to the mansion.

A stone boat, for those unfamiliar with that terminology, is like a very large toboggan. It is made of thick wooden planks and generally measures about four feet in width and ten feet in

length. Since the device lies flat on the ground, it is relatively easy to lift heavy objects, either onto it or off of it. Even when heavily loaded, it slid fairly easy on the ground.

Like everything else on this place, the trees grew like “Topsy” and it was necessary to enlarge the boxes that held the trees several times. The last time that I moved the trees, they had increased in size to where the boxes measured four feet square and the trees were more than 12 feet in height. It now required eight men to lift them on or off the stone boat.

A large iron hook was placed on each side of the box and a long pole was threaded through the hooks. This allowed four men on each side to lift the trees. It was finally necessary to build a regular house for the trees.

#208: THE PATIENT CHAUFFEUR McKAY AND HIS LARGE-HATTED LADIES

There was a considerable expense incurred in the moving of the eight large trees from their winter storage to the lengthy porch of the Maynard mansion and returning them in the fall to their hibernating quarters. It was, however, an expense that did not in the very least disturb Effingham Maynard’s daughters, Mary H. and Helen L. Maynard.

There were also two sons who shared in the great estate left by the senior Maynard but there was plenty enough to go around.

The two sisters never married and to them was left the responsibility of maintaining the home on Lexington Avenue and the “summer cottage” on the corner of High Ridge and Peeeeeble Street. Even though it was also necessary to rebuild the storehouse several times to accommodate the rapid growth of the trees, the two venerable ladies were never heard to complain about the cost. This building still stands [but not in 2022], along with the greenhouse, at the rear of what was the superintendent’s cottage at 121 High Ridge Avenue. As far as we know, it was the final resting place for the citrus trees.

We are not sure what happened to the trees after Mary and Helen passed on. However, it would be safe to say that if they were sold at a price that would reflect the cost of the many times the trees were repotted and the several occasions on which the storage building was enlarged, plus their semi-annual trips, back and forth, they would have ranked with the most expensive trees ever.

During the spring, summer and fall, the great gardens produced an abundance of very beautiful flowers. Many samplings of these flowers were exhibited and won prizes at the flower shows.

During the winter months the greenhouse flourished under the guiding hand of Charles Coles and several times each week, he would ship bundles of flowers to the Lexington Avenue address of the family. In those days it was possible to ship perishable products by express from the freight house that still stands in the freight yards. The building now houses a woodworking shop. The service was excellent and if produce were shipped by 9:30 in the morning, it would be delivered in New York City in the afternoon.

Whereas the cost of caring for the trees and flowers was of little or no consequence to the Maynard sisters, they were considerably more conservative in other areas. They always had a houseful of maids who worked very hard for a dollar a day and their keep. When one of their employees married, the lucky couple could expect to receive all of \$5 as a wedding gift.

It should be noted that fifty years ago, the sisters were considered to be millionaires several times over. One can only guess what their fortune would have amounted to by today's standards.

The great mansion was not only impressive to anyone who approached its front entrance, it was even more so when one entered the massive entrance hall. Not only was the entrance hall huge, but it also separated two enormous rooms. On one side was the very formal dining room and on the other an equally large ballroom. We do not recall this great expanse ever being utilized for anything as frivolous as dancing but it could easily have accommodated several hundred people.

It is our understanding that the gold bathroom fixtures have long since been removed by some previous owner and the old-fashioned furnaces have given way to a modern heating system. However, the rest of this very beautiful building is pretty much as it was during the glory days.

Daniel McKay had been the coachman for Effingham Maynard and when the Maynards were in Ridgefield, Dan and his wife lived over the stables in a very nice apartment. This building, which later became the garage, is now the home of Edward Kruelski and his family at 125 High Ridge Avenue.

With the advent of the automobile, it was necessary for Dan to bite the bullet and agree to learn to operate the infernal machine. An expert was sent to show Dan how to drive and how to repair the family's first auto, a Pope Hartford. Dan proved to be an apt pupil and he quickly, though reluctantly, learned to master the vehicle.

The Maynard's fleet of automobiles at one time consisted of an enormous Pierce-Arrow touring car and a Brewster limousine. The Pierce-Arrow was not only large, it was also high. You did not climb into it, you climbed up on it.

When the sisters went out for their afternoon ride, it was really something to see. The canvas top was carefully folded back and the ladies in their traditional black dresses with white collars and large hats, secured by scarves, were perched on the rear seat.

They always looked straight ahead and I always had the feeling that they really did not get to see much of the countryside. That was their style and you can be sure that they never deviated from it, not in the least. It would be fair to say that the two Maynard sisters were graphic examples of the very essence of Victorian fashions.

One story is that when on one of their afternoon rides through the countryside, they traveled up Barrack Hill Road. As usual the top of the old Pierce-Arrow was down and the two elegant ladies were elevated on the lofty rear seat.

Whereas the heads of the ladies extended into the rarefied atmosphere, a low hanging tree limb showed little respect for the dignified passengers in the open car. Helen Maynard's great hat was torn from her head and landed unceremoniously on the roadside. The scarf that was to have held the hat in place landed nearby.

Hardly a greater tragedy could have occurred. Fortunately the group had almost reached The Port of Missing Men. The hat was so badly damaged as to render it beyond repair and there was just no way that the lady would allow herself to be seen on High Ridge Avenue without the protection of a hat. Therefore the sisters waited at the inn while Dan McKay made the long trip back to Peaceable Street to procure a replacement hat.

Dan McKay was a big man who was possessed of a great sense of humor. That humor would stand him in good stead in handling the many little idiosyncrasies he would encounter as a chauffeur for the Maynard sisters.

It was necessary for Dan to make many trips to New York City for Helen and Mary Maynard liked to do their shopping in the large stores along Fifth Avenue. On such trips Dan had to contend with the horrendous city traffic as well as the many instructions he would receive from the rear seat of his vehicle.

It was not unusual when traveling south on one of the busy streets to be told to turn around and go north. The ladies did not mean go to the next corner and turn, they meant for Dan to turn right there in the middle of the block. This caused complications that were solved only through Dan's friendship with many of the policemen.

Dan always did as he was told and when he received orders to polish the cars every day, that is exactly what he did. Through the years, the paint started to disappear but the ladies did not seem to notice.

#209: THE SISTERS WANTED CHAINS IN SUMMER

So Daniel McKay served a number of years as the Coachman for Effingham Maynard and his family. He was also destined to serve many more years as chauffeur for Effingham's daughters, Helen and Mary Maynard.

His total years of service to the family were in excess of 50 and when he finally retired, the sisters showed their fondness for Dan by presenting him with the old Pierce-Arrow.

The great car, almost devoid of paint from the daily polishing it received, would be a collector's item today. Most autos had headlights that were a little less than three feet apart. Those familiar with the great Pierce-Arrows will remember that they were one of the first to have their headlights embedded wide apart in each front fender.

The McKays spent their declining years at 5 Mary's Lane, now the home of Jack and Jeanette Jones. Fortunately there was a large barn in which to keep the grand old car with its right hand drive and outside shifting levers. We can't help but feel that Dan missed having on the back seat, the very sedate sisters, in their black dresses and white collars.

Dan's successor was chosen with great care and considerable screening by the Maynard sisters. The one selected turned out to be Richard Fleming.

Dick was a very experienced chauffeur who had spent several years driving his wealthy employers in and around New York City. He could properly be called a picture chauffeur and when dressed in his natty uniform with its shiny visor, you just knew he was something special.

When smoking, Dick always used a cigarette holder and when asked why, he always answered that his doctor had told him to stay away from tobacco.

Dick and Mrs. Fleming, and their children Mary, Florence, and Richard Jr., moved into the garage apartment at 125 High Ridge Avenue. The children always looked forward to coming to Ridgefield each summer as they had established firm friendships with other children in the neighborhood.

We are sorry to report that Richard Jr. has passed on but Mary lives in New Milford and Florence, who married Freddy Leary, still lives in Danbury.

Along with the new chauffeur came a brand new Lincoln touring car to replace the Pierce-Arrow that had been retired along with Dan McKay. The Lincoln was not nearly as large as its predecessor and its height was considerably less. This made for much safer passage under the low hanging tree limbs, when the sisters rode with the top down.

A new limousine was soon added to the Maynard fleet and it was elegant to behold. The rear seats, with their camel hair covers, were completely enclosed but the front seat was entirely open, although a thin leather cover was available and could be attached over the driver's head in inclement weather. There were no side curtains so the driver was pretty much exposed.

On a wall inside the garage that separated the auto storage area from the old horse stables there was a picture of a beautiful ship. The picture must have been four feet in width and at least six feet long. It was in full color and the golden lettering on the bow of the great ship proclaimed it to be the Leviathan.

It was considered the largest ship afloat at that time. I can remember Dick Fleming telling me that a chef on this very famous ship was none other than John Scala (Bob's father).

John, for many years, was the chef at Ridgefield's famous Outpost Inn, where the Fox Hill complex is now. The Outpost Inn was considered one of the very finest restaurants in the entire country.

John was not only a master at preparing culinary delights, he was also an expert sculptor. We remember a Lion's Club Ladies Night at which our band played many years ago. As dessert was about to be served, the doors of the kitchen swung wide as a large table on wheels was pushed into the dining room. On the table was a huge block of ice that John had carved into a large lion.

There was terrific applause and it continued until John Scala came into the dining room to accept his accolades. When it became known that John possessed such talent at sculpturing, he was called on many times to perform.

At the time that the Fleming family came to Ridgefield, there were a number of wealthy families that had their own chauffeurs. They formed a nice organization and were quite active until World War II when their numbers began to decline.

One of their social events was the annual chauffeur's ball and it was a very well attended affair. Some very good stories, mostly about their employers, were exchanged at their monthly meetings.

The retired Daniel McKay and the new chauffeur Richard Fleming were both first-class gentlemen. They were, however, of entirely different temperament. Dan was of the old school that obeyed all orders, no matter how ridiculous they might seem. Dick, on the other hand, had a mind of his own and never hesitated to make a stand on an issue.

The Maynard sisters were very safety conscious and possessed of a great sense of self-preservation. Their driver must exercise extreme caution whenever they traveled by automobile.

When Dan McKay was driving and it started to rain, he was ordered to put on the skid chains. This was true, even on the hottest summer day. Dan always complied without question, much to the amusement of the other chauffeurs.

Dick Fleming had not been on the job long before Helen and Mary scheduled a trip to New York City. The weather was threatening and as Dick brought the limousine to a stop at the entrance to Lord and Taylor's, it had started to rain. As the ladies prepared to dismount, Dick was

instructed to return for them at 3 p.m., and then came the order to put on the chains before returning.

Dick was not sure that he was hearing correctly so the order was not only repeated but a tag line was added, "and don't come back without them." Before climbing back into the driver's seat, Dick replied, "I will be back at 3 p.m., but do not expect this car to have chains on."

The rain prevented further discussion of the matter and it was still raining when 3 pm. came around and the limousine rolled to a stop at the entrance of the great store. When the sisters saw that there were no chains on their car, they began to vent their displeasure on the harried driver.

Dick stood his ground, however, and said, "You can take your pick between me and the chains." Then he added, "If this car goes back to Ridgefield with chains on, someone else will put them on and someone else will be driving it."

Helen and Mary Maynard were not accustomed to having their wishes questioned. However, after a quick conference and without another word, they climbed into the rear seat for a very quiet ride home.

That was the last time the order for chains was ever given.

#210: WHAT THE OLD-TIMERS USED TO SAY

As a young fellow, I always enjoyed listening to older people. There were times when their sayings were rather frivolous and others when it was felt that they contained the wisdom of the ages. Through the years, many of the axioms uttered by these people were just salted away, only to resurface later on in life when something happened that reminded me of their origin.

One time Howland Adams came over from South Salem to help fill the silos at Irving Conklin's farm with corn silage. It was heavy work and the days were long.

Howland put away a tremendous breakfast and we asked him why he would eat so much. We always thought his answer was a classic when he replied, "When you have hard work to do, you better pour on the coal because you just can't get up steam with feathers."

When ordering a drink one time, Bill Winthrop asked that it be on the rocks and then as an afterthought added, "I just don't like to drink a lot of water to get a little tea."

Fleet Sperry, when asked one time what formula he used in the purchase of a horse, proceeded to recite a little verse,

One white hoof try.

Two white hoofs buy,

Three white hoofs are worth a gamble,

Four white hoofs and a white nose,

take off his hide and feed him to crows.

We never quite believed Fleet's little poem as one of the finest horses we knew had four white boots and a white nose.

Tom Kehoe always said, "Buy a big team because they can do big jobs and little jobs, whereas a small team can only do the small jobs."

Harry Thomas used to say that "a nervous horse is like a nervous man, they are the ones that can get the job done."

“You can’t make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear,” was one of Irving Conklin’s favorite expressions when evaluating someone who did not measure up.

He had a lot of such sayings and I once heard him say, “You should always wave to a man pushing a wheelbarrow or carrying two pails of water.” This saying did not mean very much to me at the time, but several years later it suddenly came back to me.

The Maynards employed extra help during spring; summer and fall to assist Charles Coles in the operation of their Ridgefield estate. Where they spent the winter months, I don’t know but each spring Patrick Harmon and Michael Kiley would appear, as if by magic. Perhaps this sounds like the start of a Pat and Mike joke but it is not intended that way. Pat was a rather quiet little fellow while Mike was a big burly man, with a hale and hearty personality.

In those days, it was the custom, when passing by with a horse or a team, to wave to anyone that you might meet along the way. If you happened to be riding in an auto, a gentle beep of the horn would serve the same purpose. It was a friendly habit in a friendly town where everyone knew most everyone else.

On this particular day I was returning to the Conklin farm with my team Kit and Lady. As I came down High Ridge and crossed Peaceable Street, Mike Kiley could be seen pushing a wheelbarrow that was loaded with geraniums. My wave to Mike was just automatic, without thought of the results.

It was Mike’s habit to return such a greeting with a vigorous wave that culminated in a rather militaristic salute. As he dipped one hand and then the other, the wheelbarrow started to weave erratically. It was then that I recalled Irv Conklin’s admonishment, “Always wave to a man with a wheelbarrow or two pails of water.”

The wheelbarrow came crashing to the ground as Mike went into his very elaborate saluting routine. I am afraid that some of the geraniums were a little the worse for the jostling they received.

The results were pretty much the same when I waved to Dick Bennett one time, as he carried two pails of water to the flower beds on the Malcomb S. Wilson estate on Main Street. This place is now the home of Attorney Richard J. Fricke.

On this occasion Kit and Lady were on a trot so Dick did not have very much time to return my wave, though being an old friend he felt obligated to do so. He first started to put down the pail in his left hand and then the one in his right. The result was that both pails descended with a great splash. Dick and I had many a laugh over this little incident.

One of the several jobs that we performed on the Maynard estate was gathering the hay in the orchard and on the lot just west of the mansion. This lot has since become the site on which the W. Parker Dwelley family now resides at 20 Peaceable Street.

I mowed the tall grass with my team and later when it was cured, Irving Conklin came with his team and a Yankee dump rake to put it in windrows. He was driving a young team of palominos, Ginger and Minny.

They were perfectly matched and with their light manes and tails and sleek, shiny golden hides, they made a beautiful picture. Ginger, as her name suggests, was a very spirited animal and Minny was also very full of life.

It was late in the afternoon of a broiling summer’s day and the horses had been working quite hard all day. Suddenly Minny started to lag behind and it was obvious something was

bothering her. They were allowed to rest in the shade before starting the trip back to the stable but on the way home Minny again showed definite signs of fatigue.

By the time they reached the stable the mare was so lethargic, Mr. Conklin felt it necessary to call a veterinarian. There were two fine vets in Danbury and since Dr. Knapp was out on a call, Irv got Dr. Keresy to come and he arrived in less than a half hour. He pronounced the ailment as being sunstroke and said that he would need a bottle of gin to rub on the horse.

Prohibition had just been repealed and the first liquor store in town was in what is now Barry Finch's building at 426 Main Street. I was dispatched to get the necessary ingredient but alas, I was not quite old enough to be able to make the purchase.

There began a considerable negotiating session and finally I was able to convince Jimmy that the gin was for a very sick horse.

On my return to the farm the gin was handed to Dr. Keresy who immediately removed the top from the bottle, took a big drink and then rubbed the bottle on the side of the mare. He then repeated the procedure several times and it became obvious that I had been taken.

Then the old doctor prescribed a straw hat for the horse. Holes were cut for the horse's ears and a wet sponge was placed under the hat.

The second treatment proved to be quite effective and the fine mare was back to work the next day, but she was used sparingly.

#211: PEA-COUNTING MAYNARDS AND TAVERN-SAVING CITIZENS

We have been describing the Maynard estate and some of the interesting people that were associated with it. Column 210 was to have been the last of the Maynard story but then two things happened.

First, I met Mrs. John E. Davis the other day. Mrs. Davis is a long-time summer resident of Ridgefield and was a friend of Helen and Mary Maynard. She has some real good stories about the sisters and I encouraged her to write them and submit them for publication.

The second thing that happened was a chance conversation on the golf course with a gentleman who lived and actually grew up on the Maynard estate. This gave him first-hand knowledge of these interesting people.

Charlie concurred in my opinion that the Maynard place had the richest soil in town. He even went further. While I felt that the black topsoil was about two feet deep, Charlie said that it was at least twice that deep. One thing we both agreed on was that the soil was so rich you needed only to throw out the seeds and then watch as everything sprouted up.

Charlie remembered the large citrus trees that we moved every spring and fall to and from the porches of the mansion. It is his belief that after the sisters died the trees were left in the storage house that was built especially for them and still stands at 121 High Ridge Avenue [it was recently razed]. The trees were just allowed to die as no one could afford to care for them as the Maynards did.

We talked about the great wealth of the Maynard sisters and Charlie said that he had personally witnessed several incidents that graphically illustrated their innate ability to preserve that great wealth.

He told of the methods they employed to make sure that vegetables grown on the place would not stray to tables other than their own. Tomatoes, beets, carrots, and onions were all counted and recorded, even though their numbers far exceeded what they could have possibly consumed.

The oddest thing was the manner in which the peas were harvested. Instead of merely counting the pods the sisters insisted that the pods be opened and each pea counted.

Vegetables were not the only foodstuffs that were doled out for use by the cook. An excellent set of scales was installed in the kitchen and each morning the amount of sugar and flour was carefully weighed for the day and dutifully recorded.

Perhaps the greatest example of the sisters' ability to protect their properties was the method they practiced in controlling the use of their liquid assets. And by this I do not mean watered stock. Although Helen and Mary were well-known Prohibitionists, Charlie said they always kept at least 2,000 bottles of liquor, wine and liqueur in their tremendous wine cellar that he said looked just like one of today's liquor stores.

When Helen and Mary moved each spring, from their Lexington Avenue home in New York City to their "summer cottage" in Ridgefield, it was the duty of Charlie's father and a helper to count and record each bottle as it was removed from the New York wine cellar. Several trips had to be made in order to transport this deluge of medicinal liquid to the arsenal on the corner of High Ridge and Peaceable Street.

The counting was repeated, under the watchful scrutiny of the sisters, when the precious cargo arrived in Ridgefield. The entire operation took the better part of two days. The same ritual was repeated in the fall when all the liquor had to be returned to the city.

It is not known how much was dispensed at either location, but should a drink be served to some lucky guest from the well-protected cache, a ruler was brought forth and after measurements were taken a mark and the date were inscribed on the side of the bottle. You can just bet that the Maynards were never accused of hosting a wild party.

Keeler Tavern

On another trend it just does not seem possible that 20 years have passed since a group of fine, civic-minded citizens joined together to form The Keeler Tavern Preservation Society. Just some, but not all of them were: Mrs. Richard L. Jackson, Mr. and Mrs. William Phillips, Paul and Kathryn Rosa, Daniel and Louise McKeon, and of course the late Francis D. Martin.

The ultimate goal of these dedicated people was the purchase and the restoration of Ridgefield's famous and most historic landmark. At the time, the place belonged to Vernon and Glenna Welsh, who had moved here from Pound Ridge several years previously.

Vernon Welsh was president of General Dynamics and he and Glenna had a yen for historic places. Glenna later wrote *The Proprietors of Ridgefield* after exhaustive research on the subject.

When they purchased the old tavern, the Welshes felt they were getting the oldest house in Ridgefield. It was a few years later that they discovered that the Hauley house further north on Main Street was actually the oldest.

Eventually the house that was originally built for the Rev. Thomas Hauley was put up for sale and the Welsh family bought it and their goal had been reached.

This made the Keeler Tavern available and there was genuine concern about the future of that historic old structure. Since there was considerable property connected with the tavern, there was fear that the place could become a development and even that the building itself might be altered. The fears were for naught since the Welsh family would make sure that the tavern would go to someone who would preserve it.

The Keeler Tavern Preservation Society lost no time in contacting the Welsh family and soon negotiations were underway.

Somehow these people were able to secure the financing and it just seemed to follow — and appropriately so — that the date set for the transfer would be July 4, 1966. It was felt that such a momentous occasion should be something to remember and the society set about planning an elaborate program for the day.

The tavern had been known for many years as the “Cannon Ball House.” Of course, as everyone knows, there is a cannon ball embedded in the north side of the building and that it lodged there after being shot from a cannon by the British during the Battle of Ridgefield April 27, 1777.

Someone on the committee preparing for the July 4th affair came up with the idea that it would be nice to have a little pageant depicting the battle. Somehow I was selected to write the script and stage the affair.

#212: REMEMBERING 1966 BATTLE REENACTMENT

So the 4th of July this year was just cause for all freedom-loving people to celebrate the 100th birthday of the great lady in New York harbor. It also marked the 20th anniversary of the founding of the Keeler Tavern Preservation Society and this important event was appropriately observed at the tavern.

More than 200 people attended the festivities, during which there were two showings of the movies that depicted the first reenactment of the Battle of Ridgefield. The films were taken by the late Russell Fairbanks, who had been a photographer at the Nuremberg trials. Russ's idea was to record the proceedings for posterity and when he gave me the films, he asked only that they be shown as often as possible.

Those who observed the showings on the 4th will attest that Russ's wishes have been followed, as the film has been shown so many times that it has become quite brittle and is much the worse for wear.

At any rate, it might be interesting to give an account of how the first reenactment of the Battle of Ridgefield actually came about. The purpose of the event was to commemorate the transfer of ownership of historic Keeler Tavern from Vernon and Glenna Welsh to the newly formed Keeler Tavern Preservation Society.

It should be noted that I was taken by complete surprise when asked to write and stage a suitable tableau that would be performed in front of the tavern. Frankly, it was a challenge that I was not completely prepared for and it took some time for me to adjust to the task.

Writing the script for the affair was not a real problem for history was my long suit and the facts concerning that exciting and fiercely fought engagement were readily available.

However, staging the affair was something else as it required the cooperation of an awful lot of people.

The local service clubs, as well as local fraternal societies, were canvassed in the hope that they would provide the necessary participants. In our recruiting efforts it was quickly noticeable that some were very enthusiastic about being a part of the action, while others offered to help but shied away from any active participation in the battle itself.

Then there was great difficulty in acquiring authentic muskets that would provide the necessary realistic flavor. This was before the forming of the Fifth Continental here in Ridgefield. Word of the impending battle was spread over a large area and slowly but surely someone would come forward with an ancient firing piece and a source of black powder with which to fire it.

Tim and Elisha Keeler were among the first to volunteer. They were both so very important. They had muskets and they knew of others who had muskets. Of equal importance to me was the fact that the Keeler brothers were descendants of Timothy Keeler, who owned and operated the famous old tavern which was the cause of all this activity.

The original Tim Keeler was also Ridgefield's fourth postmaster, when the office was located in the tavern. He also participated, with the patriots on our Main Street, in what would come to be the only inland battle fought in the State of Connecticut during the entire War for Independence. We felt that the participation of the Keeler boys in the reenactment of the famous battle, in which their ancestor played an important part almost 200 years earlier, provided us with the necessary momentum.

Soon Don Ruehl, Dick Godbout, Buck Argenio, Dick Scala, Frank Provino, Wayne Rohinson, and many others, some of whom we never learned the names of, came forward for front-line duty. One of great importance was Dexter Street. It was obvious at once that Dexter had theatrical ability and he proved to be invaluable in assisting with the direction of the affair.

We needed a horse for General Silliman and when David Tarsi came forward and offered his mahogany bay, it was not only accepted but David was awarded the part of the great general who at the time of the battle was Commander-in-Chief of the Connecticut Militia.

Finding someone to play the part of Benedict Arnold was not so simple. There were two reasons for this. First there was a reluctance to be the one who would personify the treasonous general. Then it had to be considered that if the staging was to be authentic, Arnold's horse must be shot from under him.

Once we assured Jim Hackert that we had no intention of destroying his fine saddle horse, he accepted the role. Jim then performed valiantly in the exciting battle, while astride his very nervous gray horse. As a matter of fact, Jim's noble steed probably traveled further in reverse that day than he did forward. It just seemed to be that every time the horse whirled around, he found something that would cause him to back up. Perhaps the horse was aware of the overwhelming odds which would negate a charge against the superior forces of the invaders.

Things were shaping up well for assembling a group of patriots, but it was still necessary to furnish them with red-coated opponents. In acquiring uniforms for the participating troops, we visited the very cooperative Scott Fanton Museum in Danbury. At the museum this problem was discussed and it was suggested that we contact Bob Morris in New Milford.

This turned out to be a most valuable suggestion and Bob was one of our very best discoveries. He not only had a number of red-coated supporters but of most importance, the group owned a little cannon of ancient vintage and it was just the size of the canon from which the ball was fired that is still lodged in the side of the Keeler Tavern.

Incidentally, for many years most people referred to the venerable old building as The Canon Bali House. Some old-timers still call it that.

When the cast of characters was complete, it was necessary to turn our attention to acquiring various props that would add to the entertainment which we were charged with providing. The script called for transporting lead from the northern part of town to the tavern, where it would be made into musket balls.

Joe Young had offered to drive his pretty team of strawberry roans but he did not have a suitable carriage to use for this purpose. Since the intent was to deceive the British into believing that Timothy and Mrs. Keeler were just out for a ride, the vehicle must be of fancy design rather than one that might be used for transporting freight. A search was then conducted for a suitable vehicle.

More about that next week.

#213: TIME FOR BATTLE APPROACHES

As previously reported, a search for a suitable carriage that would carry tavern-keeper Tim Keeler and Mrs. Keeler was conducted over a wide area. Those who owned such a vehicle felt that it was their most prized possession and their reluctance to part with it was intensified when they learned that it would be a part of a battle scene. So the search continued.

In the meantime, interest in the reenactment of the Battle of Ridgefield continued to mount. By the end of June 1966 enlistments had reached a point where the use of a draft was considered unnecessary. Joining those who had already signed up for front line duty were, Peter Smith, Joe Pinchbeck, Otto Jespersen, Roy Deeks, Roger Deeks, Gordon Plummer, Vern Robinson, Durrel Titus, Art McKenna, Bill Church, Glen Moore, and Roger Beal.

The ranks of the continentals had increased so rapidly that they now outnumbered the British. This would never do, for as everyone knows, in the actual battle which took place April 27, 1777, it was the British who had the overwhelming forces. Therefore, in order to make the pageant authentic, more redcoats were procured and we loaned some of the patriots to the invaders.

Dick Scala and Pete Smith were among those who went over to General Tryon's forces and they paid the penalty as both were wounded in the ensuing battle.

A break in the search for an appropriate carriage occurred when we remembered a beauty that was part of a collection at the Great Danbury Fair. The only problem was that it was owned by John Leahy who operated the fair for so many years and John was not about to part with his precious surrey for even one day.

John quickly raised the question of insurance should his priceless vehicle be damaged in any way. After considerable discussion, a written agreement seemed to have overcome this obstacle. Then there was the question of transportation and we countered with the fact that Francis Martin had a truck that was available for this purpose.

By now we felt that the negotiations were equivalent to borrowing the QE II for a cruise on the Hudson. However, John Leahy was himself a showman and it was to this trait that we appealed, feeling that he could not resist the opportunity to be a part of this colorful tableau. At last John's more benevolent side surfaced and before he could change his mind, Steve Martin and I, in his grandfather's truck, were at the Fairgrounds where we quickly loaded the prized vehicle and headed for Ridgefield.

Things were rapidly falling into place and some practice sessions were held in order that the participants would be familiar with their roles. My goal was to synchronize the action with my script that would be read as the battle unfolded. Nello Ciuccoli had graciously consented to furnish a fine public address system in order that those assembled on Main Street could hear, as well as see an important part of Ridgefield's history reenacted.

It occurred to us that people in the surrounding areas, as well as shut-ins, might enjoy listening to the script and the sounds of battle as the action moved south on Main Street. Paul Baker at WLAD in Danbury was very enthusiastic about the idea of broadcasting the event. Sponsors for the broadcast were needed and Craig's Jewelry, Bedient's Hardware, King Neptune, and the Ridgefield Savings Bank came forward quickly.

Paul brought Ralph Lowenstein with him to do the narration and Ralph did a real professional job. Paul later gave me a copy of the tape of the affair and it is one of my prized possessions.

It was felt that these activities should be recorded on movie film for posterity and Russ Fairbanks stepped forward to do this for us. Russ had been the photographer at the Nuremberg Trials and, as expected, he did a fine job. When Russ had the film developed he made me a present of it and it has been shown many times. Most recently I showed the film and played the tape a couple of weeks ago on July 4th and on the 20th anniversary of the reenactment at the Keeler Tavern, as it was also the anniversary of the ownership of the famous old building passing over to the Keeler Tavern Preservation Society.

A dress rehearsal was held in the parking area at the Methodist Church on the night before the big show. Two fellows showed up that I had never seen before, nor have I ever seen them since the battle. One wore a very elaborate buckskin suit with long tendrils of leather streaming from arms and legs of the outfit. He also brought with him a very expensive musket and proved the next day that he was a crack shot as he mowed down the invaders. Really wish that I had gotten to know him, he was a good actor.

The other new volunteer was a young fellow who had heard that a patriot was shot from the roof of the tavern during the battle. This story has never been substantiated, as far as I know. However, this daring young man expressed a keen desire to act out this part. We quickly objected to anything of this kind taking place as our insurance would not cover such an act.

The British contingent arrived for the dress rehearsal and brought their little cannon along with them. When it was unloaded it was discovered that the iron tire on one of its wooden wheels had become disengaged from the wheel. The tire would not stay on the wheel and without its protection the wheel itself would fall apart if it were wheeled out onto the street.

This upset Dexter Street no end, as an important part of the proceedings was the firing of the cannon to simulate the actual firing on the tavern, during which the ball was lodged in its side almost 200 years before.

We had. encountered a similar situation many years ago and asked that someone procure a child's portable swimming pool. It just so happened that Richard Mitchell had one for his children and after we filled it with water, the wheel with the tire in place was lowered into the water. We assured Dexter that the wheel would be as good as new in the morning and sure enough during the night the wood swelled up and was encased firmly under the iron tire.

The script called for all the church bells to ring at 11 o'clock the next morning, to signal the approach of the British. Following that, little Dane Kyeor would appear riding his gray pony, Cinders. Dane would be carrying messages from the north end of town to Generals Silliman and Arnold who with their troops were awaiting the arrival of General Tryon and his redcoats.

General Wooster had already been fatally wounded on North Salem Road. General Silliman had come through the night from his home in Fairfield and General Arnold had made a forced march all the way from New Haven.

#214: DESPITE PROBLEMS, THE BATTLE SUCCEEDS

At exactly 11 o'clock on the morning of July 4, 1966, the church bells in Ridgefield began to ring. They were heralding the approach of British forces under the command of General William Tryon.

Shortly, a group of Continental troops, commanded by General Gold S. Silliman, would engage the Redcoats in a simulation of the actual battle that took place on Ridgefield's Main Street, April 27, 1777. The original battle would be the only actual land battle to be fought in the State of Connecticut during the War For Independence.

There were two brigades of British troops, each numbering about 2,000 Redcoats while the Continentals were composed of some 400 patriots. The numbers of those engaged were somewhat less almost 200 years later.

It seemed that exhaustive preparations had paid off and everything was in readiness for the reenactment of the famous battle. However, there are those times when the best-laid plans go awry.

An important part of the tableau would be the firing of the little cannon by the Redcoats. To fire it, after the powder was placed in the muzzle, it was necessary to put dampened papers on top of the powder and tamp it in tightly. The man entrusted with providing the paper had forgot to bring it with him.

A hurried and frantic search of the neighborhood was conducted and I finally found some newspapers in a garbage can beneath the back porch of the Hawley house, which was the home of the Vernon Welsh family at the time. As I ran back to the parking lot at the Methodist Church where the British were waiting for the signal to appear on Main Street. Joe Young with his team and carriage were encountered at the intersection of King Lane and Main Street.

Joe was in a very precarious position as the traces on one of his horses had become disengaged from the whipple tree. The situation quickly became more serious as the horses were not accustomed to all this excitement and they became so nervous that Joe was unable to leave the carriage to make the necessary repairs.

Naturally he was very concerned about the safety of his very important passengers, Francis Martin and Cynthia Cleveland. Joe was greatly relieved when he saw me crossing the street. The bundle of newspapers was quickly passed to someone else and I managed to rehit the horse without further incident.

When Joe had regained his composure, he started his team down the street to the Keeler Tavern with Marty and Cynthia in authentic colonial garb waving to the crowd that now numbered about 3,000. This all made a beautiful picture and the crowd responded with a terrific ovation. Once the lead that was carried in the carriage was safely delivered to the Tavern, we were ready to start the battle.

Just as the sound of the British muskets was heard from the north, Dane Kysor came galloping down the street on his gray pony, "Cinder." Now that Dane had delivered his report on the advancing enemy to the Continentals who had formed near the War Memorial at the intersection of Branchville Road, the battle began in earnest.

Soon there were wounded soldiers, both British and American, lying along the roadside. One of the patriots, in the person of Buck Argenio, was draped across the sign marking the office of Dr. Mead. When later he was asked why he picked that spot to land, Buck said that he thought he should cover the sign as it was not there in 1777.

Mrs. Robert Collier, Kathryn Rosa, Louise McKeon, Marge McKenna, Sheila Rideout, and Mrs. Macy Willets served as nurses and they were kept busy tending the wounded with bandages that had been previously treated with red ink. It began to look very real as one soldier after another fell and had to be carried from the field of battle. To their great credit, the kind nurses gave equal treatment to both friend and foe.

Our friend in the buckskin suit was observed kneeling and taking careful aim in the middle of the street. It was said that he never wasted a shot but hit his target every time.

An interesting story about one of the participants in the actual battle recently appeared. He was William Edmond, after whom the town hall in Newtown was named.

At the time of the Battle, William had been a student at Yale but dropped out to join the Continental Army. William was 22 when he was wounded on our Main Street. A musket ball shattered his knee and such a wound must have been very difficult to treat, with the knowledge and meager equipment that was available at the time. He spent months at the home of Dr. Perry, a Woodbury physician, and after a year the wound became even worse.

Dr. Perry called for a consultation of surgeons and they decided that amputation above the knee was necessary. William Edmond did not concur in this opinion and said that if he must die, he would die whole.

The doctors retired to attend a meeting and during their absence William had a servant bring some surgeon's tools to his bedside. While confined the courageous young man had studied anatomy and was confident he could perform the operation himself. He made the incisions to the bone with his own hand and removed the splintered bone and the diseased portions and after cleansing the wound he replaced the flesh and bandaged his leg. The doctors on their return were very much surprised that the operation was successful.

William returned to Yale and graduated. He became a lawyer, was a member of the Connecticut General Assembly, and later a Representative to Congress. It should be noted that he lived to the ripe age of 83.

Back to the reenactment. The great crowd was very well behaved and John Haight Jr. and Sgt. Ronald Molles with Bill Church's assistance handled the situation very well.

John Haight Sr., who was then our chief of police, was on the porch of the tavern when General Tryon rode his horse up the sidewalk in front of the tavern. Tryon was brandishing his sword as he rode after the retreating Continentals.

At this point the fellow — who unbeknownst to us had practiced falling from the porch roof — came crashing down and landed between two large stones. His face looked very white and the chief shouted, "I knew that fool with the sword would hurt somebody. Call the ambulance."

With that, the fellow blinked his eyes and scrambled to his feet, much to the surprise of everyone.

An unperturbed Mrs. Van Allen Shields sat nearby and got a big kick out of it and she was then in her 96th year. It seemed a very fitting climax to a very exciting tableau on a very hot July 4th.

#215: THE ONLY HOUSE ON KING LANE

We were in the process of telling about the mansions along Peaceable Street and some of the interesting people who lived in them. Somehow, we got sidetracked into describing the first reenactment of the Battle of Ridgefield, as it was staged on Main Street 20 years ago. Our trip along that very aptly named street had just about been completed with the telling of the story about the Maynard sisters and their beautiful estate.

There is one more house, although it does not carry a Peaceable Street address. In fact it is listed as 44 King Lane and is presently the home of the Paul J. Meyers family. This very imposing structure has its own rather different personality and sits proudly on the corner where King Lane becomes Peaceable Street, at the intersection of High Ridge Avenue.

When crossing this intersection traveling north on High Ridge, it is necessary to stop and turn left for about 20 feet before bearing right and continuing north on High Ridge. This has the effect of slowing traffic along this very beautiful thoroughfare and people have the opportunity of enjoying the pretty surroundings.

So far no traffic lights have been installed and while it is necessary to stop at the intersection, there is no gridlock and no one sits waiting for a light to change. There also has been no attempt to straighten out the little jog in the famous High Ridge, so at least for now, traffic must move a little slower.

The "correction" of a similar situation on Main Street is now in the planning stages. When—and if—this scheme is ever completed, it will be comforting for pedestrians in the parking area to know that the medics and ambulances are nearby.

At any rate, until quite recently, the Myers family home at 44 King Lane and the Odd Fellows Hall at 21 King Lane, were the only structures on this short street to carry a King Lane address.

The very nice place at 44 King Lane was once a part of the fine estate that stretched from Main Street to High Ridge Avenue. At the settling of Ridgefield, when the home lots were distributed, this land became the property of Benjamin Hickock. We are not sure whether or no:

Ben ever built on this site but it was not long before the King family came along and owned the property for many years.

The King mansion, with various additions that were made through all those years, still stands on the corner of Main Street and King Lane.

Richard A. Jackson purchased the property in the early part of this century and kept everything on the place intact for a long time. The place at 44 King Lane had very few owners for some 200 years but in the past 40 years it changed hands several times.

During the early 20's Richard Jackson passed on and when Mrs. Jackson followed her husband to her just reward in the 30's, the estate was left to their son Fielding Jackson. For some reason Fielding sold off the property at 44 King Lane to Estelle de Peyster Hosmer in 1940. Why he sold off this part of the estate, we do not know, as he was left plenty of money as well as the property.

Perhaps the Great Depression had put the squeeze on Fielding Jackson. It is equally difficult to understand why the Hosmer family would want this property as they owned and lived in the beautiful place at 181 Main Street that is now the home of the Patrick James Crehan family.

At one time, before Fielding Jackson sold the property at 44 King Lane, it was rented as a private residence to John Northrop and his two sisters. They did not appear to be people who could afford to rent such a place but then you never know about such things.

The Northrops were very nice people and John was a pleasant little man who worked for many years as a yardman at the old Ridgefield Lumber Company, which is now the Ridgefield Supply Company. His last place of employment was as custodian of the town dump.

The pay of the custodian was commensurable with the amount of use that the dump could generate. There were no fees involved, as use of the dump was free. Therefore, it would be reasonable to assume that John's salary was not great.

However, it was said that John, who always had a real Santa Claus-type beard, had a keen eye for valuables that others discarded. Because of that fact, although the dump was not greatly used at the time, John made a good living by salvaging.

Since business at the dump has skyrocketed in the ensuing years, one cannot help but wonder about how profitable salvaging rights might be today. This is especially true when one considers that despite the numerous tag sales, people are more apt to throw out useful articles today that would have been considered to have value back in the Depression era.

At any rate little John went quietly, if not merrily, about his chores at the dump and in the process did very well for himself.

Winifred Browne bought the King Lane place from Estelle Hosmer in 1946. Winifred did not stay very long and three years later sold to James Doubleday. Jimmy, as we have previously pointed out, had a penchant for buying nice places and then tearing them down. To be sure, he always replaced the house that he eliminated with another fine structure. However, whether the new home was better than the old one was at least debatable.

In this instance, Jimmy departed from his usual procedure. Instead of tearing down the house, he set to work restoring it and put a very nice addition on the rear of the building as well. We always thought that it was nice that he retained the ornate New Orleans style wrought-iron work at the front doorway. We kind of feel that his lovely wife Betty had a strong influence on

the change in his modus operandi. The Doubledays stayed at their King Lane home for eight years, which was some kind of record for them.

In October of 1957 the Doubledays sold to William P. and Georgette Dyer. Bill was a product of two old Danbury families, the Cunnifs and the Dyers and like everyone else he had always wanted to live in Ridgefield.

The Dyers quickly entered the social life in town and many were the parties held at 44 King Lane. One memorable event was attended by a United States Senator and the Governor of Connecticut. The Dyers stayed 11 years and sold to Gordon Walsh, who after three years sold to W. Lee Noel, who sold to Christian A. Nast. Chris became vice-president of Chesebrough Ponds and six years ago, sold to the present owner, Paul Myers.

#216: SOME NORTHERN HIGH RIDGE HOMES

Many areas of Ridgefield have undergone considerable change in the past half century and then there are areas that have changed very little. High Ridge Avenue is unusual in that it has examples of both retention and change.

With the exception of the development of the Maynard estate, the west side of this beautiful street remains relatively unchanged from the way it looked back in the 20's.

The same can not be said for the east side. Most of the land on this side of the street was a part of the estates owned by wealthy families that lived on Main Street. They were not about to part with backland that they considered protection.

Of course, there was not the great demand for building lots that there is today. It is also true that taxes were so low that it was possible to hold on to vacant land on the pretext that our rural atmosphere was being preserved.

At any rate, the east side of High Ridge Avenue in the 20's, from West Lane to King Lane had only three homes: Elmer Bouton's, the Gray family and Mrs. Elvine Richard's. From King Lane north to Catoonah Street there were only four houses, the one at 44 King Lane, and then no more until 154 High Ridge, now the home of Thomas Shaughnessy.

In the 20's this was the home of the Howard C. Freer family. Howard was a local businessman and had an agency for Ford cars and I think Hudsons and the Essex as well. He also had a radio store where Homestead Realty is now located at 414 Main Street. He also was musically inclined and played trumpet in the local band.

Two of Howard's sons, John and Edward, still live with their families, here on NewStreet.

The next house north of 154 was the home of the James Sheridan family and is now the residence of the Hanford family. Jim Sheridan was a good carpenter and carried on an extensive business. Francis Connell and Sereno Jacob were two of those who worked with Jim.

The home at 162 High Ridge is the last before Catoonah Street is reached and during the 20's it was the home of Catherine Connery. I seem to remember that the Frank Moylan family also lived in this house which is now the home of Octavius J. Carboni, better known as "Tabby." He was featured in several articles on the Carboni family, about three years ago.

With just these few houses on the east side of High Ridge, you can imagine that there was a considerable amount of open land. Griffith Lane had not been built so there were no houses off the Ridge either.

There was one building on what is now 8 Griffith Lane. It was a brown shingled, windowless structure and had the rather peculiar duty of protecting a water supply. This area was a part of the Lounsbury estate on Main Street and sported two windmills. One windmill was located near the reservoir that was covered by the previously described wooden structure. The other stood in back of the governor's mansion and about where the south parking lot is at Veterans Park School.

The reservoir was large and must have held a tremendous amount of water. When the public water supply was installed in what is now our Community Center, the windmills and the reservoir were no longer needed. Just after World War II, Mrs. Griffith, the governor's daughter, allowed the land on High Ridge to be developed. Peter McManus could see the possibilities presented by the reservoir and bought it. With the water drained, he had an already-built basement and proceeded to build a very nice home over it. Peter's sister, whom we have always known as Aunt Netta, still lives in this fine house at 8 Griffith Lane.

We have already told of B.O. Chisolm's "Grand Hotel," just across the street from the entrance to Griffith Lane and Julius Tulipani's home at 157 High Ridge. The next place on the west side going north was built early in the century by Samuel Carpenter. Sam was very active for many years in the social and political life of Ridgefield.

This place is located at 145 High Ridge Avenue and is the home of Frances Cleaners, Inc. This establishment has been owned and operated by the former Frances Zandri for more than 40 years.

The next house on the west side is 153 High Ridge and for many years was the home of Rudolph Martin. Rudy was a brother of Francis D. Martin and, like Marty, was very active in local affairs; he also ran the Ridgefield Water Supply Company. This place is now the home of the Jerry Bryers family.

The house at 159 High Ridge sits on the south corner of the intersection of High Ridge Avenue with Bryon Avenue. The place has a rather special meaning for me as it was here that Marie lived before we were married several years ago.

This house was home to James and Johanna Regan for many years. They were Marie's granduncle and grandaunt and of the same family after which Regan Road in the Ridgebury area was named.

Uncle Jim was born at the end of Regan Road, where the Ridgebury Firehouse is now located. He was employed as super on several of the large estates, such as the John Ames Mitchell on West Lane and Harris Dunscombe Colt (Peter Parley house), now Preston Bassett, on High Ridge.

On the north corner of Bryon Avenue lived the Archibald V. Davis family. When the First National Bank (now Union Trust) [now Wells Fargo] opened in 1900, on the corner of Governor Street, Archi went to work there as a clerk and rose to the rank of top official in that institution.

Archi's lovely wife was the former Sylvia Barhite and as a young girl grew up in her family home, which was located directly behind the graceful old elm tree that some of our very misguided officials are trying to murder [on Main Street opposite Prospect]. (Just can't help wondering what Mrs. Davis would have to say about this proposed attack on this very innocent work of nature.)

The fact that Archi and Sylvia were both highly intelligent people was no guarantee that their children would inherit this trait. However, both Mary Alice and Elizabeth turned out to be exceptionally smart as well as pretty. Lizzie was in my high school class and was everyone's favorite.

Next house north was the home of James E. Ryan. Everyone should have the opportunity of knowing Jimmy Ryan. He was a perfect example of a real gentleman and it can be truly said that he did not have an enemy in the world.

If you drove up Catoonah Street to High Ridge and failed to turn right or left, you would run in what we used to call the Buckley house. Teresa Buckley married Louis Baker in the early 20s and after that the place became known as the Baker place.

Louis had been a theater manager but then joined the ranks of the newly organized state police. In those days, the state police had a few model T Fords. They were one seated runabouts and probably had a top speed of about 50 miles per hour.

This was not fast enough for pursuing some of the speedier cars of the day, so motorcycles were employed. The three popular motorcycles were Harley Davidson, Henderson and Indian. Louis Baker became an expert on the Henderson and used to perform trick riding in the field that is now a parking area at Boehringer Ingelheim [the old East Ridge School/Ridgefield High School].

Somehow, Louis did not really have a great sense of humor. He did, however, take each order seriously and did his level best to carry them to a successful conclusion.

For example, the late Leo Carroll told me that one time when he was in charge of the local barracks, an order came in to pick up a man in Norwalk on a charge of non-support. Leo passed the order on to Louis who wasted no time in getting to Norwalk.

On arriving at the given address, the officer broke in the door and found the culprit in the midst of shaving. He had finished shaving one side of his face but the other side was still covered with a thick lather and that is exactly how he appeared when they returned to the Ridgefield barracks.

#217: GREAT PEOPLE — AND SMART FLIES — IN BRYON PARK

The appellation "Bryon Park" is not used much anymore. It seems like just a few years ago that people living on Bryon Avenue, Greenfield Street or Fairview Avenue. would consider themselves as living in Bryon Park, but now they are identified by the street on which they live.

The name Bryon denoted the man who developed the area in the very early years of this century. He always signed his name B. Adelmer Bryon and followed that with an M.D. We are not sure of the spelling of his first name, but have always felt that the use of plain B. rather than the full name indicated a bit of displeasure with the name his parents gave him [Benn] .

However, many of those who knew him well always referred to him as "Barney" and this was not said in a manner of disrespect. We used to think that it might have something to do with Barney Google, who with his famous horse "Spark Plug" was a comic strip character of another era.

Others were of the opinion that the name was derived from the rapid manner in which he drove his auto, which they felt resembled that of Barney Oldfield, a famous racing car driver of

the time. We have seen the name in writing and it is not Bernard, of which Barney would have been a normal nickname.

At any rate, B. Adelmer Bryon was a doctor and his patients felt that he was an excellent practitioner of the medical profession. When I was a kid, he and Dr. R.W. Lowe, Dr. H.P. Mansfield and Dr. H.W. Allen were the four Ridgefield doctors and they handled things very well.

Dr. Mansfield was very highly thought of but had a penchant for imbibing liquid spirits. But when this was overdone, he always had the presence of mind to take another physician along with him when making a sick call.

Dr. Bryon may have been one of the very early professional men to supplement the income from his practice with earnings made in the field of real estate. Before Dr. Bryon, the only professional men involved in real estate were Indian chiefs like Chief Catoonah, who showed that he did not know the value of land when he sold this town to the original settlers. Of course, many doctors and lawyers are involved in the real estate market today.

Dr. Bryon must have been very good at the development of real estate and Bryon Park was just one of his many ventures. Perhaps it is difficult to picture an area, as close to Main Street as Bryon Park is, as being undeveloped only 80 years ago. There were some homes in the area but the place bore little resemblance to the well organized and well kept little colony that we have there today. Barney was truly a man of vision and the town is better off because of his efforts.

The doctor and his family lived in a fine large house that stood back from Main Street and about 150 feet in front of where the Grand Union [CVS] Store is now. There were at least six beautiful elm trees on the property that added greatly to the beauty of our famous Main Street. They would have provided much needed shade to that homely and hot parking area.

Of course, the trees would mean that fewer cars could park and leaves would have to be picked up each fall. Perhaps that is why the developer wanted to cut them down. When this plan was opposed he merely put the bituminous concrete paving right up to the trunks of the trees and it naturally followed that the trees would die from lack of water. It is sincerely hoped that such a ruse will not be employed in eliminating the last of the elms in what is now a matter of public interest. That last elm looks so healthy in comparison with nearby trees in Ballard Park that are badly in need of attention. [The tree Dick is talking about in 1986 was finally overcome by disease and cut down in 2013. Where it stood is now the new entrance to the CVS center.]

So back to Bryon Park. As you enter Bryon Avenue from High Ridge, the first house on the left or south side is the home of Mrs. Lawrence Coleman, the former Mildred Denton. For more than half a century, it was the only house on that side of the street.

Lawrence Coleman was for many years with the D.F. Bedient Company. He was the son of Michael Coleman who ran the lunch wagon between the Town Hall and Acorn Press and Mildred was the daughter of Samuel S. Denton, one of the largest property owners in the history of Ridgefield.

The first house on the right is now the home of Mrs. Merle Partrick, the former Gertrude Humphreys. Many years ago it was the home of William Anderson when he was the chauffeur for the Hyde sisters on High Ridge. Later on, Dick Lane lived there when he was the chauffeur for Miss Amy Low Huntington. We sure had a lot of chauffeurs in those days.

Frances Mahoney and her father lived in the next house that is now the home of Yole Casagrande. Frances was a clerk in Brundage and Benedict's store, where Fitzgerald and Hastings is now [Dr. George Amatuzzi in 2023]. She was a very pretty girl with a nice shade of red hair and very light blue eyes. Frances had an excellent disposition and was very well liked by everyone, especially me when I was a little kid delivering newspapers for that store.

The Mahoneys had a little white dog that I was just crazy about. One day while on my paper route, Mr. Mahoney gave me the dog, which was described in a previous column. Sport was the greatest of the many dogs that I have had.

Next door was the home of the Daniel Robinson family. Daniel was a butcher by trade and had previously lived and had a meat market on Grove Street just across the street where the Poly Clean Center is and on the lot where Pamby Motors park their care. When the Robinson family moved to Bryon Avenue, Dan continued the meat business and delivered house to house in a little red Model T Ford that had a canopy over the pick-up type body that made it look very much like the panel trucks of today.

Dan had a bell which he rang when he stopped in front of a customer's house. By the time the lady had arrived to make her purchase of meat, he would have the back of the vehicle open and the steaks and chops were on display. When the lady made her choice, Dan would cut off the selected portion and weigh it on a scale that slid out from beneath the roof of the truck.

As you can well imagine, flies were a big problem in warm weather. Dan had a son-in-law who was quite a storyteller. George used to say that the flies that congregated around this traveling meat market were a special breed and had better than average intelligence. To illustrate his point he told of how when Dan was on his way home, he would start up Catoonah Street with a swarm of flies behind him. Upon reaching the top of Catoonah Street, it was necessary to turn left on High Ridge for about 200 feet and then right into Bryon Avenue. George swore that the educated flies did not make the turn but went straight across lots to meet Dan as he drove in his driveway.

#218: INTERESTING OLDTIMERS FROM BRYON AVENUE

A person traveling west on Bryon Avenue in the 1920's would come to what is now number 22 and was at that time the home of the Charles W. Riedingers.

Charley was an electrician and a good one. He operated his electrical supply store and shop on Bailey Avenue, just across the street from Herb Bates' Livery Service and Garage, where The Press is now [was] located. That was in the days of the large estates and Charley had a flourishing business that gave employment to several men.

Charley's talents were not limited to electrical work. He was knowledgeable in just about anything mechanical and could fix most anything. When Irving Conklin became superintendent of Dr. George G. Shelton's estate in the early 20's, the doctor and Irv went over the list of mechanics that should be called when their services were needed. When the two came to electrical work and who should be called, the doctor said that his choice would be Charles Riedinger. Then the doctor added, "Actually Charley would do anything from fixing your watch to taking out your appendix, but we must give others a chance so it will be best if we use him only for electrical work."

Charles Riedinger was not only good at this trade but had some very good electricians such as Frank Bailey and Bill Dougherty working for him.

About the time of which we are writing, the late Harry Goodwin and his family arrived in Ridgefield. Harry's first job in town was as Charley Riedinger's bookkeeper. His last job, some 50 years later, was in a similar position for Joe Young's feed store. In between Harry must have taken care of an awful lot of books for several different businesses.

At this time there were many electrical accidents. We are not sure of the reason for this but it may have been that there were not so many safeguards at that time.

Charley Baxter was severely burned while atop a utility pole on Gilbert Street one stormy night. The Riedinger firm was engaged in doing extensive work on the Ingold estate (now the home of Dr. Patrick Neligan and his family) on West Mountain, when a tragedy occurred. Bill Dougherty was on the roof of one of the buildings when he accidentally touched a live wire and was electrocuted. The entire town was saddened by the death of this very popular young man.

Charley Riedinger himself was not immune to the hazards of his trade. On one occasion he was severely burned on the back of his left hand. The accident caused his hand to shrivel to such an extent that from then on, the use of that hand was limited to holding Charley's ever-present cigar.

Another electrician who came to Ridgefield during these years was the late Harry Perregaux. Harry came from the north country and eventually took over Riedinger's business. He also took over the home at 22 Bryon Avenue when Charley Riedinger built a new, very nice stucco house that is now the home of the Philip Knoches at 112 Barry Avenue.

In the late 20's Ruth Miller was voted the most popular girl in Ridgefield. Harry Perregaux was in complete agreement with the outcome of the voting and soon he and Ruth were very good friends. The friendship led to their marriage and it just naturally followed that they became a popular couple. Ruth was secretary for Thaddeus Crane, whose office was next to Brundage and Benedict's store [Dr. George Amatuzzi's offices], in what we used to call the Telephone Building, later the Martin Block and now I guess it could be called the Pizza Building as it is owned by the proprietors of Roma Pizzeria.

Thad Crane was one of the three or four real estate brokers operating in Ridgefield at the time. He also carried on an insurance business and when Thad was killed in a very unfortunate railroad crossing accident in Wilton, Ruth took over the business.

After Ruth and Harry were married they combined their businesses and operated from the north side of the D.F. Bedient building. Ruth still owns the home at 22 Bryon Avenue.

The next house is at 26 Bryon Avenue and actually is on the corner of Bryon Avenue and Greenfield Street. In the 20's this very attractive house was the home of George Weir.

George was the conductor on the railroad train that traveled from our station on Prospect Street to the Branchville station. Since both railroad stations are within the boundaries of Ridgefield, it could be said that the train traveled from Ridgefield to Ridgefield.

At any rate George Weir was a very dignified gentleman, as conductors were expected to be and he looked the part, as conductors were expected to do. The conductor was the undisputed boss of the train put in his charge.

The Weir house was later owned by George and Julia Huber and today is the home of John and Ethel Garbin. The former Ethel Zandri is very active in town affairs and John, who is an expert in landscaping, watches over their very nice home with the eye of a perfectionist. If an impudent weed would dare to have the audacity to raise its ugly head in John's well-manicured lawn, it would never reach a height of two inches before being whisked away.

On the other corner of Bryon Avenue and Greenfield Street is number 30 Bryon Avenue. It is now the home of John Patrick and Ada Leary.

Pat is a retired painter and Ada still holds forth at the counter in Bissell's Drug Store where she has been a fixture for many years.

At the time of which we are writing this nice home belonged to the George Browns. Mrs. Brown was a daughter of Samuel D. Keeler, a very prominent merchant who ran a very large meat and grocery store in the building that he owned where Ridgefield Auto Parts is now [until recently, Deborah Ann's Sweet Shoppe]. S.D. also had a large grain business which he operated from his elevator building on Bailey Avenue, where Knoche Realty and the Woodworks are now [and which is being removed].

George Brown worked as a clerk in his father-in-law's store and through hard work, rose to become manager of that great old store. He had a very high-pitched voice and experienced no trouble in being heard.

George was addicted to the chocolate ice cream sodas that Squash and Freddie Romeo used to make across the street at Bissell's soda fountain, and he also was known for his abruptness. As he crossed the street one afternoon for his soda, a car stopped in front of him and the driver asked, "Is this Danbury or Ridgefield?"

Without breaking stride, George answered, "Yes" and went right on.

#219: MORE BRYON FAMILIES — AND STORIES

In the nice white clapboard house at 34 Bryon Avenue live the Sileos, Francis and Mary and family. I really never got to know Francis so well, but understand he is a first-class gentleman. I know Mary well for she was one of the very fine nurses that took such good care of Dr. Van Etten in his declining years, and she was a real gem.

The house was for many years the home of Jack and Julia Cranston. Jack was an electrician by trade and he was the local manager of operations for the Connecticut Light and Power Company.

Previous to that he had been superintendent of the Ridgefield Electric Company, when our electric power was generated in the old Power House on Ivy Hill Road. Jack's duties were varied and included heading the crew of linesmen, as well as being trouble shooter for the electric company.

He was a rugged individual and looked the part. He was a tall man with an abundance of prematurely gray hair that capped a pair of piercing light blue eyes and a lean weather-beaten face. That he had a thorough knowledge of his trade is beyond question.

In the balcony of the auditorium in the old town hall, there was a projection booth that was probably 10 or 12 feet square. This was known as Jack's domain, as he operated the movie projector. His first allegiance was to the utility company that employed him and if there was

trouble on the power lines, the showing of the old silent movies had to wait until Jack had straightened out the problem with the wires.

The early movie films became very brittle from the heat of the bulb in the projector and on numerous occasions, the film would break. It was not unusual for this to happen at a crucial time in showing of the movie.

Hoot Gibson would be racing his horse across the desert in hot pursuit of a cattle rustler, or Tom Mix was just about to be captured by a band of roving Indians and bang, the film would come apart. It could even happen while Charlie Chaplin was losing his grip on some lofty ledge to which he had been clinging, in desperate fear of falling, or just as Francis X. Bushman was about to plant a kiss on the inviting lips of Mary Pickford, who was America's Sweetheart at the time.

When such a very irritating incident occurred, the unperturbed Jack Cranston would calmly stop the projector and repair the faulty celluloid. To placate the movie patrons while repairs were made, the music which always accompanied the silent movies was intensified. The songs would be suitable to accompany fast-running horses or perhaps the romantic melodies more befitting the beautiful Miss Pickford and her lover.

The music would come from the violin of Willis Boyce and the piano played by his wife Charlotte, or on other occasions from the piano of Arthur Ferry and the violin of Andy O'Connor.

The films came on large reels that were encased in metal containers and it took, several reels to show a complete movie. At the conclusion of a reel, the message END OF REEL I, or REEL I, as the case might be, would be flashed on the screen. After a pause, the next reel was activated and the show went on. It was all so very exciting.

One of the jobs that young boys would vie for was rewinding the film on reels, when the show was over. This was done by turning the reels by hand and packing them for shipment to the next town for showing. It was all done under the watchful eye of Jack Cranston and he made you feel as though he was doing you a great favor by letting you turn the reel-winder.

Julia Cranston was a very energetic lady and belonged to several of our local and political organizations. She was secretary for many of these organizations.

James Mullen was Julia's first husband and unfortunately he died at an early age. I have samples of his handwriting and he wrote with the flourish of a John Hancock. Funny how you will remember certain things about a person, such as the fact that he wrote with such a flowing hand.

I guess that James Mullen's writing would properly be called script and it was really something to see. Herb Mills was another person who would write in script.

When my father took a pen in his large gnarled hands, it was always a real pleasure to see the result. The writing of my brother Joe was very good and that of Mrs. Irving Conklin, Sr. was and still is very distinctive. I would recognize their fine hands immediately.

Anyone who received a bill from S.D. Keeler's store, which later became Walter Stewart's store, later still Perry's Market and finally Gristede's, must have marveled at the writing thereon. This was one bill that you might even look forward to receiving.

Of course, the writing on these missives could be no one's but that of Miss Mary Huber. Mary was the bookkeeper for all those great stores and I bet that she still writes like that today. The stores changed but Mary never did.

Some will say that the ability to write well is inherited, but others will say it is just a matter of working hard to achieve perfection. My father always attributed his success in writing with a fine hand to the length of the ruler and the accuracy with which it was wielded by Brother Ambrose, in a Christian Brothers School.

Years ago we were taught to write by use of the Palmer Method. Observing samples of present day writers, we have to assume that this method of training the hand has long since disappeared.

Next to the Cranstons, at 36 Bryon Avenue, lived the Edward Smith family. It is now the home of Francis and Pauline Moylan.

Francis is a carpenter by trade but always had a great love for the Ridgefield Volunteer Fire Department. He spent many years as a member of that fine organization during which time he served in many capacities including that of chief and as Ridgefield's fire marshal.

Pauline, besides raising a fine family, has been involved in real estate and also is the Republican registrar of voters. Both Francis and Pauline are natives of Ridgefield.

Ed Smith, like the present owner of 36 Bryon Avenue, was a carpenter. He had at least three sisters that I knew and they were from an old Ridgefield family. These ladies were all very petite and they were ladies in every sense of the word.

#220: MORE BRYON AND FAIRVIEW FOLKS WHEN THE GRANGE WAS GRAND

In our travels along Bryon Avenue we had reached number 36, where the Edward Smith family lived a half century ago. They had a daughter Marion, and she had a very good speaking voice so it seemed just natural that Marion was also a good singer.

We remember that Marion sang in the Village Minstrels in 1926, a show that ran for two nights to a packed audience in the old Town Hall auditorium. The hits of the show were Joe Bacchiochi and Agnes (Kelly) Carnall singing and dancing Tea for Two. It was like a Broadway production and everyone loved it.

Marion later married Thomas Shaughnessy who operated a tree surgery business that later became Knapp Brothers, Inc. Tom, who still lives at 154 High Ridge Avenue, became Ridgefield's tree warden and served in that capacity for many years.

Next door to the Smiths and on the corner of Bryon and Fairview Avenues, in a very comfortable brown-shingled house, lives Mrs. Helen D. Pierandri. It is now 42 Bryon Avenue and has been home to the Pierandri family for more than half a century.

At the time of which we are writing, it was the home of Edward Mead. Ed Mead, like his next door neighbor Ed Smith, was a carpenter. We had a number of carpenters and electricians on this street.

At that time we did have a large number of tradesmen but it should be remembered that in those times they did not build houses in a matter of days. However, you can be assured that the houses that these fellows built were very well put together. The two Eds worked together on some of the great mansions that were built in the early part of this century.

So we have completed our tour along Bryon Avenue but we must call attention to a bonus that was provided to the people who lived on the north side of this street. It was simply the

privilege of watching the beautiful horses of the B.O. Chisolm and the George Doubleday families as they cavorted in what were then the open fields on the south side of the street.

The Doubleday horse stables were just inside the back entrance to that estate at the south end of Bryon Avenue. Horses running free in a large pasture always seem to present a picture of exuberance and beauty that is unmatched by other animals.

This was especially true when the horses were cared for by horsemen such as Jerry McCarthy for the Doubledays and Tom Salter for the Chisolms. These men kept the horses well-tuned and just so full of life.

Around the corner, on the right or eastern side of Fairview Avenue, lived the Arthur Thomases, the Fred Thomases, the Allen Reynolds, the John McCarthys, the John Mitchells and the Christopher Kanes.

Arthur and Fred Thomas were brothers and they were also cousins of my good friend Harry Thomas, the blacksmith. All of them were descendants of Benjamin Stebbins of Revolutionary War fame. The Stebbins homestead was right in the middle of the Battle of Ridgefield, on the corner of Main Street where now there's an entrance to Casagmo.

The Thomas brothers lived side by side on Fairview Avenue for many years. Arthur was a clerk in the Ridgefield post office where his pleasant and kindly mannerisms endeared him to the patrons of that office. Arthur's wife Bessie was a frequent contributor of interesting articles to *The Press* and I believe that this was a practice which she continued, even after leaving Ridgefield for the sunny southland.

Bessie was such a prolific writer, it just seemed natural that she was elected secretary of most of the organizations that she belonged to. Arthur and Bessie had a daughter Elizabeth, who was a classmate of mine. We also belonged to the Juvenile Grange together. Lizzie, as we all called her, played the piano well and was a very popular girl.

Fred Thomas was once the ticket agent in the old railroad station on Prospect Street and later on became yard foreman for the Ridgefield Lumber Company. Fred's wife was the former Margareta Belle Seymour, a descendant of yet another family of early settlers. Belle, as she was called, was a sister of one of my very best friends, Clifford A. Seymour.

Fred and Belle had a son who was given the name Seymour. Seymour's son Gordon still lives in the family home on Fairview Avenue.

The Thomas family came from an agricultural background, as did many of the old Ridgefield families. When the Ridgefield Grange No. 165, Patrons of Husbandry, was organized in 1906, you can just bet that Arthur and Fred Thomas were among the charter members. This fine organization had in its membership some of the very finest people and it was always a pleasure to be in their company.

News of the activities of the Grange has considerably lessened in the last few years and it is assumed that this is directly caused by the demise of farming in this area.

Allen Reynolds was for many years the chauffeur for Mrs. Howard Lapsley Thomas. Mrs. Thomas lived in the very picturesque brick mansion that she built in the early part of the century at 35 Golf Lane. It is now owned by Cary Wellington.

Allen's wife was the former Margaret Northrop, so you just know that they belonged to the Grange. I would guess that every member of the Northrop families was a staunch supporter of the Grange.

The Reynolds had three children, Irene, Pauline, and Allen Jr. Irene went to live and work in California. Pauline worked in the office at Perry's Market with Mary Huber. Paul Berglund also worked at the store and after he and Pauline married, they moved north.

Allen was a star center on the Ridgefield High basketball team and because he was so very handsome, he was selected to play the lead in several plays.

John J. McCarthy was a prominent businessman and with his brother Robert Emmett McCarthy, conducted an electrical and plumbing business in the store just south of Thaddeus Crane's office. Perhaps we should say just north of today's Roma Pizzeria [Planet Pizza].

John handled the electrical part of the enterprise and Emmett (some folks called him Bob) took care of the plumbing. Both of these fine gentlemen were considered experts in their respective trades and they had a thriving business.

John McCarthy, in later years, served as Ridgefield's building inspector. It was at a time when our town was experiencing the early stages of tremendous growth and John's insistence on excellent work performance by contractors placed him at loggerheads with some of them.

#221: BUILDING BATTLES & THE MEDIA MANOR MESS

By the late 1950's, the building boom was in full swing in Ridgefield and houses were appearing where many felt they would never be built. This put a rather severe strain on those charged with the responsibility of seeing to it that buildings were properly constructed.

The Board of Selectmen were in the process of drafting a building code that, when adopted, would provide some protection to the home buyer. John McCarthy insisted on a strict adherence to the code and many were the stories he could tell of attempts by some builders to bypass the code.

These were hectic times in this fast-growing town and some developers strongly objected to what they felt were restrictive and unfair regulations. There were numerous court cases in which the code and the methods of inspection were tested to the limit. Some of these cases unearthed flagrant violations.

Developers arrived in Ridgefield, put up a number of houses and then disappeared as quickly as they came. It was later found that the fields in some septic systems were actually running uphill in pitch.

We remember one new building on North Street where the plans called for a louver at each end of the attic. The contractor supplied the louvers, but they were useless because he had merely nailed them in place, without making an opening behind them through which the air could circulate.

In that same building, a hole was cut in the bathroom floor, on which a toilet was to be set. The hole had been cut by a blow torch, rather than by a saw. The resulting hole was so large that when the toilet was set, there was grave danger of its falling through the floor into the basement.

A large home on West Mountain had been wired by an electrical contractor from a neighboring town. While making an inspection of the wiring, John McCarthy found that in establishing a ground for the electrical system, the contractor had merely dropped the ground wire on the side of the building and then kicked some leaves over the end of it.

John McCarthy ordered work on the building stopped and the negligent electrician was required to appear before the Board of Selectmen, who at that time had jurisdiction in such matters. There were two matters to consider: the correction of the violation and whether or not the electrical contractor, who had been cited for previous infractions, should be allowed to keep his license to ply his trade in Ridgefield.

On the evening when the contractor appeared before Leo [Carroll], Paul [Morganti] and me, he was represented by a prominent and very reputable attorney from his town. It soon became apparent that the errant electrician had failed to inform the attorney of the true nature of things that had caused this hearing.

John had prepared his charges in great detail and presented the case well. When the contractor had to admit that the charges were true, the attorney became so incensed that he drove back to Danbury by himself and the contractor had to hire a taxi to get home.

Probably the most widely publicized case was that which involved Media Manor. Media Manor is composed of land surrounding what is now known as Marcardon Avenue.

It all happened about 30 years ago and it took two years to settle the dispute, which was very costly to all concerned and that included the Town of Ridgefield. In the process, both John McCarthy and the town were sued and John's property and bank account were attached.

This was a very serious thing that could cause numerous complications. If allowed to stand it could make it very difficult, if not impossible, to attract people to serve a municipality in a position where their actions could result in having their bank accounts tied up. Fortunately, I believe the law has been changed to protect such individuals from this embarrassment.

The property in question consisted of some 24 building lots and it had several owners over the years. Some of the previous owners were speculators and some were developers.

The problem centered around the type of septic system that would prove to be most suitable for this particular property. Soil tests had revealed that a small portion was type C soil, while most of the soil was type D. Type D provides very poor drainage and is composed mostly of hardpan, or clay.

Just as there are various types of soil, there are also many different types of septic systems. The trick is to get the right one for a particular lot.

A firm named Scott and Rice were owners of the property in question. The previous owner was Simon J. Milberg of Stamford. Scott and Rice hired a sanitation engineer who prepared plans for the proposed septic systems.

Dr. Francis B. Woodford, as Ridgefield's health officer, and John J. McCarthy, in his capacity as plumbing inspector, reviewed the plans and declared them to be inadequate. Their decision was based on the fact that much of the land in the proposed development was classed Type D, indicating poor drainage.

Plans were redrawn and resubmitted several times. The changes in the plans were considered to be insignificant and were repeatedly turned down. Scott and Rice sued the inspector and the town for \$500,000 and later added another \$250,000 to the damages they sought.

During the course of two years, the case was brought before no fewer than half a dozen different judges. It was finally heard in Superior Court in Bridgeport before Judge John P. Cotter.

Our present judge of probate, the Honorable Romeo G. Petroni, was town counsel at the time and as such, was charged with the responsibility of defending both the inspector and the town.

After several postponements, the trial finally got under way. There were an awful lot of witnesses called to testify and a bunch of lawyers involved in the case, which was replete with charges of conspiracy, coercion and restraint of trade.

Judge Cotter exhibited considerable patience and continually attempted to get some kind of agreement between the two factions.

The previous owner of the property, Simon Milberg, held the mortgage on the land and had received no payments over the two-year period of litigation. This may have been a factor in the final settlement of the case.

At long last Milberg came forward with a proposal to return a substantial part of the purchase price and drop his request for interest on the delinquent payments.

Judge Cotter ordered permits issued for the septic systems and the electrical work, in accordance with the state code, and threw out the charges against John McCarthy and the town.

Before moving on, we should note that John and Katherine McCarthy had two very pretty daughters, Helen and Mary. Mary married John Hyatt and moved to Danbury.

Helen became a supervisor of nurses at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City. Her very pleasant features and calm mannerism must have been very reassuring to an apprehensive patient that might be facing surgery. Dr. Van Etten rated Helen very highly and our own son, when a patient at Lenox Hill, thought that she was just the greatest.

We understand that Helen has now retired after heading the nursing staff in Ridgefield's school system.

#222: STURGES OF THE FIRE DEPARTMENT, KANES OF MUSIC AND THE INN

Just north of the McCarthy family on Fairview Avenue in the 20's and early 30's lived the John Mitchell family. John was a plumber and a good one. Like so many of his fellow tradesmen, he worked on many of the great mansions that were built in Ridgefield in the early years of this century.

The Mitchells had three daughters, Madeline, Genevieve and Rita. The three girls were all very pretty and attended our local schools.

Madeline and Genevieve were identical twins, and both appeared with their father in the Village Minstrel Show in 1928 in the old Town Hall.

For some reason, with which I am not familiar, the family moved to Norwalk. Since it was during the heart of the Great Depression, John may have found work more available in that city. It had to be a good reason to cause the family to leave the town they all loved.

It is interesting to note that in recent years Rita moved back to Ridgefield and now lives at Ballard Green. Like so many others who have returned, Rita must find it difficult to adjust to the many changes in her old home town.

The Earl Sturges family bought the former Mitchell house at 28 Fairview Avenue and have lived there for many years. Earl is a painter by trade and worked with his brother Ernest, until Ernie retired some years ago. At that time, Earl and Peter Grommes, who had worked together for a long time, took over the business and called their firm, Sturges and Grommes.

Earl and Rita Sturges had two sons, Robert and David, both of whom I think have located in the Maryland-Delaware area.

Both Rita and Earl were born in Ridgefield and Earl came from an old Ridgefield family, many of whom were noted outdoorsmen. Earl inherited his great love for the outdoors and has always been an avid hunter and fisherman. He was also fond of sports and played on Ridgefield's fine Spartan football team.

For many years, Earl has served in our great Ridgefield Volunteer Fire Department. It is worthy of note that within a large city block live three former chiefs of the fire department, Earl, Donald Ligos and Francis Moylan. Must have been something about the atmosphere in Bryon Park.

The very next house north was also the last house on the eastern side of Fairview Avenue, at the time of which we are writing. It was the home of Christopher and Page Kane, who purchased it from Ernest Scott in the early 20's. Chris Kane was semi-retired but Page was a music director in the New York City school system and continued to commute to the Big City for many years.

Commuting was relatively easy when the Kanes first arrived for we had excellent train service at the time. However, when the service was discontinued, getting to New York got to be a chore. A person would have to drive to the Branchville station, or take a bus, on which service was irregular, or drive the entire distance. None of these alternatives appealed to Page Kane.

Page was an exceptionally talented lady and played the piano in much the same style as the incomparable Miss Mary Fox. Like Mary, Page also excelled at the pipe organ and played in several churches, including Saint Mary's. Page's extraordinary ability in the music field was matched by her prowess in directing stage shows.

All this did not go unnoticed by people in her adopted town. In no time at all Page found herself immersed in so many local activities that some people wondered if she ever had time to sleep. She was always in great demand by organizations that wanted to put on various kinds of shows. Ridgefield was a much smaller town at the time but the many stage productions, plays and minstrels, made it seem like Broadway. Of course radio was just beginning to bloom and television had not even been thought of.

Because of a thirst for entertainment, people would flock to the old Town Hall or the various church halls to hear the great singers and dancers and actors that were presented. When it came to the dancers, Page depended on her good friend Margaret McGlynn and Margaret was always happy to oblige. She was a great dancer herself and knew how to train others in "tripping the light fantastic."

Margaret McGlynn taught Monica McManus, Jeanette McManus, Patricia Potter, and Nancy Jones along with James McManus, Jack Jones and myself to do the Highland Fling and the Stack of Barley and woe betide anyone who missed a step. It was all great fun, for both the audience and the performers. Perhaps we could use some of that kind of fun today.

Page Kane was particularly expert when it came to minstrel shows. When she sat down to the piano, she did not just play the instrument, she commanded it.

It was not necessary for her to look at either the music or the keyboard, as she knew everything by heart. Therefore she was able to turn her head in the direction of the stage and give full attention to the performers.

Her disposition was rather low key and when a performer needed correction, it was done in that manner — at least it was done that way the first time around.

It was Page Kane who directed the great minstrel show in 1926 that is still remembered so well. The show was put on for the benefit of the fine Ridgefield baseball team and there was an SRO crowd both Friday and Saturday nights.

The big hit of the show was Joe Bacchiochi and Agnes Kelly, singing and dancing Tea for Two. Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers could not have done it better. Sixty years later we are still whistling that great tune.

Despite all her other activities, Page found time to serve as the Democratic Registrar of Voters, a post that she held for several years.

Just north of the Kanes, on the corner of Fairview and Barry Avenue there was an empty lot owned by Michael T. McGlynn. Page and Marion Greene bought the lot with intentions of building on it. However, the Depression came along and changed all that and only in recent years was a house built on that lot.

Marion Greene was also a teacher in the New York school system and she went on to purchase other Ridgefield property, including Sam Carpenters' house on High Ridge, now the home of Frances Cleaners.

In the late 20's George Pratt Ingersoll passed on and his home on West Lane was put up for sale. Chris and Page Kane sold their home at 32 Fairview Avenue and bought what is now The Inn at Ridgefield [more recently, Bernard's]. They named the place The Kane Inn and carried on a successful business there for several years.

#223: MORE TALENTED FAIRVIEW FAMILIES

When Dr. B.A. Bryon started the development that would carry his name, he exhibited not only a great deal of foresight, but a considerable amount of courage as well. There seems little doubt that it was the biggest, if not the very first, project of its kind, ever attempted in Ridgefield. The doctor had the good fortune to live long enough to see the completion of his plans as most of the homes were built before he died.

Over a half century ago, on the southwest corner of Fairview Avenue, lived Mr. and Mrs. Jack Galli and Mrs. Galli's children, Aldo, Tina and Elvira Girolmetti. For many years, Jack worked next door on the Doubleday estate that is now the large development known as Westmoreland.

Mrs. Galli married Jack after her husband, Frank Girolmetti, passed on, a victim of the flu epidemic during World War I. Frank had been George Doubleday's superintendent during the formative years of the great Westmoreland estate.

Elvira was a classmate of mine at Ridgefield High School. She was known to her legion of friends as "Lil." Lil was a very pretty girl, with an excellent disposition and well loved by all who knew her. Her untimely death at an early age caused great sadness in our town.

In the days before television, when people provided their own entertainment, most families saw to it that the young ones in the family were taught to play a musical instrument. Lil took lessons from Ruth Harris and became very proficient on the violin. Tina was taught to play the piano by Charlotte Boyce and when the two sisters played together, it was a duet that was

well worth listening to. The family had a nice player piano but, as good as it was, it was not quite as nice as the real thing.

Tina married Arthur Sfondrini, one of the proprietors of the Hayloft Restaurant. The Hayloft was just over the line in South Salem and Tina was the hostess at that great eating place when it was one of the most popular places in this area.

People on the dance floor today appear to be suffering from some strain of inertia and rarely make it around the floor in the course of an evening. In the days when people actually danced, Tina was considered an excellent dancer and it was (still is) a real treat to lead her onto the dance floor.

Trombonist Aldo became a fine carpenter and has been retired for some time after being associated with Bacchiochi Inc. for many years. He was very fond of sports and played both basketball and baseball for Ridgefield High School and still plays a very good game of golf.

Aldo learned to play the trombone and played in Aldo Casagrande's Ridgefield Boys Band that later became the second Oreneca Band. Aldo Girolmetti's prowess with the trombone must have made a good impression on the fine bandmaster, for later on he became Al's father-in-law when Anne Casagrande became Mrs. Aldo Girolmetti. Their very popular daughter Patricia is married to Donald Ligos.

It is nice to see that the Ligos family lives just across the street from where Patty's father grew up. Just wish that it could be possible for more native Ridgefielders to follow such a pattern and find a place to live in their hometown.

Next door to the Gallis and traveling north on Fairview Avenue lived the Ernest Swanson family. Ernest was the chauffeur for George Doubleday and we have previously told of how he was a real professional driver. Somehow those chauffeurs had that particular ability to project an image and create the impression that their passengers were very important people — and you could just know that they were.

The Swansons had two sons, Ernest Jr. and Carl. Ernest became a carpenter and worked as such on the Doubleday estate, as Fred Montanari did, when he was a young man. Ernie and Fred had good teachers, as Ernest Finch and Stanley Walker were the regular carpenters for the Doubleday family.

Ernest and Stanley were excellent in their trade and probably would be classified as fussy budgets today. One thing was sure, when they finished a project it was as near perfect as it could possibly be.

Perhaps it is hard to imagine in this day and age that there once were estates large enough to warrant the employment of full-time carpenters to keep the many buildings thereon in shape. However, there were several such estates in Ridgefield in the early part of this century. It is very doubtful that we will ever see their like again.

Ernest Swanson Jr. married another classmate of mine, Miss Alice McCoy, and they had two fine children, Robert and Elizabeth Glennon.

Bob, like his father, became a carpenter and inherited a love for antique automobiles. He made a study of the ways to restore these old cars and cannot only make them look like new but can give you a history of where they were made and what their good and bad features are.

I guess most parents dream of having their children grow up, get married and continue to live in Ridgefield. Bob Swanson was one of the lucky ones. He married Debbie Lynn Ramey and

they have two very cute daughters and live on Soundview Road just a few doors from where Bob grew up.

It should be noted that Bob's pretty sister followed his lead. Elizabeth Glennon, better known as "Glenny," married Peter Montanari and they live with their cute little daughter on High Ridge Avenue.

I had not seen Glenny for several years but just a couple of weeks ago while taking our pony Maggie for a drive, a nice lady with a little girl, stopped her car to say hello and when she smiled, I recognized that it was Glenny. We always find it quite amazing to see how quickly the kids grow up.

Next to the Swansons, at 15 Fairview Avenue, were Peter and Mary McManus. Peter came to this country from Bonnie Scotland at the turn of the century. He was an architect by profession and became associated with a fellow Scotsman, the great James F. Kennedy, who was Ridgefield's premier builder at the time.

The two men made a real good team and they were responsible for some of the great homes in Ridgefield. Peter's job had a rather special bonus as it afforded him the opportunity to meet Mary Connelly, who was Jim Kennedy's niece. Peter knew a good thing when he saw it and soon Mary became Mrs. Peter McManus.

#224: AN ARCHITECT TURNED BUILDER AND A DRAMATIC CHILD RESCUE

By the time that Peter A. McManus arrived in this country as an aspiring young architect from Scotland, James F. Kennedy had established an enviable reputation in the contracting business. His honesty had endeared him to the wealthy people, who had come to Ridgefield from the city, harboring a fear that they might be taken advantage of.

It got to a point where some of these people were asking Big Jim to perform tasks that were not normally associated with the building trade. One of these people was George M. Olcott, who built the great mansion that once graced the area where the development called Casagmo is now.

As you no doubt are aware, Casagmo stands for "Home of George M. Olcott" and has an Italian flavor. Mr. Olcott's attraction to things Italian surfaced again when it came time to establish the great gardens at Casagmo. He asked Jim Kennedy to lay out and oversee their construction and asked that one of them be a sunken Italian garden.

Jim Kennedy was a master of many things, but when it came to gardens, an expert in botany he was not. Therefore, the task of laying out the great formal gardens at Casagmo was assigned to the young architect. It was one of Peter's very first jobs and you can be sure that he put forth his very best effort. Nothing was spared and the beautiful gardens were a very great attraction that made Casagmo one of the show places of the area.

The Kennedy firm was engaged to do a great deal of construction on the estate of Melbert B. Cary, just before World War I. Cary was a noted author and lived in a mansion on the corner of West Lane and Country Club Road. The beautiful home was destroyed by fire just a few years ago and the estate is now being developed.

An elderly gentleman stopped by the post office one day and asked for directions to a place that he had visited as a boy. He tried as best he could to describe the road on which the

place was located. He had forgotten the name of the people but he did remember that the place was called “Wildflower Farm.” I remembered that Melbert Cary had called his estate by that name [actually, evidence is that he called it “Wildfarms”] and it was my sad duty to inform the old fellow that the great mansion was no more.

Melbert B. Cary’s success as an author was almost matched by his good luck in the stock market. While the Kennedy firm worked at Wildflower Farm, Big Jim and Mr. Cary frequently engaged in conversation. It was only natural that Cary would occasionally brag of his phenomenal success in the investments that he had made. It was just as natural that Jim would be fascinated by the stories of high finance, as spun by the well-known author.

Jim Kennedy had always worked very hard for his money and the opportunity to make it in a much easier fashion must have had a great appeal to him. At any rate, he was bitten by the Wall Street bug and soon found himself riding on the train to New York City each day with Melbert Cary.

His initial investments were rather modest but, when under the expert tutelage of Mr. Cary, his returns had a high yield, Jim Kennedy began to invest his life savings in very large quantities. It can generally be expected that a country gearing up for a war will have its economy at full speed ahead.

It can also be counted on that the economy of that country will go into a rather sharp decline at the end of hostilities. Our country’s economy, before, during and following World War I was no exception and among those caught in the squeeze was Jim Kennedy. When the inevitable slump came following the war, Jim was ill prepared to handle what turned out to be a very bad situation. His losses were considerable and he became very disillusioned.

To add to his woes, his fine business operations had suffered because so much of his attention had been diverted to Wall Street. Perhaps because of this, Jim closed up shop and the Kennedy family moved to Bridgeport.

At this point, Peter A. McManus, who had been closely associated with the Kennedy operations and had married Jim’s niece, Mary Connelly, decided to go into business for himself. Peter was very energetic and soon became a very successful building contractor.

Many young carpenters and painters — Dan Tobin, Tom Scott, Terry Knoche, Gus Venus, John P. Leary, Warren Keeler, Andy O’Connor and Porter Stannard, just to name a few — got their start with the McManus firm.

In the meantime, Peter and Mary McManus were in the process of raising a good-sized family. First there was a son James, who was destined to become Ridgefield’s building inspector. Before that could happen, Jim had to learn the carpenter trade and go through the rigorous training that Peter’s other carpenters were subjected to.

Then along came Monica and Jeanette, who as previously reported, learned to dance the Highland Fling under the watchful eye of Margaret McGlynn. It should be mentioned that Margaret, like both Peter and Mary McManus, was a native of Scotland. They also spoke with a decided accent that was richly flavored with a delightful burr that was quite pleasing to the ear.

Following the McManus girls came sons Richard, Fred, and Joseph. The youngest is better known as Jo Jo and he became a carpenter like his brother.

Perhaps this would be a good time to relate a little anecdote that reveals how, in years past, neighbors were able to depend on one another. It was a Sunday evening and I must have been about four at the time.

A call came from the McManus household requesting assistance. The youngest member of the family was having great difficulty in breathing. Mrs. McManus had tried calling the few doctors we had in town at the time, but they were all out on calls and none was available.

In desperation, Mrs. McManus called my mother, who after raising nine children of her own, had come to be regarded as somewhat of an expert in handling problems of this kind.

Mom grabbed me by the hand and we ran, what must have been about four or five blocks, from our home at what is now 612 Main Street to the McManus home, at 5 Ramapoo Road.

By the time we arrived, the face of the child had turned a very dark blue. Without a moment's hesitation, Mom opened the little mouth and inserted a finger, with which she flipped over a tiny tongue. With another deft movement she replaced her finger with a small spoon, until the proper color reappeared to the little one's face.

#225: THE MANY INTERESTS OF PETER McMANUS

Peter and Mary McManus had six children of their own, all of whom had a number of friends. This just about guaranteed that the house at 15 Fairview Avenue was never without plenty of people.

The family had a nice piano that Monica played very well and many were the songfests in the McManus living room. Peter was a firm believer in the theory that singing was an excellent exercise for the body and mind, as well as for the vocal cords. Therefore, it was not unusual for him to join in the singing.

When the young ones would run out of popular songs of the day, Peter would inject some of his own. Then with a burr equal to that of the legendary Bobby Burns, he would give vent to such Scottish favorites as Roamin in the Gloamin' and Loch Lomond. It was all great fun.

In the midst of this activity, Mrs. McManus would be busy serving refreshments to the singers. She was always her very gracious self and it never seemed to bother her, no matter how big the crowd might be.

Peter McManus was still a young man when he was bitten by the political bug. After working in several election campaigns and various political assignments, he ran for and was elected a justice of the peace. It was at a time when Ridgefield had its own Justice Court and the courtroom was upstairs in the old Town Hall where the selectmen's office is now.

A justice of the peace was selected to preside in this little courtroom and many were the cases that were heard there. Some of the cases were involved with bootlegging and some had to do with domestic disputes, but most of the cases were concerned with motor vehicle violations.

Peter presided over some interesting cases, including the one that involved the two Johns, as described in Dispatch No. 88. Back in the 20's, the details of every arrest were carried in *The Ridgefield Press* and generally they made the front page. As a matter of fact, for some time there was a column on the front page that carried the caption Judge McManus's Court.

It was at a time when automobiles were not as plentiful as they are today and many of the drivers had only recently switched from driving a horse to the operation of an auto. Some of these people reasoned that as long as a driver's license was not required to drive old Dobbin, they should not have to get one in order to drive the family car. We knew of one man who drove an auto all his long life without ever having a license. Some felt they would be safe, providing they were able to avoid an accident.

The State Police were stationed in town at the time and every once in a while, they would set up a spot check for driver's licenses. It was like shooting fish in a barrel.

One particular court session involved 16 people, all of whom were found to have no licenses. After their plea of guilty, they paid the \$10 fine, plus one dollar for court costs.

Following that court session, Judge McManus offered the opinion that half the people in Ridgefield were driving without a license.

Constables were used as keepers of the peace in those days and sometimes they became over zealous in the performance of their duties. One of these fellows, whose name we will not mention as some of his relatives are still here, became involved in what turned out to be a real boomerang.

One Sunday afternoon in the early 20's he followed a car in which three men were riding from just over the state line in South Salem to 65 West Lane where the State Police barracks were at the time. There he stopped the car and accused the driver of traveling in an erratic manner.

By the time he had dragged the driver to the front door of the police barracks, he was also accusing the driver of being under the influence of liquor.

Sgt. John C. Kelly was then in charge of the barracks and he did not agree with the constable's diagnosis. Sgt. Kelly refused to lock up the accused driver and suggested that the constable take the man to the jail at the Town Hall if he were to insist on locking the man up.

The constable was chagrined but toted his quarry off to the Town Hall and put in a call for Justice McManus. The upshot was that the man was ordered released by the judge and the constable was himself arrested for being intoxicated.

Peter McManus was fond of stage shows and plays and always enjoyed taking part in them. His favorite role was that of the interlocutor in a minstrel show. He served in that capacity, in the great minstrel show of 1926.

The word "interlocutor" is defined as one who serves as an interpreter. A person hearing Peter's very pronounced accent for the first time, might feel the need of an interpreter in order to understand the interlocutor.

Peter's role in politics was not limited to that of justice of the peace. He was elected and served in several other capacities including a tour as a member of Ridgefield's Board of Assessors. He was also elected as one of Ridgefield's representatives to the General Assembly in Hartford.

While he was in Hartford, his work caught the eye of Governor John Lodge who saw fit to appoint him to the State Labor Commission. He must have done a good job for after Lodge was defeated by Abe Ridicoff, Peter was reappointed to the labor commission. To satisfy the chief executive of both political parties must have taken some doing.

Being a true son of bonnie Scotiand. Peter was partial to scotch whiskey. He was also very fond of card games, especially poker, and we had many a spirited game through the years. I would guess that what little I know of the game, I learned from Peter Michael Dowling, Jim Driscoll and of course, Tabby Carboni.

On the south corner of High Ridge Avenue and Griffith Lane, there used to be a brown-shingled building. To all intents and purposes, it looked like just an old shed.

Actually the building served as a cover for a reservoir that supplied water to what is now our Community Center on Main Street. Two windmills pumped water into the reservoir. One windmill was about where the gymnasium at Veterans Park School is now and the other stood near the reservoir.

After the great mansion started getting its water through the public water supply, the reservoir was abandoned after being drained. Peter realized that the building was in an excellent location and that it would not be necessary to dig out a basement. So he bought the place and turned it into a very attractive residence. Peter's sister, whom we have always called Aunt Netta, still lives at the Griffith Lane address.

Meanwhile, the old homestead at Fairview Avenue is still in the family. James McManus had the foresight to marry Patricia Potter and like Jim's parents, he and Patsy had six children, Michelle, Eileen, Peter, Maureen, Sheena and Mark.

That would ensure that there would never be a dull moment at 15 Fairview Avenue.

#226: THE SEVERAL CAREERS OF ERNIE STURGES

In the late 20's, Ernest and Esther Sturges bought the house just north of the McManus residence on Fairview Avenue. Their contributions to the matrimonial fruitbasket were three fine children, Priscilla E., John Nilson, and Sylvia Jane.

The family name is an old one in Ridgefield and can be found among the early settlers. John, who has become a very successful builder, still lives in Ridgefield. He and his lovely wife, the former Sylvia Pinchbeck, have done their share in perpetuating the Sturges name, with three fine children of their own—Charline, James Howard and Donald Charles. The boys have followed in their father's footsteps and are building some of those very large houses that are going up around town.

Ernest Sturges was one of the most vigorous men that I have ever known. He was a painter by trade and would guess that he got his start with the painting firm that was headed by the late Harry D. Hull.

The building trades were all flourishing during the 20's. Every painter, carpenter, plumber, and electrician had all the work he could handle. Then came the market crash in 1929 and the activities of the building trade came to a screeching halt.

In those days there was no unemployment insurance and men found it necessary to accept employment in whatever capacity that was available. It was especially hard on families that had children to feed and clothe. Ernie Sturges was not one to stand around waiting for things to get better and soon he was working with me at the Conklin Dairy.

He had to be just about the greatest milkman ever. He had large hands and they enabled him to carry a great number of milk bottles. There were no paper cartons in those days.

He also had long legs, which propelled him from doorstep to doorstep with amazing speed. His natural quickness stood him in good stead, as unlike the delivery men of today, you were expected to run and Ernie was very good at it. Ernie could jump, as well as run. and if something in the nature of a privet hedge should bar his way, he would simply jump right over it.

The snow never got deep enough to stop Ernie Sturges, even in the great blizzard of February 1934. He plodded through those giant drifts, with what seemed to be very little effort.

Ernie had a very bad tobacco habit. He was an inveterate pipe smoker, but also liked cigarettes and a cigar. In fact, he would go right from one to the other.

While it did not appear to have any effect on him, you just know that it did. One thing was sure, there were very few waking moments when Ernie was without a pipe, a cigarette, or a cigar.

Delivering the milk was only a part of the workday at the farm. That little chore was performed before breakfast and then the regular workday that consisted of many different jobs began. Because of his ability to do so many things well, Ernie performed a multitude of tasks.

On one occasion, a leak developed in the roof of the Conklin residence on Ramapoo Road. Ernie climbed the ladder to the roof, located the leak and set about repairing it.

While so engaged, he called down for me to bring him some nails. I climbed to the roof and as I stepped off the ladder, I could see that he already had a can with plenty of nails in it.

That should have been warning enough for anyone who knew Ernie Sturges as well as I did. Before I could say "You already have enough nails," Ernie grabbed me.

You may recall that in Dispatch No. 83, I told of how Ernie and Charley Elliott, while working on the roof of Charley's house, engaged in a wrestling match. The match ended when the two rolled off the roof and it was a miracle that neither man was seriously injured. It was great fun.

Ernie just loved this kind of horseplay, but I had visions of us landing on the ground, as he and Charley had done so many years before. Several times, we rolled to the edge of the roof and each time, my heart skipped a beat. At long last Ernie had enough fun and he laughed as I scrambled down the ladder to safety.

The Ridgefield Rotary Club at one time had among its members Ernest Sturges, Charles Elliott and Raymond Keeler. Now, if you do not think this guaranteed lively meetings for the club, you just never knew the gentlemen in question. These fellows were all very active in salvage drives during World War II and did a really great job. They had the very worthwhile faculty of making hard work seem like fun.

When the economy of our country began to improve and the building trades became active again, Ernie went back to his painting.

Some time later, Irving Conklin and I were on our way into town and as we approached the business center we could see what appeared to be a fully extended ladder. It was in front of where Roma Pizzeria is now and looked as though it was standing without any means of support.

Suddenly the ladder began to move, as though walking along the street. We could not see the base of the ladder but Irv immediately said, "You know there is only one man that could be carrying a ladder like that."

I agreed that it had to be Ernie Sturges and as we got closer to the scene, it proved that we were correct.

Ernie served several years as a constable and several terms as a member of the Board of Tax Relief. This board is now called the Board of Tax Review. Perhaps the word "Relief" made it seem as though a reduction in one's taxes was automatic, when one appeared before that august group.

Ernest Sturges was a strong man, a good man, and always fun to be with.

David Watt and his mother came here from Scotland. just before the turn of the century. They became some of the early settlers of Bryon Park and lived on Fairview Avenue just north of the Sturges residence.

Both Dave and his mother lived most of their lives on Fairview Avenue and both died in 1950, just a few months apart. Dave was a rather private person and in a town where most people were joiners, he was never so afflicted. In the mid 40's,

Dave retired from the postal service after serving many years as a rural mail carrier. His mail route extended over into South Salem and parts of Pound Ridge as well as parts of North Wilton.

In the early days he drove a horse that was very ill-tempered. It had the nasty habit of kicking or biting anyone or anything that came near it. Dave used to say it was protecting the mail but we always felt that the horse was just ornery.

#227: BRYON PARK FOLK WHO WORKED ON ESTATES & FOR P.O.

The pretty yellow house with white trim at 27 Fairview Avenue was for many years the home of John Edward McGlynn and his family. Ed, or Eddie, as he was best known, was the son of Michael T. McGlynn, a prominent Ridgefield painting contractor.

Ed was a dutiful son and followed in his father's footsteps. It was just before World War I that Ed McGlynn and his pretty bride were married. Mrs. McGlynn was the former Agnes Reardon and I think she came from Ansonia. The nice couple were to have five children, John Edward Jr. Robert, Francis, Mary Isabelle and Anne.

Come to think of it, there sure were a number of children on that short, little street, at least on the west side. John Edward Jr. is still living in Ridgefield, as is his sister Anne, who married a local boy, Jimmy Principi, and they have lived with their children on Colonial Lane for many years.

John Edward Sr. remained in the painting business with his father until the early 40's, when he was appointed acting postmaster on the retirement of Uncle Jack Walker.

Like his neighbor, Peter McManus, Ed McGlynn enjoyed a good game of poker, even though Eddie was by nature, very conservative. He also loved to play pinochle, euchre and 45, as well.

People still play pinochle but the games of euchre and 45 seem to be just about nonexistent today. They were great games that generated a lot of competition and to play those games a player had to be very alert mentally.

Next door and going north, stands the last house on the west side of Fairview Avenue and it is located at the intersection of Barry Avenue. This was for many years the home of Ed McGlynn's brother, Charles.

The McGlynn boys built their homes on land which they acquired from their father. For some reason that is not clear, Charley McGlynn, his wife the former Katherine Kearney, and their

children, moved to Stamford in the late 20's. It must have been a sad day for the family, but Charley probably had a good reason for leaving his hometown.

At any rate, in the spring of 1928, the Charley McGlynn home was sold to James Richard O'Keeffe and his bride, the former Sara Wims. James was named after his father and in order to distinguish between the two he quickly adopted the middle name and became best known as Dick O'Keeffe.

Dick worked for many years on the West Lane estate of Henry Swords, now the home of the Ralph Delli-Bovi family. His father was superintendent for the Swords family when that great estate encompassed what is now Memory Lane and ran south into what is now Silver Spring Country Club. Sara was the cook for the Swords family and you just know that she was a real good one.

Donald Ligos was Sara's nephew and when Don first came to town from New Jersey, he made his home with the O'Keeffes.

With the passing of Henry and Mrs. Swords, their daughter Elizabeth became the owner of the estate. In the meantime, Elizabeth had married Wheaton Grant. Following World War I, the owners of the large estates began, sadly, to break up these great places. Many reasons were given for this, such as the increase in taxes, the difficulty in acquiring help to keep the estates in shape, etc.

I think Wheaton Grant had come from Virginia and wanted to go back there. For whatever reason, "Homewood," which was the name given the estate by George G. Haven, a previous owner, was placed on the market.

After Homewood was divided up and sold off, Dick O'Keeffe finished his career as a maintenance man with the town of Ridgefield.

Dick was a big, good-natured man and besides being named after his father, they also had similar talents. Both Dick and his father were excellent musicians and it was a real treat to hear them play the violin. Actually Dick played many stringed instruments and appeared with his mandolin in the great minstrel show of 1926 that we keep referring to.

Like his brothers, John and Patrick and his sister Eileen, Dick O'Keeffe was a native of the old sod and was born in County Kildare. You just know that the young O'Keeffes learned to dance to the lively Irish folk songs.

Dick's brother Jack still lives in Ridgefield and is a valued neighbor of ours. Incidentally Jack's son, Thomas, is superintendent of postal operations at our local post office.

There is one other street in the development that is known as Bryon Park. Like Fairview Avenue, this road runs north and south and is called Greenfield Street and some very fine families have lived on it.

In the 30's and 40's, there was Elsa Scherf and her little daughter. Elsa was a substitute rural mail carrier and was a real good one. She was very athletic in appearance and you could easily get the feeling that she would be very good with a tennis racquet.

Across the street lived John Mahoney and his wife, the former Mary Clark and their cute little red-haired daughter, Marie. John became a chauffeur for Seth Low Pierrepont and the Mahoney family lived at Twixthills for several years. Funny how those names come up. They are all town roads now, Pierrepont Drive, Seth Low Mountain Road, and Twixt Hills Road.

Mary Clark Mahoney worked for some years in the office of the S.D. Keeler Store, which later became Walter Stewart's Store, then Sam Perry's Market, later still Gristede's, and is now Ridgefield Auto Parts.

The Primo Baldaserinis lived on this street when they were first married and the Eugene Mortensens also started their married life there as did Irving Keeler and Myrtice Weaver. In the early days of radio Myrtice used to recite poetry on radio station WICC and she also appeared in that 1926 minstrel show.

Byron Sherwood lived on the west side of Greenfield Street and was a rural mail carrier for the local post office for many years. One of the most important things that a rural carrier is to learn is first the protection of the mail and then the protection of his little cash box. Once, after Byron had loaded his car before starting his deliveries, he noted that he had forgotten his hat and went back inside the office to get it. He left this cash box on the fender of his car and a postal inspector hid it. Byron went wild and the inspector was lucky to escape with his life.

#228: FAMILIES ON THE STREET OF TWO NAMES

One of the early Italian families in Ridgefield was that of Augustus Conti. During the period of which we are writing, the Contis lived at what is now 14 Greenfield Street, or Avenue. You do have a choice, you know.

Like its sister, Fairview Avenue, Greenfield is a rather short street, perhaps 150 yards long. In fact, if you stood midway down the street and your eyes are in good shape, you might note that the sign on the north end of the street says Greenfield Street, while the sign on the south end of the street says quite plainly, Greenfield Avenue. [*This is still true in 2023!*]

At any rate Gus lived to a ripe old age and can be considered as the patriarch of the Conti family in Ridgefield. He was the father of Ananzita, Geno, Ernest, Joseph and Fred. As you probably know, Joe Conti was the father of Ridgefield's town clerk, Dora Cassavechia, and her sister Mary, who became Mrs. Mario Marcheggiani.

Ernest Conti, who lived for half a century in the Epenetus Howe homestead, of Revolutionary War fame, at 91 North Salem Road, was the father of Leonora and Ernest Conti Jr. Leonora is now Mrs. Joseph Dunleavy and Ernest Jr., still lives on North Salem Road.

Fred Conti was a handsome young man and when he married the pretty Jean Zandri, they were one of Ridgefield's popular young couples. Fred was not a big fellow, but he played football on Ridgefield's great Spartan football team. He did much to prove that it was not necessary to be of monstrous proportions to play the game well. Fred was smart and his quickness more than made up for his lack of size.

In later years, the Daniel Bennetts lived in this house at 14 Greenfield. Dan, like his three brothers, worked most of his life on the great private estates of the early years of this century. Dick Bennett looked after the M.S. Wilson place on Main Street. Finn Bennett worked on the F.E. Lewis estate on West Lane. George Bennett was superintendent on the W.A. Jenner estate on High Ridge and Dan was superintendent on the Reggie Lewis estate on South Salem Road.

The Bennett boys were all fine bowlers, though most of them suffered from poor eyesight. Dan was one of the very best bowlers that I have ever seen. He had a terrific hook ball, that was a beauty to see.

As Dan's eyesight got progressively worse, he had to wear glasses that kept increasing in thickness as he grew older. Finally Dan needed assistance in locating the pins — not with the first ball, as he knew just where to stand when all the pins were up. However, if a second ball was needed, which was not very often, Dan would ask the number of the pins that were still standing. He would then adjust his approach to the foul line and pick off the remaining pins.

Gottlob Gluck and his family lived in the house at 10 Greenfield Street and I think he was related to Gottlob Riede, who preceded me as superintendent at Hillscroft. Mr. Riede was an expert concerning trees and shrubs and planted many things for the Glucks, some of which are still growing there today.

Vinnico Carboni bought this place in the late 20's and lived there with his family until he passed on, just a few years ago at the age of 102. Gus Conti was the patriarch of his family and Vinnico was certainly the patriarch of this Carboni family.

There were three sons, John, Marino and Vasinto. John and his wife, the former Inez Servadio, still live in the old family homestead at 10 Greenfield Street. John was a star baseball pitcher at Ridgefield High and also played the tuba in Aldo Casagrande's Oreneca Band and is now retired from Gilbert and Bennett.

They also had three sons, John Jr., Vincent and Paul.

Marino, who we used to call "Molink," moved to the midwest many years ago and I believe he still lives with his family in Texas. Vasinto (Vinnie), is the golfer of the family and lives on Nod Road with his wife, Alda. In case you did not know, Alda owns and operates the Candlelight Shop on Main Street.

We have fond memories of Vinnico, the patriarch, with his ample mustache, ruddy cheeks and ready smile. He was a kindly old gentleman and worked most of his adult life on the Carle estate in South Salem.

Transportation was no problem for Vinnico, who never drove an auto. For many years he walked that long trek over the state line to work. He must be considered a real advertisement for walking your way to health. Without modern medicines and vitamins, he made it to 102 and how many do you know who lived to see their great-great-grandchildren?

The Fred Brundage family lived across the street from the Carbonis for many years. Fred came from Mt. Kisco and married the former Jennie Pehrson. Jennie came from an old Ridgefield family and we can remember her father with his long white flowing beard, when he lived on Ramapoo Road.

The Brundages had four sons: Walter, Ralph, Lawrence and Edwin. We see Lawrence occasionally, for though he lives now in New Fairfield, he never misses a wake when some old-time Ridgefielder passes on.

Fred Brundage went into partnership with his neighbor Jesse Benedict and they operated the Brundage & Benedict Store, where the real estate firm of Fitzgerald and Hastings is now at 419 Main Street.

Some called the store B and B and some called it the Busy Bee. Busy, it was, and you could buy almost anything from dry goods to newspapers there. I can remember getting my first pair of crepe-soled shoes at this store. Frances Mahoney handled the dry goods and took care of the books.

My first newspaper route originated from this store and I can remember Jesse Benedict saying that his biggest problem was getting the boys to remember to leave the papers at a new customer's house and then found that they were still leaving the paper six months after the customer moved away.

The delivery of newspapers was a large phase of the operations and on Sunday the paper routes extended into North Salem, South Salem and Pound Ridge. This was accomplished with the aid of Jesse Benedict's 1915 Model T Ford, which sometimes rebelled against the load it had to carry and the many miles it had to travel.

#229: BUSTER'S GOAT-POWER CART; AMAZING GEORGE BAILEY

Next to the Byron Sherwoods on Greenfield Street lived the Charles Coe family. Charley, his wife, the former Mary Bailey, and their son, Charles Jr., had previously lived on Danbury Road right across the street from the entrance to the Old Ice House [*Girolmetti Court*].

The large white, rambling structure was a two-family house and it was owned by Sam Denton, as were all the houses on the hill to Joe's Corner and on to the stone wall that now encloses the Casagmo development. In fact that house next to Casagmo's wall is now 612 Main Street, and that is where I was born a few years ago.

It just so happened that the house where the Coes lived on Danbury Road and the one on Main Street where I was born were once just one very large house and it sat just south of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church. But that is another story.

The house on Danbury Road where the Coe family lived was torn down more than 20 years ago and Mary Girolmetti built the neat little brick house that sits there now. The house that it replaced is just one of the many houses that have been moved in Ridgefield from their original foundations. I would bet that more houses have been moved in Ridgefield than in any town of comparable size.

At any rate, Charles Coe Jr. was called Buster, in order to distinguish him from his father. Of course we soon shortened Buster to Bus and even that was used less and less as he grew up until it finally disappeared entirely and he became just plain Charley.

When Bus was a little fellow, his father bought him a goat. It caused great excitement in the neighborhood and the little black and white animal got lots of attention.

Goats are very healthy creatures and they used to be used as companions for race horses. At many race tracks they lived right in the box stall with the horse.

Goats are also very playful and make great pets. Charley's goat had curved horns and it seemed to enjoy having the human kids grasp the horns and attempt to push the goat back as it tried to go forward. Very few of the kids were strong enough to stall the little fellow for even a minute.

Goats were quite often used as subjects in the comic section of the Sunday newspapers and invariably they were pictured eating tin cans. The neighborhood kids used to bring cans to Charley's goat but it soon became apparent that the goat was only interested in the paper that was wrapped around the can and not the tin itself.

The goat came complete with a nice harness and a cute little wagon. It had been trained to pull the cart and did very well until it encountered an immovable object, such as the side of a building. It was then that adjustments had to be made as the goat had never learned to back up.

Charley patiently began training sessions with the goat, but the little animal proved to be quite stubborn and flatly refused to take a step backward. Then came the day when the goat gave in and started to back up. The problem was that once he started backing he would not stop. The goat backed Charley around his yard, at a very good clip, until the front wheels got cramped under the wagon, turning it over and depositing the driver unceremoniously on the ground.

While the Coe family lived on Danbury Road, the three Bailey boys, Frank, George and Robinson, lived with them. The Baileys were all very fine mechanics in their respective trades.

If he were around today Frank Bailey would no doubt be an electronics expert. In the early days of radio, Frank built one by hand from scratch. It was an enormous machine with three large dials that had to be synchronized to get any particular station. When properly adjusted, it was possible to get such distant radio stations as WEAJ and WJZ in New York, WOR in New Jersey, WBZA in Boston, WRIS in Cincinnati or even KDKA in Pittsburgh.

There was another trick that was used in an effort to get the distant radio stations. It was by use of an antenna and the longer it stretched, the farther the reception. Therefore the antenna would be strung from the radio to the farthestmost tree possible. If no tree was available, a pole might be used in place of a tree.

Radio buffs like to brag about the distant stations that they had been able to reach and in the early 20's, there was considerable competition.

My brother Paul had a set that had been made by Jimmy Kilcoyne. It was one of the very early radios in town, if not the first, and it had exceptional range.

One morning Paul, walking to work, met a couple of neighbors who were bragging about stations they had reached the previous evening. One of them asked Paul how far he had gotten the night before. The weather had been very cold so hardly breaking stride, Paul said "I just opened my window last night and got Chile."

Frank Bailey was an excellent electrician and when he was not tinkering with radios, he worked for Charley Riedinger, but later on he opened his own radio store on Main Street.

Frank's brother George was a carpenter and what a carpenter he was. George was a little fellow whose movements were quite deceptive.

He never seemed in a hurry and in fact gave the impression that he was rather slow. However, the project on which George would be working seemed to take shape as if several men were putting it together. It can be truly said that this little blond fellow had no waste motions as he went about his business with the ever-present pipe dangling from the very center of his mouth.

I do not think that George ever measured some of the boards that he cut. He would simply gaze at the space where the board was to be nailed. Then he would saw the board and it would fit perfectly into the space for which it was intended.

George was a real wonder. It was during the early Depression years that he left Ridgefield to be the boss carpenter for a firm that was engaged in a large project on Long Island. Robin Bailey was known as a finished carpenter and like his brother George, he never seemed to hurry.

Again, like George, there was no wasted motion and his work was beautiful to see. Robin worked along with George Johnson for the Knoche Brothers firm for many years. The Knoches' clientele was for the most part made up of people who demanded the very best in workmanship and you can rest assured that they got it.

#230: HAY! THAT'S SOME LOAD THEY HAVE!

As we were meandering along Greenfield Street, we were in the process of extolling the mechanical skills of Robin Bailey. While so doing, another little anecdote came to mind and it might prove to be of interest.

It happened just a few years ago and we were far from Greenfield Street. Marie and I were attending the National Convention of Postmasters in Phoenix, Arizona, and in the course of events, we visited a nearby town called Rawhide.

This turned out to be a rebuilt, frontier town. It was very authentic, complete with rambling buildings, false storefronts, wooden sidewalks and dusty streets, through which there wandered, horses, cows, chickens, and other members of the livestock family. There were many tourists in the town and the stores were doing a very brisk business.

When I stopped to examine some harness that was on display, the group that I was with got a little ahead of me. As I crossed a narrow little side street in pursuit of my companions, my side vision detected a man approaching the main thoroughfare. There was something vaguely familiar about the man, the way he walked in his cowboy boots and the way he wore his huge sombrero.

As the man came closer, I called out "Hello Bob" and he looked at me with a rather startled expression. It took a minute for him to recognize me, which is understandable since it was quite a few years since we had seen each other. It turned out to be Bob Roache, who had built several homes in Ridgefield some 30 years ago.

When I inquired about his wife, Joyce, he pointed to a store that my companions were about to enter and informed me that she was operating what seemed to be the general store. As I entered the store, Joyce could be seen directing the operations and when I pointed her out to Marie, we had a pleasant talk about Ridgefield and the many changes that had taken place since she and Bob moved to the West.

You see, Joyce was Robin Bailey's daughter. All of which seems to prove that you can find former Ridgefielders anywhere, even in the middle of the desert. Just thought you'd like to know that.

So back to the Coes of Greenfield Street. Charles Coe Jr., was another fine carpenter and worked for many years for the Knoche Brothers firm. Charley, or Buster as we used to call him, had a very interesting hobby. He was an expert at making model airplanes, into which he placed tiny engines. He got great enjoyment out of flying the little planes around the ball diamond at the old high school.

Charley married the former Ada Burdick and they were a popular young couple. Ada was a rural mail carrier at the local post office. Both she and Charley were very good at square dancing and rarely, if ever, missed the dances held each Saturday evening at Odd Fellows Hall, where Al Broadhurst and his orchestra played for a lively crowd.

The Coe family moved from Danbury Road to Greenfield Street in the late 20's and lived right next door to their friends, the Byron Sherwoods. Both of these families were great square dancers, so you just know that they had lots of fun together.

Charles Sr., had been a farmer in his younger days, but converted to masonry work and became really good at it. However, he never got the love for life on the farm out of his system

and both he and his neighbor, Byron Sherwood, used to help us get the hay in for Irving Conklin's cows and horses. This was done after they had put in a full day's work at their regular jobs and they seemed to enjoy the hard work.

Charles Coe was a big strong man and though Byron was not quite as large, he was equally as strong. In those days there were no hay choppers or even hay loaders. The hay had to be raked into windrows by a dump rake and then piled into hay cocks. It was then pitched by hand, with a fork, onto a horse-drawn wagon. When the load arrived at the hay barn, it was then pitched again, by hand, into the hay mow.

It was really something to see Bryon and Charley, as they dug into the large hay cocks and pitched them up to me on the wagon. Many times the handles on their pitch forks would bend, almost to the breaking point, with the weight of the hay.

My job of loading the hay wagon was made much easier because these great hay pitchers always placed those large forkfuls of hay where they could be most easily handled. The job of loading the wagon could be very tough for a kid, if the hay pitchers were inexperienced. If the hay was not properly loaded, the job of pitching it off when the load got to the barn, could be a complete disaster.

On one memorable occasion, we had sowed oats on a large field that stood on the corner of West Lane and Elmwood Road, just over the New York State line. A very attractive white house now graces that field. It was the home of Phil and Eleanor Masterson for many years.

At any rate the sky became very dark as we were gathering in the oats and a thunder storm was brewing. It was decided to clean up the field and get the oats on the wagon in order to be able to get all the oats under cover.

The very large barn on the Dr. Shelton estate had large sliding doors at either side which made it possible to drive the team in one door and out the other, while leaving the load of hay completely under cover.

Oats are very heavy and the last load was surr. to be a really big one. The man kept on pitching and I kept on loading, until the load was so high they could no longer reach me, even with long-handled forks, but the field was cleaned.

Then to my dismay, it was discovered that my team, Kit and Lady, could not move the wagon. Harry Terpeny's roan team, Duke and Diamond, was dispatched to hook on in front of Kit and Lady and the four horses got us started toward the barn.

The thunder in the sky was increasing as we approached the stone abutments through which we had to pass to reach West Lane. The load was so large that it was a real struggle to get through the abutments and when you drive by now, some 50 years later, you will see that one of the abutments is leaning and it is possible that we started it to tip.

We had to pass through two more stone abutments as we reached the barnyard but got the load under cover just as the storm, in all its fury, struck. While the load was in, the horses were out and before we could unhook them a bolt of lightning struck not more than 50 feet in front of them.

It was all kind of scary, but we saved the oats.

#231: THE PEEPING TOMS OF BRYON PARK

We have just about completed our trip through Bryon Park and telling of the families that lived there during the 20s, 30's, and 40's. The park is composed of Bryon Avenue, Fairview Avenue and Greenfield Avenue or Street, as you prefer. It is probably Ridgefield's very first development and was named for Dr. B.A. Bryon, the man who made it possible.

We just cannot leave the area without another little anecdote about some of the people who lived in the park. These are people who were considered to be a little different at the time. Perhaps, by today's standards, they might not cause a stir, or even be newsworthy.

However, at the time, these people kept their neighbors in a state of constant agitation and caused more than just a little fear.

Those who have been following this column for a couple of years may recall that in column #116, there was mention of the fact that at one time there were no less than three peeping toms operating in the High Ridge, Bryon Park area. We labeled these characters by number, no. 1, no. 2, and no. 3.

It was disclosed that Peeper No. 1, after numerous complaints had been registered, was observed while actually performing his nocturnal antics. He turned out to be a very prominent person, who just could not resist the temptation to peep through the windows of the building that was being used as a convent, at the corner of High Ridge and Abbott Avenue.

Peeper No. 2 had a "modus operandi" that was considerably different. He shunned the more sensational method of actually pressing his nose against the window glass, preferring to make his observations from the relative safety of the sidewalk. However, this offered very little solace to those who during the night looked out to find this fellow staring at their window.

It should be noted that Peeper No. 2, seemed to be most active during a full moon. Those who follow the various phases of the moon may find this to be of great significance, but it should be remembered that the bright moonlight made it easier to observe the peeper.

The case of Peeper No. 3, was considerably different. This fellow not only roamed the neighborhood peeping in windows at will, he also stalked any woman who had the temerity to venture out and walk after dark without benefit of a companion.

In one very notable instance, a lady, whom we know quite well, was terrified to find she was being followed one evening, and ran to a neighbor's house for protection. She was indeed fortunate that Mildred Coleman was at home and offered protection from what could have been a very serious situation.

A call was placed with the State Police, who were still in Ridgefield at the time and Officer Emil Struzik was dispatched to the scene. Peeper No. 3 was still at the door of the Coleman residence as the police car traveled up Catoonah Street.

When he saw the flashing lights on the car as it turned onto High Ridge, he took off on a run for home. The officer did get a glimpse of the man as he disappeared down the street.

After questioning the intended victim, the officer went to the home of the suspect. The peeper's wife answered the door and despite the best efforts of Officer Struzik, he never got to question the man as the wife declared that he was sick in bed and had been there all evening. This proved to be all the protection needed by the peeper and he was free to continue to harass the neighborhood.

During the next incident involving Peeper No. 3, the story is different but the results were the same. It just seemed incredible that even though his identity was well known to most people in the area, he was able to escape arrest.

It was indeed fortunate that while his nightly exploits covered a considerable length of time, no violence occurred. As a matter of fact, the closest anyone came to suffering bodily injury was the peeper himself, in the following rather sensational event.

A young newly married couple moved to a nice second floor apartment in Bryon Park. The husband's business caused him to attend a night meeting once each week.

Peeper No. 3 became familiar with the young husband's schedule and decided to make a visit during his absence. Shortly after the husband left for his meeting, the wife decided it was a good night to go to bed early and read a book.

Television was in its infancy at the time and the young couple had not yet acquired one. Besides it would be difficult to concentrate on the book, with pictures dancing across a TV screen, whereas the radio was not a distraction.

So with the fine music of Glenn Miller to listen to and a good book to read, the lady was prepared for a quiet evening at home. Alas, it was not to be.

The young housewife had been reading for some time when her glance happened to wander up and over the top of the book. There, just a few feet away and close to the window glass, was the leering countenance of her neighbor, in the person of Peeper No. 3.

The urge to utter the loudest scream possible must have been great, but this extraordinarily, practical young lady had other ideas. Without revealing what she had seen, she inched slowly toward the edge of the bed and then made it appear that she was on her way to the kitchen for a bedtime snack.

As she came abreast of the window, this very courageous woman whirled around and threw the window open. Then, with all her strength, she gave a mighty shove that pushed the ladder away from the house and it went crashing along with a very surprised Peeping Tom to the ground.

The peeper must have been a cat, as he landed on his feet and somehow was able to run off, leaving his ladder behind.

It was only after this exciting action had taken place that the lady called the police. During their investigation, the police found that the ladder, which they had confiscated, carried the initials of the peeper, who lived nearby.

Armed with the incriminating evidence, the police visited the home of the peeper. As you may have already guessed, the dutiful wife again attempted to exonerate her husband. She vehemently declared that her husband was asleep in bed and had been there all evening.

The ladder was produced and initials were shown, but the wife quickly recalled that someone had stolen the ladder just the previous week.

Perhaps such loyalty as exemplified by the peeper's wife should be admired. However, that was a feeling that was definitely not shared by the neighbors.

Oh yes, when the young husband returned later in the evening, the usual quietness had returned to the area. When he asked his wife how her evening had gone, she replied, "It was very routine." It was not until they were at breakfast the following morning that disclosed what had

transpired the previous evening. Her reason for this was very simple, "If I had told him when he came home, he would not have slept a wink all night."

Such consideration for a husband is worthy of commendation.

#232: THE TALENTED BLOOMER CLAN

Two very nice homes, at the north end of Greenfield Street, carry a Barry Avenue address, but many people consider them to be a part of Bryon Park. They may have been there before Bryon Park was developed.

The house that sits on the northwest corner of Greenfield Street and Barry Avenue was home to Ray and Grace Fish and their sons Ray Jr. and Bob for some 25 or 30 years. However, at the time of which we are writing, it was the home of Andrew T. Bloomer and his wife, the former Anna Stauffer.

The Bloomers are an old Ridgefield family and Andrew, Clara, Frank and George, were all natives of the town. Clara married Horace Walker, a former chief of the Ridgefield Fire Department and one of the first of the paid firemen. They lived for many years at what is now 44 Gilbert Street.

George Bloomer was a carpenter and built his own home, one of the first to be erected on the site of the old Fair Grounds, at 366 Wilton Road West. George and his wife had two children, Jane and George Jr. Jane is now Jane McGrath and still lives in the family homestead.

Another brother, Frank Bloomer, was a farmer and stayed on the old family farm. Frank and his wife had a daughter, Edith, who later became Mrs. David Gearbart. David was well known through his association with the Acorn Press and at the time he passed on, was editor of The Wilton Bulletin.

When Edith was a little girl, she had very long curls and she looked very pretty, as she sat on the wagon seat with her father, as the team of horses plodded along the country roads of town. They really made a living picture of rural life in Ridgefield. [*Edith later became the town clerk of Wilton.*]

It should be noted that the road on which the family farm was located was aptly named Bloomer Road and it runs south off Branchville Road.

Andy and Anna Bloomer would have made excellent subjects for a Norman Rockwell picture. Anna was the real grandmother type and possessed that highly desirable trait that enables some people to put other people at ease and make them feel right at home.

Andy was tall and graceful, with a thin face, that belied a rather well-muscled body. He and Anna were fine dancers and it was a treat to watch them glide over the dance floor, especially when the band was playing their favorite old-fashioned waltz.

Andy was an ardent bowler and for many years he had a team that carried his name. We used to bowl on the alleys that were located in the basement of the old Congregational Church House.

Andy was an inveterate pipe smoker, as were some of the other bowlers, such as Ray Keeler, Ernie Sturges, Irving Conklin, Jack. Smith, Frank Wallington, Lee Vance and myself. There were only two alleys and they were situated in a rather confined area.

You can readily imagine that when all those pipes were going, it was difficult to see the pins at the other end of the alley. Even worse, when we had finished an evening of bowling, our clothes smelled as though they had been through a forest fire with Smokey the Bear.

I guess that sometimes we tend to stereotype those who are engaged in various types of employment. Hands that have thumbs that are blunt, with tips that just go straight across, can only belong to a garage mechanic, who has twisted a lot of nuts onto a bolt. A carpenter or a painter will have something in their demeanor that will link them to their respective trades. The well dressed gentlemen, with the for bidding facial expression, just has to be the loan officer down at the bank.

Well, as a young fellow, I came to think that a primary requisite for anyone who worked in a hardware store was that they looked like either Andy Bloomer or Jack Whitlock. You were bound to meet one or the other, when you entered Bedient's store back in the 20's, 30's, or 40's.

Andy, with his large frame, kindly face, steel-rimmed glasses and ever present pipe, was the personification of a good hardware man.

Andy and Anna Bloomer had a daughter Edna, and a son Andrew Jr. Edna married and moved to Norwalk, our mother town, where she worked as a registered nurse for many years.

Andy Jr. married a very popular local girl, Elizabeth Weitzel, and they had a daughter Kaye and a son Tommy. I am sorry to relate that neither Kaye nor Tom live in Ridgefield, and in fact, there are no Bloomers listed in the local phone directory.

At a very early age, Andrew Jr. learned to play the alto saxophone. It was not long before he became equally proficient with the clarinet, the tenor sax and the bass sax.

Like his father, Andy became associated with the D. F. Bedient Company, but his first love was music and he could have easily made a good living with a dance band.

While with Bedient's, Andy learned the floor covering trade and in later years, joined with Jimmy Bellagamba in establishing the B & B Floor Covering Company. As a matter of fact, as I am writing this, I am looking at a first-class tile job that they did for us more than 30 years ago and it looks as good as the day they put it down.

We had the pleasure of playing in the same dance band with Andy on many occasions and it was always great fun. It is always fun when the band has the ability to put the crowd in a dancing mood.

Most of the fellows that Andy played with came from the Norwalk area. For some reason, Norwalk always seemed to produce the very best musicians. Some of them were Bix Santella, a great friend of Andy, Ernie Harris, Aaron Ashboom, Mike Livingston, Pete Vaast, George Hendricks, Hack O'Brien, and Ernie Pollard. Some of the great bands that he played with were Jack Miller's, Frank Volk's, Vic Vaast, Hughie Golden's and Charley Sterling's.

Andy also gave lessons on the sax and clarinet and many local boys learned to play under his careful guidance.

This time of year reminds me that we almost always were able to go skating on Thanksgiving Day. Our favorite place to skate was New Pond, which unfortunately is no more. Someone opened the gates in the dam and the pond just flowed away.

Andy Bloomer was a really good skater, as was John L. Sullivan, with whom he always seemed to be in competition. Some of the other skaters that come quickly to mind were Francis

Martin, Alero Ciuccoli, John Nash, Nathan Perry, Pete, Lynce and Reno Carboni, Red Dunlap and John McGowan.

#233: BARRY AVENUE BENEDICTS, ELLIOTTS AND CARBONIS

The house that sits just to the west of the former Bloomer homestead is the residence of Charles and Betty Elliott. It was built in the 40's and while it carries the address 41 Barry Avenue, it could be considered as a part of Bryon Park.

Charlie is the son of the late Charles Elliott Sr., who was the subject of our Dispatch No. 83. Charles Jr., still carries on the refuse collection business that was established by his father more than half a century ago. So "Chuck," as his many friends call him, owns and operates one of the very oldest family-owned businesses in Ridgefield.

The house on the corner of Fairview and Barry Avenues is rather new and not of the era which we are covering. The lot on which this house sits once belonged to Ernest Scott and in the mid 20's, Ernie sold it to Marion Green, a New York City school teacher.

Just recently, I received a letter from Rev. Thomas Hennessey, inquiring about the location of this property. Father Hennessey is a Jesuit priest and a professor at Fordham University. He is a nephew of Marion Green and visited her in Ridgefield when he was a Little boy and Marion lived on High Ridge Avenue, in the house that was built by Samuel Carpenter and is now the home of Frances Cleaners.

Marion Green must have been a rather affluent school teacher, as she owned not only the lot in question, but the house on High Ridge and another on Main Street as well as having an interest in The Kane Inn, which as you know, is now The Inn at Ridgefield on West Lane [*lately Bernard's and now, The Benjamin*]. I would guess that if she were still around today and owned all these properties, with today's values, she would be considered quite wealthy.

There are two more houses that could be a part of Bryon Park. One is on the corner of Greenfield Street and Barry Avenue. It is now the home of Alex Santini and carries a 25 Barry Avenue address. Those who have been following this column may recall that we told of Alex's fabulous career in Dispatches 54 through 57. We really should have written a book about his many achievements.

At the time of which we are writing, this house was the home of Jesse L. and Maude Benedict. One of Jesse's outstanding characteristics was that when he found something good, he stayed right with it. This includes his gracious wife, Maude, with whom he celebrated their golden anniversary.

Then, too, he was in business on Main Street for more than 45 years and he was Ridgefield's town treasurer for 39 years.

Jesse was born in Pound Ridge and exhibited great intelligence when he moved to Ridgefield at the turn of the century. At that time, the store at 419 Main Street, which now houses Fitzgerald and Hastings [*Dr. George Amatuzzi's office*], was a kind of general store, owned by Andrew Flood and Fred Brundage.

Andrew Flood passed on in 1906 and Fred Brundage brought in his friend and neighbor, Jesse Benedict, as his partner. For many years, the sign over the front door read, Brundage and Benedict. We used to call it the "Busy Bee" or B&B.

After Fred passed on, Jesse kept the store going until 1951. He then sold the business to Harry Boshnack and later it became Miller's Department Store.

Jesse was a kindly man and very well-liked. His store was a favorite meeting place, especially on a Sunday morning when it seemed that people in the village area all went there for their newspapers. When you engaged Jesse in conversation, you could not help but get the feeling that you were talking to a pretty solid citizen.

Jesse had a rather amusing habit. When the conversation was light he sometimes would break into a little clog dance, which he could do so very well. It was a trick that he performed, even in his old age. It really was kind of cute and never failed to bring a smile to those who gathered around the store.

During the week, newspaper boys, including myself, delivered the papers door to door in the village area. Then, on Sundays the paper routes were extended over into New York State. We used Jesse's 1915 Model T Ford to deliver to Pound Ridge, South Salem and North Salem.

This was quite an experience and we met a lot of very interesting people. There was a Ryan family just over the line in North Salem. They were quite wealthy and had a butler. He was the very first Chinese man that I had ever seen and I found him to be fascinating. He always wore a stiff white jacket and was very charming, always smiling and he had the most pleasant mannerisms.

The fact that he always had a cup of hot cocoa for us on a cold winter's day made him something very special.

Jesse kept his job as town treasurer all those years and many times he was unopposed at election time, because he was so well-liked. I was a member of the Board of Selectmen at the close of his career and at times when Jesse was unable to carry on his duties, Harry, Paul and I would deputize Nancy Servadio (Nancy is still the mainstay of the selectmen's office) to carry on for him until he was able to return.

The last house that might be considered a part of Bryon Park has the address, 23 Barry Avenue. It has been the home of Elsie Carboni and her family for the past 35 years.

Elsie is the former Elsie Zandri and is well-known throughout this area for her ability to prepare her culinary delights for large groups of people. Her late husband, Deno Carboni, passed on a number of years ago. His untimely death at an early age must have placed a great burden on the young family. That they were equal to the challenge is quite evident in the many nice improvements that they have made to their lovely home.

It is hard to believe that on this property there was once a very large barn that contained a stable of race horses, but that is another story.

The Carboni family acquired this property from the Charles Cain family. You may remember that Charlie worked as a garage mechanic for Louis DeVantry when Louis ran Central Garage on the corner of Danbury Road and Grove Street, where Pamby Motors is now. Charlie married DeVantry's daughter and went into business across the street where Mobil is now.

Charlie accepted a job with a large oil company and moved with his family to India. That was a long time ago and we have not heard from the Cain family since.

#234: THE REMARKABLE SELLECKS

Selleck is a family name that can be found liberally sprinkled through the history of Ridgefield. In fact, the Sellecks were among the very early settlers, not only of Ridgefield, but many surrounding towns, especially Danbury.

There were Sellecks in the New World, even before Ridgefield or Danbury were settled. According to Beverly Crofut, members of the Selleck family were early settlers of Long Island and the name can still be found in telephone directories of the famous old island.

The Rev. Charles G. Selleck was pastor of the local Congregational Church more than 150 years ago, when that church was located in the very middle of Main Street, at its intersection with Route 102.

Many years before that, Captain Jonathan Selleck was appointed, along with David Waterbury and John Copp, by the General Assembly, to view the land that would make up our town. That was in 1706 and two years later the land was purchased from Chief Catoonah and his Ramapoo Indians.

According to Mr. Crofut, the Selleck family, of which he is a direct descendant, was related to the Sands family. The Sands were very early settlers of Long Island and Sands Point was named in their memory.

Bev is a veritable walking encyclopedia concerning the history of the great Selleck family. We have encouraged him to write a book on the subject, lest that wonderful information be lost to future generations.

In this area, the Sellecks were connected with a variety of enterprises. Jarvis Selleck was a farmer in the early days of that section of town that is known as Farmingville. Sturges Selleck owned and operated the Maplewood farm, which was just over the town line on Route 7.

Sturges was a very progressive farmer and recognized the necessity of getting his products to market. In 1812 Sturges Selleck built what was called a turnpike, through the Sugar Hollow section of what we know as Route 35 and 7. The land along that stretch is very swampy and travel to Danbury was very difficult especially in the spring of the year.

Building that road must have been a really tough job. When it was completed Mr. Selleck installed a tollgate and the receipts helped to pay for his efforts. A recent vote on Super 7 seems to indicate that perhaps that is the only way that highway will ever be built.

Many of our roads were built with funds derived from those who lived along it, with payments based on the number of feet of their property that fronted on that particular road. In some instances the families did the actual work, rather than pay to have the work done.

The Maplewood farm was on the southeast side of the highway as you cross the little bridge where Bennett's Farm Road intersects Route 7. It later became Maplewood Inn, operated by Benjamin Selleck and his wife Phoebe. It became a great place for people of Danbury and Ridgefield to meet. The great rambling old building was torn down some 45 years ago.

The place continued to be called Maplewood for a few years and the name was then changed several times, the last of which was "The Foundry." The sign out front now reads. "The DownUnder."

Keeping the Sugar Hollow section of the road to Danbury in good condition turned out to be a full-time job. The swamp, over which the road was laid, had an appetite for gravel, like some carnivorous animal. Overnight, sections of the highway would sink into the mire.

This was a condition that continued even after the concrete highway was laid in 1925. Large slabs of concrete would sink into the swamp, without warning. This created very hazardous conditions until the 40's when a rather new idea was tried. Holes were drilled into the surface of the road and cement was forced under the slabs of concrete, with great pressure, and once again, man had triumphed over the forces of nature.

The Sellecks seemed to have a propensity for road building that went back a good many years. Another ancestor, Benjamin Selleck, is credited with building the turnpike between Baltimore and Washington in 1800. He must have been Bev's great, great, great grandfather.

Many Ridgefielders will remember the most recent Benjamin Sturges Selleck. We got to know him in the late 20's and he was one of the most interesting and colorful characters we have ever met.

"Sturg," as his many friends called him, married Jessie Eliza Keeler after whose family Keeler Drive is named. You can bet that if this wonderful couple had ever posed for a Norman Rockwell painting, it would have been a classic.

The Sellecks lived for many years on Ridgebury Road in a farm house just opposite from where Regan Road branches off to the right. Sturg operated a dairy farm and sold and traded horses and raised chickens on this very picturesque farm. Some of his barns are still standing across the road from the farm house.

Mabel, one of the Sellecks' daughters, married Joel Crofut. After Joel's untimely death at an early age, Mabel and her children, Beverly, Stan and Marvin, came to live on the Selleck's Ridgebury farm.

In the early 20's, the Sellecks sold the farm to John McLaury and moved to 23 Barry Avenue, which is now the home of Elsie Carbon and her family. The McLaurys named their place "Airdrifts Farm" and the Sellecks named their new home "Little Brook Stables." The name Little Brook was derived from the fact that a little brook that started up around Peaceable Street flowed north, after a heavy rain, by the Sellecks' horse barn.

Sturg had a stable of racehorses which he brought, along with some chickens, from the Ridgebury farm. They were trotters and it was my good fortune to exercise them in the large lot that bordered the Selleck property and on which now sits St. Mary's School.

Alice Brook and Jolly Brook were trotters and Sand Pilot was a pacer, and riding him was like sitting in a comfortable rocking chair. They were good racers and Sturg used to enter them in the Grand Circuit races. He had a large Dodge van and traveled to Goshen, Albany, Syracuse, and as far west as Ohio.

Alice Brook set a record at the Danbury Fair track and large sums were offered for her, but Sturg would not part with a winner. Unfortunately in the next race after setting the record, a piece of the harness broke and the driver lost control of the mare. She raced around the track, seven or eight times, at tremendous speeds until someone threw a blanket over her as she passed by. The damage was done and she was never the same great racer.

Sturg drove a maroon-colored Hudson Super Six coupe, over the dashboard of which there was always at least two dozen King Edward cigars. He and Jessie celebrated their golden wedding anniversary in 1934. Jessie passed on six years later and Sturg followed three years after that. They were great people and we would not expect to see their like again.

#235: THE KENNEDYS AND THE KNEELING COWS

There is one more house that we almost overlooked in writing about Bryon Park. The correct address of this house is 175 High Ridge but it is part of that large area that we know as Bryon Park..

This fine old house sits on the west side of High Ridge, opposite St. Mary's Church and just south of St. Mary's School parking lot. The house seems to be vacant now and is owned by Bill Boland.

Back in the teens, the 20's and 30's, it was the home of John Morgan. I'm not sure as to what John's middle name was, or even if he had one. However, we are sure it was not Pierpont, and yet he was often referred to as J.P. Morgan, after the great financier.

John looked the part of a prosperous businessman, though I am not sure what his occupation was, as he was retired when I knew him. He had a well-trimmed mustache, a well-pressed, three piece suit, across the vest of which was draped a very large gold watch chain. That chain looked as though it would have had sufficient strength to moor the Titanic.

John's wife was the former Theresa Walsh, who was born just two doors south of the Morgan house, in what we later called the Baker house. Mrs. Morgan's brother was the very prominent Judge James F. Walsh, of whom we will hear more later.

Of equal import to us was the fact that John Morgan was an uncle of Miss Grace White, later to be Mrs. Clifford A. Holleran. Grace was one of the greatest of the many fine school teachers that we ever had. She was one of those who made you learn.

This being the Christmas period, you might be interested in a fine gift that I just received. You may recall that we have frequently mentioned in this column the name of James F. Kennedy, who was Ridgefield's premier builder 100 years ago. Some of the buildings that wear his trademark are St. Peter's Church in Danbury, Congregational Church in Ridgefield, St. Mary's in Norwalk, St. Mary's in Ridgefield, the great E.P. Dutton mMansion of High Ridge, and our fine library on Main Street.

"Big Jim," as he was affectionately called, was indeed a big man and he had a big family — four sons and four daughters.

Margaret Kennedy and I have become pen pals. She was a young lady when the family moved to Bridgeport during World War I. After attending Merrill's School of Business, Margaret became a private secretary and you just know she was a good one. Advancing in her profession caused her to move around some, and eventually she got to California, where she later became a postmaster.

Someone sent Margaret one of the columns that I wrote about the great Kennedy family. She was delighted that someone remembered the family and soon we were corresponding — just as two retired postmasters should, via the U.S. mails. This was not an easy chore for Margaret as her eyesight had failed badly. However, with the help of a public stenographer, we were able to keep in touch.

During the past year several of my letters went unanswered and it became a matter of concern. Then just the other day I found a slip in my P.O. box, heralding the arrival of an unexpected article. The postmark was Riverside, Calif., and when the wrapper was removed, a little red book was revealed and inside the book was a little note from Margaret Kennedy. The

title is engraved on the front of the book, in gold and it reads Ridgefield, Conn. 1708-1908 Bicentennial Celebration.

We consider this fine book to be one of the nicest presents ever received and after 78 years, it is still in good condition. Apparently the book was written and published at the close of Ridgefield's 200th anniversary, as it contains the many speeches that were made at the closing exercises.

The Honorable William O. Seymour was chairman of the proceedings and he introduced each of the pastors of the local churches and they responded with appropriate remarks. Addresses were also given by many prominent citizens, including former Governor Phineas C. Lounsbury, Judge Howard B. Scott, Judge James F. Walsh (Mrs. Morgan's brother), and Cyrus Northrop. LL.D.

Lest you might think that the program was limited to adults, we would hasten to point out that our local schools conducted an essay contest and the winners were allowed to read their essays at the closing ceremonies. We were very happy to read that Margaret Kennedy was one of the winners. Her essay appears on pages 76, 77, 78, and 79 and, of course, it is entitled A History of Ridgefield.

So Margaret Kennedy, who will soon be 90, was featured at our town's bicentennial in 1908, in a celebration that was chaired by the Honorable William O. Seymour. Mr. Seymour happens to have been the great-grandfather of Karl Seymour Nash, publisher of this newspaper. Just thought you would like to know that, also that 50 years later, Karl himself was the chairman of our 250th anniversary and 75 years later, the writer of this column was chairman of our 275th anniversary.

We just think it is great that Margaret Kennedy, who took part in those fine ceremonies 78 years ago, is still with us and we offer this as a tribute to her, as we also thank her for a wonderful Christmas present.

When I was very young, I remember hearing certain anecdotes that were treated as axioms. One that comes to mind at this time of the year was that on Christmas Eve, at midnight, all animals on the farm go into a kneeling position.

It was a few years later that we remembered the story and since Irving Conklin's farm was just a short distance down Ramapoo Road, we decided to go and see for ourselves what would happen at midnight. There were about 50 cows in the barn and when we opened the door at just 12 o'clock and turned on the lights, we noted that about half of the cows were on their knees, while the other half were lying down.

Of course, the skeptics said that all the cows were lying down and as we entered and aroused them, some were in the kneeling position preparatory to rising to a standing position. We ignored their theory and the next morning, the pious cows all received an extra ration of grain.

So a Merry Christmas to all.

#236: NATIVE SONS CELEBRATE 200th

The book that I received for Christmas, which describes Ridgefield's 1908 Bicentennial ceremonies, is really very interesting. The exercises, which took place on Monday and Tuesday, July 6 and 7, of that year consisted of many speeches by a number of prominent people. It just seemed to be the mode of the day.

Some of the speeches, made at the closing exercises 78 years ago, sound as though they could have been made yesterday. This is especially true of the remarks made by Judge James F. Walsh.

Judge Walsh was not born in Ridgefield, but came here with his family, at the tender age of four weeks. That's about as close to being a native as you can get.

So the judge grew up in Ridgefield and attended our local elementary schools, including that seat of learning that was conducted by the Honorable William O. Seymour, the chairman of the Bicentennial. We had no high school at the time, and like many others, young Jim Walsh took the train each day to Norwalk for his high schooling.

After graduating from college and law school, Judge Walsh joined a law firm in Greenwich. He would have liked to practice law in Ridgefield but at that time everyone in town was so honest and good and neighbors got along so well, there was little chance of making a living here as an attorney.

It would seem that today the situation is somewhat different. When one sees the great number of lawyers now practicing in Ridgefield, it is hard to realize that just a little more than 50 years ago one would have to look long and hard to find a practicing attorney.

Oh, we had lawyers who resided in Ridgefield but did not practice here. There was the noted Attorney Samuel Keeler, who lived where the Joseph Hall family now lives at 293 Main Street. Lawyer Sam, as he was affectionately known, was very active in town affairs and even served for years as president of this newspaper [*The Ridgefield Press*]. However, his activity in legal matters was pretty much restricted to the canyons of New York City.

Those unfortunate enough to require the protection of an attorney generally turned to Danbury and engaged Judge Cable, Judge Cunningham or perhaps Judge Davis. Even our own town counsel was imported from Norwalk for many years in the person of the venerable Judge John H. Light.

Many changes were to take place in the judiciary, with the arrival of a young attorney named Joseph H. Donnelly, in the very early 30 s. In the halcyon days of Ridgefield, even our probate judges were not of the legal profession. I am not sure if even today it is required. However, for the past 40 years the judges have been attorneys and should be.

At any rate Judge Walsh, as a young attorney, did not feel that he could pursue his profession in his hometown but became highly successful in Greenwich. It was not long before other members of the bar in that town induced the bright lawyer to become involved in politics.

After holding a few minor offices, he became a candidate for the state legislature. Being a Republican, once he had secured the nomination, his election was just about assured.

The Walsh star became a comet and after serving as representative, he became a candidate for the state senate and was again elected, with the support of Governor George E. Lounsbury. Eventually Judge Walsh became speaker of the General Assembly. He was a hometown boy who made good and his opportunity to speak at the exercises was well deserved.

It almost seemed like a search had been made for former Ridgefield men who had fashioned successful careers in other localities, as several of the speakers fit right into this category. Other speakers, such as Governor Phineas C. Lounsbury, told of how it had been their ambition to accumulate money and then return to Ridgefield. Judge Walsh echoed their

sentiments and added “But times have changed and what was sufficient to live on years ago, we do not think now is sufficient.”

Would this not be equally true today? It seems that many of our young people must leave Ridgefield to seek their fortune in order that they, too, may come back to live here and we wish them well.

To illustrate how times had changed, Judge Walsh, in his remarks, told of a young man who planned to get married. He asked his employer for a raise, for he felt that he could not raise a family on \$10 a week. The employer was not impressed and informed the prospective bridegroom that when he got married he was only paid \$8 a week and he raised a family of four.

“Yes,” the young man replied, “but that was before the day of the cash register.”

In his remarks, Judge Howard B. Scott also told of his ambition to make enough money so that he could return to and live out his days in Ridgefield.

The address closing the exercises was made by Dr. Cyrus Northrop, another very successful native son. Dr. Northrop was born on West Lane in 1834. He left Ridgefield as a young man, more than 50 years before the bicentennial.

After completing his education, Dr. Northrop became professor of English literature at Yale and served in that capacity for 21 years. Then he was lured to Minneapolis, where he proceeded to become the president of the University of Minnesota, a post that he held for more than 22 years. Dr. Northrop was possessed of a very great memory and he recalled the names of the many native sons who went on to become prominent in various fields of endeavor.

For a little town, it certainly had more than its share of men who became successful throughout our country. One thing that all these men had in common was the conviction that to live in their hometown, they must acquire the means to do so in far away places that offered more lucrative compensation. It seems that very few were fortunate enough to realize their ambition to return here.

So despite the many changes in Ridgefield over the years, it is still very difficult, if not impossible, for our high school graduates to afford to live in Ridgefield and that to me is sad. One of the reasons for this is the terrific costs of rents and leases. Perhaps it is time for the powers that be to consider rent controls and more young couples could join me in a Happy New Year to You.

#237: BIG FIRES AND A LITTLE FIREBUG

In the areas and times that we have been covering, there was a character that was considered to be a lot more dangerous than the peeping toms and their nocturnal hi-jinks. This fellow was a firebug and like the peepers, he was suffering from a psychosis.

Some of the fires that were set by this person have been mentioned in previous columns. In Dispatch #167 we told of how his name was synonymous with what is felt when one has a toothache. We would add that we were referring to his last name and his first name was Fred.

As so often happens, with people who have a penchant for setting fires, Freddie was a member of the fire department. He never missed a fire and always worked diligently, along with his fellow firefighters to extinguish the fire that he himself had set.

What makes the story about Freddie Payne so unusual, is the fact that he was able to carry on his nefarious activities over such a long period of time, without being detected.

Apparently no one was suspicious of this little fellow, who not only helped fight every fire, but was always among the first to arrive on the scene.

When Freddie was finally apprehended, he readily admitted to setting a number of fires over a period of a dozen or more years. There were several fires which he would not take “credit” for setting, including the one that destroyed John Keeler’s barn. However, after listening to his story, those conducting the investigation felt that all the evidence pointed directly in Freddie's direction.

Most of the fires that occurred during the time in which the little firebug was operating involved barns and other outbuildings. John Keeler’s fire was a very serious loss, for it was a large barn and housed some 60 horses. Two horses died in the terrible conflagration and 65 tons of hay were destroyed, as was the large building. No doubt, it was the loss of the two horses that caused Freddie to deny his guilt.

There were some rather spectacular fires in the first quarter of this century, such as the Adams and Keeler Livery Stable fire and the one that destroyed the William S. Hawk estate and the one in 1922 that destroyed several buildings on Bailey Avenue.

The Adams and Keeler stable was located near the corner on south Main Street, where you exit onto Wilton Road East. The fire got a good start and a stiff breeze took care of the rest. The result was that the great stable was a complete loss.

There are about 20 horses in the barn and though some were hardly singed, the stable hands were able to lead them all to safety. Horses seem to have the utmost confidence that everything will be all right as long as they are in their stalls. Unless they are blindfolded, they will not leave a burning building and unless they are forcibly restrained, they will dash right back into a raging inferno.

The neighs of terrified horses are very shrill and those who witnessed this terrible fire said that they could be heard as far away as the town hall.

The William S. Hawk mansion was one of the largest and most beautiful in the history of Ridgefield. It had some 40 rooms and was styled after one of the fabulous European castles.

Mr. Hawk had been lured to Ridgefield by descriptions of the town that he had heard from his wealthy friends. His first visit here, before the turn of the century, convinced him that this was a community of sheer beauty.

Mr. Hawk and his wife stayed for several months at the old Bailey Inn, while he searched for a place to build his new home. During the process, he bought land from several different people, until he had amassed some 30 acres of very desirable property. The Hawk estate would stretch along the south and west side of Branchville Road. It started just beyond where East Ridge enters the state highway and the frontage ran to where Rockwell Road (formerly Cushman Lane) intersects with Branchville Road.

The fine cut-stone wall that encircled the property is still visible. The stone pillars with their iron gates, at the front and back entrances to the estate, are still intact and in good condition.

When Mr. Hawk was ready to build on the highest elevation of his property, he engaged the services of a noted architect, William Bates. It was said that the cost of erecting the mansion was \$40,000 and while it may have seemed a large amount at the time, it is hard to believe today.

After the tragic fire, all that was left standing were the four enormous chimneys. They stood there for many years as a grim reminder of that terrible loss.

The carriage house survived and continues to be known by that name, though it has been remodeled into a very attractive residence.

The fire on Bailey Avenue could have been very tragic as there were a number of people involved. It occurred on April 26, 1922 and started just about where the Acorn Press building is now. The fire was quickly out of control and the wooden buildings burned to the ground. There was a bakery, a cooperative store, and several apartments and a small building that housed the instruments of the old Ridgefield Band.

The baker, Peter Trottoli, and storekeeper, Antonio Travontino, escaped, as did Ernest and Mary Conti and their baby daughter, Leonora; and John and Elizabeth Morganti, with their son, Paul. Paul was just a wee bit of a boy at that time and we wonder if he still remembers the excitement.

My brother, Paul, took me to see the ruins the next day. Everything was lost in the fire, including the band instruments. As we looked at the still smoldering timbers, a shiny piece of metal caught my eye where the band building had stood.

It was the cymbal, from which the handles had been burned. We rescued them and put new handles on and they were later used for many years by Aldo Casagrande's Oreneca Band.

There were a great number of fires in 1923 and the one at S.D. Keeler's barn on Branchville Road proved to be Freddie Payne's undoing. Brother Gus was driving by as the fire started and after turning in the alarm he went to the barn. A light snow had fallen during the day and there were Freddie's footprints leading away from the blaze. They were very easy to follow.

#128: THE HIGH-FLYING JACOB FAMILY

In the very early part of this century, Morris Gottlieb was the proprietor of a clothing store on Main Street. Business was good and Morris seemed to be quite prosperous. Therefore, it came as a real surprise, when a huge ad appeared in The Press, to the effect that Morris Gottlieb was selling, not only his business, but two houses that he owned.

It was war time but Morris was too old for duty and people wondered about a line in the ad that indicated Morris needed cash at once.

Sereno Allen came up from Westport to view the situation. He was not interested in the Gottlieb store but wanted both of the houses. They were (still are) located, one on the corner of High Ridge Avenue and Barry Avenue and the other, with four apartments, was right next door. The apartment house was known for many years as the Gottlieb flat.

It seems rather odd now, but both of the roads mentioned went through a name change during the period of which we are writing. High Ridge, from Catoonah Street north to Gilbert Street, was known as Maple Avenue and along that stretch, it was lined, on both sides of the street, with large and beautiful maple trees.

As a tribute to the very famous artist, Frederic Remington, the name Barry Avenue was changed to Remington Avenue. Remington was the largest property owner (about 50 acres), along the highway that extends from High Ridge to Ramapoo Road; from that point on it is West Mountain Road, to the New York State line.

For some reason, the names Remington and Maple Avenue did not stick and reverted back to High Ridge and Barry. Perhaps because the Maples started to disappear and Remington was not around to defend his name.

The name Barry Avenue came from the R.C. Barry family, which had a sizable farm on the north side of the road, almost opposite Fairview Avenue, at the turn of the century.

At any rate, Sereno Allen purchased the two Gottlieb houses and lived in the corner house. When Mr. Allen passed on, in the very early 20's, his grandson became owner of the two properties.

Sereno Thorp Jacob had only recently married Marion Wakeman at the time and the young couple moved from Westport to their new home in the corner house. To say that this handsome couple, with Sereno at the wheel of his Stutz Bearcat, received considerable attention on their arrival in town, would be a gross understatement.

There was much conjecture among the local gentry, when shortly after settling down in the corner house, they started construction of the large stone wall that still encloses the corner house. The old axiom that goes "a good fence makes good neighbors" has been tested many times. Actually it all boils down to the purpose of the fence and its effect on the immediate neighborhood.

At first glance, it appeared that this fence was to shut off the outside world. Actually, a stone wall is an excellent buffer against unwanted noises and since the corner house was very close to both of the highways, it was in need of some protection.

The Jacobs proceeded to have three children, Sereno Jr., Sally and Merritt. Thus the wall served a dual purpose, in that it protected the children from the highway, since they were quite lively, especially the last-named, as Merritt was a high flyer. Actually, he is still a high flyer as he is now a pilot for Pan Am, as his dad was before him.

Sereno Sr. was a bona fide hero of World War I. He was born and grew up in Westport, where as a boy, he learned the carpenter trade. This was not exciting enough for the adventurous youth that he was, so he joined the Merchant Marine and went to sea.

When the war broke out he did not wait for the U.S. to declare war, but volunteered as an ambulance driver and served on the battlefields of France. The ambulance duty brought Sereno in contact with the fledgling French Air Corps. Soon he became enamored with the thoughts of flying an airplane and volunteered for duty with the French.

After mastering the art of keeping those little planes in the air, Sereno joined the famous Lafayette Escadrille. This great outfit was headed by Eddie Rickenbacker and was composed of American pilots who could not wait for their own country to enter the conflict.

The group soon became a part of the French military and operated much as Claire Chennault's "Flying Tigers" did in World War II.

The word escadrille denotes a unit of the French Army, consisting of six airplanes, with pilots and equipment. Of course, the word Lafayette was used by the pilots as a payback to the great Marquis de Lafayette, for his tremendous help to this country in the Revolutionary War, in which he served as a major general in Washington's army.

No doubt it took a lot of courage to fly those flimsy little biplanes. The pilots must have been considered authentic daredevils 70 years ago, flying planes that are a far cry from the ones of today.

When the U.S. entered the war, Rickenbacker's unit transferred to the U.S. Army Air Corps.

Following the war, Sereno Jacob became a promoter of airline service. Then, at the bidding of his old friend, he joined Rickenbacker and flew planes for Eastern Airlines. However, poor health forced him to quit flying.

After arriving with his bride in Ridgefield, Sereno reverted back to his old trade and did carpenter work with James Sheridan and Francis Connell. This must have been rather tame for a man who was used to the glamor which Sereno had experienced so he turned his attention to local affairs and became associated with the late Harold E. Finch in real estate.

Sereno found time to serve on the Board of Assessors and became chairman of that group. He was also a member of the Building Committee for the addition made to the old High School on East Ridge. During World War I, Sereno served as chairman of Ridgefield's Defense Council.

Marion, in the meantime, endeared herself to all who knew her. She had a most pleasing personality and operated a successful antiques shop where Liberta's is now on Main Street. She also served as hostess at Stonehenge, when that famous establishment was run by the "Skinker" Victor Gilbert.

#239: BEADIE BEDIENT AND HIS IMPEDIMENT

So our old friend Harry Hull has passed on. A lot of nice things should be said about this fine man, who meant so much to our town. It will take a special column to do this and we fully expect to do that.

We have started down Barry Avenue and got to the second house, one which carries number 4. It is a large building, with four apartments and was known for many years as the Gottlieb Flat. It was so named after Morris Gottlieb, who owned it until Sereno Allen purchased it in 1918.

This building must have been one of the first, if not the very, apartment house in Ridgefield. There were apartments over some of the stores, such as Bissell's, but this was strictly an apartment house. It made an ideal place for young couples to start their married life and for many years, it has served just that purpose. Many are the young couples who got their start in one of these apartments.

Perhaps we could keep some of our young married couples in Ridgefield, if we had more apartments such as these. However, the price of an apartment or a condo is enough to scare a young person right out of town.

It seems that when a developer starts planning a multifamily building, the label "low and middle income" is used. Then, when the time comes to rent or lease the place, the misnomer comes to mean that only those in the \$75,000 bracket can afford to live there. This must be very discouraging to a bride and groom who want to stay in their home town.

The next house, going down the hill, is number 6 Barry Avenue. It is a very attractive brown shingled house and is the former home of Francis and Daisy Bedient. Francis passed away some 25 years ago but Daisy lived on until just a couple of years ago when she was in her 100th year.

Daisy was one of the three Smith sisters whom we have mentioned previously. The others were Henrietta Smith Hoyt and Ruth Smith Whitlock. These ladies were from an old Ridgefield family.

They were all very petite, and ladies in every sense of the word. When you met one of them, you just knew that you were meeting someone very special. They were a rare breed and it was great to know them.

Francis Bedient was a son of David F. Bedient, who owned and operated the famous old store that still carries his name [*Bedient's Hardware*]. Francis and his sister, Leona, who was our assistant town clerk for so many years, were both called "Beadie" by their many friends.

When D.F. Bedient passed on in the 20's, his son took over the business and ran it until Abe Morelli purchased the company in the 50's.

Beadie was a little fellow — in stature only. Actually, he was considered to be a big person in many ways, especially where his heart was concerned. He was an inveterate cigar smoker and wore gold-rimmed glasses. Beadie was full of pep and literally bounced around his store.

Many years ago, the D.F. Bedient Store was a classic country general store, where you could buy anything from hardware to harness and even groceries. There was even an old-fashioned pot-bellied stove around which the old-timers would gather to swap stories on a cold winter's day and you can just bet, they were some stories.

Beadie was a trusting person and this was of real benefit to many of his customers. During the dark days of the great Depression, a number of families would have been in dire straits, had it not been for the compassion shown by this kindly man. He was not an easy mark, but he would extend credit to those who otherwise might go hungry.

Did you ever notice how some of the very nicest people have been plagued with an affliction of one kind or another? Beadie had such a problem, but he would not let it alter his pleasant disposition.

It had to do with his manner of speaking. Beadie just could not enunciate certain letters of the alphabet. He had great difficulty with the letters, c, g, k, r, s and v. Oh, Beadie always seemed to manage to get his message across very well. After hearing him a few times, a person would tend to disregard his impediment, though at first, one might look at him in surprise. His sunny disposition was such that a new acquaintance was quickly won over and it was great to do business with him.

As might be expected, some of Beadie's attempts to make himself understood developed into situations which might be viewed as humorous. I will tell of a few, as long as it is clearly understood that it is not our intention to poke fun at this very respected gentleman.

On one occasion, back in the horse and buggy days, Beadie was courting Daisy and planned a ride in the countryside. He called the livery stable and when Reggie Humphreys answered the phone, he heard the following request, "Hey Weggy, tend up a two-teatta and a twotta, Daisy and I donna dough widen" — a two-seater and a trotter.

In later years, it was the custom for this very nice couple to spend Sunday evening at the movies in Danbury. There was no movie theater in town at the time.

Beadie always stopped at the store for a handful of cigars. On this summer evening, my father, Jack Walker and Frank Taylor were sitting on the store's front porch. The porch has since been replaced by the two showrooms, on either side of the front door.

For several weeks, groceries had been mysteriously missing from the store and Beadie was aware of this as he drove up in his Hudson Super 6. Beadie said hello to his friends on the porch and entered the store.

As he reached into the cigar case, he looked up and saw a man struggling to get out through a back window and the man was carrying a large bag full of groceries. Beadie became so excited that, instead of calling to the men on the porch to head off the burglar, he ran to the front door. Then he vaulted over the surprised sitters and shouted "Top you ton of a B, top!"

The thief, with his loot, raced down Bailey Avenue, but was later caught.

Ebenezer Scofield lived in Pound Ridge and called Bedient's to inquire about garden hose. Eben had speech impediment and Lawrence Coleman could not understand him and passed the phone to Andy Bloomer. Andy turned the phone over to Jack Whitlock and Jack with a mischievous grin, handed the phone to Beadie.

In just a minute, as you have guessed, the fur began to fly as Beadie and Eben each thought the other was making fun of the other.

Incidentally, as far as Beadie was concerned, my name was "Ditty Weenie."

#240: CHIEF BROWN'S FIREMEN'S BALLS, WILD PINOCHLE PARTIES

Mr. and Mrs. Fred Smith have lived at 8 Barry Avenue for a number of years. Fred was a long-time clerk at the D. F. Bedient Company store and retired just a few years ago.

Mrs. Smith, the former Gertrude Whitlock, was a classmate of mine at dear old Ridgefield High School. We graduated together a couple of years ago and have remained good friends.

During the period we have been covering, this was the home of Ellsworth F. Brown. "Brownie," as most everyone called him, is probably best remembered as the long-time chief of the Ridgefield Volunteer Fire Department.

Brownie loved a parade and as fire chief, served as marshal several times. He was rather tall and very slender with gold rimmed glasses and a little well-trimmed mustache.

He was always very proud as he marched down Main Street, wearing his white chief's hat and carrying his bullhorn, which was really a large silver megaphone. A large bouquet of flowers protruded from the bell of the horn.

When it came to having a good time, Brownie really knew his way around and he would always see to it that everyone else had a good time as well. During the many years he served as chief, he kept things lively and the firehouse was the scene of many social events.

When plans for the parties were of such proportions that they could not be held in the firehouse, the affairs were moved to the town hall. The annual Firemen's Ball was always a great social success and the auditorium of the old Town Hall was always filled to capacity. It was a time for neighbors to get together, in the 20's and 30's. It was also an opportunity for those unfortunate enough to have moved away to return and visit with old friends.

I still have the program for the Firemen's Ball that was held on May 27, 1938. Wharton Ford's orchestra played for dancing and Bede Best was his vocalist. The late Ralph B. Crouchley was chairman of the affair. Some of the songs rendered by this fine dance band were, "I'll Take Romance," "The Missouri Waltz," and "Stars Fell on Alabama" and when Bede Best sang "All Of Me," everyone crowded around the stage to listen.

The following year, our own Mayflower Swing Band played for the ball. We had a fine floor show that featured the great international ballroom dance team, Veloz and Yolonda. They had been appearing at New York's World's Fair and we were lucky to get them. People actually danced in those days, rather than just swaying to and fro, in one spot, as many do today.

Brownie was great for getting people together and he used to invite neighboring fire departments to compete in card tournaments. There was fierce competition between Danbury and Ridgefield during the 20's. Pinochle was the popular game in those days and it was not unusual for 50 or 60 men to gather for the spirited contests.

As a kid, I was called on to perform with my harmonica and I joined with Ernie Stash and his violin and Moxie Hahn at the piano to make a trio.

Moxie was a Danbury fireman and an excellent entertainer. He was short and stout, very much like Alfred Hitchcock, and even had the features of the great director. He would play any song, old or new, and his style ranged from Liberace to Fats Waller. Moxie was a whole lot of fun.

The 18th Amendment was in effect at the time and alcoholic beverages were not easy to come by. However, there were a number of apple orchards in town at this time, so hard cider and cider brandy were manufactured and saved, to be dispensed to the thirsty card players.

About 20 feet east of where the present rear doors of the firehouse are now, a large metal hoop was hung on a rack. It had been used years before as a fire bell [*the hoop is today displayed on the Bailey Avenue side of the town hall*]. Next to the hoop was a little gray shed, in which the potent cider, which was called "The poor man's champagne" was stored.

Brownie made sure that Moxie's glass never ran dry while he played the piano and Moxie had a very definite taste for the highly effective apple juice. After a few glasses, Moxie thought he was Ignace Paderewski.

At about this time, the boys would slide the piano bench from beneath Moxie and to the delight of the crowd, he would continue to play without missing a beat while still in a crouched sitting position a la Victor Borge.

Brownie always made sure that there were other forms of entertainment for the card players. Whenever a crowd gathered at the firehouse and the cider was flowing, it seemed that a set of boxing gloves was bound to appear. This was especially true after the card games were completed.

Fritz Frinder was a very good boxer and was always ready and willing to exhibit his prowess at the game of fisticuffs. After Fritz had worn out a couple of opponents, someone was sure to goad John Christopher to challenge him.

John worked for the State Highway Department and was very strong. He was also very short and very left-handed. John was not the least bit scientific and depended largely on his sweeping left handed haymaker to keep his adversaries at bay. After some cider, John's overhand haymakers created a real breeze as they missed their mark by a considerable margin and everyone had a good laugh.

On one occasion, as Fritz danced around, ducking John's wild swings, he became a little overconfident in his ability to cause John to miss. Finally, Fritz dropped his hands to his side and made no effort to parry the blows. Soon he was sticking his chin out, while he was encouraging John to hit it.

The crowd was enjoying John's discomfiture and John was becoming very annoyed. Finally, Fritz bent forward with his chin an open invitation and John, measuring the distance very carefully, started his swing from the floor and his left hand came over in a terrific arc and landed flush on the target. It was some time before Fritz came to.

Brownie was a window clerk at the old post office when it was located where Addessi's is now. During the Depression, postal workers were not paid the salaries that they get today. Many of them found it quite difficult to make ends meet.

In those days most everyone was bothered at one time or another by bill collectors. One day a man who was obviously a bill collector approached Brownie at his window. The man asked to speak to Ellsworth Brown and Brownie said "Sorry, but you just missed him, as he has gone out to lunch."

#241: THE MAN IN THE CELLAR AND POSSE IN THE SNOW

Next door to Ellsworth Brown in the 30's lived the Herman Martins at 10 Barry Avenue. Herman was a very scholarly looking gentleman and always seemed to look his Sunday best, whether just coming home from church, or raking the leaves on his lawn. Like his neighbor "Brownie," Herman had a neatly trimmed moustache and wore gold-rimmed glasses.

When I knew him, Herman was employed on the great Frederic E. Lewis estate where he worked at sundry jobs. It seemed that he must have been an assistant to the superintendent Jack Smith but there were times when he substituted for anyone who was absent. He could be working with flowers in the beautiful conservatory one day, replacing a teamster on another, or filling in for an ailing cow man.

The Martins had a very pretty daughter named Ethel, and she married the handsome John Walters in the 1920's. They made a very nice-looking couple and were popular with the local social set.

In the 50's John and Ethel moved to Florida, for some reason that I could never understand, although the weather we have been having recently may provide a clue as to what they were seeking to escape from.

Just below the Martin house lived the Joseph A. Zwierlein family. For many years, Joe was one of Ridgefield's best known characters. He was a painter by trade and was employed by Michael T. McGlynn before going into business for himself as a painting contractor.

Joe was quite a large man and many of his friends referred to him as "Big Joe." Despite his size, Joe could climb a ladder with ease and he seemed to have no fear of great heights.

Very few painters would care to climb church steeples but Joe seemed to relish the task. I remember watching him do the gold leafing of the cross atop Saint Mary's Church and could not help but admire his nerve as he worked at that very lofty height.

Joe was born in Bridgeport, but came to Ridgefield as a very young man. No doubt he was attracted by the lucrative opportunities provided those in his line of work by the many wealthy families that had come here.

As a boy, Joe had learned to box and became a very good amateur boxer. He gained a favorable reputation in several of the boxing clubs around Fairfield County.

Joe was one of the organizers, along with Joe Roach and Pete Chrisifis, of the Ridgefield Athletic Association. This was a thriving organization in the 20's and early 30's and had a well-equipped gymnasium on Danbury Road where Genoa Importing Inc., is now.

This was at a time when both boxing and wrestling were carried on without the silliness that seems to accompany them today. These fellows were serious about their sports and any clowning was quickly discouraged.

Joe met and married the former Irene McGlynn and they had a son, Thomas Joseph. Tom Joe, as he was called by most everyone, was born on Decoration Day (Memorial Day) 1916 and it was probably the only time his father ever missed a parade. Big Joe always marched with the fire police, except for the last few years when he rode in one of the fire trucks, with "Boots," the fire department's Dalmatian, perched beside him.

During his high school days, Tom Joe was student manager of the baseball and basketball teams. I think he graduated from Bucknell. At any rate, he had a degree in physical education and later became director of physical rehabilitation at one of the large veterans' hospitals in Pennsylvania.

Irene, like her sisters, Ethel (Ryan) and Mary (Kasper), was a local school teacher. Mary passed on only a few weeks ago. All three sisters taught at dear little old Titicus School at one time or another. Irene also played the piano very well and performed at many of the local stage productions.

During World War I, Big Joe joined the Home Guard and advanced to the rank of supply sergeant. The commander of the group was Second Lt. David W. Workman, who later became editor of this newspaper [*The Ridgefield Press*]. Joe belonged to several local organizations and his favorites seemed to be the Knights of Columbus and the Ridgefield Volunteer Fire Department. You can bet that Joe was faithful to, and a strong supporter of, these worthy organizations and he left his mark on both.

Like many large people, Joe was light on his feet and a really good dancer. We remember he and Irene winning the prize for waltzing on several occasions.

Incidentally, Joe and Irene began their married life, as so many other young couples did, including Marie and me, in that lovely apartment at 613 Main Street. They later lived in the house at 13 Catoonah Street, that until a few years ago was the offices of the District Nurse and is now called "Under the Dogwood Tree." For a short time they lived in a house on Governor Street, where the Toy Caboose is now. Then they moved to 12 Barry Avenue and finally to 73 West Lane.

It was at this time of the year, while the Zwierleins lived at Barry Avenue, that an incident occurred that is worthy of note. Joe was out at a meeting one night and Irene heard a noise in the basement. She opened the kitchen door that led to the basement and there in the darkness was the outline of a man.

The man hurled a rubber boot at Irene and then fled out the back door of the basement. Irene quickly recovered and soon had the police, in the person of Charles Wade Walker, on the scene.

Word spread quickly through the neighborhood and soon a posse of neighbors was organized. It was the be led by a very nervous, part-time policeman.

The trail of the intruder was easy to follow as there was a light freshly fallen snow. Sounds like the firebug story but it is more exciting. The tracks led north through the fields to Ramapoo Road and an old hay barn that had a ground floor basement. The barn was a part of Irving Conklin's dairy farm and while the upper part of the barn was used to store hay, the basement sheltered a dozen young heifers that Irving used to winter there.

The basement doors were always left open, in order that the herd of heifers would have easy access to a tiny pond where they got their water. The tracks of the culprit led directly to the open barn door.

At this point a decision had to be made. Do you barge into the barn or do you wait for the quarry to come out?

Perhaps this is a good time to explain that the officer carried a gun, but, as he said later, he was terrified at the thought of ever having to use it. In fact, he said that he had never used it, even in practice.

By now the posse had grown to a considerable size and they wanted some action. The man had managed to enter the barn without disturbing the heifers and they remained quietly in their shelter. However, at the approach of this small army, led by Charles Wade, a distinct rumble could be heard. Just as they reached the door, the herd, probably encouraged by the man, stampeded out the barn.

Several people were knocked flat, including the officer, whose gun went off harmlessly into the air. The heifers raced across the open field, with the perpetrator keeping pace in their midst. He sure could run and with all the tracks made by the crowd, it was impossible to follow him.

Several people thought they knew who he was, but positive identification could not be made and he got away scot-free.

#242: HOW TO GET BIG JOE'S GOAT

Since last week's column, there have been inquiries as to the identity of the housebreaker. You will recall that he escaped detection by stampeding Irv Conklin's heifers, after joining the herd. In the excitement that followed, no one could positively identify the man.

However, you can be assured that this culprit and Peeper No. 2, are one and the same, and Mrs. Zwierlein agreed to that theory.

Also, there have been requests for some stories about Joe Zwierlein. There were many humorous incidents involving Joe and if they can cause a smile here and there, they will be worth relating.

As we have pointed out, Joe was a big fellow and we should say that despite a gruff exterior and a rather abrupt manner, he was very good natured. There was nothing backward about Joe and he had the courage to stand up for what he believed to be right. He would fight hard for a cause and if things did not go his way, he would roar like a wounded lion. Yet, when the final decision was made, even though not in Joe's favor, he would loyally put his shoulder to the wheel and help as best he could, as he was a great organization man.

Possibly because of his size and the fact that he was good natured, many felt safe in teasing Joe. The joking and the teasing were always sure to bring on a reaction, but somehow it was easy to get the impression that Joe was enjoying the proceedings, just as much as the teasers.

Many are the tricks that were played on Joe, and though his initial response was bound to be very loud and rather severe, he got over it quickly and soon was enjoying whatever trick had been played.

Joe was very fond of playing cards and it made little difference, whether it was pinochle, poker or set-back, though he favored poker, a game at which he enjoyed phenomenal success.

One evening Joe became engaged in a spirited game of poker and as usual, it proved to be quite profitable for him. A number of men crowded around the card table, to watch the proceedings. As the evening wore on, the onlookers wore down as they tired of watching the game and left for home.

Two of the last to leave were George Fasola and Dr. Peter Yanity. Each of these gentlemen was known to have a rather mischievous nature, which would occasionally surface in the form of some trick they would play.

Some time later in the evening Joe Zwierlein's luck ran out and he decided that the prudent thing to do was to go home to bed. The other card players heard Joe's car start and after it had run for a few minutes, the engine stopped.

It was not long before the silence, which usually surrounds a poker game, was shattered by Joe's loud voice as he demanded to know who had been fooling with his car. Someone had jacked up the rear wheels of the car, so it was impossible to move the vehicle in either direction. Not only did the tricksters make sure that the wheels did not touch the ground, they removed the jack and replaced it with concrete building blocks.

Joe was awful mad, especially when he had to borrow a jack to lower his Ford station wagon to the ground. However, when speculation narrowed the suspects down to the aforementioned pair, of which Joe had learned to become tolerant, he laughed along with the rest of the men.

Then there was the great card tournament, between the K of C Councils of Ridgefield, Danbury, Bethel, Newtown, and New Milford. For this event, Joe was teamed up with Tabby Carboni to represent Ridgefield. That the two were eminently successful is proven by the fact that they won top honors in the pinochle division, and the prize was a goose.

Tabby, being well aware of Joe's willingness to take issue with most any suggestion, announced that he would take the goose home and at a future date, Joe and Irene would be invited over for dinner. As expected, Joe disagreed and stated that he would take the goose home and the Carbonis would be invited over to dinner at the appropriate time.

Of course, Tabby had anticipated this and was delighted to accept Joe's kind offer, as Tabby was well aware that the prize was a live goose rather than one all prepared to go into the pot. Not many people have suffered through the agonizing experience of picking the feathers from a goose. Though a goose tastes very good, the taste could never compensate for the job of removing those obnoxious feathers, especially the smaller down feathers.

Like the good soldier he was, Joe tackled the job and it consumed most of the day. On the night that Tabby and Katherine arrived for dinner, Joe met them at the door. Needless to say he was under a full head of steam, but somehow managed to restrain himself, though his muttered greeting was intertwined with a line about how it was necessary for him to use tweezers to get those small feathers off the bird. Joe never used profanity, but he must have been sorely tempted on this occasion.

Joe and Bernie Bernie Christopher worked for Joe as a painter and he was a master at getting under Joe's skin. Come to think of it, Bernie was the Art Carney of his day and Joe would have made a great Jackie Gleason.

Once they were side by side painting the picket fence at the Keeler Tavern, when Bernie suggested that he change to the other side of the fence and then each could paint his own side of the fence. Bernie would put more paint than was necessary on his brush, with the result that the excess paint spattered onto Joe's face. Of course, Joe would explode, which would make Bernie happy, as he moved to a safe distance from the boss.

On another occasion, a boring and wrestling card was to be presented at the Italian and American Hall. The ring in which the contests were held had to be rented from a gymnasium in Bridgeport. Joe and several others, including Bernie, went along to load the ring into Peter McManus's truck for the ride back to Ridgefield.

Once the ring was set up, Bernie strode to its center and announced that he always wanted to put on the gloves with Joe. You can bet that Joe readily accepted the challenge and went to his corner to have the gloves laced on.

Bernie did not wait for the lacing, he merely shoved his hand in the glove, tapped Joe on the shoulder and when he turned, he let fly. The blow landed flush on the jaw and Joe went down but bounced back up and took after Bernie, who had wisely dashed out the front door of the ball. When last seen they were running hard up Bailey Avenue.

#243: WHEN COON HUNTING WAS A POPULAR PASTIME

In the 1920s and 30s hunting for raccoons was a rather popular and profitable sport. It was at a time when raccoon coats were the thing to wear and the pelts brought from \$5 to \$8, according to their color and condition. The darker the pelts, the higher the price.

In later years two things caused a great drop in the value of "coon" skins. Mink coats had become a great attraction for those who could afford them and those who could not, turned to cloth coats. Then Russian furs began to flood the market and a hunter was lucky to get even \$2 for a coonskin. In recent years raccoon coats have made a comeback.

In the period of which we are writing, some hunters were interested in hunting raccoons for the extra money they made, and some because the hunting was done at night and did not interfere with their regular employment.

Then there were those, like my brothers, Jack and Charlie, who just enjoyed hearing the coonhound's great voice as it raced through the woods. To them there was nothing quite like turning the hounds loose and waiting to hear the sharp bark that indicated the trail of a coon had been found.

That particular sound would continue, over hill and dale and through the swamps, until the barking of the dogs became deeper and longer and the hunters knew that a coon had been treed.

Jack knew every inch of the wooded areas of Ridgefield and from as far from the hounds as a mile or more, he could tell you whether they were crossing a small brook, or passing through a particular barway or gate. When the hounds finally started "barking up," Jack would lead the way to the spot where the coon had been. The route that he took might be circular rather than straight, in order that difficult places to walk might be avoided.

If the tree in which the coon was perched happened to be climbable, Jack would use spurs, such as the linemen use to climb utility poles, and he would go up the tree to have a look. When it was determined that the coon was large enough to take, a shotgun was used to bring it down.

When it was found that the coon was too small, someone would shake the little critter out of the tree and Jack was always satisfied, just to hear the dogs run the coons in.

These fellows took their coon hunting seriously and there was great rivalry among them concerning the ability of their hounds. One time, brother Jack and Ernie Stash became partners in the purchase of a hound. Her name was Rose and they went all the way to Virginia to get her. They paid the unheard of sum of \$435 for Rose and that was in 1931, when the Great Depression was in full swing.

Rose turned out to be well worth the price. She was a beautiful black-and-tan and highly intelligent.

When Rose barked you could bet your life that it was a coon. The other hounds might run after a deer, a fox, a skunk, or even a rabbit, but not Rose. We heard other animals around in the woods at night and when our flashlights picked them out, we would see Rose go right by them without even a glance. She was responsible for treeing more than 60 raccoons in that very first year.

Rose was such a great coonhound that when she was too old to join in the actual chase, she was carried from the car into the hunting area. The other dogs remained leashed until Rose found the trail. As soon as she barked, the younger dogs were released to do the running and Rose was carried the rest of the way. She did not mind this procedure and seemed content in knowing that she had played her part in the hunt to perfection.

When Rose passed on, the interest in coon hunting diminished rapidly. By the same token, there was a dramatic increase in the raccoon population. It is no longer necessary to go into the woods to find raccoons. On most any night you can find one on your back porch, or in one of your garbage cans.

It was customary for a new hunter to have the chore of carrying the heavy shotgun on the night of his first hunt. This would guarantee him the privilege of shooting the first coon that was treed.

On Joe Zwierlein's first coon hunt, he carried the gun for miles and it began to look as though he would never get the chance to use it. The moon was almost full and raccoons like a darker night.

It was just about midnight when Rose's bark floated back to us and we were sure of the quarry. She was joined by Watch, another good hound, and soon they were barking up.

When we reached the tree, our flashlights located a real large coon about 30 feet from the ground. Jimmy Sullivan was carrying the shells and Joe, in preparation to exercise his rights, asked Jimmy for a shell. Jim was of a rather mischievous nature and handed Joe a blank shell.

Of course, nothing happened and Joe asked for another shell. Jimmy told Joe that if he was not successful, he would have to shoot the coon himself as he had only a few shells, and with that he handed Joe another blank.

Joe took very careful aim but despite the blast, not a leaf stirred.

Jimmy took the gun, and of course, with a good shell, brought down the coon.

“Well,” Joe said, “I’m sure that I weakened him.”

#244: A TALE OF TWO DOGS

We have been writing about the late Joseph A. Zwierlein and told about the first time that Joe went coon hunting. In that story we told of some of the great coon hounds that we knew more than 50 years ago.

One of the hounds, named Rose, was pictured as being highly intelligent. With your kind permission, I would describe a jealous streak that this great dog developed and how she discredited what she felt was a pretender to her coveted role as “queen of the pack.”

Rose had come from Virginia and quickly established herself as just about the finest coon hound that any of us had ever seen. She was probably seven years old when she arrived in Ridgefield and that is a little past middle age for a hunting dog. Because of that fact, brother Jack felt there was need for a younger hound to take over, if and when Rose began to tire of the nocturnal sorties into the wooded areas.

Since Rose had proven to be such a sensation in her profession, it was agreed that the new dog should come from the same area of the country from which she had been acquired. Another trip was made to Virginia and another beautiful black-and-tan was located in the mountains, just a few miles from where Rose had plied her trade.

Her name was Flo and she was the “spittin’ image” of Rose. However, at the tender age of two, Flo was much younger and full of pep.

Rose did not take kindly to this incursion into what she considered her personal domain. She did not mind the other dogs, as they were males and both “Leed” and “Watch” treated Rose with proper respect. Rose seemed to rather tolerate Leed, who was a large blue tick and she actually appeared to like Watch, a fine dog with the colors of a beagle. It would be fair to say that Rose really ruled the kennel and did a great job, keeping the other dogs in their places.

Flo was quite another matter and, being rather brash as well as young, presented a challenge to the older dog’s leadership. So, she had to learn the hard way that she must play second-fiddle to the queen — if she wanted to play at all.

There were the initial skirmishes between the two females, in which Rose lost no time in convincing the interloper that she was the boss. The situation changed somewhat when the hounds were in the woods where Flo’s great speed enabled her to avoid Rose and her rulings.

This caused the older dog to exhibit a disposition that we never knew she possessed. Rose would actually sulk and refuse to pick up a trail, for when she did, Flo would race right past her in joyous pursuit of the raccoon. It got to a point where it became necessary to keep Flo on a leash until the coon was about to be treed and only then was she allowed to join in all the excitement.

Once we made the mistake of releasing Flo too soon. It happened on the westerly side of Nod Road, just across from the home of the Mortimer C. Keeler family. This place would later be known as Heritage Farm and later still, the surrounding area would become the beautiful Twin Ridge development. At the time of which we are writing, there were very few houses in the area.

Rose had picked up the scent of a raccoon and was carefully chasing what turned out to be a very large, 34-pound coon. Rose must have known it would be a prize catch, as there was a resonance in her baying that we had never heard before. When Rose heard Flo coming to join the

chase, her great voice was suddenly stilled and Jack immediately sensed that Rose was about to play some kind of trick.

After several minutes, we heard Rose again, but this time she was traveling south, whereas she had previously been traveling north. Jack [*Venus*] said “That jealous old Rose is running the track backwards.” Flo caught up with Rose and passed her, which was apparently just what Rose had expected.

Flo continued south traveling at a torrid pace and again Rose’s voice was stilled. When next we heard Rose’s familiar voice, it was a mile to the north of where Flo was still running the track backward. The sly old hound had completely confused the younger dog.

Soon Rose was “barking up” a large oak tree near the home of Henry K. McHarg (now the home of the Donald K. Brush family). It was the largest coon we had ever seen and Rose was not about to share any of the credits with a young upstart like Flo.

Just thought you might like to know that coon hounds, just as some humans, can be guilty of snobbishness on occasion. One thing was sure, the old dog taught the new dog some new tricks.

There were many stories about Joe Zwierlein and one had to do with a dog. In his spare time, Joe has served as Ridgefield’s dog warden in the 30’s, but after several years and many experiences, he gave up the job.

A new dog warden was appointed by the Board of Selectmen and the new warden did a creditable job for some years. However, there was a change of administration in town hall and a terrific clash of personalities began to develop between the first selectman and the dog warden.

It got to a point where sides were drawn and supporters of the dog warden were quite vocal in praising him for doing a good job. It got so bad that a parting of the ways was inevitable, for as they say, “You can’t buck City Hall.”

So the dog warden departed and Joe Zwierlein was persuaded to take back the job he had relinquished many years before.

Sometime after he was installed as the new warden, Joe approached me and asked that I get him one of the gadgets that the mailmen carry. He then explained that he had observed the mailman making his rounds on West Lane, where he was confronted by a large black dog. The dog had a menacing manner and gave every indication that he was about to bite the mailman.

Joe told of how the mailman quickly reached into his pocket and brought out what looked like an oversized fountain pen. The gadget emitted a spray which was directed at the belligerent animal. Joe said he was amazed to see the dog lay down and roll over.

He was describing HALT, a product that had proved to be very effective in subduing unruly canines. I gave Joe a dispenser of the spray and forgot the matter, until I met him several weeks later.

He acted very annoyed and told me how I had gotten him in all kinds of trouble. I asked what the trouble was and Joe told of how he had received a phone call from a lady in the Ridgefield Lakes area. The lady complained about a dog that was biting everyone that it came in contact with and the neighbors were very upset.

Joe told of how he got in his car and headed north to the Lakes area completely confident that his new armament, which he thoughtfully had put in his pocket, would protect him in any situation.

As he approached the address that the lady had given him, Joe recognized the house by the little hedge in front of it. He also noticed as he alighted from his car that a large dog was stretched out on the lawn, facing away from him.

Joe described how, with the spray can in his hand, he quietly, but confidently, approached the offending animal. However, just as he was about to push the button on the spray, another dog bit him, right on the rear. He said that the dog has such strong jaws, he bit right through his wallet.

As you have already guessed, Joe had sprayed the wrong dog, which was later found to be very old and without teeth.

#245: WHY JERSEYS AND GUERNSEYS WERE POPULAR

It was in the late 40's that Joe and Irene Zwierlein moved from 12 Barry Avenue to their own nice home at 73 West Lane.

The Barry Avenue property was owned by the Mortimer C. Keeler estate and now it became the home of the Irving Keelers. Irv was the son of Mortimer and some years before had taken over the operation of the great old Keeler farm on Nod Road. The farm had been the home of that venerable family for many years and was a true family enterprise in every sense of the words.

Irv was a good farmer and besides running a large poultry operation, he also conducted a dairy business. For his milk supply, Irv depended on a herd of Jersey milch cows. Now there is a word that I have not seen or heard in a very long time. The word milch merely denotes that the cows were kept for the production of milk, rather than beef.

Jersey cows were rather small animals, compared to the other breeds. They were noted for their ability to produce milk that was very rich in butterfat. This was a very desirable trait in the days before large dairies started to homogenize the milk. This process prevented the cream from rising to the top of the glass bottles.

Years ago, most people were interested in getting the richest milk possible and with the disappearance of the cream line, all milk looked the same. The butterfat content was not printed on the bottle cap, as it is today.

Before homogenization, the dairies depended on the depth of the cream line to advertise the quality of their product. Some dairies even had their glass milk bottles made with a long slender neck, to create the impression of a long cream line.

There was one bottle developed that had a rather large bulge at its top. It was called a "cream top" bottle and when a small spoon, which was supplied by the dairy, was extended into the bottle, it blocked off the milk in the lower part of the bottle. This made it easy to pour off the cream, which was then used in the morning coffee, or it could be used for whipping cream.

Some of the dairies that used the cream top bottle had a slogan printed on the side of the bottle that read, "You can whip our cream but you can't beat our milk." The quality of milk seemed to be of much more importance in those days and competition between the dairies was very intense. Just can't help but wonder if many people have their favorite brand today.

Jersey cows and Guernsey cows were great producers of the highly prized cream, or butterfat, as it is referred to today. The color of the cream from a Jersey cow was a deep yellow, while the Guernsey cream was of a golden color and was advertised as "Golden Guernsey."

Most of the other breeds produced more milk, but less cream and it was so much lighter in color that it could hardly be distinguished from the milk.

Because of the desire of the public for rich milk, the Jersey and the Guernsey cows were very popular. Both breeds originated from the Channel Islands that bear their names and are a part of the British Isles.

All that changed when homogenization wiped out the cream line and then the doctors started to advocate using milk with a smaller cream content. Production became the byword over butterfat and the Holstein-Friesian cow, which was a great producer, came into its own. This large black and white animal is a native of Northern Holland and greatly outnumbers the other breeds on the large dairy farms of today.

The trend toward low-fat milk continued until today; butterfat has practically disappeared. It makes one wonder how those old timers who thrived on rich milk ever survived.

At any rate when the demand for milk that was rich in cream lessened dramatically, the Jersey and Guernsey herds began to disappear. We have always felt that this fact had some bearing on Irving Keeler's decision to give up farming.

We should mention that the little fawn colored Jersey cows were very cute. They were also very tough and could survive where the larger breeds could not. Even so, my own favorites were the pretty red and white Guernseys.

Whether it was the declining popularity of milk that was so rich in cream, or the very tough competition in the dairy industry, or the drudgery that is generally associated with the work on a farm, or perhaps a combination of all these things, Irving Keeler decided that it was time to get out of business and give up the farm.

Many of the areas of Ridgefield, which have been relegated for agriculture, were best suited for dairy farming. However, due to the rugged terrain, which Ridgefield has in abundance, farming of just about any kind was never an easy proposition.

Though the taxes on farmland were levied in such a manner as to encourage those with large holdings to retain their land, the steadily increasing land values resulted in the sale of many of the local farms. Developers came on strong and the character of Ridgefield changed rapidly.

Ridgefield once had numerous small family farms and when the wealthy families came to town in the late 1800's and early 1900's, most of them fortified themselves with what were euphoniously labeled "Gentlemen's Farms." There were only five to six farms that were large enough to be considered as commercial ventures.

With the demise of the Keeler farm, the number of large farms was reduced further. Today, Dan McKeon's Arigideen Farm is just about the only one left.

The Keeler farm had been in that family for more than a century when Tom Baggott purchased it more than 35 years ago. Tom and his boys kept the poultry part of the operations going and they raised produce which they sold at the farm and at a vegetable stand they operated on Route 7.

After a few years, the Baggott family gave up farming and Barry Montgomery transformed the farm into one of the very finest of developments that we now know as Twin Ridge.

Somehow we got a long way from Barry Avenue so back we go to 12 Barry Avenue, which is now the home of Angelo "Beebe" Zandri and Mrs. Zandri. Beebe is a machine operator

for Morganti Inc. Beebe, like Joe Zwierlein, is a great dancer and is also known for his prowess as a set back player.

#246: WIRED LEMONS, PLASTER, AND DRUMS

One of the fine old homes on Barry Avenue is at the bottom of the hill and just west of the Beebe Zandri's. For some years now, it has been the home of Dorothy J. Brown. During the period of which we are writing, it was the home of William and Jane Davies.

The Davies had three children, William Jr., Linda and Ann. Linda is a retired school teacher and still lives in Ridgefield. At one time, this house was owned by Mrs. George H. Newton. It was later owned by C. Lindsay Sutherland, who sold it to John Curtiss in the 40s. Curtiss had the place for only a year and then sold it to the Davies family.

William Davies Sr. will probably be best remembered as a very good horticulturist. For many years he was the superintendent for Dr. William H. Allee, when the Allee family resided in the mansion on the corner of Main Street and Market Street, where the District Nursing Association now has its offices.

Bill was justly proud of the beautiful flowers that he grew and never missed having a prize entry in the many local flower shows. In those days there was great competition between the gardeners on the private estates that were so numerous in Ridgefield.

Their activities were not limited to the local shows; they also had exhibits in the National Flower Show that used to be held in New York City at the old Grand Central Palace. Many of the great Ridgefield gardens were represented in that superlative display of botanical beauty.

There is a story, which we have reason to believe is true, of how one of our local exhibitors at the big show in New York entered a lemon tree in the fruit tree class. It was a very healthy looking tree, but had a rather serious drawback. Whether it was the wrong season or not, was not made clear. What was clear was that the nice little tree was utterly devoid of any fruit.

With typical "Yankee ingenuity," a commodity which Ridgefielders possessed to some degree, our exhibitor paid a visit to his favorite grocery. After acquiring a dozen nice fresh lemons, the exhibitor proceeded to wire the lemons to his tree at strategic locations.

When he had finished his cosmetic surgery, he put the very pretty tree on display. It drew the admiring glances of the judges and as you probably have already guessed, the little lemon tree walked off with the blue ribbon. Incidentally, the 1987 National Flower Show is in full swing at this time.

Just west of the Davies house there was, and still is, a little brook that had its source up on High Ridge and Peaceable Street. After a heavy rain, the water flowed north, through Byron Park, under Barry Avenue, along the Conklin Dairy, under Ramapoo Road, and emptied into New Pond.

New Pond has just about disappeared, as some years ago, the dam that caused the pond to come into being was opened. The water flowed out of the pond into the Titicus River, where it joined the water from Upper Pond and Roberts Pond and eventually emptied into the Croton River.

The little brook also served as the eastern boundary for an open field that was also owned by Mrs. George H. Newton. William Weinberger purchased the lot in the late 20's and

established a fine little nursery there. Billy Weinberger was superintendent for the Hyde sisters on the very attractive estate that they had built in the early 20's at the southern end of High Ridge. This place, with its cobblestone and old English courtyard, is now the residence of the Mortimer V. Schwartz family.

The nursery, which featured various trees and shrubs, was a sideline for Billy, who was also a fine horticulturist. The lot is now overgrown with trees and it is hard to imagine that it was once a fine nursery.

Just north of this lot is a house that is barely visible from Barry Avenue. For many years it has been the home of Mrs. James Gaeta. Her late husband carried on a very prominent plumbing business from this place.

During the period of which we are writing, this was the home of the Roy W. Davis family. They had a daughter, Bertha, who married Jacob Walters and they lived a little farther out on Barry Avenue.

The Davises also had two sons, Paul and Philip. Paul was once the proprietor of the Blue Front Grocery Store on West Lane. This old country store is a real landmark and was known for more than 40 years as Casa-More. The name is a combination of the names Casagrande and Moore. Gene Casagrande and John Moore were partners in the business that they started in the very early 40's. Joseph Hahn recently purchased the business from Gene Casagrande and changed the name to West Lane Market and Spirits.

Phil Davis was one of Ridgefield's fine young athletes and played on local baseball and basketball teams. Phil was also a good amateur boxer and might have made a career of it. Like his father Roy, Phil was an avid hunter and father and son used to roam the great wooded areas of Ridgefield, before the wild game fled the onslaught of the developer's bulldozer.

Roy Davis was a mason by trade, in the days when the plastered walls and ceilings of houses were made by hand. My father worked with Roy Davis, Percy Humphreys, Lon Stevens and Will Stevens. They were artists in their trade and much in demand, especially in the days when the large mansions were being built in Ridgefield. However, that was long before plasterboard came on the market. Plasterboard is much easier to install and quicker as well as cheaper for the builder.

Whenever these men worked on a house that was close to home, I used to take my father's lunch to him and it was always a treat to smell the plaster as it was being applied. It was always a mystery to me as to how the plasterers could make the surface so smooth.

Roy Davis was a charter member of the Ridgefield Volunteer Fire Department and later was chief of that excellent organization.

I guess for me, his ability as a plasterer was exceeded only by his prowess as a drummer. Roy played the parade drum, sometimes called the street drum in the old Oreneca Band. This great band represented Ridgefield very well and was in great demand in all the surrounding areas. In those days, the drummer had to learn to march while keeping his left leg rather stiff. This prevented the drum from bouncing around as he marched. Today, most drums have a metal strap that fits around the drummer's leg.

After a parade, drummers from all the bands would gather in the firehouse for a competition called the "Battle of the Drums" and Roy always won.

#247: BARRYS OF BARRY AVENUE WHO WATER-GLASSED EGGS

As we continue to travel west on Barry Avenue, we come to number 42. It is a cute little old house and sits quite near the highway. The present owner is Miss Rita Mitchell and she grew up across the street at 28 Fairview Avenue.

For many years, this was the home of the Patrick Raines and their two nieces, Mary and Katherine O'Hearn. Both Mary and Katherine were local school teachers. They were also both very pretty and both were just as nice as they looked.

Unfortunately, Mary's teaching career was cut short by a very tragic and very crippling ailment. For a long, long time, Katherine O'Hearn did double duty as a nurse for her sister, while continuing to teach. These fine girls greatly added to the beauty of that 1926 minstrel show that we keep referring to from time to time. In that show, the sisters sang, but we remember them dancing "The Sailor's Hornpipe" and other folk dances and they were very talented.

As teachers, the O'Hearn girls took a special interest in their pupils and the young people never had anything but the best to say about them. I remember our own children coming home with glowing tales of how Katherine had encouraged them and how very patient she had been with them. The girls were a great credit to their profession and will be long remembered.

Just west of 42 Barry Avenue is a very nice open field that goes with the place. The field is probably 3 or 4 acres of the rapidly dwindling open space in this area.

I can remember mowing the hay on that field, with a team of horses and a McCormick-Deering mowing machine. The field runs north to where Irving Conklin used to have his dairy farm and it produced a very good crop of hay. It would be nice to see it stay as it is, for the neighborhood kids to play in.

Just west of the open field is number 52 Barry Avenue and it is now the home of the Morena family. It is interesting to know that the original house at this address was owned by John Barry, after whom Barry Avenue was named. According to Roberta Barry Robertson, John Barry's grand-daughter, the original house was so big, it was rather difficult to manage.

Actually a large house was needed, for John and Mary Ann Barry had 10 children. However, as the children grew up and left home, the big house was cut in two and moved into neighboring Brvon Park and became two separate homes. We are not sure which of the present houses made up the Barry home but one thing is sure, a lot of houses in Ridgefield were moved to where they are presently located.

Roberta, who now lives in Mamaroneck, is to be credited for many of the interesting stories connected with this place. Her father was John Barry's son, Robert, so you know where her name came from. She lived with her parents and her sister Mary, when they were little girls, in what was called "the old Barry house," before it was moved.

While talking with Roberta, you become quickly aware that she has an incredible memory and can describe in detail every room in the old house. I hope you will be as interested in her description of the way of life, before and during World War I, as I am.

When the Barry sisters were little girls, they did not attend local schools. Instead, a teacher was hired to come to the house and start their education. They were joined by the Mitchell twins, Madeline and Genevieve. The twins were older sisters of Rita Mitchell and lived on Fairview Avenue. It should be said that Madeline and Genevieve were also in the cast of that 1926 minstrel show.

At any rate, a little classroom, replete with desks and blackboards, was set up for them and Roberta remembers that their first reader started out with “The hen found a bag of flour. She tried to carry it home.”

The teacher was Miss Teresa Buckley, who lived in the little house at the very top of Catoonah Street. Teresa later married Louis Baker, who was one of the original state policemen. Lou was stationed in Ridgefield and we told about him in Dispatch No. 216.

Robert Barry was engaged in real estate in New York City. It was his custom to take the train to Branchville Station and then on to the city on Sunday afternoon. He did not return until Friday evening. This put a considerable burden on the family and they all had to help to keep things going during the father’s absence. The chickens had to be cared for and in the winter months, the coal furnace had to be stoked.

In those days, they had not yet started to put lights in the chicken house to encourage the hens to keep laying eggs during the relatively short winter days. Therefore, in order to prepare for the days of short egg production, eggs were preserved by immersing them into a wooden tub, in which there was a concoction that was both thick and slimy. It was also quite cold, since it was kept in the cellar.

The system was called “water glassing” and it was widely used in the days before electric refrigerators and the huge electrically cooled warehouses of today. This method of preserving eggs was used not only on the farms, but in private homes as well.

Large quantities of eggs were purchased when they were plentiful and the price was down. They were then “water glassed,” to be used when eggs were scarce and the price was high. The material used to prepare the solution was called water glass and had as its base a certain kind of clay (called sodium silicate). It was made by the Rutland Fire Clay Company at a plant in Rutland, Vt. This same firm is in operation today and produces roofing materials, patching plaster, furnace cement, and a concrete patching substance.

A one quart can of water glass, when mixed with 11 parts water, would keep about 16 dozen eggs. It was then poured into an earthenware crock, or a wooden tub. The eggs were then placed in the container, leaving them about two inches below the surface.

It should be noted that the mixed material could also be used as an adhesive. Small wonder that it was with a feeling of revulsion that Roberta reached into the sticky solution to retrieve the eggs to be used for breakfast. It was a chore that she did not relish.

(To be continued)

#248: HOME LIFE A CENTURY AGO

With the moving of the “old” Barry house from 52 Barry Avenue to Bryon Park, the Robert E. Barry family moved to a farm in Washington Depot. That was in 1913, and while the family was still in Connecticut, it was not like Ridgefield.

Therefore, like many others who have moved away from Ridgefield, the Barry family had a yearning to return. The opportunity presented itself when George Abbott, who had married Robert Barry’s sister Kate, offered Robert 14 acres on Barry Avenue. The offer was made for the purpose of settling an old debt. It was the only incentive that the Barrys needed to come back home.

The land in question encompassed what is now the Michael P. Hilton residence at 70 Barry Avenue. A further attraction was the fact that the land was just two doors west of the old Barry homestead.

Robert Barry lost no time in accepting the offer and plans were made to build a new home on the property. It was not long before construction was started on the fine house that stands there today. The house was completed in 1915, and a very happy family moved back to their old neighborhood.

Roberta Barry remembers that the new home had a large living room, a dining room and kitchen on the first floor. There was a so-called butler's pantry between the dining room and the kitchen, as well as what they called "the little room," right off the kitchen. This room had a pantry closet, with shelves that were lined with jars of canned fruit and vegetables that were grown right there on the place.

There was a large coal burning stove in the kitchen and a barrel of flour sat in the corner near the little room. The flour barrel was in constant use and produced many loaves of bread, all sorts of rolls, cake and cookies. You must remember that this all "took place long before a housewife enjoyed the luxury of driving down to the nearest supermarket to get the necessary foodstuffs for her family.

The kitchen also had several other pieces of equipment that were essential in the operation of a successful family enterprise. Near the kitchen stove was a large old coffee grinder. Most people bought their coffee in bean form at the time, and ground it as needed.

There was also a contraption for grinding corn and an "ice box" that was regularly filled with large chunks of ice by an "ice man" who came along, house to house, with his horse drawn ice wagon.

In the cellar, there was a large coal burning furnace and of course there was the proverbial water glass tub. The cellar also had a large table, upon which Robert Barry used to grow endive in wooden flats.

The second floor of the house had four bedrooms and a bathroom. The third floor, or attic, with its three attractive dormer windows, had two unfinished rooms that were partitioned off with beaverboard.

The spacious grounds had just about everything to help provide for a happy family. There was a large grape arbor that each fall was filled with luscious Concord grapes. There were various berry bushes, fruit trees and a garden with rich soil.

The place had three chicken houses and in the clothes yard there were clothes lines, mounted on four poles — no electric clothes dryers in those days.

When Mrs. Barry decided it was time for a chicken dinner, Robert would repair to his tool house and reappear with his axe in hand. Roberta and her sister, Mary, much to their annoyance, were not allowed to view the actual execution of the chicken that was selected, but like all kids they were very inquisitive and wanted to know what it was all about. On one occasion, when the girls were aware that a chicken dinner had been planned, they went out and crawled under the chicken house to watch.

Unlike those who attended the beheadings in the Tale of Two Cities, the girls remained very quiet. However, one of them was rather squeamish and made a slight noise, just as the guillotine was to be put in operation. The father heard the noise, the ruse was discovered and

Robert Barry marched his daughters back into the safety of their house, before completing the coup de grace.

During World War I, home gardens and the growing of food took on a very important role in the war effort. There was a shortage in just about every commodity and people were urged to grow as much food as possible.

The field just to the west of the Barrys' new home was plowed and a good stand of corn was grown. This was shared with an Allen family that lived in New Rochelle, where they had no room to grow anything. The two families worked together each weekend on their joint venture. Incidentally, the soil in that field has again been moved around, this time by a bulldozer.

Because of the war effort, the Barrys found it necessary to enlarge their garden and the vegetables it produced proved to be invaluable. This was also true of the fruit trees, the raspberry patch and the strawberry beds, of which they had several.

When the house was being built, electric wires were installed. However, since the power lines had still not been extended throughout the town, no fixtures were installed. This made it necessary to use kerosene lamps for lights in the house. This created a chore for the girls and they were kept busy, filling the lamps with oil and cleaning the many chimneys.

If wicks were not properly trimmed, the lamps would smoke and the glass chimneys would turn black, adding more work for the girls.

Like all kids, the girls looked forward to the Christmas season. They used to wait anxiously for their father to go into the woods with his axe to cut a pine or cedar tree for them to decorate. Their excitement mounted when Robert returned and the tree was carefully set up in the living room.

Once the tree was in place, with its butt in a pail of water to keep it fresh, the girls started to trim it. The tinsel was strung among the boughs, popcorn balls, and various baubles were attached and another important item was added. Since there were no electric lights, candles were used. They were small candles and they were attached to the branches with little metal clips.

The danger of fire was great, but very few occurred as the tree was carefully watched. The fire marshal, if we had one then, would have had a field day.

#249: MANY OLD ENTERPRISES OF THE ASTUTE ERNIE SCOTT

We got a little ahead of our story as we traveled west on Barry Avenue, due to the fact that the Barry family moved from 52 Barry Avenue and then later returned to 70 Barry Avenue. So back to 52 and the impressive white house that has been the residence of the Joseph T. Moreno family for the past 15 years.

As has already been told, the original house at 52 (the old Barry house), was made into two houses and both were moved across the street and into Bryon Park. This all took place before World War I. Almost as soon as the old house disappeared, construction started on the present house at this location.

We are not sure whether the builder of the present house was the Walsh family, or Ernest Scott. One thing is sure: Ernest married the Walshes' pretty daughter, Marie, and the Scott family lived there for years.

Ernest and Marie had a son, John E. Scott, who was known to his friends as “Buddy.” In the 30s, Marie and Buddy moved to the Stamford-Greenwich area. Marie was a niece of the noted Judge James F. Walsh, as was Teresa Buckley, who taught the Barry children before they attended local elementary school.

Ernest Scott came to Ridgefield as a young man in the early part of this century. He was born in Aberdeen, Scotland, and when he talked, his voice had a pleasant little burr that proved that fact.

By profession, Ernest Scott was an engineer and apparently he was a very good one. At the time of his arrival in this country, the great John Hampton Lynch mansion on West Mountain was being constructed. This beautiful place is now owned and occupied by the Congregation of Notre Dame.

The engineer in charge of construction on this job was taken ill and young Ernest Scott was sent to Ridgefield to take over his duties. Like so many others, Ernie was greatly impressed by the beauty of Ridgefield and by the time his job at the Lynch estate was completed, he had made the decision to make Ridgefield his home.

Ernest Scott’s choice of Ridgefield as a place to make his home proved to be a good one. He quickly adapted himself to the local scene and his many talents were much in demand.

Ernie. was a very astute businessman and through the years, he acquired considerable wealth. An edifice that was to benefit from Ernest Scott’s engineering skills is the very impressive St. Stephen's Church on Main Street. This church was built in 1915 and six years later Ernest Scott started construction of the red brick business block that stretches north from Ridgefield Hardware, to Catoonah Street. This building has been known as the Scott Block for many years.

When that large block of stores, offices and apartments was completed, Ernie turned his attention to the other side of the street and erected the building that now houses several stores, including Jeanne Cook's travel agency. This was also called the Scott Block and since George G. Scott also had a Scott Block, you had to know your Scotts to avoid confusion.

Ernest Scott did more than build houses, churches and stores. He owned the Ridgefield Market, which was at the southern end of the new block he had built on the east side of Main Street.

Henry Weidner was manager of the store. Some of those who worked in this meat market were, my brother Paul, Lester Winn, Jack Sheehan and Maurice Weaver. Mrs. Norman Bennett (Lottie) and Marion McGlynn were bookkeepers and Quinto Carboni was a delivery man.

In those days all the food stores made deliveries and they would deliver any sized order, even as small as a yeast cake. Like all meat markets of that day, the floor of the store had a heavy layer of sawdust. Every evening, at closing time, fresh sawdust was applied and then the whole floor was raked, very neatly, and made ready for the next day’s business.

There was also a Scott Coal Company, which Ernie operated from where the Ridgefield Supply is now. Sam Cousa made deliveries of coal, with a one-horse wagon that was drawn by a huge black horse. The horse was stabled in a barn at 52 Barry Avenue.

Irving Van Wagner was also a deliveryman and he used to drive a truck that was made by the White Motor Company.

With the Scott enterprises under a full head of steam, and still growing, Ernest Scott found himself badly in need of help to keep everything on an even keel. Soon help was on its way, in the person of his sister Fanny, who came over from Scotland.

Fannie was a very bright lady and she stepped right into the operations. Fannie not only kept the books on the many activities, she also served as Ernie's troubleshooter.

Continuing out on Barry Avenue, we come to number 62, which is now the home of the Lawrence J. Cernoch family. This large white house was built by George Abbott, who had married Kate Barry.

They had two children, Florence and Louis. Lou was an outstanding athlete and Francis Martin used to say that Lou could have been a major league baseball player. Lou was also musically inclined and played clarinet in the old Oreneca Band.

Jacob Walters bought the Abbott place in the 20s, after he married Bertha Davis (Roy Davis's daughter). The Davis family lived just three doors away, at 38 Barry Avenue, so Bertha did not have far to move.

Jake and Bertha had three children: Philip, Gerald and Edith. Both Phil and Gerry were excellent athletes. Phil was especially good at pitching baseball and Gerry was a very good batter. Both boys were very good bowlers. Phil had a fine curve ball and Gerry a blistering fast ball.

Phil took piano lessons from Lottie Boyce, as did his sister Edith. They both became fine pianists and I remember a recital at which they played a duet in a most professional manner.

The Walters children also had a very nice little pony. It was a great attraction to all the kids in the neighborhood. Gerry was a fast growing boy and his legs got so long that when he rode the pony, he had trouble keeping his feet from dragging on the ground.

Jake Walters had been a chauffeur, but like so many others engaged in that line of work, he later went into the automobile repair business. Then he acquired a new car dealership and conducted a thriving business in the store where Brunetti's Market [*Lantern restaurant*] is now. Jake took care of the repairs and his brother John ran the store and sold the cars.

#250: CARS, BOWLING, REFUGEES, & A POLYMATH PROFESSOR

We have been telling about the Walters family that lived on Barry Avenue, but detoured to Main Street, where Jacob and John Walters sold and repaired automobiles. Their place of business was where Brunetti's Market [*Lantern restaurant*] is now and the repairing was done in a garage, just to the rear of the store.

There was a long narrow building that stood not more than a foot, just to the north of the garage. For some years, this building had been used as a place to bowl.

Bowling is a sport that has its ups and downs and during a down period, in the 20's, the alleys were removed and the Walters brothers used this place to store their cars.

Later on, when Jake Walters moved his operations to Herb Bates' garage on Bailey Avenue [*where the Ridgefield Press used to be*], the bowling alleys were installed again.

Bowling had regained its popularity, especially in 1938, when the town suffered through a devastating hurricane. There were an awful lot of damaged trees and a great number of men were imported from Massachusetts to repair the damage and clean up the debris. These fellows

used to bowl candle pins, rather than big pins or duck pins. Orazio Rossini and Marty Marinelli ran the bowling alleys and they lost no time in acquiring candle pins for their new customers.

During the period, when the building was without the alleys, the Walters brothers carried on a new car agency and used the building to store their cars. They sold several makes of autos, including the Flint, Durant and Star. Later still, Leo Pambianchi carried on a Nash agency from where the Walters brothers had been. All of these cars have long since gone out of existence.

So back to Barry Avenue again and to the Walters home at number 62. The next owner of this large house was Frances (Zandri) Strouse. It was here that Frances established her business that came to be known as Frances Cleaners. That business is still in operation today at 145 High Ridge Avenue.

The next family to occupy the house was Gaetano and Sadie (Pambianchi) Pancotti and their children. It was well that the house was large, for they had a number of little ones. There was Harry, Reno, Gino, Vincent, Louis, and Louise and they were to be followed by Marie and Rudy, eight in all.

Vincent still lives in Ridgefield with his wife, the former Corinne Kaiser. Vinnie, who has been a member of the Ridgefield Fire Department for many years, did not have to look far for Corinne for she was growing up just two doors away, where her parents operated a farm.

Right next door, at 70 Barry Avenue, Lived the Michael P. Hilton family. This is the house that Robert Barry built in 1915, and a picture of which has appeared on this page of The Press [*posted with the previous week's column*]. Mrs. Roberta Barry Robertson, who now lives in Mamaroneck, recognized the house where she had lived as a child.

In the late 20's, this place became the home of Fabian Franklin, his wife Christine Ladd Franklin and their daughter Margaret Ladd Franklin. Fabian Franklin was born in Hungary and came to this land of opportunity as a young man. While still in his native land, Fabian studied engineering and worked as a surveyor.

After coming to America, Fabian enrolled at George Washington University and later continued his studies at Johns Hopkins University. He had a passion for mathematics and later became professor of mathematics at Johns Hopkins.

Fabian Franklin became a very prolific writer and wrote for several publications, including The American Journal of Mathematics, The Yale Review, Forum, and the North American Review. He also became an assistant fellow of The American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

For several years, Fabian was editor of the Baltimore News and also served as associate editor of the New York Evening Post.

We remember Fabian Franklin as a most imposing figure of a man. He was always very well dressed and had a quiet but friendly manner. He had a long beard and could be seen, most any afternoon, as he walked the short distance from 70 Barry Avenue, to St. Mary's Club House (now the K of C Home) [*and now St. Mary's offices*] at the top of Catoonah Street.

The club house had a very fine library and Fabian seemed to enjoy going there to study. It was very quiet there and he never tired of reading and learning.

Christine Ladd Franklin was also quite noted in her own right. She was a prominent psychologist and was widely known as the architect of the Ladd-Franklin Theory of Color.

I believe that it was the Franklin family that had the house next door built, while they lived here. This cute, white brick building is number 80 Barry Avenue and is now the home of the K.H. Schmid family.

Mrs. Franklin passed on in the early 30's and Fabian went to his just reward in 1939. Their daughter Margaret continued to live here for a time but eventually the place was sold for a day school. It was known as the West Mountain Country Day School and the same name was later changed to The Ridgefield Country Day School.

So there seemed always to be a lot of children in this neighborhood, and the number was considerably increased when the next family moved into the large white house at 70 Barry Avenue.

It hardly seems possible that it is almost 30 years ago that Fidel Castro started his big push from the mountainous regions of Cuba in his campaign to overthrow that country's Batista government. As we all know, Castro was finally successful and his victory was greeted by many well meaning people as a great thing for a country that had suffered a long time under the dictatorship of Batista. Little did they know that they were merely jumping out of the frying pan and into the fire.

One of those who stood on the street corner in Havana and cheered as Castro and his triumphant troops marched into the Capital of that unfortunate country was a handsome young international lawyer. His name was Manuelo Vega-Pinochet and he had been a classmate of Castro when both were in college.

Things had been very bad under Batista and Manuelo felt that any change had to be for the better. He soon learned otherwise.

#251: VEGA FAMILY FLEES CASTRO

Those who were taken in by Fidel Castro were many, and they were not just Cubans, seeking relief from the very oppressive Batista regime. Peace-loving people throughout the world, including the United States, saw the end of the Batista dictatorship as a step in the right direction.

Castro, from his headquarters high in the mountains around Havana, had promised his countrymen a democratic form of government. The long-suffering Cuban populace looked forward to a share in the operation of their government, but it was not to be.

Within weeks after his triumphant march into the streets of Havana, it became apparent that Castro was veering in the opposite direction. Those who closely observed the operations could see that the Cuban people would be faced with more oppression. Of equal concern was Fidel Castro's love affair with the Soviets.

Anyone who voiced the slightest disagreement with Castro's policies could look forward to very severe treatment.

The aims of the new regime quickly became obvious to Manuel Vega. This young international lawyer from a very prominent family was one of the first to understand Castro's real ambition and it frightened him.

In the early days of the Castro administration, Fidel carried on an extensive search for prominent people to serve in his cabinet. Their first qualification would be their unquestioned

loyalty and allegiance to his leadership. If those selected were well known abroad, they would add greatly to the image that Castro would like to present to the world.

By the time that Castro's emissaries arrived at Manuel Vega's office, that very bright young attorney had seen through the facade behind which Fidel was operating. Even so, he was not prepared when he was offered the office of attorney general.

No doubt he was worried as to what would happen to him if he turned down a post that many would consider attractive. Therefore, Manuel wisely sent word back to Castro that he would need a little time to consider accepting such a prestigious position.

The Vega family owned and operated a large and very beautiful plantation in Cuba. It had been in the family for generations and Manuel had every intention of having his children take over the operation at some future time. This fine family had a great love for their country. These thoughts must have been running through Manuel's mind as he rode out to the plantation and informed Mrs. Vega of Castro's proposition.

His conscience would never permit him to accept the post. He was well aware that to do so would reduce him to being just another of Castro's vassals. Yet, the alternatives were very risky. If he turned down the offer, the welfare of both he and his family could well be in jeopardy.

Manuel and Mrs. Vega were still quite young, and looked even younger. However, they had nine children and another on the way. This fact had a very serious bearing on any decision that would be made on their future plans.

After discussing the matter thoroughly and considering all alternatives, Manuel stated that he had come to the conclusion that the family must leave behind its beloved plantation and flee to the United States. Mrs. Vega was very supportive in this momentous decision and plans were quickly drawn to bring their escape to fruition.

It must have been a very sad and very tearful Vega family that felt forced to leave their homeland. I was never quite sure as to why Ridgefield was selected as their destination. However, their journey ended, at least temporarily, when Manuel and Mrs. Vega, with their nine children and the governess for the children, arrived at the house we have been writing about at 70 Barry Avenue.

Needless to say, there was much excitement in the neighborhood. It was the biggest increase in population that Ridgefield had experienced in many years and soon the 10th child joined the family.

The Vegas were a wonderful family and it was my good fortune to know them quite well and be considered their friend. I remember the names of some of the children. Fernando was the oldest, then Manuel Jr., who most everyone called Manolo, Marguerita, Rosita, Pedro, Mercedes, Ricardo and little Jose.

They were very lively kids, but they were also very well behaved as well. It should also be noted that, like their parents, these young people were all quite handsome. I would bet that by 1965, Marguerita had become a beauty queen and Fernando and Manolo would be heartbreakers. Manuel Vega would remind one of Clark Gable and Mrs. Vega resembled Elizabeth Taylor, when Liz was at her very best. If you were meeting Mrs. Vega for the first time and she was introduced as the mother of 10 children, you would just never believe it.

During the short time that the Vegas graced our town, Manuel commuted to New York City, where he was associated with an international law group. Immigration laws prevented him from opening his own law office until he had worked in a law office and resided here for five years.

Local tradesmen and merchants looked at the arrival of the large Vega family with great anticipation. None showed a greater interest than the milk companies. The milk business has always been highly competitive and I should know, for I was in it for many years.

Ridgefield was about one third of its present size in population at the time, and there were more than half a dozen milk companies, all looking for business. To them, the Vega family looked like the bonanza of the century. Never did any family receive such attention.

Word of all those kids got around very rapidly and each milk company called on the Vega family, with offers they could hardly resist. Whereas, it had been common practice to drop off a sample quart of milk to any new family, the amount of samples was greatly increased with the Vegas. Soon they had enough milk to start their own store.

One milkman offered free milk for a week, while another extended it to two weeks and it went on from there. It was a sure thing that if I was going to get the Vega business, some other tactics would have to be employed.

When milk samples failed to acquire the business, some milk companies began to offer discounts of such proportions that little profit could be made.

#252: THE ELECTRIC COW

So the intense battle between the milk companies for the privilege of selling milk to the large Vega family continued. It went on for more than a week, with all kinds of promises and offers being made.

The big milk companies made such ridiculous concessions that the smaller companies began to drop out of contention. As a result, it just seemed as though little “Dic-Rie Dairy” was not large enough to continue the competition.

Then something happened that turned things around. A new diner was soon to open in south Wilton and Orem's Dairy, which supplied me with milk, had contracted to serve the new restaurant.

For a commercial establishment of this kind, it was customary for the dairy to supply a milk dispenser. This came in the form of a large stainless steel cabinet that would sit on the shelf behind the service counter. The dispenser held two cans of milk, each of which contained 20 quarts.

Milk was drawn from the dispenser by merely holding a glass against the handle of a spigot that was conveniently located on the bottom of the dispenser. The milk was kept cold by electric refrigeration.

While at the dairy one day, I noticed the shiny new dispenser being made ready for delivery to the diner. It looked like the answer to my problem and I explained my plan to Dick Hoyt, the owner of Orem's Dairy.

Dick loved to beat the competition and we quickly made a deal. The result was that I drove off with the dispenser and a new order was placed for one. I had no idea that the plan would meet with such success. There was considerable activity, connected with the trip by the

Vega family from Cuba, but it is doubtful that anything ever approached the excitement that was kindled by my arrival at the big white house at 70 Barry Avenue, with what the children promptly labeled “the electric cow.”

While the dispenser was being installed, the kids lined up with their glasses held at ready, as they anxiously awaited their turn to sample the new gleaming gadget. The milk flowed in an almost continual stream and it was a novelty that did not wear off quickly. In fact, there was a sharp increase in the milk consumption at 70 Barry Avenue.

It would be safe to say that they were a happy and healthy bunch of kids and Dic-Rie Dairy had its biggest milk customer.

The oldest boys, Fernando. and Manolo, went to Fairfield Prep and the younger ones attended Saint Mary’s School. They were all readily accepted by their classmates and became very popular.

The father, Manuel, was a man with a very calm exterior. However, I remember one occasion when he addressed one of our local service clubs and as he described his family's flight from Cuba, it was difficult for him to control his emotions.

He was not alone in this, as his audience was quickly caught up in the deep feelings that the family experienced.

One day Manuel approached me with a worried expression on his handsome face. In his hand, he carried a very official looking envelope. He handed it to me and asked that I read the contents. It was from the United States Immigration authorities and concerned his visa. You can be sure that it had nothing to do with a credit card, as they had not yet come into being..

Actually the letter notification that the Vega family had been in this country for one year and if they wished to retain their visiting rights, they must leave the United States for at least 24 hours and then they were free to return.

I never knew the benefits that would be gained by such a move and perhaps today, this regulation may no longer be in effect. However, the regulation was very much in vogue at the time and Manuel was very concerned about the matter.

The frightening alternative was that, if the order was not complied with, the family must return to Cuba, with all the connotations that would accompany such a move.

Manuel Vega did not look forward to complying with the immigration order, but he knew that he had no other choice. The move from Cuba had been a painful ordeal and a repeat performance would not be relished. It should be noted that, whereas the number of Vega children had increased to 10 since their arrival in Ridgefield, number 11 was by this time well on his way.

Planning the exodus of such a large group was no easy matter. It would tax the ingenuity of even the most seasoned travel expert. These kids were exceptionally well behaved, but they were also very lively.

The joyous thoughts, generally associated with an excursion, must shrink rapidly at the thought of traveling a great distance, in the confines that public transportation offered. Some thought was given to taking the family on a trip to Mexico, where there would be no language barrier. However, the great distance that had to be traveled proved to be an obstacle.

My suggestion that the Vegas take an overnight trip to Canada brought big smiles to the faces of Mr. and Mrs. Vega.

Manuel lost no time in chartering a Greyhound bus for the trip to visit our friendly neighbor to the north. Plans called for the Vega family to visit Montreal, stay overnight and return to Ridgefield the following day. However, once there, they found the historic old city so intriguing that they stayed an extra day.

Apparently, regulations concerning the practice of law were so rigid that no exception could be made, even for a refugee of the Castro regime. Manuel would have to work for another lawyer for five years before he could open his own law office. This prospect did not appeal to a brilliant attorney, who had already been quite successful in his native Cuba.

So when offered a haven in Spain, where he could open his own office at once, Manuel decided he must leave Ridgefield for Madrid. It was a sad day when the Vegas left 70 Barry Avenue, for they had made many friends here.

While on a business trip to New York, Manuel paid us a visit. Fernando and Manolo are now attorneys in their own right and he said that there were then 13 children — but that was some time ago.

#253: THE FIRST ‘SNOWBIRDS’

In the story about the house at 70 Barry Avenue, it should be noted that after the Vega family moved to Spain, the large house became the residence of the Albert Ernst family.

In telling about the Jacob Walters family, at 62 Barry Avenue, I neglected to mention Robert as one of the Walters children. This fact was brought to my attention by Bobby Walters' sister-in-law, the former Jacqueline Leighton. “Jackie,” as we used to call her when she was the bookkeeper at the Conklin Dairy, now lives in Fairfield but keeps in touch with her hometown, as so many others do, by reading *The Ridgefield Press*. So thank you, Jackie, for bringing the matter to my attention.

Robert Walters was the youngest of the Walters children and may have been the best musician in a very musical family. Bobby was a concert pianist and was good enough to have a recital at Carnegie Hall.

I am sorry to report that all four children of Jacob and Bertha Walters have passed on. Jane Walters, daughter of Jackie and Gerald Walters, now lives in upstate New York. Jane has a son, Michael, who will be entering Colgate this fall. I fully expect that in the near future, the sports pages will be carrying stories of Mike's prowess on the football field. So good luck, Mike!

Across the street from the Walters house, live Margaret and Marie Kilcoyne at 57 Barry Avenue. The Kilcoyne family have lived in this fine example of the architecture of the late 1800's for well over half a century. Marie retired several years ago, after a long and honorable career as a school teacher in the Ridgefield school system.

In the 20's and 30's Margaret was the office manager for McCarthy Brothers when that plumbing and electrical business was located where The Yarnbee is now, at 413 Main Street.

Whereas, the McCarthys had their office and showroom on Main Street, they also had two wooden buildings at the rear of the office. One building was used as storage of their supplies and the other was a workshop. Both of these old buildings have long since disappeared. One sat where Dale Ventres operated his repair business until a couple of years ago and the other sat where the present commercial ice machine is now.

With the start of World War I, Margaret Kilcoyne, as her part in the war effort, accepted a position in Washington, D.C. Following the war, she returned to Ridgefield and became associated with our First National Bank and Trust Company that later became The Fairfield County Trust Company and is now The Union Trust Company [Wells Fargo]. The original name sounded good.

The grand house at 57 Barry Avenue was built just before the turn of the century by George E. Ward. George was the owner of the Ward Steamship Line, which was a rather large enterprise at the time. He had his own carpenters, plumbers and other tradesmen employed to keep his ships in repair, so he just brought them to Ridgefield to build his new home.

Being a man of the sea, George Ward felt his house should reflect that fact. The desired nautical effect was provided with the addition of a large wrap-around porch. That porch, which really had a touch of the sea as its flooring was just like the deck of a ship, was removed several years ago. The terraced lawn of the place is still very attractive.

It should be mentioned that the area we are covering produced a number of performers for that great minstrel show of 1926 that we keep referring to. In fact, in a cast of 58, there were 20 who came from Barry Avenue, Bryon Park and High Ridge, a radius of about a quarter of a mile.

It may also be of interest that the cast included no less than five sets of sisters. There were Margaret and Marie Kilcoyne, Curly and Molly Seymour, Elizabeth and Isabel O'Shea, Mary and Katherine O'Hearn, and the Mitchell twins, Madeline and Genevieve.

Margaret Kilcoyne was a very accomplished musician and was a member of the Ridgefield Mandolin Club, which starred in the show. The club was very popular in the 20's and in 1926 it appeared on the initial broadcast at the opening of WICC in Bridgeport.

Margaret also excelled on the piano and for several years was the organist at St. Mary's Church.

Traveling west on Barry Avenue we come to the next house past Kilcoyne's which is the attractive home of the William Brown family. I remember that it once belonged to James H. Ripley and it seems as though a family named Ronk lived there in the early 20's. However, the house became vacant and remained so for several years during which it fell into a state of disrepair.

In the early 30's, George Doubleday was still in the process of adding to his already considerable real estate holdings. The Ripley place adjoined Doubleday's property to the north and the east and its acquisition would give him a solid block from Barry Avenue to Peaceable Street and extend west to Peaceable Hill Road. This would then comprise his estate which he called Westmoreland and would later become the development that is known by that name today.

The purchase of the Ripley place entailed considerable litigation, but once completed George Doubleday lost no time in starting the restoration of the Ripley house. He had two full-time carpenters on his estate, Ernest Finch and Stanley Walker, as well as an apprentice, Fred Montanari, so George did not have to look far for tradesmen.

When the renovation was completed, the place was dubbed "The Villa" by the Doubleday family and served them for winter weekends, while their mansion on Peaceable Street was closed down during the cold winter months. The Villa was much easier to heat than the large mansion that is now the Temple Shearith Israel [Congregation Shir Shalom].

It was customary for wealthy families to close down their mansions in the fall and retreat to an apartment in New York City, or perhaps to one of the southern resorts. They would then return in the spring and must have been the original “snowbirds.”

It is interesting to note that whereas such migration was restricted at the time to only the very rich, it has become commonplace for those of much lesser means to enjoy this kind of lifestyle today. Call it a sign of the times. Ridgefield was not a ghost town from November until May, but you were made quickly aware that the winter season was approaching when the gates to the large estates were closed for the duration.

#254: THE TRAIN THAT NEVER CAME

Westmoreland was one of the very largest of the huge estates that Ridgefield once boasted of. Like Rome, it was not built in a day. George Doubleday just kept right on adding to his holdings by purchasing every available bit of land that adjoined his estate.

It was only after months of negotiating back in the early 30's that Mr. Doubleday was able to add the Ripley property on Barry Avenue to his already sizable estate. What made the acquisition of this property so very difficult was the fact that there was a right-of-way through the property. The right of way was in the hands of a group, called the Ridgefield, New York Railroad Corp.

It was more than a century ago — in fact it was in 1867 — that these people incorporated. Their purpose was to build a railroad from Port Chester to Ridgefield. The new corporation received a charter from the General Assembly in Hartford and work was started on this sizable project.

Land was purchased, culverts were installed and some grading was done. However, the economy of the country took a nose dive in 1873 and the very hard times that followed, resulted in the suspension of the activities.

The project had not gone un- noticed by the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad Company. The New Haven was already a large and well established firm and jealously guarded its standing in the area. If the New Haven could not get control in any other way, it would buy up the competing franchises, whenever they became available.

At the turn of the century, wealthy New York City businessmen were moving their families to the tranquility that beautiful Ridgefield had to offer. Train service from the Ridgefield Station (where Ridgefield Supply is now) was good. However, the line that had been proposed to Port Chester would have been more direct and no doubt would have cut down on the travel time.

This would have offered some real competition to the New Haven. Therefore, when talk about reviving the Ridgefield, New York Railroad was rekindled, the New Haven kept a close watch on the proceedings.

The talk about resuming construction on the railroad also caught the attention of the General Assembly in Hartford. In an effort to keep the project moving, that august body in 1907 adopted a regulation that required a certain amount of work to be done, or the charter under which the railroad company operated would expire.

This ruling met with the approval of the New Haven, for they had been made aware that the fledgling railroad could never raise the money that was needed to complete the project. As

was expected, attempts to borrow money to resume construction were unsuccessful and the Ridgefield & New York was bankrupt.

For six years, the idea of another railroad in Ridgefield lay completely dormant. Then in November of 1915, *The New York Sun* reported that work would soon be resumed on the Westchester, Northern Railroad. This new name was applied by a group that had taken over the defunct Ridgefield & NY RR.

The charter obtained by the new outfit was in the name of the New York, Westchester and Boston Company.

If you have guessed that the new company was a subsidiary of the New York, New Haven and Hartford, you would be quite correct and can go to the head of the class.

There was a great deal of excitement over the prospect of the new railroad finally becoming a reality. New plans called for a considerable extension over what had been proposed by the original railroad company. Now it was planned to lay the tracks all the way from White Plains to Danbury, where connections would be made to Boston and other points north.

Of interest to the people of Danbury was that the railroad would pass right near the Great Danbury Fair. Perhaps this might have saved the fair or perhaps the railroad might have been a boon to the mall that replaced it.

It began to look as though the new plan might be successful. More than half of the right-of-way for the new road had been secured, or options on the land had been taken. Work on the roadbed was resumed, but was short-lived.

It was about this time two things happened that put the idea of a railroad direct to Danbury from White Plains to rest for good. Travel by rail began to lessen somewhat, as Henry Ford discovered the production line that produced Model Ts like there was no tomorrow.

Then World War I was spreading throughout Europe and the attention of most industries, especially the railroads, was diverted toward the war effort.

This time, when work ceased on the railroad, it was never resumed.

There are still several reminders in Ridgefield today of the abandoned roadbed on which the tracks were never laid. Plans had called for the railroad tracks to enter Connecticut just north of the former Bell estate (now a restaurant) where West Lane enters Route 123 [in Lewisboro]. It was to run through the former George G. Shelton estate and cross Route 35 (South Salem Road) near where Cedar Lane connects with that road.

The roadbed would pass near the present residence of the Harry Neumann family [100 South Salem Road] and then cross Golf Lane. At this point the roadbed is still clearly visible. As a matter of fact it was here that it finally provided a service as it is now the driveway for the houses that have only recently been built at 115 and 119 Golf Lane.

The rail line would then continue northeast, across Westmoreland and cross Barry Avenue at the former Ripley property (where the Villa is now). It would cross Ramapoo Road about where Bruce Maine lives now and continue across New Street, just north of where it intersects with Pound Street, crossing North Salem Road at the cemetery, where North Street starts.

There was a large building at this point that was known as the Kellogg mansion. It was owned by the railroad and besides the Kelloggs, it was home to the James F. Kennedy and the

Ciro Ciuccoli families. From that point the rail line would follow along Route 35 (Danbury Road) [and Route 7] to the fair grounds.

Perhaps the town could have used it for the much talked about by-pass of Main Street.

#255: BIG JIM'S FARM & OLD TURKEY SHOOT

Anyone who has attempted to complete a transaction with a bankrupt firm is sure to discover complexities of monumental proportions. George Doubleday was to learn this very quickly in his negotiations concerning the purchase of the Ripley property on Barry Avenue.

The right of way over the property, which had been secured by the defunct New York, Westchester and Boston Railroad, caused a real problem. Once the problem was solved and the property was acquired, Doubleday did a great job of renovating what came to be known as his villa. In later years, the villa became the home of George's brother, Chester Doubleday.

There were no problems connected with George Doubleday's purchase of the former Irving Holmes farm at 99 Barry Avenue. This addition to the large Westmoreland estate took place in the late 20's, some four years before Doubleday purchased the Ripley property.

Incidentally, the name Westmoreland seemed quite appropriate, and even prophetic, as practically all of the land that Doubleday added to his large estate was west of his mansion on Peaceable Street. It certainly was an indication as to what direction he intended to move. George not only knew where he had been, he always seemed to know which way he was going.

Irving Holmes had a considerable amount of land on Barry Avenue, which he had operated as a farm for some years. It was a good farm and had proven to be quite profitable. However, farming was hard work and Irving must have been happy when Doubleday made him an offer that would have been difficult to refuse.

To be sure, 1928 was a good year to sell, because the economy was at its peak, just a year before the great Wall Street crash. So Irving Holmes accepted the offer and with his wife and two daughters Beatrice and Clara, moved to the Farmingville area and took over the operation of the Winters place. It was noticed that about this same time, Irving started smoking rather expensive cigars.

We should note that his granddaughter Joan is now Mrs. Edwin Allan and lives with her family at Stonecrest.

With the addition of the Holmes and Ripley property, Westmoreland now stretched from Peaceable Street, north to Barry Avenue and west from the mansion to Peaceable Hill Road.

George Doubleday's appetite for land did not subside with age. It was about 10 years later, and he was well past middle age, when he purchased the Steele Roberts property on Peaceable Street. This added about 43 acres to Doubleday's already large holdings.

This purchase was made possible by the disastrous and spectacular fire that destroyed the Roberts mansion, as described in Dispatch No. 197.

After acquiring the Irving Holmes farm, George Doubleday set to work to transform the nice old farmhouse into the attractive mansion it is today. When renovations were completed, the place became the home of George's daughter Alice and her new husband, John Holbrooke. As you probably already know, it is now the home of Fred and Nancy Montanari.

Almost across the street, at 92 Barry Avenue, is a fine old farm house. It is now the home of the Paul Korkers. Just behind the house is a large barn that Paul has recently reconstructed. The barn serves as a studio for Paul, who is a professional photographer.

During the era of which we are writing, it was the farm of the James H. Smith family. "Big Jim," as he was known, was the subject of Dispatch No. 18, when the Smith family lived at 644 North Salem Road. Jim Smith was one of Ridgefield's most colorful and best known characters.

He was a rural mail carrier and when not delivering mail, or hunting, or fishing, he was raising turkeys and chickens at his Barry Avenue farm. Jim was also an outstanding bowler and captained several championship bowling teams.

In telling about the famous turkey shoots at the Smith farm, I described an old 12-gauge Parker shotgun that Irving Conklin used to borrow from Howland Adams. [*Note: For those unfamiliar with old-fashioned turkey shoots, the turkeys were the frozen prizes, but not the targets, which were made of paper.*] The gun was not only exceptionally accurate, but also had the nice habit of bunching the shot in the middle of the target. The gun was the envy of all the marksmen, as it won most of the turkeys.

Somehow the gun disappeared and we did not see it again for years. Then we discovered that it was in the possession of Howland's brother, Joe Adams.

As the old saying goes, just about everything can be replaced and sure enough, my brother Jack came up with a Remington pump gun that did the job. The Remington bunched the shot equally as well, or even better than the old Parker. Jack won so many turkeys with that gun that he had to buy another freezer to store them all.

Jack was a crack shot and enjoyed competition. He was also a very good sport and used to let others use his famous gun. Therefore, there were many occasions when he found himself competing against his own gun.

I remember one time when I used Jack's gun and put seven shot in the desired circle of the target. I felt reasonably sure that no one could beat that and no one did. However, Jack tied me by putting seven shot in the circle. This necessitated a shoot-out and again I put seven shot in the circle.

Then Jack shot and, as you probably have guessed, he put eight shot in and beat me.

After Big Jim Smith passed on, his wife Beatrice kept the farm going for a while. However, it was just too much work and she sold the place to George and Rose Kaiser.

We are sorry to say that just two weeks ago, George passed on to his reward. George Kaiser was a very fine man and worked very hard, as did all his family, in keeping the farm going as the Smiths did.

One of the most necessary things to have in the successful operation of a farm is children who are willing to work hard. George and Rose had eight. They were Charlotte, George Jr., Corinne, James, Rose Mary, Joseph, Patricia, and John. You can be sure that they worked hard and you can be equally sure that they never got in any trouble.

With the passing of the Doubleday family, Westmoreland has become a large development and more recently, the Kaiser farm has followed suit. So just about all the old Ridgefield farms have disappeared.

The price of land being what it is only a rock and roll singer would have enough money to operate a farm and they are not the kind to be interested in farms:

#256: WHEN THEY MIGHT HAVE SAID, “HI, HI.”

If you were to be out walking on Barry Avenue in the 30's, after passing the turkey farm you would come to what is now 110. It was a cute little old white house, with green trim.

The house was old even then and it was quite close to the highway. The long front porch that has since been removed made it seem even closer to the road. The house is considerably larger today as through the years additions have been made to the north side. Also, the color has been changed from white to red, and a garage has been added.

If your walk was taken on a nice day and it was made during the late afternoon, chances are that as you passed the house, your attention would be drawn to a white-haired little old lady sitting on the porch. It was Annie McGlynn's habit to enjoy watching the sun go down behind West Mountain and in her many years, she saw a great many sunsets.

Annie was a sister of Michael T. McGlynn, who lived just a little farther out on Barry Avenue. She had a very kindly face and would have made an excellent subject for a picture by the great Norman Rockwell as she sat there in her rocking chair.

Annie never married and lived alone in that house as long as I can remember. Just as her face would indicate, she had a very pleasant disposition and it was always nice to stop and talk with her.

Though she seemed to live apart from the world at large, Annie kept up on things and was well aware of what was going on. *The Press* kept her informed on local news and her little Atwater Kent radio brought in news of the world.

I believe this house is now the home of the Francis X. Kobe family

Next door and traveling west is a fine stucco house at 112 Barry Avenue that is now the home of the Philip Knoche family. The house was built by Charles W. Riedinger in the early 30's. Charley, one of our local electricians, was described in Dispatch No. 62. He was an excellent tradesman and a real fussbudget, so you know that only the very best went into the building of this very nice house.

The Riedingers lived next door, at 118 Barry Avenue, while their new home was being built. This made it easy for Charley to keep a watch on the progress that was being made, and you can be sure that he did just that at every opportunity. He shuttled back and forth, checking this and that and, of course, he did the electrical work himself. The inspections that Charley made and the suggestions that he gave to the other tradesmen, resulted in the splendid house that became his dream home.

The Riedingers passed on after only a few years, but at least they enjoyed their fine home for a time. The place then became the home of the George G. Scott family.

George was for many years Ridgetield's judge of probate and town clerk. In fact, for some time he held both jobs at the same time. Come to think of it, George Scott must have been the last judge of probate who was not a lawyer. Despite not having the benefit of legal training, I never heard of any of his rulings being questioned and the records in the probate office were all exceptionally well kept.

George wrote with a smooth flowing hand, as anyone who has had cause to examine the records in the town hall will attest. When in school he must have learned the long forgotten Palmer Method.

His signature, which appears thousands of times in the many record books, is mindful of that of the great John Hancock. Those who are able to write like that today are few and far between.

George held offices in several fraternal organizations. He also served many times as the moderator at town meetings. He owned some of the buildings in the business area on Main Street and conducted business in some of them. All in all, George Scott was a very busy man.

The Scotts are one of Ridgefield's real old families and at one time there were so many of them and they owned so much land that the Scotland District was named for them.

Both George's father, Hiram K. Scott, and Hiram K. Jr. were postmasters for many years. They served at intervals that were dictated by changes in the administration in Washington. Hiram K. Sr. was the 11th postmaster of Ridgefield and first took office on April 7, 1851.

This might be a good time to note that yours truly holds the record for continuous service as postmaster. Since that record spans more than 20 years, it is reasonable to assume that it will not be surpassed in this century.

The youngest of George Scott's sons was named Hiram. He must have been the third or fourth to be given that name, so when he was a boy we called him "Sonny." As he grew older, the name Sonny was dropped and we called him "Hi." This served a double purpose as when you met him on the street, "Hi" was both a name and a salutation.

Many will remember Hi as a great bowler, when the bowling leagues used the Congregational Church House alleys. After conducting an auto body shop for many years, just off Main Street, where Morelli's Inc., is now, Hi and his wife Marion moved to Florida.

Sidney Scott is a grandson of George and is retired after many years of service as a mail carrier from the Ridgefield Post Office. I believe that Sid and his son Russell are the last of the venerable Scott family in Ridgefield. The town sure has changed.

At any rate, when the Riedingers moved from 118 Barry Avenue to their new home next door, 118 became the home of my brother, James A. (Gus) Venus and his wife, the former Estelle Lynch. Then, in the late 30's, 118 was purchased by Patrick and Helen Potter and it is still the home of their daughter, Rita.

Pat and Nellie Potter were a great couple and lots of fun to be with. Pat worked on many of the large estates that Ridgefield used to have. Like his brothers, Tom and Chris, Pat was a very strong man. He was also very quick and was handy with his fists. With a combination like that you can be sure he commanded plenty of respect.

Fortunately, he was also an exceptionally good natured man. Pat loved to play cards and was very good at pinochle, setback, 45 — an old Irish game, and poker. To play poker with Pat was an unforgettable experience, and we did many times.

#257: THE BRIEF ADVENTURES WITH SPOT

In telling about Patrick Potter, it should be noted that he was one of those who helped to drive the Ku Klux Klan from the town hall on the last visit of that terrorist group to Ridgefield.

It happened in the middle 20's and that very exciting evening was described in Dispatch No. 73. It is my guess that the Klan had not anticipated having an encounter with someone like Pat. One thing is sure, he must have made a lasting impression, for there has been no repeated performance in more than 60 years.

Pat was a great outdoorsman and loved hunting and fishing. His favorite sport was fox hunting and he always kept a couple of real good fox hounds. I must have been eight or nine when Pat made me a present of a beautiful young fox hound.

I was delivering newspapers at the time and I took the large dog along with me on the paper route. It was with great pride, after finishing the route, that I presented "Spot" to my family.

My brothers quickly accepted him, but mother was not the least bit enthusiastic. Spot was lodged in the basement for his first night in the Venus household and after dinner plans were made for a more suitable place to keep him.

However, as it turned out, there was no need for the plans, for alas, during the night Spot chewed a hole in the door. In the morning, the dog and I got our marching orders that ended with the directive, "Take the dog with you on your paper route and do not bring him back."

So Spot and I started out and at each stop he was offered to a family free of charge. There were no takers, until we reached Lou Barrett's house on Titicus Hill. Lou was an avi fox hunter and quickly recognized that Spot had the makings of a fine fox hound. However, Lou would not accept my free offer and insisted on giving me a dollar or two.

Lou Barrett had two other hounds, but Spot proved to be the best of the lot. Word of Spot's prowess soon got around and within a month a man stopped at the Barrett house and offered Lou \$150 for him. Lou turned down the offer and the next night someone stole Spot along with one of the other dogs.

The very next house is the home of the Arthur Miller family at 124 Barry Avenue. Like so many of the older houses, it sits right close to the highway. It had been the home of the Lockwood family some 60 years ago and later became the home of the John W. Smith family.

Jack Smith had been the superintendent on the Frederic E. Lewis estate, "Upaganstit," for many years. When that great showplace — now Manor Estates — closed down in the 30's, the Smiths, who had lived where the Joseph Dunworth family live now, had to move.

At that time, Jack Smith bought the Barry Avenue house from the estate of Hannah Lockwood.

Jack had made a great name for himself, with the many prize winning flowers that he exhibited at the National Flower Show in New York in the old Grand Central Palace. It was in the great conservatory at the Lewis place that Jack had succeeded in growing orchids. He is generally credited with being the first in this country to have done so [with certain species].

Jack Smith could not live without a greenhouse, so the first order of business, when the family moved to Barry Avenue, was to build one at the rear of their new home.

After Jack passed on, the greenhouse was taken down. It had housed many varieties of flowers but his favorites were the 16 original orchid plantings which he had brought with him from the Lewis estate. Foremost among that collection was the Louis Cymbidium, which had been a perpetual winner at all the shows.

Jack Smith's success with flowers and especially with orchids, was known far and wide. This resulted in his being asked to judge at flower shows all over the country, including the big one in New York.

During this period, Wadsworth Lewis (son of Frederic) was in the process of establishing a large estate between Limestone Road and Great Hill Road, and Jack was called on to supervise this project. It was not as large as "Upaganstitt" but it turned out to be a beautiful estate.

After Wadsworth passed on, the place was purchased by the noted Henry Luce and his equally famous wife, Clare Boothe. It is now owned by Hans P. Kraus, who has kept it in excellent condition.

At about the time that the Wadsworth Lewis estate was completed, the New York World's Fair was being put together. Jack Smith was called on to select and supervise the plantings at Flushing Meadows.

Incidentally the materials for this enormous undertaking were furnished by Ridgefield's famous Outpost Nurseries. Outpost also did the landscape gardening for the Fair and it was acclaimed for the great job it did.

Somehow in his busy life, Jack Smith found time to serve on Ridgefield's Board of Selectmen.

I guess it sounds as though all Jack ever did was work. That is not quite true. He was blessed with a very fine voice and he appeared in that 1926 minstrel show that we keep mentioning. Jack was also a good golfer and a very fine bowler. Like his neighbor Big Jim Smith, Jack also captained a bowling team on which I once bowled at the Old Congregational Church alleys.

There is a nice open field, between 124 and 134 Barry Avenue that has somehow miraculously escaped from the developers. It was once a part of the property at 134 and perhaps it still is.

The grand old house is now the home of the Robert Knoche family. It was once the home of the Michael T. McGlynn family.

"M.T." or Painter Mike, as he was called in order to distinguish him from his cousin "Plumber Mike," was a prominent painting contractor. Mr. McGlynn had his paint shop in the small building on the north side of Catoonah Street, just as you start up the hill.

He used to drive a horse named Tommy and we used to ride with him from the shop to his home on Barry Avenue and then walk back. It was worth the walk just to ride behind that horse. At the end of the ride I was always given the admonition, "Save up your pennies, for when you get old they will be the only friends you have."

M.T. was a director of the Ridgefield Savings Bank for many years and for just about a half century, he was a member of the Board of Education, when it was still called the school board. Ridgefield has long been credited with having an excellent school system.

M.T. was always in favor of the best quality education, but without any frills. You can bet that any budget that had his approval was utterly devoid of any padding.

He loved to tell the story of an old friend of his, who served on the Katonah, N.Y., Board of Education. The friend told M.T. that he could never understand a system whereby a mother, on a winter's day, would dress her child in warm woolen clothing, put the child on a

heated bus for a ride to an overheated school, where the youngster would then take off most its clothes to run around a million dollar gymnasium, in order to get its exercise. I'm sure that M.T. heartily agreed with his friend.

Incidentally, Mr. McGlynn passed on in his 98th year.

#258: OLD JOE KNOCHE AND HIS MILE-LONG WALL

The large white house at 131 Barry Avenue has been in the Knoche family for many years. It is now the home of the Terrance Knoche family.

Unfortunately, Terry passed on just a few years ago. Mrs. Knoche is the former Helen Golden and her name must be added to those who took part in that great 1926 minstrel show.

Terry and Helen had six children, most of whom became tradesmen and all of whom are very industrious. Terrance Jr. is a plumber by trade and is with The Ridgefield Water Supply Company. Terry lives a short distance away on West Mountain.

Robert followed in his dad's footsteps and became a fine carpenter. Bob and his wife live right across the street from the old homestead, at 134 Barry Avenue. John became a real good electrician and lives with his wife and family at 374 Branchville Road, from where he conducts Knoche Electric Inc.

Philip is a surveyor with the Henrici Company and lives with his family just around the corner at 112 Barry Avenue.

Mary Ellen and her husband, Arthur Miller, live just across the street at 124 Barry Avenue. Of course, the very popular Charles Knoche owns Knoche Realty at 34 Bailey Avenue. Charlie and his wife, the former Debbie Morganti, live at present on Catoonah Street, but will soon be moving to Perry Lane.

They used to say that the youngest in the family stayed the closest to home. However, in this case the youngest, except for John, will live the farthest from what we call the Knoche compound.

Helen Knoche is justly proud of a family that has Charlie to furnish the property to build a house on; Phil to survey the property and draw a blueprint of it; Bob could do the carpentry work and put the house together; while Terry could install the plumbing and John could take care of the electrical work, leaving Mary Ellen to run the whole operation.

Before this family of Knoches, there was the one headed by the patriarch of them all. Joseph J. Knoche was well over six feet in height. He was of slender build, with wide and square shoulders and was quite strong.

His head was covered with an abundance of snow white hair and he had a large moustache to match. At the very least, it would be fair to say that he presented a very impressive appearance.

Old Joe, as we will call him to distinguish him from a younger Joe, married the former Mary Hickey and they had four children. A daughter, Elizabeth, attended local schools and later taught kindergarten, before joining the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, at Philadelphia's Saint Elizabeth Convent. As a nun, Elizabeth took the name Sister Mary Alberta and worked among Black people and Indians in the Southwest. She passed on to her eternal reward only a couple of months ago.

Then came Terrance, Teresa and last but by no means least. Joseph Albert Knoche. Terry became one of Ridgefield's premier carpenters and builders. Teresa married Joseph Sheehy and still lives in what was the original family homestead on Pelham Lane. Teresa also appeared in that much mentioned 1926 minstrel show.

Joseph Albert (young Joe) married Margaret Quinn and they live in their very nice home, next to the old homestead on Pelham Lane. Not too far away, on Nod Hill Road, lives their son Joseph (Joey) and his wife, the former Patricia Sheehan and their nice little family.

Young Joe, like his brother Terry, became a fine carpenter and the two brothers joined forces in the building trade, under the name Knoche Brothers. It became one of Ridgefield's best known and most successful enterprises. As might be expected, Joey followed in his fathers footsteps and learned the carpenter trade.

Three things are quickly noticeable about the Knoche family. They are close-knit and live near each other.

Mentioning the old Knoche homestead on Pelham Lane brings to mind the fact that this road, which connects Nod Road with Nod Hill Road, is the border line between Ridgefield and Wilton, on their eastern sections. As you travel over this winding road, you are one minute in one town and the next minute, you are in the other.

I am not sure where the name Pelham came from. [Editor's note: The name comes from the John Pelham family that farmed that neighborhood in the late 1800's.] This road, for many years, was known as Knoche Road. I can understand that, as the Joseph J. Knoche family must have been one of the early settlers of that area and lived there for some years before moving to Barry Avenue. Some years ago, the Edward Knoche family also lived on this road.

Old Joe, the patriarch, by trade was a stone mason par excellence. Some of his creations are still around today, as monuments to a craftsman who believed that everything that he built must last forever. I get the feeling that old Joe's aspiration to produce fine work must have rubbed off on his sons.

During World War I, when the Knoche family still lived in the old homestead they had a neighbor, who lived on the corner of Pelham and Nod Hill Road. His name was J. Alden Weir and besides being president of the National Academy of Design, was known as one of this country's foremost landscape artists.

It was about this time that Mr. Weir commissioned old Joe to build a stonewall fence around his quite sizable estate. Weir knew another artist when he saw one and the only directive that he gave old Joe was that no cement would be used in building the fence.

This restriction did not faze old Joe in the least, as he had built dry walls before. However, this wall would prove to be a bit more difficult, as there were places where the wall must cross swampy areas.

Old Joe did not have to go very far to his work, as the wall started almost in front of his home. The great wall of Ridgefield (or Wilton) would be about one mile long and each stone had to be cut so that it fit properly and it must have taken a very long time to build it. More than 70 years later, the wall is still intact, even as it passes over the swamp areas. The only stones that have moved in all those years are ones that have been moved intentionally for one reason or another.

#259: HOW OLD JOE OUTFOXED MR. MONEY BAGS

One of the nice things about being a builder is that if you are good at your trade, and live long enough, some of your creations may become monuments to your ability. If the material you use is cement, stone or brick, the result of your work may last for many years after you have passed on.

This was especially true in the case of Joseph J. “Old Joe” Knoche. Several of his monuments are worth telling about.

There is the story about the magnificent gateway entrance to the former Philip D. Wagoner estate on Oreneca Road. This great showplace is now the home of the Harrison Horblits.

Unfortunately, Old Joe passed on before he had the opportunity to see his work on television, in the form of a commercial.

As the story was told to me, a prominent family on West Mountain had a weekend guest who was affiliated with a very large advertising firm. One of the firm’s best known clients was the Anheuser Busch Corporation. While riding along Oreneca Road, the man's attention was drawn to the very impressive entrance to the Wagoner estate. The grandeur of this fine structure shifted his mind into high gear. He could see that here was something that would provide a perfect background for an ad that his firm was working on.

This happened during the fall of the year and soon the famous Budweiser Clydesdales would be appearing at the Great Danbury Fair. The ad man lost no time in securing permission to stage what was to become a familiar scene on millions of television screens. On their way to the Fair, the trailers that transported the huge horses were diverted to West Mountain and television cameras whirled as the gates opened and the beautiful horses passed through, pulling the big red wagon.

Another story about Old Joe was one my father delighted in telling. He felt that it graphically illustrated the advantage of knowing how to do a job correctly.

In this story, Old Joe was boss on a job that required a lot of stone-cutting. On this particular day, two of his men were engaged in splitting a very large stone. They were burly men and one stood on either side of the stone, flailing away, with mighty blows from their large sledgehammers. The stone resisted their best efforts and it began to look as though they would never crack it.

Old Joe watched the men from a short distance and finally went over and asked the men to step back. He examined the stone carefully in order to determine which way the veins ran. Then he raised his hammer and with one sharp blow, the large stone split in several pieces. It was all in knowing where, and how, to strike the stone.

My own favorite story about Old Joe had to do with an anecdote that demonstrates not only his business acumen, but the fact that he possessed a deep sense of humor. It just naturally followed that a man blessed with Old Joe’s fine craftsmanship would have among his customers many of the wealthy people of this area.

One in particular had made use of his talents on several occasions and always seemed pleased with the work that was performed. This customer was one of the wealthiest of Ridgefield’s wealthy, and always paid his bills. However, he was also very slow in paying and Old Joe was aware of this from the jobs he had done for this man over the years.

The man and his family, like many of the well-to-do, did not spend their winters in Ridgefield. In late fall they would leave for a warmer climate and like the migrating birds, they returned in the spring. On this particular spring, Old Joe received a phone call from his wealthy customer to the effect that his fireplace was in need of repairs. Old Joe was exceptionally good with fireplaces and agreed to have this one in fine condition when the family returned after their hibernation in the warmer climate.

The family returned in a spring that was so exceptionally warm that there was no occasion to use the fireplace. However, with the coming of fall, it was a different matter. It was in October when, on a crispy Sunday afternoon, the man decided to enjoy the warmth of his fireplace. The butler brought in some kindling wood and a few logs, and proceeded to light the fire. Alas, within minutes smoke began to float out into the room and it became necessary to extinguish the fire.

It was not long before Old Joe's phone was ringing and a very irate customer was complaining about his repair job. To make matters worse, the man was embarrassed because he had a house full of company.

Old Joe calmly listened to the man for a while and then reminded him that, whereas the work had been performed seven months previously, he still had not been paid for his services. Negotiations were carried on over the telephone and finally Old Joe agreed to come right over and fix the fireplace. It was also agreed that Mr. Money Bags would first pay Old Joe for the work he had done as soon as he arrived.

The customer was really a very nice man—he just had the annoying habit of keeping tradesmen waiting for their money. In this instance, he was standing on his front porch, with money in hand, when Old Joe arrived, with no tools to fix the fireplace.

After receiving his pay, Old Joe entered the mansion and strode across the living room to the fireplace as the man and his guests watched with great interest. In dramatic fashion, Old Joe knelt in front of the fireplace and extended one of his arms up the chimney. When his hand reappeared, it was holding a large pane of glass that had been blocking the path of the smoke.

He then relit the firewood and the fireplace worked perfectly. It was all done in such a professional manner that the all guests broke into laughter and even Mr. Money Bags had to join in the merriment.

He later enjoyed telling about how he had been outfoxed by Old Joe.

#260: A NURSERYMAN'S COLLIE & AN AD MAN'S MUSIC

When the Knoche family moved to Pelham Lane (Knoche Road) in the early 30's, their home at 131 Barrv Avenue was leased at least twice. First it became home to the Charles Sterling family and then the Paul Case family came for a short stay.

Charles Sterling was perhaps best known as one of the area's finest musicians. Charlie was an accomplished violinist and played with several of the popular dance bands of the 20's and 30's. He also had his own band and played many times at the old Odd Fellows Hall on Main Street in the building that now houses Marshall's, Rodier's, Cortina's, Century 21 Associates, Gigi's and Rubin Associates. Of course, he also played in the old town hall auditorium and the various church houses.

It was a time when ballroom dancing was very much in vogue. Those dances were so much fun and we wonder why we do not have them anymore. In those days people really danced and gracefulness, poise and balance were equally as important as one's ability to perform gymnastics, to what now passes for music.

This was also a time when a dance band was not complete without at least one violin. Amplifiers had not yet come on the scene, so there was no blasting from the bandstand. The music was easy on the ears and people could actually carry on a conversation while it was being played. It was a generation or two before eardrums started being destroyed by the jungle drums that are aided and abetted by all those electronic gadgets.

Charlie Sterling was an affable little gentleman, with a well-trimmed moustache and he was very well liked by his fellow musicians. While on stage leading his dance band, Charlie kept a watchful eye on the couples as they danced by. This enabled him to view the effect his music was having on the dancers and he was always able to select the songs that would be most pleasing to them.

Keeping the crowds of dancers in a happy mood was only one of Charlie Sterling's talents. He was also an excellent salesman. In fact, he was the ad salesman for the Acorn Press for several years and was very successful in that role.

When Charlie was not performing with his violin, or selling ads for the paper (he was the first ad man for *The Press*), he would turn his attention to the actual printing of the paper.

The Sterlings had two daughters, Frances and Betty, and it was just a natural thing that they were musically inclined. Betty had a very nice voice and I thought she might have a career as a singer. However, through the years I have lost track of the girls.

When the Paul Case family arrived at 131 Barry Avenue, they brought with them a couple of small children and a huge collie dog. Paul had come to Ridgefield in the 30's and was associated with the Outpost Nurseries.

When the Depression slowed down activities at the nursery, Paul, like several of the nurserymen, started a business of his own. Several local men were employed in Paul's new venture and the business seemed to thrive. It probably was World War II that caused him to go out of business.

I have good reason to remember the Case's dog. He was a beautiful black collie and was as big as a small pony. For many years this breed of dog enjoyed a fine reputation as a family dog. This was especially true with farm families, for whom it performed many tasks, such as herding the farm animals and it was treated as one of the family.

The collie was highly intelligent and had a fine disposition that matched his very handsome appearance. There are some who believe that the great writer, Albert Payson Terhune, played a major role in some changes in the collie that were not necessarily for the betterment of the breed. Besides writing many books about dogs, Terhune served for many years on the editorial staff of the old *New York Evening World*. Terhune's books were very popular back in the 20's and 30's. One that I liked very much was *A Book of Famous Dogs*.

Mr. Terhune had a great love for the collie dog, but was always trying to improve his appearance. His large estate in New Jersey was called Sunnybank Farm and it was here that he operated extensive kennels for his favorite dogs.

By inbreeding, Terhune sought to produce a collie with a much longer nose and a much more narrow head. Some of his friends advised him against his experiment, saying that it was like “gilding the lily.” Perhaps he should have listened.

At any rate, the collie’s heads became more slender and the noses grew a lot longer. It just naturally followed that as the head narrowed, the distance between the eyes became less and there was less room for the brain to develop. There were some dog fanciers who felt that the old collies were not only more intelligent, but a whole lot better-natured.

I do not know whether Paul Case’s dog came from Sunnybank, but he had a very narrow head and close-set eyes. I was to find out that he was not a very good-natured dog. In fact, he was vicious.

We had a couple of milk routes at Conklin's Dairy at the time and Irving Conklin himself delivered to the Case family. He told me one time about how the Case’s collie would attack without the slightest provocation. Irving said that the dog was so dangerous, he would leave the milk out by the mailbox rather than risk putting it on the porch, as was the custom.

There came a time when, in Irving’s absence, I was called to deliver his route. By the time I got to 131 Barry Avenue, I had completely forgotten the warnings about the dog.

It was still not quite daylight as I approached the house carrying several glass bottles full of milk. I was about 25 feet from the house when there came a very loud growl from the direction of the front porch and the dog came flying out from under it.

The big dog meant business and leaped right for my throat. In desperation I threw up my left arm to ward him off and one of his fangs caught the strap of my new wrist watch that Marie had given me as a birthday present. The watch went flying into the semidarkness and with it went my usual good nature.

As the dog turned to renew the attack, a bottle somehow found its way to the small space between his eyes.

The next time Irving Conklin delivered his route, he told of how when he got to the Case house, their big dog came out from under the front porch and ran as fast as he could go in the direction of West Mountain.

#261: WILLIAM DINGEE: CHEF, ELECTRICIAN, OFFICIAL

In the early days of this century, the Patrick Geehan family lived on Mopus Bridge Road. The property was later purchased by the great Shakespearean actor Walter Hampden, and is still the home of his son, Paul Hampden. Pat Geehan and his wife Bridget had nine children. The youngest was named James and we have something in common, since I too am the youngest of nine.

In those days, it was generally expected that, as the children in a large family grew, the older ones would move on and maybe the youngest would remain and take care of the parents. By the time World War I came along, the Geehan family had dwindled to a point where a large house was no longer necessary. So Pat, Bridget, and their son James moved to a nice little house, at what is now 135 Barry Avenue.

The house is still there, but it is larger now than when the Geehans lived there, and it is still very nice and neat. True to form, Jim Geehan remained with his parents and after his father passed on, Jim stayed and cared for his mother. He never married.

Jim was only middle aged when he became ill and expired. He was then followed only three months later by his mother. The Barry Avenue property was left to Jim's sister Elizabeth, who was married to Thomas Curley, whom we told about in Dispatch No. 81 — that was a long time ago.

Mrs. Curley kept the place for a few years, until she was also called to her just reward. The place was then placed on the market.

It was just a little over 50 years ago that a young couple, William and Eleanor Dingee, were looking for a place to bring up their family. The Geehan house was ideal, and just what the Dingeess wanted. So they lost no time in purchasing what was to be their family home for more than half a century.

Why is it that today there are few, if any, places available in Ridgefield that newly married couples can afford to start out in? Why do developers continue to build homes that are so large that only those in the higher brackets can afford them?

Bill Dingee had done a hitch in the U.S. Navy, where among so many other things, he learned to do electrical work. So when Bill came home from the Navy, he worked for various electrical contractors.

He had a good eye for business and no doubt looked forward to the day when he would have his own electrical business. However, this ambition had to be put on the backburner for a while, as soon after Bill and Eleanor bought the Geehan property, an opportunity arose that proved to be of great interest to them.

John Pappageorge and his brother-in-law, Peter Chrisifis, had been operating The Fairfield Lunch in the store where The Question Mart is now [*today, A Touch of Sedona*]. For more than a dozen years it had been a popular eating place and was a thriving business.

John and Pete had decided to open an even larger restaurant in Cambridge, Mass., and let it be known that they were going to sell their Ridgefield business. Bill had also learned to cook and prepare food while in the Navy, and was anxious to try out his culinary talents.

Though it was only a few months after acquiring his new home on Barry Avenue, Bill was equal to the challenge and soon he was doling out food to a lot of happy customers at The Fairfield Lunch.

Though business was brisk, it was a lot of hard work and Bill soon decided that he could do better in the electrical business. In short order — no pun intended — Bill sold the restaurant to Florence (Mrs. Fred) Bates, who changed the name to The Village Grille, and ran the place for several years. Florence expanded the operations to include the store next door to where The Horologist of London is now [*today, Sedona Art*] and changed the setup to include a bar.

When Leo Pambianchi took over the business a few years later, he changed the name to The Belmont, and added the store where the Candlelight Shoppe is now and it was a big thing in town at the time.

Once free of the restaurant business, Bill Dingee gave full attention to the electrical business and soon established the firm that still operates today, under the name Dingee Electric. It proved to be a very successful enterprise and is operated today by two of his former employees, Wilfred Weaver and Richard Carboni.

Woofie and Dick have carried on the high standards that were set by Bill Dingee so many years ago. Bill found time in his bus life to serve in several positions in our local government.

Both he and his good friend, Ernest Sturges, were progressive and could be considered moderates. Yet, when they were on the Board of Finance, they would not allow any wild spending sprees and demanded a dollar in value for every dollar spent. It seems that Marty Carr is the only one asking questions at budget time today. He is like "A Voice Calling in the Wilderness," but Marty would have had lots of support from Bill and Ernie. They would want to know why both school and town budgets are up, while school enrollment is down and during the past year there has been no appreciable increase in population, and they would insist on satisfactory answers.

Ernie and Bill also served on the Board of Tax Review (we used to call it The Board of Relief) and both men proved to be very compassionate. The Board of Relief seemed like a good name for that committee and it begins to look like relief is what some people are going to need when they look at their new tax bills next week.

Bill and Eleanor Dingee had two sons, Robert and Richard. They were among the lucky ones, who got their homes before the housing market went crazy. Bob is a teacher in the Norwalk school system and lives with his family on Soundview Road. Dick is second assistant chief in the Ridgefield Fire Department and lives with his family in the old family homestead on Barry Avenue. He comes from a family of firefighters. His dad was a member of the Hook and Ladder division of the old Volunteer Fire Department. His uncle Arthur drove the Reo fire engine in the Phineas Lounsbury Engine Company and his grandfather Roswell Dingee belonged to the Hose Company.

#262: COTTAGE STREET PIONEERS, GRANNY KEELER'S CLAN

It was during the mid 40's that the late Harold O. Davis decided to develop a piece of land that he owned on Barry Avenue. I think that at least a part of Harold's purpose was to provide employment for young men who were returning from service in World War II.

It was not a large tract of land and is probably one of the very smallest of Ridgefield's many developments. The project, when completed, consisted of only three dwellings. The road serving these homes is called Cottage Street and is less than 100 yards in length.

One of those who worked at building the homes on this little street was Evo Principi. Evo is a carpenter by trade, and knew first-hand that the workmanship in the houses was very good. So, with a display of confidence in his own work, Evo bought one of the houses and he and his family became the first residents on Cottage Street and they have lived there ever since.

For those who are not acquainted with Evo Principi, you should know that he comes from a family of athletes. He himself was one of the finest baseball players that Ridgefield High School ever produced. Evo set some enviable records and there were those who thought he might pursue a career in baseball. Perhaps his decision not to do so was based in part on his reluctance to leave Ridgefield and we can understand that. However, Evo still retains a great love for our nation's favorite pastime, and follows the efforts of all the teams, especially the Mets and Yankees.

The house on the corner of Cottage Street and Barry Avenue was first owned by Dr. Charles Izzo, a prominent dentist who practiced in Ridgefield for many years. His office was located over the store where Ridgefield Auto Parts is now [until recently, Deborah Ann's].

This house was also once owned by Colonel Bernard J. Finan, who lived there with Mrs. Finan for several years. Col. Finan was retired from the United States Air Force, after serving in both World Wars I and II.

The Colonel was a fine gentleman who, as you can imagine, lived a very eventful life. His tall and very erect figure had a definite military bearing that made him quite easy to recognize. A son, Bernard J. Jr., is now a colonel, and of course he is in the U.S. Air Force.

Unfortunately, there was just not enough available land in the little development to provide for a road that would meet the town's specifications for its acceptance as a town highway. Therefore, the road is actually an accessway, or private road, and those who live on it are saddled with the expense of maintaining it.

Of course there are certain benefits that are enjoyed by those who live on a private road or a dead-end road. They do not have to contend with wild drivers racing through their little settlement.

Directiv across Barry Avenue from Cottage Street there is a fine old house that has been vacant for a long time. It is hard to imagine a house in Ridgefield being vacant for very long.

During the period of which I am writing, this was the home of Warren E. Keeler and his wife, the former Marv Fahey. Mary was called "Granny" by most everyone who knew her.

Warren E. and Granny had three children that we knew: Bernard F., Mary and Warren J. Warren E. passed on at a relatively young age and Granny and her son Warren J., lived on in the old homestead for many years.

They were joined on weekends by Granny's daughter, Mary Keeler Burke. Mary worked in New York City during the week. Mary's daughter, Rita Burke, also lived and grew up here under the watchful eye of old Granny. Rita was a pretty, curly haired blonde and was very popular with her classmates. I believe she now has a family of her own and lives in California.

Bernard F. Keeler did not stray far from the old homestead. In fact, he and his wife, the former Mary Scanlon, lived right next door where the Gavin family lives now at 152 Barry Avenue.

Bernie served as a corporal in the Home Guard during World War I. He was also very active in local affairs and was a member of the school board (Board of Education) for several terms.

Bernie was a staunch Democrat at a time when, if you wanted steady employment, it took a considerable amount of courage to belong to that party. He was a longtime member of the Democratic Town Committee and was also a past Grand Knight of Marquette Council K. of C.

Warren J. Keeler, like his brother Bernie, was a painter by trade. Also like Bernie, he was quite tall and it was said that they needed a ladder only when it was necessary to reach a very high ceiling.

Warren was not as outgoing as Bernie and never married. Though he had a rather gruff exterior, Warren was a kindly person. However, a person would be well-advised to think twice before crossing him, as we will see.

The Bernard F. Keelers had three children: Catherine. Joseph F. and Bernard R. Keeler. Young Bernie was called Dick, to distinguish him from his father, and like his father and his uncle, he was also a painter.

His brother, Joseph F., was a carpenter by trade and built his own home, just a short distance further down Barry Avenue. Catherine lives with her husband, Stanley Piasta, in the Branchville area of town. Both Stanley and Catherine are staunch Democrats and Stanley served for many years on the town committee. Catherine retired some time ago after being the office manager at the Danbury office of the State of Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles for many years.

So Granny Keeler was the matriarch of a close-knit family. She was rather feisty and she was also a fountain of wisdom and information. It was always an enlightening experience to hear her proclaim on the state of the neighborhood, the state of Ridgefield in general, or for that matter, the state of the Union itself. You can be sure she kept up on all those things.

It must have agreed with her, for Granny lived to the ripe old age of 98 and was as sharp as a tack to the very end.

#263: JONES, McMANUSES AND MORE FROM MARY'S LANE

Traveling along Barry Avenue, we come to another short, dead-end street. It is called Mary's Lane and I believe this road was named for Mrs. Peter McManus, the former Mary Connelly. Peter McManus had been the owner and developer of this property.

Mary's Lane runs south and west from Barry Avenue. As you enter the little street, your attention would be drawn to a rather large house on your left. It is the old, and very well kept, home of John T. and Jeanette (McManus) Jones. It was in this very nice setting that Jack and Jeanette raised their four daughters: Elizabeth Ann, Virginia, Arlene, and Monica.

During the period of which I am writing, this had been the home of Daniel McKay and his family. Dan had retired after having been the coachman and later the chauffeur for the Effington Maynard family.

At the rear of this place there was a large barn, at the end of which there was a nice apartment where Mr. and Mrs. Robert Barnes lived for many years. The barn also housed a gigantic Pierce-Arrow touring car. In a rare display of generosity, the Maynards had given this fine old car to Dan, as a retirement present.

You did not just get into this high-wheeled, right-hand-drive vehicle, you actually climbed in. Once perched upon its plush, black leather upholstery, you could look down on the rest of the world.

As reported in Dispatch 208, Dan — as directed — polished the car daily, for so many years that the great old car became devoid of all its paint. Even without the paint, the car had a brilliant shine and would be worth a fortune today.

The Jones family acquired this place in the 40's after Dan McKay passed on, and have lived there ever since. As a young lad, Jack Jones lived with his parents and sister Nancy, just off Main Street, on Branchville Road. His father was superintendent for the Misses Annie and Ellen Stone when they owned and lived in the mansion at 212 Main Street. This place was later the home of Miss Emily Buch and today it is the home of George J. Goodstadt and his wife Alexandra.

Jack Jones was always athletically inclined and was a fine baseball and basketball player. He would have been the star catcher on our high school team, except his father took a position in New Canaan, and the family moved to that town.

In those days, New Canaan was known as "The Next Station to Heaven." Of course, that was because Ridgefield was the next station.

As well as being good at baseball and basketball, I remember that Jack Jones had a set of boxing gloves that he knew how to use. Today his athletic activities have been relegated to a weekly game of golf at Dhly Ridge, where I am told he still shoots in the 80's.

Like any sensible person, Jack made his way back to Ridgefield, at the very first opportunity. Continuing his display of good judgment, Jack married Jeanette, his childhood sweetheart, and remained in his favorite town.

Jack became a member of the Connecticut State Police Department and advanced to the rank of lieutenant before retiring after many years with that fine law enforcement agency.

Jack had another talent that is worthy of mention and that was his ability to do the Irish step dances. He was not as good as his father, who was an expert, but young Jack could sure shake his feet.

It should be noted that the Jones homestead had a Barry Avenue address for many years. However, when Mary's Lane was built, it connected with the Jones's driveway. This caused the address to be changed to 5 Mary's Lane, even though the house faces Barry Avenue.

By the same token, the house directly across Mary's Lane from the Jones house faces Mary's Lane, but because the driveway connects with Barry Avenue, it has the address 159 Barry Avenue. This house, which is now the home of Arthur Keeler and his wife, the former Kathryn Brady, was built back in the 30's by Richard Cogswell.

Dick was a fine plumber, associated with McCarthy Brothers, and you can be sure that this house is well put together. It later became the home of Mrs. James Dobbie and her sister Miss Eva Emerson.

The other homes on Mary's Lane are relatively new and are owned today by Michael Holleran, Peter Thonis, D. K. Boufford, Joseph McManus, and Jack Croce. Jack is also a retired state police lieutenant and has served several terms on Ridgefield's Police Commission.

Of course, Joseph McManus, better known as "Jo Jo," is the youngest son of Peter and Mary McManus. He is a carpenter by trade and built the house where he and his wife "Totsy," the former Augusta Meyer, raised their children: Michael, Catherine, Mary, Joseph Jr., and Jane Anne.

"Totsy" is secretary for Attorney Sidney Burger and is the daughter of Fritz Meyer who operated a noted woodworking shop in Wilton for many years. She is also known for her culinary ability and makes an exceptionally good mince pie.

It is interesting to note that the barn, with the apartment, that stood behind the Jones homestead, has either been replaced or remodeled and is now a much larger structure, with the address 15 Mary's Lane.

Just a few feet beyond Mary's Lane, there is another dead-end road. It is called Woodcock Lane and we would like to think it was named for our former and very popular first selectman, Joseph M. Woodcock.

The road serves another small development and the five homes that were built here are of recent vintage. With West Mountain as a backdrop this place is very picturesque.

At one time, this road served as the back entrance to the William Harrison Bradley estate. William Harrison Bradley was a direct descendant of Col. Philip Burr Bradley, a local Revolutionary War hero and Ridgefield's second postmaster.

#264: ARTIST FREDERIC REMINGTON AND HIS HOUSE

Directly across the street from the Jones homestead, there are two stone gateposts. They stand on either side of a very long driveway that leads to the home of Griswold Forbes at 154 Barry Avenue.

This large estate [now subdivided] has been known for many years as "Oak Knoll." It has a mansion, a superintendent's cottage and a barn that is set on the highest point of some 50 acres of land. The acreage extends north and west from the driveway for about a quarter of a mile on Ramapoo Road and then east for another quarter of a mile on Ramapoo Road. There are some swampy areas on this large piece of property.

At one time the mansion was clearly visible from Barry Avenue. However, more than 40 years ago, hundreds of pine trees were planted along Barry Avenue and the mansion is now screened from public view.

The trees also screen a swampy area, on which valuable peat bogs were discovered several years ago. It proved to be a high-grade peat and plans were made by Mr. Forbes, to harvest the sphagnum. He was assisted in this venture by Donald Scott.

A method that was quite ingenious was employed in getting the peat out of the swamp. A large drag scoop was attached to a long endless conveyor cable that was powered by a "donkey engine." The scoop then ran out into the swamp and gathered the very dark peat. It then returned the peat to higher ground, where it was bagged for market.

The bags carried the name "West Mountain Peat" and I remember it being on display at Joe Young's store on Catoonah Street and at several other outlets. It was considered a very good grade of peat moss.

Mr. Forbes' mother, Mrs. Nina Newton Forbes, was a previous owner of this very, very nice place. Mrs. Forbes had acquired the place from the estate of her father George Henry Newton, who in turn, had purchased Oak Knoll from the Hauser estate in 1918.

George Newton had been a prominent Western banker who retired at a rather young age and moved with his family to Ridgefield.

Oak Knoll was intended to be a kind of gentleman's farm and Nina Newton Forbes continued to run it as such. Enough of the acreage was tillable and supported two cute little Jersey cows that Mrs. Forbes was very proud of.

She also had a large brown dog that policed the estate and was very protective. It was an Afghan and liked to hunt. Warren Keeler was almost a next door neighbor and he had a flock of chickens, so the Afghan did not have to go very far to do his hunting.

Warren noticed that periodically one of his hens would be missing. He also noticed that the visits of the Afghan were becoming more numerous, so he kept a careful watch over his chickens. One day Warren spotted the dog leaving his place, carrying one of his hens. He lost no time in confronting his neighbor with what he had seen.

Naturally, Mrs. Forbes defended her dog as she felt that he could never be guilty of such an atrocity. It was a meeting of two very strong-willed people.

So Warren loaded his gun and bided his time. It was not long before there was a repeat performance and Warren trudged up the long driveway, carrying the unfortunate chicken in one hand and the Afghan in the other. It was all rather convincing.

I do not remember the most famous of the owners of Oak Knoll, as he died before I was born. However, my father and my older brothers remembered him very well. He was, of course, the great Frederic Sackrider Remington, one of this nation's finest artists.

Frederic Remington was born in Canton, N.Y., in October of 1861 and died, while living in Ridgefield in December of 1909. In that short life span of 48 years, Remington accomplished so much and traveled so far that he must have been a human dynamo. Though his greatest fame was derived from being America's foremost painter of army and Western life, he was equally adept at sculpturing and writing.

Remington's father, Pierre, was a news editor and had his heart set on having his son's become a writer, and encouraged him at every opportunity. The Remington family moved to Ogdensburg, N.Y., where Pierre was the customs collector when Frederic was a young child.

After attending local schools he went to Highland Military School, in Worcester, Mass. From there he went on to Yale Art School, where he received his only training in art, though he quit after only a year and a half.

While at Yale, Remington showed a greater interest in sports than in art. He excelled in football and though in his freshman year, was selected by the great Walter Camp to play on Yale's great football team.

Frederic was only 19 when he quit college to go west. He was an excellent rider and quickly learned to throw a lariat and handle a six gun. He was also a very good boxer and his powerful fists gained him a reputation and the respect of the ranchers and cowboys.

Remington loved the rough life of the cowboy and roamed all over the West, from Mexico to Canada. He also prospected for gold in the Apache country and lived with the roughest and most colorful people, both settlers and Indians. He owned a small ranch in Kansas and even had a part ownership in a notorious cowboy saloon in Kansas City.

All these experiences caused Remington to realize that the West was rapidly changing and soon its colorful life would be history. This made him determined to capture the color and glamor of the great open spaces and preserve it on canvas.

However, his early efforts were not very successful and he was broke when he returned to New York in 1885. Here his luck changed and his rise to success was rapid. Soon he was one of the best known and most highly paid illustrators in the world.

When the Spanish-American War broke out, Remington became a war correspondent and this must have pleased his father greatly.

On his return from the war he devoted much of his time to sculpturing. His first bronze was one of his best and of course it was "The Bronco Buster."

As postmaster I attended the First Day of Issue of the Brien McMahon postage stamp. Stamp collectors from all over the area attended and many beautiful stamps were displayed for sale, including the one honoring the late Senator McMahon. However, the most popular stamp at

the show, by far, was one of Remington's paintings of cowboys and Indians that had been made into a postage stamp several years before. [Actually, six U.S. stamps have honored Remington and his work.]

In Ogdensburg, N.Y., there is a Frederic Remington Art Museum that has a beautiful display of Remington's paintings and sculpture work. Also at the museum, there is an exact replica of Remington's last studio, with the notation that the original is in Ridgefield, Connecticut. Art lovers will find that a trip to this museum is well worth their while.

This would be a good time to give Griswold Forbes great credit for the loving care that he has given, not only to Oak Knoll itself, but also the care he has given the studio, which is exactly the way that Remington left it.

Remington suffered an emergency appendectomy and was thought to be well on the road to recovery when he died the day after Christmas 1909. His request that his epitaph would read "He Knew the Horse" is exactly how it appears at his grave in Ogdensburg.

#265: THE MANY KEELERS OF BARRY AVENUE

Across from the Forbes estate on Barry Avenue, there were more members of the venerable Keeler family.

Several of the houses on this side of the street are relatively new, but at the time of which I am writing, that of Joseph F. Keeler at 163 Barry Avenue was quite new. Mrs. Joseph Keeler, the former Teresa Sfondrini, still lives in this very nice home. It was built by her husband, who was a carpenter and a son of Bernard, whose family was subject in Dispatch No. 262.

Joseph was in early middle age when he passed on. He and Teresa had a son, Arthur, mentioned in No. 262, and a daughter Christine. As you can see, there are a goodly number of Keelers on Barry Avenue and more to come.

The house at 193 Barry Avenue is now the home of Donald T. MacDonald and his wife, Joan. Donald is well known as a clerk at the Ridgefield Post Office. Mac, as he is called, has been with the postal service for more than 25 years.

Joan, who grew up in this house, is the former Joan McCarthy and is the legal secretary for Judge Romeo G. Petroni. They were blessed with two children, Robert and Patricia.

Joan's father was the late Dennis McCarthy who was in the employ of the White Rose Bread Company. Dennis was a handsome man, with a very pleasant personality, and was an excellent salesman. His truck was made in Bridgeport by the White Motor Company and it seemed appropriate that the White Rose Company would have trucks that were named White.

Joan's mother, the former Helen Keeler, was as pretty as Dennis was handsome. Sadly, both Dennis and Helen passed on while Joan was still a young girl. Fortunately, her good grandparents, Howard and Sadie Keeler, raised Joan to be the fine lady she is today.

It was Howard Keeler who built the MacDonalds' home in the early part of the century. Howard was a chauffeur for several of the wealthy families in this area.

When he was a boy, the automobile was still looked on with a certain amount of suspicion and many were those who believed that it could never replace the horse as a reliable means of transportation. In the early days of the auto, there were those with fast-stepping horses, who took particular delight in passing a slow moving car or one that had broken down along the

highway. In such instances it was standard procedure for the horseman to call out the familiar phrase "Get a horse," as he passed in triumph around the unlucky motorist and his discredited and detested automobile.

So, while Howard Keeler grew up at a time when the horse was still king, he kept his eyes focused on the growing popularity of the heir apparent. He learned all he could about the operation and the working parts of the automobile. It was well that he did for in the early days of the auto, a chauffeur would have to know not only how to operate a car but also how to repair it.

Howard Keeler and his wife, the former Sadie Elliott, had three children, Helen whom we have already mentioned, Edward and Albert. Edward lives on North Street in Ridgefield and Albert lives in neighboring Danbury.

Edward Keeler inherited his father's love for the automobile and became a chauffeur. He learned the proper care for the vehicles that came to be in his charge and they always looked as though they had just come out of a showroom. His own personal autos were always easily distinguished by their highly polished and gleaming appearance.

Edward and Jane Keeler had three daughters, Helen Jane, Doris Ann and Margaret. It was just four weeks ago that we witnessed the untimely passing of the very popular Helen Jane. Helen had been associated with the H.P. Bissell Company for many years. Doris Ann now lives in Charlotte, North Carolina with her family and Margaret, who lives with her father, has had a lengthy career with our local Board of Education.

Next door, at 195 Barry Avenue, is one of the very oldest houses on the street. It was built by Arthur Keeler during the latter part of the 19th century, probably in the early 1880's. Arthur and Esther Keeler were the parents of Howard Keeler.

By now you probably would agree that the saying "The apple does not fall far from the tree," would certainly apply to the orchard in which the Keeler family tree was flourishing.

Oddly enough, this old Keeler homestead in the 30's became the home of yet another Keeler family, though this one was no relation to the ones of which I have been writing. Raymond Keeler and his wife, the former Ruby Holabird, raised their four children, Roy, Russell, Pamela and Nancy, while living at 195 Barry Avenue.

Raymond Mortimer Keeler and his family can trace their ancestry back to the original settlers of the town. I have mentioned Ray in this column on several occasions and he was depicted as a fun-loving man. I feel that it is a correct description of a fine man, whose very agile mind lent itself to some of the most humorous incidents that I have ever had the pleasure of witnessing.

However, Ray had his serious side and when the situation called for it, he could be as hard-nosed as any businessman. I guess he was just seriocomic by nature.

As a member of a family that had been engaged in farming for so many years, it was expected that Ray would continue in the tradition of those who had a great love for the tilling of the soil. Therefore it was not surprising that he enrolled in the Connecticut Agriculture College, which later became the University of Connecticut.

However, after graduating from that fine institution, Ray decided there were other means of using the land. His attention turned to general contracting and soon he had a thriving construction business, which he conducted from his Barry Avenue home.

Always looking for an easier and quicker way to get a job done, Ray learned to use explosives as a method of establishing small lakes and rivers. He could plant dynamite at strategic points that would allow it to explode at intervals, opening the earth in such a manner as to lessen the use of heavy excavation machinery.

In his later years, Ray became involved in real estate, following in the footsteps of his uncle, William R. Keeler, who was one of the one or two realtors in Ridgefield when I was a kid.

#266: WOOFIE. ADRIENNE, & KEHOE'S MIDNIGHT RIDES

In writing about the late Raymond M. Keeler, it should be noted that despite a busy life, Ray found time to serve our town in several capacities. He was a longtime member of the Republican Town Committee and was elected a constable on a number of occasions.

Ray also served on the Board of Tax Review and was a member of Ridgefield's first Police Commission. He was an active member of the Rotary Club and spent many hours in collecting scrap metal for war use during World War I.

Ray was an inveterate pipe smoker and each day he opened a fresh package of Granger. He was an antique car buff and his favorite was the Franklin, of which he had several. Ray was a member of the American Franklin Auto Club and exhibited in various antique car shows in this area.

The Franklin had an air-cooled engine and because it had no radiator, the car had a graceful glooping hood that made it quite attractive. It also made it easy to recognize and there was no mistaking Ray and his auto.

The present owners of 195 Barry Avenue, Wilfred L. Weaver and his nice wife, the former Adrienne Benninger, are both native Ridgefielders. I guess that "Woofie," as Wilfred's friends call him, and Adrienne are good examples of people who were quite young at the time of which I am writing and can be considered as models of those who grew up in the halcyon days of Ridgefield.

In the early years of this century, a great many Ridgefield people were employed on the many private estates that dotted the area. For example, Woofie's father, Maurice Weaver, was at one time the horseman at Hillscroft Farm, when that lovely place was owned by Edward Simons. His grandfather, Fred Weaver, was superintendent for Dr. William S. Rainsford's "Savin Hill," where the restaurant is now.

Albert Benninger, Adrienne's father, was the superintendent for many years on the Gerard P. Herrick estate, "Gray Shingles," on High Ridge Avenue, which is now the home of William and Christine Bradt.

I have often deplored the fact that so many of Ridgefield's young people have had to move to areas where employment is easier to come by and where the cost of living is more affordable. Fortunately, Woofie and Adrienne have been able not only to stay in Ridgefield, but to prosper while so doing.

As related in Dispatch No. 261, Woofie and Richard Carboni took over Dingee Electric, when Bill Dingee retired several years ago. That business is still being conducted from the Weaver home at 195 Barry Avenue.

Adrienne inherited her father's interest in botany with the result that her nice home is surrounded with many forms of plant life and colorful flowers. She is also justifiably proud of the fine collection of antiques that she and her husband have expertly restored.

Woofie has been a member of the Ridgefield Volunteer Fire Department for many years and is still very active in that fine organization. It would be a rare occasion that he would not be seen right there at the fire, helping in every possible way. He is also a very good drummer and is greatly responsible for the rejuvenation of the excellent bugle and drum corps, known as "The Flamesmen."

Taking a cue from their parents, the Weavers' two sons, Keith and Eric, both have settled down in Ridgefield, no doubt they are motivated by love for their hometown.

Next door to the Weavers, at 217 Barry Avenue, we find a new family, Edward and Amy Yasko. In the 1930s this fine old house was the home of Thomas and Mame Kehoe and their family.

Tom was described in Dispatch No. 26 as a man who excelled in the operation of farm machinery. It was difficult for farmers to purchase machinery that they would use only once a year for planting or harvesting, and then have to store it until the following year. The answer was to hire Tom Kehoe, who would travel from farm to farm with his large collection of machinery. He had land plows, cultivators, harrows, rollers, stone boats, mowers, corn harvesters, reaper and binders, as well as a huge thrashing machine.

Tom never seemed to hurry and the time of day did not have a great effect on him. It was not unusual for him to move his machinery from job to job in the middle of the night.

Both the reaper and binder and the thrashing machine were huge contraptions and it took a big, strong team of horses to pull them along the highway. All Tom had for a light was an oil lantern that swung back and forth on the rear axle of whatever machine he was moving.

You can imagine Tom Kehoe being pulled along by a big team of horses at 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning, while perched high on some monstrous machine. There were no street lights on the country roads that he traveled and Tom either had the eyes of an owl, or he had complete confidence in those horses. Perhaps it was a combination of both.

Mrs. Kehoe was the former Mame Scallon. She is the oldest of the nine Scallon children and is now in her 94th year and still lives in Ridgefield. She is possessed of a most pleasing personality and no one could meet Mame without experiencing the feeling that she is something special.

When the Kehoe family moved from 217 Barry Avenue, it became the home of Grover S. Phelan and his wife, the former Harriet M. Whitlock. Grover retired after many years with the Gilbert and Bennett Wire Mill Company in Georgetown. He was a tall handsome man, with a perfectly trimmed moustache and had a pleasant though very quiet manner.

Just to the north of this house, there is another building, which the Phelans acquired. It had been a large barn, in which Tom Kehoe had kept the horses that he called Tom and Jerry. Tom also stored some of his machinery in the barn and it had a shop where he repaired all that machinery during the winter months. You can be sure that when spring came, everything was in good shape and ready to go.

Ray Phelan, who was the son of Grover and Harriet, converted the barn into a very nice dwelling and it became the home of Ray and his wife, the former Yolanda Salvia. Ray served on

several town boards and carried on a business that supplied tools to many of the area garages that did repairing. This place, at 223 Barry Avenue, is now the home of Ralph and Carol Ficker, who recently moved there from Great Hill Road.

#267: THE DOWSER OF WEST MOUNTAIN

Traveling along Barry Avenue, we come to its intersection with Ramapoo Road. At about this point you will find that the name of the highway changes and becomes West Mountain Road.

At the southeast corner of West Mountain and Ramapoo Roads sets a fine old house that once had a West Mountain Road address. It is now 221 Ramapoo Road and the change, of course, is due to the fact that while the house faces West Mountain Road, the driveway enters Ramapoo Road.

This place is now the home of Mrs. J. Gordon Coffin and her son, Barry. Mrs. Coffin is the former Ann Woodford. Ann is fondly remembered as the pretty little blonde daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Francis B. Woodford.

As a young girl growing up at 325 Main Street, Ann must have been exposed, to some degree, to the care of people in need of medical attention. Her father was a general practitioner and treated patients who had a wide variety of ailments. The fact that Ann is today a fine nurse's aide is no doubt due to a great extent to her early experiences as the daughter of a father who was recognized as a fine doctor and a mother who was a fine nurse.

During the period of which I am writing, this nice old house was the home of Theodore B. Bailey and his wife, the former Mary Lambert. Some people may have called him Ted, but to me he was always Mr. Bailey.

He was a retired blacksmith and farrier when he came to live in our town back in the 20's. A blacksmith worked at shaping various metals and fusing them together, whereas a farrier was a person engaged in the shoeing of horses. Mr. Bailey used his considerable knowledge and talents to excel in both categories, as did the late Harry M. Thomas.

Mr. Bailey was very old when I got to know him. He had a very abundant crop of gray hair, both on top of his head and on his face. He was of medium height and he had a real slender build that belied the fact that he was a very strong man. He exhibited a rather striking appearance, as he walked down the street, with his gray mane partly covered by an old floppy hat and a large walking stick that was more like a cudgel, clutched in his hand. One thing was sure, Mr. Bailey made a distinct impression and once seen, he was not easily forgotten.

When still a young man, Mr. Bailey established a blacksmith shop in the Bald Hill section of neighboring Wilton. He was a kindly, outgoing person, with a good singing voice, which he frequently used while at his work. While singing, the sentences of his songs were punctuated by an extra hard blow of his hammer, and he always timed it perfectly.

Mr. Bailey's engaging personality caused his shop to become a favorite place for people of the area to congregate. This was true whether or not they had metal work to be done, or a horse to be shod. People affectionately referred to him as "The Blacksmith of Bald Hill."

At the time of Theodore's marriage to Mary, he was living in Katonah, N.Y., and Mary lived in Bedford, N.Y. The wedding was set to take place in January and during the previous

night there had been a terrible, howling blizzard, accompanied by sub-zero temperatures. The roads were so clogged with snow that travel, even by horse and sleigh, was impossible.

The weather proved to be no deterrent to the young and strong Theodore Bailey. It was just 6 a.m., when he started to walk through the snowdrifts to Bedford. Despite the snow and the terrible cold, he arrived at noon, just in time for the wedding.

Obviously the young couple wanted not only to get married, but also to stay married. It was while they lived on West Mountain that they celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary. Are you listening, young newlyweds?

Mr. Bailey gained considerable fame in his later years as a water finder, dowser or douser — take your pick. Many were the requests for him to come with his divining rod, or forked stick, to locate an underground source of water.

There were a number of skeptics and I was one who just did not believe that it could be done. To those unfamiliar with the art of dowsing, it is apparently something that only certain individuals can do successfully. Those so favored use either metal divining rods, or a forked stick, cut from a birch, peach or apple tree, or some other tree that they feel works best for them. Two ends of the stick are grasped in either hand of the dowser, while the other end extends outward from his hands.

As the dowser walks over the selected area, the end of the stick will commence to move when it passes over underground water. The greater the quantity of water, the greater the movement of the end of the forked stick.

If the subterranean deposit of water is of sufficient size, the end of the stick will actually twist until it points straight down at the exact spot. This seems to be true no matter how strong the dowser is, or how tightly he holds the divining rod.

In 1931, my brothers Jack and Joe built their service station on Danbury Road. It is now owned by Dino Giardini and is called Limestone Service Station. There was a need to dig a well for water and Jack decided to ask Mr. Bailey to locate the spot for it.

I was there one day when Mr. Bailey appeared, coming up the highway, driving his old sorrel horse “Joshua.” Though I had the utmost respect for Mr. Bailey, it was difficult for me to suppress a laugh when he brought out his forked stick and confidently guaranteed to find water, providing there was some available in the area.

Mr. Bailey grasped two ends of his divining rod, and with the other end pointing directly out in front of him, started his march around the property. In just a few minutes there was a slight movement of the point of the stick, which I firmly believed was being induced by some manner by the dowser, without our seeing it.

The movements of the stick increased and both Jack and Joe believed they could dig right there and get water.

Mr. Bailey cautioned that he still had not found a sufficient supply. Suddenly, the stick really began to act up and twisted until it pointed directly toward the ground. Lo and behold, I became a believer, when after a few feet of earth had been removed and it was discovered that they were uncovering an old abandoned well.

#268: WHAT DOWSING DICK FOUND

Theodore B. Bailey may have dispelled any doubts that I may have harbored concerning the validity of his prowess in finding water, but others were skeptical. The debate over the ability of dowsers to discover underground pockets of water has been going on for many years.

What makes it so interesting is that it seems apparent that not everyone can make the divining rod perform. Added to this is the fact that some of those who can, are apt to cloak their unusual powers in an aura of mystique, and those who cannot, may scoff at the idea and shunt it off as pure trickery.

I do not believe that Mr. Bailey ever showed anyone how to perform with the divining rod. No doubt, he wanted to guard against having someone encroach on what he felt was his private domain.

However, it is my feeling that many others could make the forked stick work, if they ever had a chance to try it, after being properly instructed in its use.

A case in point occurred many years after Mr. Bailey had located the old well at the Limestone Service Station. It happened at a meeting of the Kiwanis Club, when that organization held its luncheon meetings at Luigi's Restaurant in the Branchville area.

James Hackert, a member of the club, was an amateur dowser and enjoyed using the divining rod just for the fun of seeing it act up. On this particular day, Jim, who had been asked to give a talk to the club on dowsing, appeared with several forked sticks that he had cut from several different kinds of trees.

After giving a very interesting talk on the art of dowsing, Jim invited the club members outside, where he proceeded to give a graphic demonstration of how the rod works. There were the usual number of doubters, but they all enjoyed the show as they watched the point of the rod quiver and twist in Jim's grasp.

After the exhibition, Jim asked if there were any of his audience who would like to try their hand at dowsing. I am not sure how many accepted his offer, or what kind of success they had. However, when I was handed the forked stick, it did nothing until Jim showed me how to properly hold it.

After only taking a few steps, I began to feel a slight movement in the rod. As I continued to walk, the movements became stronger and finally the end of the rod twisted until it pointed straight down.

Everyone laughed, but Luigi (Lou Ridolfi) stepped forward and exclaimed, "Hey, you are standing right over my septic tank."

My thoughts went back to how Mr. Bailey had found the well so many years before. We put a tripod over the abandoned well. The tripod had an iron wheel at its top — actually it was a pulley — over which a rope was threaded and attached to a large wooden bucket. The bucket was then loaded with stones and gravel that had been poured into the old well, and that material was brought to the surface.

Once the well was cleared of all debris, it proved to be a well-functioning water supply. I dare say that it is still in operation 56 years later.

It is too bad that more people are not willing to share their talent, as Jim Hackert did. I once knew a man who was particularly adept at grafting fruit trees. He enjoyed exhibiting his

handiwork and showed me an apple tree, on which he had grafted four different kinds of apples. There were McIntosh, Greenings, Fall Pippins and Russets, all growing on the same tree.

Naturally, I was very impressed, but when he explained how it was done, the man made it sound so mysterious and so difficult to do, that I was afraid to try it.

Sometime later, it became necessary for me to graft a fruit tree and to be on the safe side, I asked our Tree Warden, Tom Shaughnessy, to do it for me.

Tom did better than that. First he gave me a set of grafting tools and then explained in simple terms how to do the grafting. Because of Tom's kindness, I was soon able to do it.

To get back to Mr. Bailey, it should be noted that on the south side of his home at 221 Ramapoo Road, he had a barn where he kept his old horse "Joshua." He also had a little wagon shed across the street from his house, where he kept his buckboard.

One Halloween night, some mischievous boys got the little wagon out and somehow pulled it part way up a nearby telephone pole. They were not motivated by any animosity, for Mr. Bailey was well liked and had no enemies.

He was very upset when morning came and he saw his buckboard dangling from the pole. I am happy to report that another group of boys came along and got the wagon down, without damaging it.

Mr. Bailey lived a long and useful life and remained active right to the end. He passed on in his home on Ramapoo Road, in June of 1940 at the age of 89.

The place then became the home of Charles H. Baxter and his wife, the former Mary Senese. Charley was a lineman for the electric light company. Way back in Dispatch #5, I told of how he was almost electrocuted while repairing the electric wires on Gilbert Street during a bad storm. Fortunately he was rescued by Jack Cranston and Jack Nalley.

The Baxters are an old Ridgefield family and Charley's father, D. Crosby Baxter, was the founder of this newspaper [The Ridgefield Press]

The Baxter family lived at 221 Ramapoo Road for a number of years and then moved the barn, in which Mr. Bailey had kept Joshua across the road, to what is now 224 Ramapoo Road. The barn was enlarged and remodeled and became the new home of the Baxter family. This very cute little house is now the home of the Kevin Quinn family.

Charley, who was very handy with tools, did most of the work himself. He was a very hard working man and wasted very little time in talking. It would be safe to say that he was a man of few words, and if asked a question that could be answered with either a "yes" or a "no," those were the words that he would use.

Ridgefield, with all its beautiful trees, has been prone to electrical outages during severe storms. Because of that fact, the electric company takes particular pains to keep the lines clear in that area vital to the welfare of our town, such as the town water supply. Therefore, when Charley was wiring his home, he had the presence of mind to connect with the line serving the water company, with the result that he experienced very few power failures.

Charley passed on at age 83 and his contribution to the matrimonial fruit basket was seven children, 34 grandchildren and 18 great-grandchildren.

#269: SAM CARPENTER, THE ACTRESS, & THE BEACON MANSION

Just above the intersection of West Mountain Road and Ramapoo Road, there is a relatively new development. This large tract of land was once a private estate, as are so many developments in Ridgefield.

At the turn of the century, this property was owned by Samuel Emlen Carpenter and his wife, the former Nellie J. Crouse. Sam had purchased the property, piece by piece, from several neighbors until he had amassed well over 50 acres. This is the same Sam Carpenter mentioned on the History Page of *The Press* (July 30th [1987] edition) along with the picture of the house that he built at 145 High Ridge Avenue that is now the home of Frances Cleaners.

Sam Carpenter was a retired real estate tycoon when he came here from Philadelphia at the dawn of the 1900's. He was still a young man when he retired and had become very wealthy. My father, who was a friend and admirer of Sam, told me of how Sam had been a star athlete at Harvard. He was also quite handsome and attracted considerable attention whenever he walked down Main Street, with Nellie at his side.

While there is little doubt that most of the admiring glances came from the distaff side, Sam Carpenter was very popular with the menfolk. Sam was a man of the world and lived his life to the hilt. If notoriety came his way, he would make no visible effort to duck it.

Divorce was not nearly as common 60 years ago as it is today. Yet, in the early 20's Sam divorced Nellie, and within a couple of weeks he was married to the celebrated actress, Katherine LaSalle. Aside from being Sam's second wife, Katherine will be best remembered as John Barrymore's leading lady.

Katherine's name has a decidedly French flavor, so it came as no surprise when she induced Sam to move to Paris, where he died after just a few years, while still in middle age.

In the meantime, Joseph Conron, his wife Cecelia, and their children Dorothy and Raymond, had been living for several years at "Vita Semplice," the beautiful estates on Saint John's Road that later would become "Hillscroft Farm" and is now another development.

The Conron family leased this fine estate from Charles T. Root, as a summer home, but naturally they fell in love with Ridgefield and became year around residents.

Mr. Conron was the head of a giant meat packing company that had headquarters in Chicago and offices in New York City. He was kept busy, traveling between the two largest cities in the country, but managed to spend weekends with his family in his favorite town.

As retirement time drew nearer, Joseph Conron had made up his mind to spend his later years in the town that he had become so fond of. He wanted to build his home in weekends were spent traveling along the country roads, looking for the right spot to build. When he arrived at what is now 4 West Mountain Road, he knew at once that this craggy bluff, with its spectacular view, was made to order for him and his family.

When the Carpenters put the place on the market, Joseph Conron was right there with the money to buy it.

Building a mansion at the very top of the bluff was no easy matter, and it was not accomplished in only a day or two. So the Conrons continued to live at Vita Semplice while their new home was being constructed.

Joseph Conron's timing is worth mentioning. No sooner was his new mansion completed than the mansion at Vita Semplice was struck by lightning. The grand house was completely

destroyed in the fire that followed. Edward Simons became the new owner of Vita Semplice and built the present beautiful mansion at 133 St. Johns Road, that is now the home of Robert Soloff and his family. Simons changed the name of his new estate from Vita Semplice to Hillscroft Farm.

Someone informed Mr. Simons that the fire that destroyed the previous mansion was the second one which had been caused by a lightning bolt. This caused Simons to take the added precaution of installing lightning rods, not only on the mansion, but on the many tall pine trees that were, and still are, quite numerous around the place. I once witnessed lightning being conducted harmlessly down the side of a huge pine and into the ground near the superintendent's cottage at Hillscroft.

In the meantime, Joseph Conron and his family were safely settled in their new home on West Mountain. Because of its lofty perch, the estate was named "Hillaire."

The bright white mansion, with its red tile roof, was visible to most any area of the town and served as a guide to airplane pilots, as pointed out in an earlier column.

There was a garage with stables attached where Raymond and his sister Dorothy kept their riding horses. Dorothy called her mare "Goldie" and Raymond called his horse "Chocolate Soldier." They could properly be called members of the horsey set.

Raymond remained unmarried while the family lived in Ridgefield, but Dorothy married James Butler Jr., whose father owned a chain of grocery stores. The Butler stores were easily recognized by their green fronts. One of them operated in Ridgefield for a time where Homestead Realty [Sammy + Nat] is now at 414 Main Street.

Unfortunately, the younger Butler was killed in a tragic accident, similar to the one which recently befell Secretary of Commerce Malcolm Baldrige. It happened at a horse show in Mt. Kisco, when his horse fell on him when failing to negotiate a jump.

James Doubleday bought Hillaire in the mid 50's and proceeded to tear down the very attractive mansion. Jimmy was noted for purchasing and then demolishing old mansions. He would then replace them with more modern structures.

There must have been a number of frustrated pilots, as there were no air traffic controllers in those days at Danbury airport.

#270: MORE MOUNTAIN FOLK, LIGHTNING AND A STOVE

James and Elizabeth Doubleday had formed a pattern, which called for them to buy an old mansion, tear down the existing building and then replace it with a more modern structure. Therefore, it came as no surprise when a few years after replacing the Conron mansion at 4 West Mountain Road, Jim and Betty began to look for new worlds to conquer.

Incidentally, this house can still be seen from the highway, if you look real quick. Just as you turn the corner, traveling west on Barry Avenue where it intersects with Woodcock Lane, a little white dot, high on the mountain before you, is clearly visible. It is not as prominent as the red roofed Conron house that preceded it. The trees in the area have grown to a point where they almost hide the newer structure.

The Doubledays had their estate on the market only a short time when along came David and Florence Graham. The Grahams had lived for a few years on Shadow Lane and quickly fell in love with this place and the majestic view that it offered.

My good friend and neighbor, Jack O'Keeffe, had, with tender loving care, kept the place in tip-top shape for the Doubledays. Jack agreed to stay on and look after the place for the Grahams and this fact alone must have been an inducement for them to purchase it.

David Graham had been a very successful investment banker and now in retirement, he was looking for a place that afforded some peace and quiet. He was a native of northern Ireland and this place on the mountain top must have reminded him of his native land.

The driveway leading to the mansion was very long and it was also very steep, but once you reached the top, you were assured of complete privacy.

A more recent owner of this beautiful estate was Dr. Henry G. Minot. After a time, Dr. Minot decided to share the place with others and the surrounding acreage was developed by Carl Lecher. Soon, two roads were built, leading into the estate, Doubleday Lane and Sharp Hill Road. Once the roads were roughed in, a number of new homes began to dot the landscape. Among the new homes was one that was built for Dr. Minot, where he now lives after selling the former Doubleday mansion to Scott Tenney. The Tenneys had previously lived at Twixt Hills.

It should be mentioned that there is a pond just before you get to Sharp Hill Road, and it is still known as Conron's Pond. In days gone by, this pond was a favorite place to skate for those who lived nearby.

The pond is not very deep and through the years, it became clogged with weeds. A few years ago, someone opened the dam that formed the pond and cleared out the weeds. The dam was then closed and the pond reappeared. It requires another quick look to see the pond, as the trees are quite dense between the pond and the highway.

Incidentally, the highway was rebuilt in the 30's all the way to the New York State line. It is a state highway and I believe the work was done as part of a W.P.A. project. This was a common practice during the days of the great Depression.

While the road was being rebuilt, the great retaining wall, directly opposite the entrance to Conron's Hillaire estate, was built by the Bacchiochi construction company. I guess the word Hillaire is no longer used when referring to the new development.

A little farther along the highway at 55 West Mountain Road is the very attractive home of Fred and Meredith Stahl. Fred, who was a professor at Sacred Heart University, has now become a consultant in the computer business. This place was built as a summer home for Alvin and Eva Rosencrans about the time of World War II. Alvin was a very prominent importer and did extensive traveling in foreign countries. He was also a very good violinist and was well known in musical circles.

Like so many others who started out as summer residents, the Rosencrans soon became enamored with Ridgefield and stayed the year around.

Just past the intersection of Oscaleta Road with West Mountain Road, we come to a house that is partly hidden by trees and shrubbery. It is 81 West Mountain Road, and is the home of David and Jacqueline Nichols. I seem to remember that in years past the house was shielded by a huge boulder.

This house was built in the mid 30s, for a pair of newlyweds, Judge Joseph H. and Ellen Donnelly. Joe and Ellen started married life with a fine new home. Of course, they also had new furnishings, among which was a very nice, flat-top Westinghouse electric kitchen range.

For some time I have harbored the conviction that large stone formations have a tendency to attract lightning. This belief was kindled by observing bolts of atmospheric electricity that seemed to concentrate in the rocky areas of town.

There may have been some reason, other than the previously mentioned boulder, that caused the numerous flashes of lightning around 81 West Mountain Road. However, it seemed that when the sound that is credited to Thor was heard, it was always preceded by a nearby flash of light.

After one particularly bad storm, Ellen Donnelly began to prepare the evening meal and discovered that her stove would not work. It was then discovered that the wiring of the stove had been destroyed by lightning. Joe was not about to let a little thing like lightning interfere with family life, so he had the stove rewired and put back into service. The rewired stove worked to perfection and life at the Donnelly residence returned to normal.

However, the violent side of nature refused to subside and it was not long before it challenged the Donnellys again. During a very bad storm a bolt of lightning struck the ground near the boulder. When the stove again refused to work, no one had to tell Ellen what caused the trouble. So the stove was banished to the basement and a new one took its place in the kitchen.

When I learned that the burned out stove was to be transported to the trash heap, I offered to take it off their hands. Joe and Ellen quickly agreed and the stove was on its way to Earl Roberts, who rewired it for the second time. Marie and I enjoyed the stove for several years, until we moved to Hillscroft, where there was already a stove.

Then along came newly married Enzo Bartolucci and he and Elsie enjoyed it for many more years. Maybe they disconnected the stove during electrical storms.

#271: THE ARNOLDS AND OTHERS OF ELEVEN LEVELS

The house at 84 West Mountain Road is now the home of the T.M. Scott family. During the period of which we are writing, it was the home of Margery Storey. Marge moved away after attending local schools, and I never heard about her again.

A little further on, and on the other side of the street, at 111 West Mountain Road, there is the former home of Stephen Blumenthal. This cute little house was built in the 20's by William Wascher. Bill was a good carpenter and did the actual work on the house himself, so you just know that this house is well built.

The Waschers moved from Ridgefield in the 30's, and the place became the scene of a real tragedy, when the next owner committed suicide, as reported back in Dispatch #99. Almost across the street, there is the attractive entrance to a very pretty scene. The driveway leads to the homes of Syn N. Heaton and Robert Tuccio.

Bob and his wife, the former Barbara Branchini, live in a beautiful chateau on the shore of what used to be called Fraser's Pond, a very serene body of water. This is a setting that many an artist would love to capture on canvas, especially in the fall when the leaves are turning.

Bob's father is the well-known Jerry Tuccio, who put together the largest of Ridgefield's developments. When Jerry retired a few years ago, Bob took over the management of these extensive enterprises.

This particular development was once the large, private estate of Arthur C. Fraser and his wife, the former Rose McLane. Mr. Fraser was a famous patent attorney, and considered one

of the very best in this country. He was the senior member of the well-known law firm, Fraser, Myers and Manley.

When the Frasers had their great mansion constructed early in this century, it was their intention to use the place as their summer home. It served that purpose only a few years, and then the Frasers, like so many others, had the mansion winterized and became year-round residents.

The mansion nestled among the trees on a high point above the aforementioned pond, and of course it provided a magnificent view of the surrounding countryside. Just to add to the colorful scene, all of the buildings on the estate had bright red roofs.

Mrs. Fraser maintained the estate for a few years after her husband passed on, in the spring of 1934. It was then purchased by Joseph Shapiro. The Shapiro family were horsey people, and the place, which consisted of several hundred acres and several miles of driveways and bridle paths, was just made to order for them. For some years, the Doubledays had the only polo field in Ridgefield, but the Shapiros constructed one, on a level acre of their new place, and it was of regulation size.

The new owners took title to the former Fraser estate just a couple of months before the attack on Pearl Harbor. World War II stymied the operations of the estate, as it did to the other large estates. However, when the war was over, a number of alterations were made, especially to the buildings that housed their valuable horses.

Mrs. Shapiro was active in several charitable organizations, and took a special interest in the restoration of toys for children of needy families. She was assisted in this venture by William Sturges, who did the repair work on hundreds of discarded toys at the Ridgefield firehouse.

After a dozen years, the place was again put on the market. This time the new owners were Paul D. and Elizabeth [better known as Dean and Betty Arnold]. They were the Arnolds of the well-known Arnold Bakers bread company, so there was little doubt that they could afford to maintain the estate.

The Arnolds took an active interest in local organizations, and as well as making cash donations, they could be counted on to furnish their bakery products to many of the charitable affairs that were held.

Finally there came a time when the Arnolds moved away and the great place was sold to Jerry Tuccio for developing. Along the way, someone had selected the name "Eleven Levels" for the place. No doubt this was because of the several level areas on the craggy mountainside. At any rate, the name stuck and became the name of the new development.

One of the several roads that serve the development is Eleven Levels Road. Part way up the next hill, at 128 West Mountain Road, is the very attractive home of the Walter Slavins. The house had the familiar concrete siding and red roof.

This house was the home of the many superintendents that ran the large estate through the years. Some, but not all of these families were the Patrick Potters, who we told about in a previous column, the Robert Currys, the Patrick McAleers, and the Clarence Fischers. Bob Curry has passed on, but his wife Mary still lives in New Canaan. Mary is the former Mary Quinn and a sister of Mrs. Joseph (Margaret) Knoche.

Pat McAleer and his wife still live on Roberts Lane. Pat is now retired, after serving as foreman of our local road maintenance unit. Clarence Fischer may still be living, and if so, I

believe he would be, along with Thomas Shaughnessy, one of the two remaining members of our local Last Man's Club.

Clarence used to raise bloodhounds, and became quite noted for training these fine dogs. As his fame spread around the state, Clarence began to receive many requests from police departments to assist in finding missing persons. On at least one occasion, the dogs were successful in finding a lost child here in Ridgefield.

The Fischers were also successful in raising a handsome son, Clarence Jr., and three beautiful daughters, Dorothy, Gloria and Mary.

At the top of the hill, and on the corner of West Mountun Road and Eleven Levels Road, there is a small house that has the usual Fraser colors. It housed the gardeners on the estate, and there were many of them. One of the gardeners was Robert Paris, who moved here with his family from northern Vermont. The Paris family consisted of three sons, Donald, Lloyd and Robert Jr. Bob's brother, Walter Paris, still lives in Ridgefield with his son Richard, the famed woodworker.

#272: WEST MOUNTAIN FOLK, ONE OF WHOM WAS HIGH-SPEED

As we approach the crest of the second hill on West Mountain Road, we come to a little white house that carries number 152. It gives the appearance of having been vacant for some time. The most recent occupants were Peter Schroeder and his family.

Peter was noted hereabouts for his talks to service clubs and other organizations about scuba diving. He was an acknowledged expert in this field and his talks were accompanied by excellent movies of his underwater explorations. Peter also taught scuba diving to those who were interested in this very popular sport.

Peter Schroeder described himself as a news analyst for the Dutch newspapers. It was his duty to read the large city newspapers and magazines, especially those that carried items of international significance.

According to Peter, the Dutch newspapers that he represented were a little wary of the veracity and accuracy of many of the printed items. Therefore, after digesting and analyzing them, he would report his own interpretation.

Peter's report was made by telephone between the hours of 2 a.m. and 6 a.m. Of course, the phone rates are lower during these hours. Still, he must have had an astronomical telephone bill each month.

During the 40's and 50's, this little place was the home of Ross and Mary Eaglesham. Ross was a very well known artist and a very nice gentleman. Mary was quite active in several local civic groups. She was a registered nurse and did a lot for the Red Cross, as well as our local District Nursing Association. Mary taught first aid on a regular basis to members of local organizations. We really missed the Eagleshams when they moved away.

Dr. Bache McEvers Emmet and his wife, Anne, came to Ridgefield in the early 1890's, and like just about everyone who came here, they were entranced by our beautiful town. Soon the Emmetts were buying up land on West Mountain, and then they started to build the great mansion [called Greywacke] where the Neligans live today. Through all the years, and various owners that followed, there have been several alterations and some additions, but basically the original structure has remained intact. [The house, in poor condition, was removed around 2017.]

After Dr. Emmet passed on, Mrs. Emmet kept the place going for a few years, However, in the late 20's, when the economy suffered the infamous nose dive, Mrs. Emmett felt that the estate was just too large for her to manage, so she put it on the market.

The house at 306 Main Street, on the north corner of Market Street, became Mrs. Emmett's new home. The house was a part of Governor Phineas Lounsbury's estate (now the Community Center) and the governor had used it as a guest house.

For years it was known as the Emmett house, but when the C. Park Hannaman family later lived there, the name changed and it is still referred to as the Hannaman House.

William Forbes Ingold became the new owner of the Emmett estate on West Mountain. He was reputed to be a very wealthy man, and had a very considerable amount of work done to the estate.

Ingold had a couple of chauffeurs and it was said that he had several standards that must be met before they were hired. One was that they must demonstrate their ability to handle an automobile while traveling at a speed of 100 miles per hour. He had several large limousines, two of which were Packard convertible touring cars that were well able to satisfy his desire to ride at high speeds over the highway.

One of the chauffeurs was the late Thomas Scott, whose son Thomas Jr., lives in Wilton, where he operates a taxi and limousine service. Tom Jr. is married to the former Sarah Wettingfeld, and was the subject of a recent article in *The Press* that told of the many famous people that use his services.

Some may remember that Tom Jr., when just a little boy, was the victim in a near tragic accident at Silver Spring Country Club. It all happened during the annual July 4th fireworks display, when a skyrocket went awry and entered the car where young Tom was sitting with his mother.

Thomas Scott Sr. told many hair- raising stories about driving for Mr. Ingold. One story concerned the transportation of a load of Scotch whisky from New York City to the West Mountain estate, with New York State Troopers in full pursuit. It was in the waning days of the Prohibition period, so perhaps the troopers may have been a little reluctant to risk their lives for a law that was about to be eliminated. At any rate they were a considerable distance behind Ingold's Packard, when they turned off at the state line.

West Mountain Road was rebuilt during the mid-30's, and in order to straighten a curve that is now a part of the driveway at the entrance to the estate, Ingold traded some land with the state. It involved the old West Mountain schoolhouse, which had ceased functioning as a school. The building became a kennel, then a laundry and now may be a dwelling.

Incidentally, I believe that Rita Potter and her sister Patricia Potter McManus both attended this school as little girls. A brochure that I have, listing the students in all of the Ridgefield schools in 1915, shows that West Mountain School had seven pupils, four from the same family. They were Charles, Foster, Rachel and Wallace Clark, David and William Dougherty and Helen Mansfield.

In spite of Ingold's wealth, he experienced some rough times during the Depression years, but he sure provided a lot of jobs for local tradesmen.

Edward J. Barber became the new owner of the estate in the late 1930s. Mr. Barber was the owner of a steamship line and was president of the Battery Place Security Corporation. He added more acreage to his already substantial holdings.

The Barbers stayed for some 20 years and then in 1960 the place was up for sale again. It was purchased by Phyllis Moffett who had lived in Wilton but had a keen desire to become a Ridgefielder. That is a desire that should be easy to understand.

#273: THE GREAT ESTATE OF THE LYNCHES

One of the most attractive homes on fabulous West Mountain is the residence of Joseph and Dolly Wittman. This fine structure has undergone numerous changes, through the years, and it is apparent that they were all for the better.

Dolly tells of how this house was once the centerpiece of a little compound of smaller houses. When Dolly's grandparents, John Hampton Lynch and Lucy Moffett Lynch, came to Ridgefield around the turn of the century, they lived in this house while their magnificent mansion was being constructed a little further on and across the highway.

The Wittman house at 206 West Mountain Road was later used as a guest house by the Lynch family. Later still, it became the home of Dolly's parents, John H. Lynch Jr., and his wife, the former Emilene Danforth Starr.

Dolly remembers growing up in the house that is now her home. Her parents then built their own mansion directly across the road at 211 West Mountain Road. This place is now the home of the Andrew W. Alkiewicz family.

World War II Aviator Joseph Wittman was a United States Navy aviator in World War II. While in the service, Joe became a friend of a fellow Navy flier, Richard E. Conley. After listening to the wondrous stories that Dick Conley had to tell about his hometown, it was no wonder that Joe readily accepted Dick's invitation to visit Ridgefield once the war was over. Joe, like everyone else, quickly fell in love with Ridgefield and its natural beauty. An important part of that beauty was a girl named Dolly Lynch, and it was not long before she and Joe were married.

Joe Wittman and Dick Conley went into business, operating Conn-Air, an air taxi business from Danbury Airport. They were just a little ahead of their time, as the service was not as popular as it is today.

Dolly's grandfather, John H. Lynch Sr., was the president of The Terminal Warehouse Company and The Lincoln Safe Deposit Box Companies and was connected with several other ventures in New York City. His wife, the former Lucy Moffett, was a sister of Mrs. George Doubleday, who lived where the Temple Shearith Israel is now on Peaceable Street.

To say that these fine ladies were active in local affairs would be a gross understatement. They belonged to several organizations and any civic movement that would benefit Ridgefield was certain to have their vigorous support.

The great Lynch estate is now the home of the Congregation of Notre Dame [in 2024, it's Ridgefield Academy]. Its very imposing mansion has had a large addition, which more than doubled its already expansive proportions.

A school [Notre Dame Academy, 1972-76] was built on the property by this order, but it closed after a few years due to the difficulty of recruiting teachers, rather than from a lack of pupils.

The view from the mansion can only be described as spectacular. It allows one to see for many miles to the west. The foothills of the Catskills actually appear to be nearby, and it is easy to imagine the mighty Hudson, as it winds its way down to the sea. It is a real treat to see the sun go down as you gaze from the west side of the mansion over South Salem, the lakes at Waccabuc and on past Katonah.

Mrs. Lynch kept the large estate going for many years after her husband passed on. During the fuel shortage caused by the war, she used the Wittman house for the winter months. The estate stretched along both sides of West Mountain Road and extended for a considerable distance along Old West Mountain Road.

It was along this road that the Lynch family had their farm, and the grand barn that is now the home of Leonard and Madeleine Corbin.

There were also three houses on Old West Mountain Road that served as homes for some of those employed on the estate. Two of those houses, in which the Paul Marconi and Patrick Culhane families once lived, have now disappeared. The one that still stands, at 221 Old West Mountain Road, was the one in which the herdsmen lived. The Hamilton family lived in this house as did the Roy Nortons and the Irving Keelers.

The superintendent's cottage still sits, high on the hill, just south of the school, and just beyond that is the garage, with the nice apartment where chauffeur Thomas Salveson lived with his family.

The superintendent's house, where the David Dougherty family lived for so many years, always looked rather tiny to me — the reason being that the Doughertys were very large people. Those who knew this family will remember David Sr. as a tall man well over six feet in height. His well-tanned features and large handlebar moustache greatly resembled those of the great motion picture star, Ward Bond.

Mrs. Dougherty was not tiny, and her children David Jr., William and Alice were all over six feet tall. In recent years, additions have been made to this little cottage.

We hear a lot about graft today, and it is not a new word. When the large mansions were being constructed years ago, there were superintendents who were not averse to accepting “gratuities” from contractors, who did work on the estates.

David Dougherty refused to participate in transactions of this kind. Mr. Lynch was aware of this fact and it explains why David, aside from his proven abilities, remained the super until he died.

When David Sr. passed on, the reins were handed to David Jr., and he continued to handle the operations until Mrs. Lynch passed on.

I guess that Mrs. Lynch could be described as traditional, especially as far as farming was concerned. If a job could be done with horses, that is how it was done. I do not believe that she ever had a tractor on the place.

There were so many fine hay fields on the estate that there was generally a large surplus of hay. Once the large barn was full, the hay that was still standing was sold off to local farmers. One of those who bought the hay was Irving Conklin and that is how I got to mow the hay there.

On one occasion, we mowed a huge field of some 20 acres that extended north from Old West Mountain Road to Round Pond. At one time there were four teams pulling their mowers around the field. Irv Conklin drove his gray team, Major and Dick, I drove my blacks, Kit and Lady, Harry Terpeny had a team of roans, Duke and Diamond, and Dave Dougherty had a pair of dappled grays. I don't know what Dave called them except when they misbehaved, and even if I did write those words, my editor would not print them.

#274: ROUND POND'S PURE WATER AND ORENECA'S MANSION

It seems that in any discussion concerning the large estates on West Mountain, the name Henry B. Anderson is sure to crop up. This man owned so many acres of land that when he abandoned the idea of building a second Tuxedo Park on the mountain, many of the adjoining estates acquired pieces of his gigantic holdings.

It was like the crowd circling the table at a wedding, on which the wedding cake had been placed.

The large 20-acre field that stretched from Old West Mountain Road to Round Pond, was once a part of Anderson's property, as was the land surrounding the pond itself. It is probably difficult to picture this field as ever having been open space. Many years have passed since the hay on this field has been cut.

Since that time, the field has become overrun with trees, and it now looks more like a forest than a hay field. I wish that I had a photograph of the hay being mowed by the four teams of horses previously mentioned. It would have made a picture that could never again be reproduced in Ridgefield.

At 262 West Mountain Road, where it intersects with Oreneca Road, there is a house that is part of the property owned by the Ridgefield Water Supply Company. This house is now the home of Terrance Knoche Jr. Just one of Terry's many duties is keeping the machinery at the pumping station in shape. The water is pumped from Round Pond to the large standpipe on another section of West Mountain. The water pressure in town is subject to the height of the water in the standpipe. *[Note: Round Pond stopped being used as a reservoir around 2002 when Bridgeport Hydraulic was the owner; in 2004, new owner Aquarion transferred the pond and surrounding lane to the state. The standpipe on Peaceable Ridge Road is still used for maintaining pressure.]*

This house was once the home of Leo Waite, who was then the guardian of the pumping station. Many years ago, it was the home of Ray Mansfield, who also watched over the pumps. Ray had a very pretty daughter named Helen, who was one of the very first ladies to work as a clerk in the Ridgefield Post Office when it was located where Addessi's Jewelry is now.

The name Round Pond stems from the fact that the pond is quite round. The reason for its roundness was explained one time by Leland Glidden, who was then president of the Ridgefield Water Supply Company. Mr. Glidden's theory was that, many years ago when the glacier was passing over West Mountain, a huge chunk of ice broke away from the main block and settled in this spot. Then, as the ice melted, it caused an action similar to that which would happen if a little ice cube was placed on a little mound of sand. *[These geological formations are called kettles.]*

It all sounded very reasonable and Mr. Glidden went on to explain that because of Round Pond's lofty elevation, there are no streams of water entering the pond. He pointed out that this fact eliminates the possibility of any undesirable debris being washed into the pond. This guarantees the high quality of water derived from the many fine springs that feed Round Pond.

One afternoon back in the 30's, I was mowing with my team at the nearby Bulkley estate. Irving Conklin stopped by and asked me to stop on my way home and mow a very small field near the pumping station.

I was aware of the size of the field and felt that I could mow it in less than an hour. However, unbeknownst to me, the field was studded with small pipes that had been driven into the ground whereas the hay was at least three feet tall. It was about 5 in the afternoon when I arrived at the little field, confident that I would continue my way home by 6.

After mowing only a few feet there was a crackling of the knives in the cutting bar and I knew that I was in trouble. We always carried many spare knives and rivets, so that repairs could be made right on the spot. The repair jobs were numerous and by 9 p.m. the knives and rivets had all been used.

The trip home was an unforgettable experience. My team of Belgians, Kit and Lady, were young at the time, and until the previous spring, had never even been harnessed.

It was a bright moonlit night, and the mares were not used to seeing their own shadows on the highway. All the way down the mountain, they jumped one way and then the other trying to avoid the outline that they saw on the pavement. It was a trip to remember.

One of the greatest of Ridgefield's numerous mansions is just a little farther on, at 50 Oreneca Road. It is now the home of the Harrison D. Horblits. The great stone mansion and matching superintendent's house and the matching classic entrance which we like to refer to as the Clydesdale gateway, were built in the 20's by Philip Dakin Wagoner. The property had once belonged to the Lounsbury family and they left it to Jennie Rockwell, from whom it was acquired by Mr. Wagoner.

Philip D. Wagoner, whose friends called him P.D., was a very successful businessman. He was one of those who put together the Underwood Corporation, and he served for many years as president and chairman of the board of that very large firm.

P.D. spared nothing in the construction of this elegant estate. It was said the stones for the building were imported from France.

He intended to use the place during the summer months and on weekends, but never really got to enjoy the mansion for very long. Mrs. Wagoner died only a few years after the mansion was completed and P.D. was so devastated that most of his visits to the place were spent in the super's house.

Mr. Wagoner was an exceptionally fine man and it was he who passed on stock market tips to his barber Paul Laszig, when Paul had his shop where J.R. Interiors is now at 3 1/2 Catoonah Street. Paul, like most barbers, was a good conversationalist, but more important, he was a good listener.

While cutting P.D.'s hair, Paul would start by talking of the news of the day but soon switched to financial matters and then listened to the words of wisdom. That his methods paid off

is proved by the very generous sums of money that Paul's wife, Imgard Johanna Laszig, left in trust, for Meals on Wheels, the Thrift Shop and other worthy organizations.

It always annoyed P.D., on his visits to the town hall, to see that the typewriters used there were Royals and Remingtons, so he gave several Underwoods to the town. He also did considerable business with what is now Union Trust. The bank had only one Underwood and Gus Grennan said that when they saw P.D. coming, the other typewriters were pushed under the counters and the Underwood was put on display.

#275: HOW ICE WAS HARVESTED IN THE ERA OF THE ICEBOX

In telling about Harrison D. Horblit's beautiful estate, it should be noted that when P.D. Wagoner bought the property back in the 20's, there were two buildings on the place. Jenny Rockwell had a small house that sat where the mansion is now, and there was an ice house that sat right on the shore of Round Pond.

Joseph W. Hibbart stored his ice here when he carried on an ice business as well as a meat and grocery store at 424 Main Street, where Cappiello's Jewelry Store is now.

In the days before electric refrigeration, the harvesting of ice from our local ponds was quite a large operation. The winters seem to have been much colder and the ice much thicker in those days.

In cutting the ice into blocks, a gasoline powered engine was used and it was drawn back and forth across the pond by either a horse or a mule. Mr. Hibbart always used mules, as they were generally lighter than a horse and less likely to break through the ice.

The engine ran a circular saw, similar to the one now used to cut through the surface of a highway when an excavation is to be made. The saw was set to cut to within a couple of inches of the water beneath the ice. In other words, if the ice happened to be a foot in thickness, the saw would cut 10 inches deep. This was called scoring the ice into cakes, and they could weigh as much as 300 pounds.

The ice machine had handles for the driver to guide the saw and they were similar to those used on a plow. On one handle of the machine there was a rope that was attached to the whiffletree. If the mule should break through the ice, and this was not an unusual happening, the driver would yank on the rope and release the mule from the machine.

If the pond on which the ice was being harvested was fed by springs, the thickness of the ice could vary. If the ice was a foot thick where the scoring started, it could be only 10 inches thick where the spring was located. This was sure to provide a dunking in the icy water for the mule and sometimes the machine as well.

When this happened a second mule joined in the rescue operations. A lasso was thrown over the head of the unhappy mule and its partner then pulled him to safety.

There were times when the rescue operations were not successful, and the mule was lost. As far as I know, this never happened at Round Pond, but there were one or two accidents at New Pond, just off New Street, where the mules were lost.

When the saw also went into the water, of course, it sank to the bottom of the pond and had to be retrieved by using grappling hooks.

The disaster was complete when the mule, the saw and the driver all took an icy bath together. However, I am happy to report that no driver was ever lost.

After the scoring of the ice was completed, the remaining two inches of ice was cut with a very large and very long hand-saw, made especially for this purpose. The cakes of ice were sometimes separated by use of a very long iron rod that had a flat end, similar to a huge chisel.

As the cakes of ice were separated and floated freely, they were then guided toward the ice house by use of a long wooden pike. The pike had a metal hook on its end and this aided in pushing the cakes of ice up a chute that stretched from the shore of the pond to the door of the ice house.

The men working in the ice house then packed the ice away, using sawdust between the cakes to prevent them from sticking together.

The harvesting of the ice was very hard work, and the tools that were used were rather primitive.

Incidentally, there is an excellent collection of ice tools on display at John Girolmetti's Old Ice House Restaurant. Johnny's father, Mario, was one of the very last ice men to operate in Ridgefield, as were Nanny Lavatori and Charley Russell.

Charley is still around, at age 97, and he remembers me as a kid riding with him on his ice wagon.

Sixty years ago the old icebox was giving way to the electric refrigerator. There was even a refrigerator that ran by gas. I think it was a Philco, but it never became as popular as those that used electricity. Every once in a while, one of the old-fashioned iceboxes will show up at an auction or tag sale. People use them today, as storage chests, or as conversation pieces.

Old-timers still refer to the electric refrigerators as iceboxes. Those early refrigerators seemed to last much longer than their modern counterparts.

At any rate, the old ice house at Round Pond and the small dwelling that stood nearby were both removed to make room for the elegant mansion that now graces that beautiful estate.

I guess that there are no longer any ice houses standing in Ridgefield. One of the last to disappear was one that belonged on Dr. George G. Shelton's estate. It stood on West Lane, on the left just as you reach the New York state line.

Patrick and Alice Garrard now live at 50 Oreneca Road, in the fine cut stone house that was originally intended to be the superintendent's house on the P.D. Wagoner estate. I do not think it was ever used for that purpose, as Mr. Wagoner lived there himself for some time.

A little farther on, at 94 Oreneca Road, is the home of Orris and Betty Stark. This very nice house was home to the John Duncan family, when John Sr. was superintendent on the Wagoner estate. Later it became the home of another super, Andrew Brady, his wife Margaret and their children, Patricia and Andrew Jr.

The younger Andy is now in Portland, Maine, where he is employed by the U.S. Postal Service, and Pat, who is now Mrs. Franklin Shaw, is still performing her duties as a disciple of Florence Nightingale.

The senior Andrew Brady had been the superintendent for Sidney Farrar when Sidney had his estate on North Salem Road. Sid had been the first baseman for the Philadelphia Phillies, back in the 1890's. Of more importance was that he was the father of the famous Geraldine Farrar, who was best known as one of the very greatest of all the Metropolitan Opera stars.

From this point we enter the great Bulkley estate, better known today as the Randolph estate. This is perhaps the largest of all the great showplaces that Ridgefield had to offer. Its

hundreds of acres extend well over into New York state and include the famous Sarah Bishop Cave and once had the equally famous “Swinging Bridge.”

#276: THE VIEW FROM THE TOP

It was at the dawning of the 20th Century that Jonathan Bulkley and his family came to Ridgefield. It must have been pretty wild on craggy old West Mountain, when Mr. Bulkley started to amass hundreds of acres that would make up his great estate.

Rippowam Farm, as it was called, had very little level land and even less that was suitable for farming. However, a farm was just about a necessity on any large estate and Mr. Bulkley set right to work at clearing the land and leveling it for farm use.

A great amount of the acreage that made up the estate was acquired from the Mead family that lived in neighboring South Salem. The Meads were probably the owners of the greatest amount of land at the time in that area. [Thomas H. Mead called his mansion “Rippowam.”] I believe they owned a lot of land around Lake Waccabuc and where Waccabuc Country Club is now. Further north, the largest owners of property were Ogden Mills and Henry B. Anderson.

A great part of the Bulkley estate was once involved in a dispute between the states of New York and Connecticut that went on for more than 200 years. Trouble between the states erupted soon after the boundaries were established in 1664, and continued, periodically, until a settlement was ratified by the legislatures of both states, and then by the Congress about 100 years ago. The dispute seemed to be fomented by the towns of Stamford and Greenwich and their desire to remain as part of Connecticut and New York State’s desire to own the lakes at Waccabuc.

The difference of opinion in the matter was focused on a large tract of land that was known as “The Oblong” because of its shape. Since it encompassed some 62,000 acres, it was no small matter.

At any rate, in the settlement, Ridgefield lost the very picturesque lakes at Waccabuc, Peach Lake, and a freak of nature in North Salem that was called “Boulder Stone.” This huge piece of granite was deposited on five smaller stones by the same glacier that gave us our present water supply at Round Pond. I guess we should credit that same glacier for the many hills and vales that add so much to the beauty of Ridgefield.

In the process of the settlement, the big towns of Stamford and Greenwich apparently gained the land that they sought. They also remained a part of Connecticut, and the state itself was provided with the little toe that protrudes from its southwest corner.

Years ago, as you entered the Bulkley estate from Oreneca Road, there were several houses that provided homes for some of the families that were employed on the estate. Only one of these houses remains, and it is the home of Gary Vozzo and his family. Gary is now the superintendent on the estate. One of the houses was moved some years ago to Danbury Aod, where it now sits on the corner of Limestone Road, just south of the Limestone Service Station. It does seem that more houses in Ridgefield have been moved from their original location than in any other town in the area.

George Beard was the superintendent for the Bulkley family during the period of which I am writing. George enjoyed a fine reputation as a horticulturist, and displays that he exhibited

won many prizes at the flower shows. The large estates in Ridgefield were well known for the excellent displays that they entered in area flower shows and the big show in New York City as well.

To add to the prestige that was enjoyed by our town in botanical circles, in 1934 Mrs. Jonathan Bulkley was elected the president of the Garden Clubs of America.

To add to the natural beauty of his estate, Jonathan Bulkley had thousands of rhododendrons planted through the wooded areas and along the driveways. Someone must have sent word to the great herds of deer that roam about on the Pound Ridge Reservation. At any rate, it was not long before the deer descended on Rippowam Farm in droves. During their visits, the deer played havoc with the beautiful shrubs and presented George Beard with a very serious problem.

His plight was duly noted in an article that appeared in *The Ridgefield Press*. *The Press*, even in those days, had a very wide circulation among people who, for whatever reason, found it necessary to move from Ridgefield. These people wanted very much to keep in touch with their favorite town. Therefore, it was not surprising 50 years ago when a lady in the state of Washington read in *The Press* that George was having difficulties in protecting his shrubbery from the deer.

When a person's problem is made public, someone is almost sure to come up with a solution. The lady in Washington wrote a letter to the editor, in which she told of how a similar situation had occurred out on the West Coast. She told of how the deer had been discouraged by simply scattering camphor balls around the rhododendrons.

Perhaps the lady was thinking about a shrub or two, rather than the thousands at Rippowam Farm. However, George Beard was willing to try anything and he must have bought a truckload of camphor balls. I am not sure of how successful the experiment was, but it was said that there were no moths on West Mountain for a long, long time.

Jonathan Bulkley was the senior partner in Bulkley, Dunton & Company. This was a firm that manufactured paper, and it was founded by Mr. Bulkley's father in 1833.

Jonathan joined his father's firm right after graduating from Yale in 1879. He progressed rapidly in the business, and became a director in more than a dozen paper companies. Bulkley & Dunton had their offices on Madison Avenue in New York City.

Jonathan married the former Sarah L. Tod and they lived at 600 Park Avenue. Mr. Bulkley built his Ridgefield mansion at a very high point of land, with an excellent view to the west. It overlooks the lakes at Waccabuc, and much of the land that was taken from Ridgefield, in the settlement that has been mentioned. Since a large portion of his land extended into New York state, it may have been his way of reclaiming some of those many acres.

#277: THE SAGA OF SARAH BISHOP & HER CAVE

As you travel along Oreneca Road, a narrow one-lane road branches off to the north. This road leads to the Girl Scout Camp that nestles high on the mountain.

Some years ago, Earl Sturges and Warren Keeler donated a large tract to the Girl Scouts with the aim of allowing them to have a camp.

[To the south runs Rippowam Road and the Bulkley-Randolph estate, Rippowam Farm.]

Francis F. Randolph Jr, is now the owner of the great estate and it is with a feeling of gratefulness that I recall the tremendous help he was to me when I was chairman of Ridgefield's 275th Anniversary fete.

No account of the old Bulkley estate would be complete without telling about Sarah Bishop and her cave.

Most everyone is familiar with the tragic story of Ridgefield's most famous hermitess, but for those who are not, I will briefly tell it again. By so doing, I will combine the stories of historian George L. Rockwell and Samuel Goodrich (Peter Parley).

Mr. Goodrich's story was gathered first hand, as he actually knew Sarah Bishop. On several occasions she was an overnight guest of the Goodrich family on High Ridge. The place is known as "The Peter Parley House" and is now the residence of the Preston Bassetts.

My columns have dealt primarily with Ridgefield as it was in the 20's and 30's, but the saga of Sarah Bishop goes back 200 years. It seems generally agreed that this mysterious woman came from a good family and grew up on Long Island.

It was extremely difficult to get Sarah to tell about her early life, but bits of information, elicited during her more talkative moments, give reason to believe that her life as a hermitess was caused by a love affair that went sour. It was not a very romantic story. Sarah Bishop, as the story goes, fell in love as a young woman with a sea captain (possibly British). As the date for the wedding drew near, the captain just disappeared and Sarah soon learned that she had been jilted.

It apparently had a devastating effect. The poor woman went into a state of deep depression that worsened greatly when marauding British troops visited her town on Long Island. The soldiers destroyed the town and in the process burned the Bishop family home.

Before leaving the town, the invading troops caused Sarah to suffer "a fate worse than death."

Whether or not Sarah Bishop was the sole survivor of her family is not known. However, when the despicable raid was over, Sarah left the island. How long she wandered through the wilderness is also unknown, but at some point in time she arrived in Ridgefield.

She then made her way to West Mountain and found a spot that offered an excellent view of the area of Long Island where she had lived. After the heartbreak which she had suffered there, it would seem that she would not want to ever see Long Island again.

At any rate, high on the mountain, Sarah discovered a small cave that is just over the line in New York state, and it was here that her incredible story of survival began. The cave is located just a couple of hundred yards north of the Randolph mansion.

Sarah Bishop's cave is just as much a freak of nature as North Salem's "Boulder Staone." Certainly, it is not man-made, as it would have been impossible to arrange the huge stones that form the cave without the aid of the most modern machinery. It would be difficult to assemble the stones, even with today's sophisticated construction equipment, if such machinery could ever be transported to this rugged and craggy area.

So we can credit the great glacier for providing Sarah Bishop with this unique shelter, in which she would live out her meager existence.

Only a person with a vivid imagination can visualize this poor lady living in this little stone cavern for a dozen years or more. Yet, it is a historical fact that Sarah was able to brave the elements during those years until her death in 1810.

During her tenure on this mountain retreat, Sarah Bishop lived on berries and fruits and produce from a little garden that she cultivated. This was all fine during the summer months, but winters must have been a very horrible experience.

Goodrich, in his poem about the hermitess, notes that Sarah used to sit outside her cave, surrounded by her animal friends. He tells of how a fox would approach, close enough to nip at her fingers, and now the flapping wings of an eagle overhead caused a draft that fanned her long gray hair. He also depicts a crow sitting atop her head and a rattlesnake coiled in her lap. No doubt her gentle manner caused these animals to place their trust in her.

It was said that Sarah Bishop was a religious person and attended services at the Congregational Church, where the senior Rev. Samuel Goodrich was pastor. The junior Goodrich tells of how, when she was an overnight guest at the Goodrich home, Sarah would refuse to eat at the table with the family. No doubt this was to avoid conversation, with resulting questions. He said that though she accepted gifts, she would never beg.

There is a house in South Salem on the corner of Waccabuc Road that is still owned by the Hoyt family, and Sarah used to keep some fine clothes there with the Jared Hoyt family. She would change from her bedraggled, everyday clothing, to which she would return after attending church.

It was on a return trip from South Salem on a cold winter night that Sarah stumbled and fell to the ground. She may have suffered some kind of attack. At any rate, Sarah was found there by neighbors. She had frozen to death and was buried in the cemetery in an unmarked grave at North Salem. Sarah Bishop took with her a dramatic story that would surpass most of those seen on our TV screens today.

#278: THE ONCE-FAMOUS 'SWINGING BRIDGE'

On the return trip from our walk to Sarah Bishop's Cave, we again pass the great mansion that Jonathan Bulkley built so many years ago. It is not as large as it once was, but it is still a very impressive structure.

Jonathan's daughter, Sarah Bulkley Randolph, decided back in the early 50s that the place was much larger than she needed. The result was that the great ballroom and servants' quarters, as well as an archway that crossed the driveway, were removed.

To walk the distance through the heavily wooded area from the cave to the mansion is like taking a journey that in ten minutes would span two centuries. You feel like you have been in a time capsule.

Once back in the present time, your attention is attracted to the magnificent view to the west. It is a peaceful scene that stretches across the valley and over the three lakes, Rippowam, Oscaleta, and Waccabuc.

Very few houses can be seen, as most of them are hidden by the many trees that blanket the landscape. The trees also shield every roadway, and no movement of any traffic is evident. You could easily get the feeling that you are in another world.

While gazing at this delightful rural picture, you might find yourself tempted to forget that only a couple of miles away, the main highways of Ridgefield are clogged with many hundreds of automobiles. To the east of the mansion are the garages, gardens and gardener's cottage.

Speaking of the gardeners, we are reminded of the many people who were employed on this great estate, through the years.

Just last week, The Press, in its 25 Years ago column, noted that William Roy had won several prizes for displays that he exhibited in the show under the "Big Top" at the Great Danbury Fair. At the time, Bill Roy was the gardener for Miss Emily Buch, when she lived at 212 Main Street (now the home of George J. Goodstadt and his family). Bill had previously been the head gardener at Bulkley's Rippowam Farm.

When a team wins the World Series or the SuperBowl, it is customary to give much credit to the manager, rather than the team players. In much the same way, a superintendent would receive the accolades when the gladioli, the dahlias or roses from the estate he managed won the blue ribbons at a flower show.

It was in this vein that a while ago, we gave credit to George Beard for prize winning entries from the Bulkley estate, when he was the superintendent at Rippowam Farm. Actually it was Bill Roy and his expertise in botany who developed and cared for the beautiful prize winning flowers. Bill has long since moved to Florida.

According to Bill Jr., better known as "Ike," the trophies that his father won were many and he still has them in his Florida home, which is overflowing with them. It is worthy of note that many years after Bill Roy left Rippowam Farm, his son Ike returned to that fabulous place, where he was employed for several years by Frank Randolph, the present owner. Ike is now in charge at the Henry J. Leir estate.

As you descend the winding driveway, from the mansion to Oreneca Road and thence to Rippowam Road, you will pass the Tod Bulkley estate. It lies just to the south and between Rippowam and West Mountain Roads. This all had been a part of Jonathan Bulkley's estate, until his son Tod built his nice home there more than half a century ago.

Both Tod and Mrs. Bulkley have now passed on, and their fine estate is now in the process of being developed. It is neither a pretty sight to see the great trees falling in front of the bulldozer, nor pleasant to hear the quietness of the forest being shattered by the roar of engines.

On Rippowam Road, across the way from the rear entrance to the Tod Bulkley estate, there is a break in the stone wall that lines the road. There used to be a path from this spot, that led to the famous "Swinging Bridge."

This great curiosity was a creation of Jonathan Bulkley's very fertile mind. Apparently Mr. Bulkley had been thinking about this project for some time, as it was no spur-of-the-moment idea.

At any rate it was at the close of World War I that he approached a New York firm about the possibility of building this bridge over a deep chasm. It took a lot of planning, as safety was of the utmost importance. [Some sources say work took place in 1913.]

Mr. Bulkley's plan was to build a bridge from a rocky cliff at the front of his mansion, and wrap it around a gigantic oak tree. stood in the middle of the ravine. It would take some skillful engineering.

A heavy metal band was fashioned to fit around the tree near its top. Five large chains were then attached to the metal band. The chains were then fastened to a bench that encircled the tree. The bench and the bridge were made of wood, as were the hand rails that went along on either side of the bridge, as it spanned the ravine.

The bridge was more than 100 feet in length, and it was some 40 feet above the ground at the tree end. At one place, it was 60 feet above the floor of the ravine.

A space was left at the tree where the bench encircled it. This provided for the expansion of the tree and allowed the bridge to sway a few inches. Thus, the name "Swinging Bridge."

The bridge must have attracted thousands of visitors through the years, as word of it circulated around the countryside. It was especially popular with young lovers, who enjoyed sitting on the bench and gazing at the lakes in the distance.

After 20 years the bridge showed signs that it was ready to succumb to the elements and there was some question as to whether it should be repaired or removed. Many people were happy when the decision was made to repair the bridge and John Walters was engaged to do the job. So the Swinging Bridge received a reprieve and it lasted another dozen years, until it was taken down.

The bridge was a novelty the likes of which Ridgefield will never have again. It carried the initials of many people and I seem to remember that R.E.V. appeared on the guard rail as the bench curled around the tree.

#279: MASTERS AND SUPERS OF IRADELL FARM

As we continue to travel down Rippowam Road, and approach West Mountain Road, we come to Iradel Farm, the beautiful estate of Mrs. Consuela Vanderbilt Earl.

Iradel has been one of Ridgefield's showplaces for many years. Back in the 30's, this place was a beehive of activity. It was at that time that Clarence P. Wyckoff brought his family to Ridgefield.

Mr. Wyckoff was a native New Yorker, but was educated in England at Harrow and Cambridge. They must have been the right schools for him for he became a very wealthy man.

After his schooling, Mr. Wyckoff returned to this country and went to work on Wall Street. He went up the ladder to success quite rapidly and soon became a member of the New York Stock Exchange.

It was right after the Wall Street crash of '29 that the Wyckoffs came to Ridgefield. The crash had caused a lot of belt tightening and many of the wealthy families had to change their style of living.

However, the Wyckoffs seemed to be relatively unaffected and that proved to be a great benefit to local people who were seeking employment. Mr. Wyckoff did very much to shape the beautiful place that Iradel Farm is today and in the process, gave work to a lot of people.

When Clarence Wyckoff was not busy making his fortune, he spent a lot of time collecting rare and valuable books. One of the features of his fine mansion was a library that was carefully stocked.

Unfortunately, Mr. Wyckoff did not have much chance to enjoy his new home, as he died only three years after coming here. Mrs. Wyckoff and the children stayed for a few years after his passing and then sold the place to the Wildenstein family.

I did not get to know the Wildensteins, but I am sure that they were also very wealthy. Dennis Lynch was their superintendent and told me how the bluestone driveways had to be raked daily, whether or not they had been used. They must have worn out a lot of rakes on those drives.

When the Earls came to Iradel in the early 50's, Aiken Knox replaced Dennis as superintendent, and gave the great place his tender loving care until he passed on, just a few years ago.

The word superintendent seems to crop up in this column quite often, but they were an integral part of the history of the great estates. They were sometimes referred to as "caretakers," especially if they did not have others on the place to supervise.

They were a special breed as they must not only possess a thorough knowledge of the operation of an estate, but have some experience as a politician and a diplomat as well.

It was a position that was much sought after, as it generally provided a nice cottage to live in, as well as produce from the garden and a good salary. Some were even supplied with an auto for their own use. It was a position that was considered respectable and in some cases quite lucrative.

If the work force on a large estate was of sizable proportions, many a super found himself in trouble if he could not control his workers, while at the same time keeping his employers happy. While many of the superintendents retained their positions for many years, there were those estates where the turnover was great. They were like the manager of a baseball team, although unlike Billy Martin, once they were gone they did not come back.

Diplomacy had to be used when the master decided he wanted roses planted in a section of the garden where the madam had already instructed the super to plant her favorite tulips. On such an occasion, the super had better know which one of his bosses to please.

Before the Earls came to Ridgefield, Colonel Earl had served in the Army in both World War I and World War II. During the latter conflict he was honored with the Legion of Merit, and a special citation from the Secretary of War.

He was an active man and following his army career, served as a consultant to the Howard Johnson restaurant chain. He was also a director for the Division of Trade Bank and Trust, the Commonwealth United Corp., the Child's Company, and Sherry Inc.

Mrs. Earl is a direct descendant of the famous "Commodore" Cornelius Vanderbilt. At Iradel she has maintained a large kennel of show dogs. At one time she raised miniature farm animals and it was a real treat to see the tiny cows, horses and goats, as they cavorted in their paddocks. Another curiosity was a little hen that laid blue eggs. They came in very handy at Easter time.

#280: MR. BUNKER AND HIS ESTATE

Traveling east on West Mountain Road from the New York state line just a half century ago, you would not see a house until you were almost at the top of that long steep hill. In fact, there were no structures of any kind until you came to William Bunker's barn.

The barn was an exceptionally fine building, in which Mr. Bunker kept several horses and a couple of milk cows. In recent years, the barn has been converted into a very nice house, and is now the home of Frank A. MacManus and his family at 269 West Mountain Road. It is one

of the finest examples of how a barn can be made into a nice dwelling that Ridgefield has to offer.

Just above this house is another example of the same. This is 257 West Mountain Road; this very pretty house was once William Bunker's carriage house. This building once sheltered some of the finest carriages to be found anywhere in the area. It is now the home of Pierre Vallez and his family.

The Vallez residence is not just an ordinary building, it is an architectural gem. Like everything else that William Bunker did, this location is high enough on the mountainside to offer a fine view of the surrounding country to the west.

Just a little higher on the mountain is 253 West Mountain Road. This is the home of Minosh Mural and this fine mansion, as well as the former carriage house and barn, was built by William Bunker, just before the turn of the century.

The mansion sets a considerable distance back on the mountainside and cannot be seen from the highway when the leaves are on the trees. Its location provides an excellent view of the lakes, Waccabuc, Oscaleta and Rippowam, and beyond.

The Press recently carried a picture of the lakes that, I believe, could have been taken from this vantage point.

Mr. Bunker came here from New York City, where he conducted a produce business. He did not wait to retire before making his home in Ridgefield. In fact, he was still in his 30's when he arrived here and started to buy the land on which to build his estate. Therefore, it is fair to assume that he had been more than moderately successful in his large produce business.

He loved Ridgefield and his idea of relaxation was to ride about on our country roads. He enjoyed driving his own horses, although he had a coachman who was kept for the purpose of transporting Mrs. Bunker around the town.

After William Bunker passed on in the early 40's, the estate was purchased by Edward Schreyer. I am not sure what Mr. Schreyer's main source of income was before he came to Ridgefield. However, after his arrival, he established a workshop in which he spent a lot of time doing experiments and putting some of his many ideas to work.

Mr. Schreyer invented numerous household gadgets and it was said that he perfected the steam iron. He was also credited with inventing one of the early electric razors. The story was that it was one of the best razors at the time and that it was eventually sold to the Schick Razor Company.

The Schreyers stayed only about 10 years and then the place was sold to Robert C. Weinberg. Mr. Weinberg also came here from New York, where he had served in several capacities. After graduating from Harvard, with a degree in architecture, he worked at his chosen profession, in the office of a large architectural company.

After a few years. Mr. Weinberg opened his own firm and became a fellow of The American Society of Architects. Somewhere along the line, Mr. Weinberg became interested in city planning, and devoted much of his time to this occupation. His talents were quickly recognized and he was appointed to New York City's Planning Board, as a consultant.

He was involved in several of New York's great housing projects, including the large apartment house complex at Riverdale, in the Bronx. At one time, Mr. Weinberg served as adjunct professor of planning at New York University.

He also spoke on planning for several years on a regular radio program over station WNYC. In later years, he was a consultant to the Stamford, Connecticut Planning Board.

I would guess that the planning of the William Bunker estate was what attracted Mr. Weinberg, and of course the huge mansion, which is an architectural gem. The buildings were all erected at a time when excellent builders were available.

Mr. Weinberg always decried the fact that everything had to be done in such a hurry today, that builders cannot spend the time to produce the fine buildings of yesteryears.

After his arrival in Ridgefield, Mr. Weinberg lost little time in making his presence known and soon he was offering his advice to our local planners. He certainly had the credentials and his advice, which was given mostly at Town Meetings or public hearings, was given without charge. Sorry to say that much of his advice was ignored.

A number of years ago, when the police station was in the basement of town hall, and more space was needed for efficient operation, Mr. Weinberg came up with a rather novel idea that would cause an addition to the building. The addition would be built on columns and would extend it over the present parking lot at the rear of the building, leaving the space or parking, as it is now.

His idea was to keep the town government and all of its operations in the center of the town. He felt strongly on this matter and never hesitated to express his opinion on the matter.

He also was an advocate of Regional Planning and felt that towns should combine in their plans as they would know their respective needs better than someone in Hartford. He believed in more local control and less state control, and on this we definitely agree with him.

In his busy life Mr. Weinberg found time to write several books on planning that could be put to very good use today.

#281: HOUDINI & SUNSET HILL AND HALL

Old West Mountain Road stretches along the top of one of the several ridges that are a part of Ridgefield's mountainous region. In the process, it serves as the connecting link between West Mountain Road and Barrack Hill Road.

During the period of which I am writing, very few people lived on this old road. As a matter of fact, there were only three houses on the southeast side for the entire length of Old West Mountain Road. They were the homes of some of those who were employed on the John Hampton Lynch estate and were mentioned in a previous column.

The only other structure on that side of the highway was the great barn that housed the livestock on the Lynch farm.

Only one of the three original houses remains, and the large barn has been transformed by Leonard and Madeleine Corbin into as fine a dwelling as can be found in the area.

The rest of the land on that side of the highway, and all the way to Barrack Hill Road, was a part of the Arthur C. Fraser estate. That fact alone was sufficient to insure that there would be no more buildings on that side of the road, at least in Mr. Fraser's lifetime. He was a man who thoroughly enjoyed his privacy.

The hundreds of acres of rugged woodland on the northwest side of Old West Mountain Road were all a part of the Port of Missing Men properties. This great tract of land had been accumulated before and after the turn of the century by Henry B. Anderson. Mr. Anderson was a

man with great ideas, and he had planned to establish a resort area here, similar to the one at Tuxedo Park over in New York State.

Mr. Anderson's holdings in Connecticut consisted of several hundred acres, but he had even twice as much land over the state line. After constructing his famous inn, and his own palatial mansion atop Titicus Mountain, Mr. Anderson intended to build a gigantic country club in the same area.

It was about 1910 that James A. Stokes joined the many notables who visited the Port of Missing Men, and like so many others, he was smitten by the great natural beauty of the surrounding countryside. Mr. Stokes must have been a man of great persuasion, for he was able to talk H.B. Anderson into parting with some of his most desirable land. Mr. Stokes purchased one of the highest points of land in Anderson's almost 2,000-acre empire.

James Stokes lost no time in starting the construction of the magnificent mansion that is now the home of Robert and Linda Vaughn and their family.

For many years, the Stokes mansion, and its outbuildings, including the homes for some of the employees on the estate, were the only buildings for the entire length of the northwest side of Old West Mountain Road. From its lofty perch on the mountain top, the mansion affords a view of the countryside that can only be described as spectacular. It is agreed by some of the old timers who worked on the estate, that prior to the age of pollution, when the atmosphere was clear, it was possible, with the aid of good glasses, to see the Empire State Building from the lawn on the west side of the mansion. [In the 1970s at least, you could see the skyline of Manhattan from Sunset Hall's widow's walk.]

In the 30's there was a giant dirigible, the Los Angeles, and on one of its trips, it flew from Lakehurst, New Jersey, to Albany, New York. In its flights, the dirigible followed a path along the Hudson River, and men who were painting the mansion at the time were able to see the great airship for several hours, as it sailed along its way.

After a few years, James Stokes sold the great estate that he had named Sunset Hill, to [the wife of] Dr. Leopold Weiss. Dr. Weiss was a brother of the famous magician and escape artist, Harry Houdini.

Houdini's real name was [Erich] Weiss and he and his wife spent many weekends at his brother's Ridgefield home. I recall seeing him as he shopped in the local stores on a Saturday morning. On one occasion I sold Houdini a Ridgefield Press, and that was in the days before it carried Dick's Dispatch. [Later research indicates Houdini's visits to Sunset Hall were probably very rare; the magician hated his sister-in-law, Sadie Glanz Weiss, a Manhattan fashion executive who actually owned the house, not her husband. Houdini was also estranged from his brother. The reason? Sadie Glanz had been married to Nathan Weiss, brother of Erich and Leopold, divorced Nathan, and 10 days later, married Leopold. Houdini was heartbroken as well as furious over what he considered scandalous mistreatment of Nathan. "Houdini's displeasure took many forms, including cutting Leo's head out of family portraits and forbidding his burial in the Weiss family plot," said John Cox, a longtime student of Houdini.]

Houdini was regarded by many to be the greatest of all magicians, and his success as an escape artist was little short of phenomenal. Millions of people must have stared in amazement as he performed his death defying stunts. One that was particularly daring was when he allowed himself to be tightly chained and placed in a large bag which was locked shut. The bag was then

lowered into a body of water, like the Hudson River, and in a matter of minutes Houdini managed to free himself and rise to the surface.

It is ironic that just two weeks ago at Halloween marked the 51st anniversary of Harry Houdini's death. He was in the middle of famous escape acts when he was somehow struck a blow in the abdomen. There were many who thought that foul play was involved in the accident, but it was never proven.

At any rate Houdini's appendix was ruptured and though he was rushed to a hospital, peritonitis had set in. It proved to be an obstacle that even the great Houdini could not overcome.

After his death, Mrs. Houdini made several attempts over the years to communicate with him through a spiritualistic medium, without success. Houdini left his vast collection of magic secrets and his methods of escape to another brother, Dr. Theodore Franz Weiss. The brother was also a magician and operated under the stage name "Hardeen."

Sunset Hill became Sunset Hall in the early 30's, when the Cutten family took over the estate. Mr. Cutten headed one of the large oil companies. I think it was Sinclair, but I am not sure. One thing I am sure of and that is that Mrs. Cutten was known as "Sunny" and she was a singer and a good one.

The Cuttens did a lot of renovating to the place, both inside and out. It seemed like an army of men were employed, between Peter McManus on the interior and Raymond Keeler on the exterior.

#282: SUNNY CUTTEN GILDS THE SUNSET HALL LILY

Sunny Cutten had some very definite ideas as to how Sunset Hall, her luxurious mansion on Old West Mountain Road, should look. Her husband gave her a free rein and it was under Sunny's direction that many changes were made to the very imposing mansion.

The big structure was soon to become even larger and has so many rooms that a person could get lost in it. Every room would reflect Sunny's taste in interior decorating and she had good taste. That fact, coupled with an attitude that cost was no object, assured that this place would become something special.

Because of Sunny's musical background, much attention was given to the music room, or ballroom as it is sometimes called. It was all part of a large addition, which the Cuttens added to the south end of the building. This absolutely beautiful room, with its high 16 foot ceiling has very large glass doors that open onto the swimming pool. The floor is done in imported Italian marble of various colors.

A later owner covered the floor with a huge white rug that had tendrils three or four inches long, and a rake was used on it, in preference to a vacuum cleaner.

This room has one of the very finest fireplaces that I have ever seen. It is not only pretty, it is large and it works.

In one corner of this magnificent room there was a concert grand piano, and you just know it was a Steinway. Here in this room, Sunny Cutten could sing and play the piano to her heart's content, surrounded by pictures of herself in various stage roles.

I have no idea how much the Cuttens spent in "gilding the lily" that was Sunset Hall. It must have been a fortune by the standards of that day.

The estate had grown in size through the years, as owners added acres of the wooded areas until it comprised about 100 acres. At one time a portion of the land was cleared and a three-hole golf course was constructed.

This was back in a time when a golf course was often referred to as golf links. To be sure, these links were not very long. However, it was said that due to the steep slopes in the area, you could get as much exercise on the three short holes as you would on a regulation nine-hole course.

In the mid 30's, a small pond was dug on the north side of the mansion, and a skeet shoot was constructed on one side of the was pond. Clay pigeons were hurled across the pond as the marksmen tested their ability with a shotgun.

I did the grading around this area, with my team Kit and Lady and a metal grading scoop. The little pond is still there, but the skeet shoot is overgrown with trees.

The Cuttens did an excellent job of landscaping around the mansion and the grounds were dotted with very exotic shrubbery, much of which was imported. Many of the shrubs and trees are still there today.

Lee Vance was the superintendent for the Cuttens, and he was a very busy man. He was also a very nice man and is fondly remembered by all who knew him.

Lee and Phyllis Vance had a very handsome son, Lee Jr., who was lost in World War II, as a member of the U.S. Marines. [Major Lee R. Vance Jr. was wounded in fighting in the Pacific, but survived the war only to die in 1952 in the Korean conflict.]

A huge retaining wall was built on the southwest side of the mansion. There are several such walls in Ridgefield, but I doubt that any would rise to the height of this one. The face of the wall is curved and as you look up at it, it is mindful of an ancient battlement.

On either side of the wall there is a long winding stairway, with flagstone steps. It is truly a work of art.

As World War II was winding down to a close, the nations of the world were tired of war and men of good will were seeking a means of preventing another such tragedy. Out of their deliberations came the idea of a United Nations.

An international committee was formed for the purpose of finding a suitable site for this peace seeking organization. Sunny Cutten was one of the first to offer her great estate for this noble purpose.

Many other sites were considered, across the land from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Then came the day when an almost endless parade of chauffeur-driven limousines descended on little old Ridgefield. The committee seemed to agree that Sunset Hall offered the peace and tranquility that it needed, and certainly there was sufficient space for its purpose.

Another Connecticut site, in Greenwich, received favorable consideration so Sunny enlisted the help of Connecticut's Senator Brian McMahon. Soon the caravan made a return trip to Ridgefield in early 1946, but at this point the Rockefeller family entered the picture and their New York site was chosen.

Ridgefield was a town of about 4,500 at the time and while there were those who would welcome the United Nations, many felt that their town would be overrun with foreigners. These people breathed a sigh of relief when it was decided to make New York the world's capitol.

When her efforts were unsuccessful, Sunny Cutten made up her mind to sell Sunset Hall to anyone with the means to purchase it. Along came Samuel Rubel and he not only had the means, he liked what he saw, especially the privacy that the great estate had to offer.

Rubel, a Russian immigrant, had made a fortune in the coal and ice business in New Jersey, and was anxious to get away from it all. He felt that Sunset Hall was just made to order for him.

It was said that Sam Rubel had so many works of art, before long the place began to look like a museum. It sure looked like a museum a few years later when I was selected as one of the appraisers for the estate.

The Rubels did a lot of entertaining and one of the surprises for his guests were slides, similar to those on a playground that went from the bedroom windows to the pool. This was before the day of heated pools so it is expected that those using the slide in the early morning would be fully awake by the time they reached the cool waters of the pool.

#283: THE RUBEL BARBECUE AND THE VAUGHN TALENT

When Samuel Rubel and his family moved into Sunset Hall in 1946, it was with the expectation of enjoying country living to its fullest. After years of the confinement of city life, they found the rural atmosphere much to their liking.

An integral part of the family's new lifestyle would be the opportunity to experience the joy of having a great barbecue in their peaceful surroundings. To them, nothing was more countrified than a real, old-fashioned barbecue, with large chunks of meat turning on a spit over a bed of very hot coals.

A very large barbecue pit was constructed at the south end of the swimming pool. It was made of stone, to match the great retaining wall that was previously described, and placed midway between the long winding stairways that flanked the wall.

The steps of the stairways were made of very smooth flagstone, and as everyone knows, flagstone can be very slippery, especially when it is the least bit wet. This was a fact that was apparently overlooked in placing the barbecue pit near the stairways.

During the very first barbecue session, grease from the grill spattered onto the flagstone steps, with the result that a very slippery situation was created. The first person that tried to descend to the lower level arrived at that point in record time. Much to his surprise, he landed in a very unceremonious sitting position.

I do not believe that the Rubels, in their stay at Sunset Hall, made any major changes in the great mansion. However, the practicality of this family surfaced during an oil shortage.

As the story goes, Mr. Rubel had connections that afforded an opportunity for the purchase of a large shipment of oil just before the oil shortage became acute. Taking advantage of the situation, two very large oil tanks were quickly lowered into the swimming pool and they were filled with several thousand gallons of oil.

It was considered a graphic example of self preservation, and Sunset Hall would remain warm.

Incidentally the name of the place was changed to Sachem Hill.

After Samuel Rubel passed on, the great place was placed on the market and I was appointed one of the appraisers by Judge Ralph Cramp. It was an interesting experience.

The contents of the mansion, including the many works of art, were so numerous that they were placed in book form. It was a very large book and along with a description of each article, there were fine pictures of the more beautiful items.

In a short time along came the Paulist Fathers. Their full name is Congregation of the Mission of St. Vincent DePaul. The great mansion retired members of the order.

It was while the Paulists were here that their Bishop O'Shea, who had been a prisoner of the Red Chinese for 20 years, was released. The bishop was very old and in very poor health when he arrived in Ridgefield. Unfortunately, he passed on before he had a chance to enjoy his new surroundings.

One of the missionary priests, Father Trotta, used to assist at Saint Mary's and was a great favorite of the parishioners.

The Paulist Fathers stayed about 10 years and then moved, I believe, to Pennsylvania. In August of 1969, William H. Ashplant became the new owner of what we still call Sunset Hall. I only met this family once, and they stayed here only a few years.

Ownership then went to Dr. James G. Katis. Dr. Katis did a considerable amount of work on the mansion in the way of plumbing and electrical work, but no extensive decorating. All of these people enjoyed the splendor of this magnificent estate, but none were as happy with it as the present owners, Robert and Linda Vaughn.

I would guess that most people would agree that nothing could be done to Sunset Hall to make it any more appealing, but the Vaughns have done just that. Each owner, in his or her own way, has done what they felt best in improving the already very impressive mansion. It has gone from a baronial edifice, to a musical palace, to a novitate and now it is a very livable home.

The first impression one gets on viewing the large mansion is that it is just too big for a family of four. That thought is quickly dispelled when a tour of the place is completed. Every room has its purpose and every room is used.

The decor is in such exquisite good taste that you know immediately that someone used excellent judgment. It turns out that the person responsible for all this is Linda Vaughn. Her hand is reflected in every one of the many rooms, all of which have been recently redecorated.

The reason for this is really quite simple when it is revealed that Mrs. Vaughn is an interior decorator. That she is an expert in her profession is quite obvious. I could easily run out of superlatives in describing the beauty of this incredible home.

In describing the talents of Linda Vaughn, I almost forgot that her husband is also quite talented. I guess most everyone has seen Robert Vaughn, either in the theater or on the television screen. Robert has appeared and starred in many major productions and is still very much in demand.

It is next to impossible to carry on a conversation with him, as the telephone rings constantly with offers from studios and requests for public appearances. He seems to thrive on a very busy lifestyle that would wear most people out very quickly. Through all of this he manages to remain his very amiable self.

Despite the many serious parts that Robert Vaughn has played he will probably be best known for his role as "The Man from U.N.C.L.E." Not surprisingly, when the Beatles first came to this country, their very first request was for the opportunity to meet The Man from U.N.C.L.E.

Of course, Robert graciously complied with the request.

#284: AN UNUSUAL WOMAN'S IRS BATTLES

In telling the story of Sunset Hall, it was noted that Harry Houdini was a weekend visitor to this fabulous estate. It was owned at the time by [Sadie Weiss, wife of] Dr Leopold Weiss, Houdini's brother.

Since then I have learned that my former good neighbor, Selma Goldwitz, was a cousin of the great Houdini. So, as they say, it's a small world and getting smaller fast. Selma and her husband Sam moved a few years ago, but had the good sense to stay in Ridgefield. They now live on Spring Valley Road, and as a further show of good sense, they still read *The Ridgefield Press*.

Several owners of Sunset Hall bought up surrounding properties until the estate comprised more than 100 acres. Then, in the 50's, like things that go up, the size of the place started to come down. Acreage along Old West Mountain Road was sold off, for choice building lots.

One of the first to buy a lot from the estate, was a woman [photographer, antiques dealer and one-time racecar driver Jacqueline Seligmann], who rumor had it, was a direct descendant of the notorious pirate Jean Laffite. As every pupil in our local schools must know, Laffite established headquarters in New Orleans in the very early part of the 19th Century. From this vantage point, he engaged in smuggling and piracy. At one time, he had more than 1,000 followers, most of whom were desperadoes.

Laffite's brother, Pierre, was an unscrupulous New Orleans merchant, and served as a fence for his ill-gotten goods. The brothers each were able to amass a fortune from their nefarious activities.

Jean Laffite showed good judgment when he decided to assist the United States in the Battle of New Orleans during the War of 1812. In exchange for his support, the pirate was pardoned by President James Madison. He must have been one of the first to receive a presidential pardon.

However, Laffite later returned to his career as a pirate. He specialized in Spanish shipping, but then made the mistake of attacking an American merchant vessel in 1820. The pardon was negated and warships were dispatched to the Gulf of Mexico. Even so, Laffite was allowed to escape, with many of his cut-throat followers.

There is no way of knowing whether any of Jean Laffite's genes were passed on to his descendants. [Alas, no connection between Laffite and the Seligmann family has been found.] However, it would be fair to say that the person who built her house on Old West Mountain Road was, at the least, rather extraordinary.

She always drove a rented auto that was loaded with so many of her belongings that the rear bumper almost touched the surface of the highway. She changed autos quite frequently and the transfer of her baggage must have been a monumental task.

It should be stated that among the many objects loaded into her auto, the most important were two very large briefcases. Actually they were more like suitcases, and their contents made them bulge at the seams.

Apparently, the cases were loaded with the woman's most valuable possessions, and she never left them out of her sight. They looked to be so heavy that it would take a strong man to

carry them. However, she handled them with ease and never left them in her car, even though she locked the car, while doing her shopping.

Each evening about 5, she would drive to the front of the post office, secure a Grand Union shopping cart, and load it with her briefcases. They would stay in the cart, under her watchful eye, while she did her business.

The woman had an unlisted telephone and would not accept delivery of mail at her home. She did have two post office boxes, and her last name ended with two N's. If a letter arrived with only one N, even though correctly addressed to one of the boxes, it was refused and returned.

On one occasion she mailed a registered letter to President John F. Kennedy, with a return receipt requested. It was apparent that she just wanted the President's signature. However, when the receipt was returned, it had been signed for by one of the presidential assistants, Arthur Schlesinger Jr.

The woman was furious and a terrible scene ensued. She refused to leave the post office, until there would be a guarantee that the President's personal signature would be forthcoming.

It was calmly explained to the woman that regulations in vogue at the time, allowed the President and the general of the army, to delegate the authority of signing a return receipt, to one of their subordinates.

It got to be closing time and the postmaster finally had to call the police, as the woman still refused to leave. The appearance of an officer was sufficient, peace was restored and everyone went home.

As a result of this incident, the IRS redoubled its efforts, and then came the day when a court appearance was ordered. The case was heard in New York, with the notable Judge John Murtagh presiding. A story in the N.Y. Daily News told of how a woman, carrying two enormous briefcases came dashing into the courtroom, yelling that she was an attorney and demanded the right to represent herself. The judge was so flustered, with his courtroom in utter chaos, that a mistrial was ordered.

It was rumored that the woman was very wealthy. However, according to the Internal Revenue Service, she suffered a mental lapse each spring, during which time she neglected to file an income tax return.

One December evening, at almost 6 o'clock, a handsome young IRS agent came to my office. He had spent considerable time without success trying to locate the residence of the woman.

After receiving proper directions as to how to get there, the agent quickly departed. He had only just disappeared, when I got the feeling that I should have warned him that he would not be dealing with an ordinary individual.

It was only a month later when another IRS agent, who had been assigned to the case, informed me of the young agent's harrowing experience. He was admitted to the house by the woman's companion, and was in conversation with her when suddenly the woman herself burst into the room. She was in a state of dishabille, and rushed at the young agent, while she screamed and accused the agent of the most abominable of crimes.

You can be sure that the agent was completely innocent. However, he had no witness, and because a complaint was lodged, he suffered two years' probation.

#285: THE ILLUSTRIOUS BRADLEYS, FATHER & DAUGHTER

In our trip along West Mountain Road, I bypassed one house that was built back in the middle 20's. This very attractive place was built by Mary Linda Bradley, and sits a considerable distance back from the highway.

Mary Linda really enjoyed her privacy. The long driveway leading to the residence is about 100 feet south of the entrance to Dr. Patrick Neligan's estate. The house was built to last, as its construction contains much stone work. There are also several retaining walls that are made of fieldstone.

Mary Linda Bradley came here from Chicago with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. William Harrison Bradley, and her sister, Marion Anna, just before the first World War. While their home was Chicago, they could have been properly called world travelers as they spent many years in foreign countries.

Mary Linda's father built his mansion on the southern end of West Mountain, with the main entrance on Peaceable Hill Road and a service entrance on Barry Avenue. The service entrance is now Woodcock Lane. The place was large enough to accommodate many people, but Mary Linda, who was a rather independent person, decided she would build a home of her own. Despite the fact that stones are quite plentiful in the area, many of the stones used in building Mary Linda's new home were trucked in from other places.

Miss Bradley never married and seemed to enjoy living alone in her mountain chateau, which she had named "Ackworth Cottage." In her younger years, she was quite athletic and participated in many sporting events. At one time she [was captain of] the [Katoonah Basket Ball Club].

She also had an avid interest in aviation in its early days. She was one of the first women to receive a pilot's license, and did extensive flying. Most of Mary Linda's flying was done in California and Arizona, two states that she visited quite frequently.

Many of her numerous ideas and feelings were expressed in verse. She wrote two books of poetry, one of which was inspired by her experiences while flying her airplane. She liked to write and never hesitated to express her views on local affairs, and matters that affected her adopted town.

In 1917, as her contribution to the war effort, Mary Linda Bradley organized and served as the first chairman of the local branch of the National League of Woman's Service.. These ladies valiantly performed their many duties until the local branch of Red Cross was formed following the war. Mary Linda also chaired the Ridgefield Committee on Home Economics, another important part of the war effort.

Four days before the actual signing of the armistice in 1918, a false report of the ending of the great conflict was circulated. In no time, a great celebration was organized in Ridgefield. A parade was held, and following the Home Guard down Main Street, was the League of Woman's Service, with Mary Linda Bradley marching at its head.

In later years her health failed and she had to curtail many of her activities. Though she was ill for many years, Mary Linda lived to age 79.

I decided to take a ride up to see the mansion that Mary Linda's father, William Harrison Bradley, had built so-many years ago. Though it had been a long time since I had seen it, I knew just where it was, and expected no difficulty in finding it.

However, everything looked very unfamiliar as I climbed to the top of Peaceable Hill Road. The landscape had been completely rearranged, and where the main entrance and driveway used to be, there is now a new blacktopped road, and a sign that reads Blacksmith Ridge.

A tour of the area revealed many more changes, and a number of fine new homes. However, I never did find Bradley's mansion.

In desperation, I called my friend Pat Shaw, and she informed me that the mansion was no more. It turned out that the place first suffered a rather disastrous fire some years ago. It was then partially rebuilt, with a flat roof that eventually collapsed under a heavy winter snow.

So the Bradley mansion, which was called Felsenberg, is gone, and the large estate has been replaced by a very nice development. Which proves that people still find West Mountain a very desirable place to locate.

William Harrison Bradley had lived a very eventful and interesting life. He started his life properly by selecting as his father Judge William Henry Bradley. William Henry was a very prominent man in Chicago, where for many years he served as clerk of the United States Circuit Court.

William Henry Bradley showed the good judgment, for which his family was noted, by becoming the grandson of the famous Colonel Philip Burr Bradley. As every pupil in our school system must know, Col. Bradley was one of Ridgefield's all-time, most noted citizens. Col. Bradley's local residence was where Ballard Park is now.

Col. Bradley was one of the stout-hearted local men who courageously faced the overwhelming forces of the Redcoats in the Battle of Ridgefield, April 27, 1777. He was later appointed colonel of the Fifth Continental Regiment. He was an authentic hero and took part in many of the major engagements during the Revolutionary War.

It was just 200 years ago that Colonel Bradley was chosen one of Ridgefield's two delegates to the convention in Hartford, where the State of Connecticut voted to approve the new United States Constitution. He was also Ridgefield's second postmaster, following the term of Lt. Joshua King. He served in the dual role of postmaster, and as justice of the peace. At most town meetings he was selected as the moderator.

The Colonel's great grandson, William Harrison Bradley, continued to add lustre to the family name. He married Carolina Lawson, a sister of Victor Lawson, owner and publisher of the *Chicago Daily News*, and his sister Jessie, in turn married Victor Lawson. William H. was for many years with the U.S. Department of State and served as consul general at Nice and at Manchester, in England. His last tour of duty was as consul general at Montreal.

It seems a shame that he was not blessed with a son that would carry on the tradition of this extraordinary family.

#286: THE STORE THAT ONCE STOOD BY THE FOUNTAIN

Lately there has been considerable speculation as to the origin of an old house that is located on Bailey Avenue. Newspaper reports indicate that this building is to be either torn down, or moved to another location.

As usual, this would be done in the name of progress.

There are many who feel that this old structure has significant historic value, but no one seems to know where it came from. One thing on which there is complete agreement is that the building is quite old.

Funny how stories, if repeated often enough, seem to become facts. Some stories have the house as being constructed right where it stands. Others have it as being moved to its present location.

Some even believe that the house is actually the old Corner Store that stood near the fountain, on the corner of West Lane and Main Street. Their theory is that the house was moved from the corner many years ago and then converted into a two family dwelling.

I remember that Julius Tulipani once told me that on his very first day in Ridgefield, he carried on a conversation with a man who lived with his family in the house in question at that time. Since this had to be in the very early days of this century, it seems logical to believe that the house has been there a good many years.

Incidentally, the man with whom Julius spoke and received directions from was Luquette Travaglini. Luquette will be best remembered as the father of Ridgefield News Store "Big Squash" and police dispatcher "Little Squash."

All this would tend to eliminate the possibility of the old house ever having been the former Corner Store. The store still stood near the fountain until it was moved in 1929.

If in fact the house was moved to Bailey Avenue, it is possible that it was one of several buildings that were moved from the grounds of our present Community Center. Governor Phineas C. Lounsbury made a number of changes on his estate when he built his great mansion in the 1890's.

The original Corner Store was built in the early 1800's by Thaddeus Keeler. Mr. Keeler operated the place as a general store. When he was appointed Ridgefield's sixth postmaster in 1827, the post office was moved across the street from Timothy Keeler's Tavern to the Corner Store.

In the mid-1800's, the store and surrounding property was acquired by David Hoyt. One of Mr. Hoyt's first acts was to demolish the original Country Store. It was then rebuilt and again operated as a general store.

David Hoyt later sold the store to Edward H. Smith and D. Smith Sholes. Smith and Sholes decided to try something different and changed the place from a general store to a shirt factory. Apparently the factory did not do so well and after a few years, the partnership was dissolved. D. Smith Sholes became Ridgefield's 17th postmaster in 1884.

The Corner Store remained vacant for a while, and then Edward H. Smith was joined by his son Edward L. Smith. The father and son then reopened the place again as a general store.

Business was very good and soon the Smiths were able to hire a young clerk to help them. The clerk was George G. Knapp, and he was a very popular young man.

The young clerk had an eye for business and could see great possibilities for the Corner Store. After a short time, George Knapp purchased the business from the Smiths and ran the store for several years.

George Knapp married the former Josephine Nichols, who was one of Ridgefield's very favorite school teachers. They lived at 31 North Salem Road, the present home of the Kelley family.

George was one of our town's leading citizens and later became judge of probate. Unfortunately he passed on at a relatively young age.

Samuel D. Keeler took over the Corner Store and operated it as a general store, in conjunction with a much larger store that he owned in the business area of town. His main store was located in the building that he owned, and which now houses Ridgefield Auto Parts [Rodier Flowers in 2024]. I would guess that the initials SDK were as well known in Ridgefield as FDR, JFK and LBJ were in later years. As a matter of fact, someday, someone will remove the blacktop that covers the sidewalk in front of the auto parts store, and the large brass letters SDK will be revealed, embedded in the concrete sidewalk.

In the early 20's, William Travis Clark took over the Corner Store, and operated a thriving business there as an antiques shop. Bill also engaged in furniture repairing at this location. There was also a smaller building at the rear of the store that was used as a cobbler shop.

When D. K. Hoyt acquired the Corner Store and surrounding property, he ran it for a short time as a meat market. Then Mr. Hoyt leased the building to a man named Lyons, who lived nearby on Wilton Road East. Lyons once again had the business revert to that of a general store.

He was known as a man who lived a rather frugal existence. In fact, he invoked an economic approach to any matter that concerned food. He must have been the last one to operate the Corner Store as a commercial venture.

The name Lyons also had a particular affinity to the word fire, of which he had more than one. In 1925 there was a bad fire in his home and in 1926, his barn burned down. Fortunately his old sorrel horse was outside at the time and so was saved from the conflagration.

It was said that Lyons never overfed his horse, and as I remember, the horse gave that appearance. His coat was a pretty sorrel, but he was awful thin.

One day, when I was a little kid, my brother Paul and I were walking by the store and the horse was tied out on an empty lot, just beyond the store, where the Henle sisters live now. That house has since been moved, probably 50 yards closer to West Lane.

I asked Paul why Lyons had tied the horse there, and he replied, "Probably because he does not want him to blow away."

#287: WHERE THE CORNER STORE WENT; SIAMESE ROYALTY VISIT

Just in case you are still interested in what happened to the old corner Store, I am happy to report that it is still very much alive. The little cobbler's shop that stood behind the store is also still serving a useful purpose.

D. K. Hoyt sold the Corner Store and surrounding property to Herbert Spencer Griems in the late 20's. Mr. Griems decided that the old store had outlived its usefulness, and started to have it dismantled.

One of those engaged in the project was Thomas Scott. Tom was a carpenter by trade and could see at once the building was structurally sound, and an effort should be made to save it.

Tom approached Mr. Griems with an offer to buy both the store and the cobbler's shop. Mr. Griems readily accepted the offer and Tom made plans to move the buildings to his home on Soundview Road. According to Donald Scott, who still lives with his family on Soundview, his father added to the original building and it now serves as a two-family dwelling.

The cobbler shop was transformed into a small barn that housed some of the cattle, owned by the Scott family. It is still standing and is now used for storage.

It would not be difficult to figure out who it was who actually moved the two buildings to their present location. Ridgefield's premier mover of buildings was the noted Caro H. Northrup, and Caro just happened to be Mrs. Scott's father.

So Caro, his son Reed and Tom Scott, jacked up the buildings and slid long beams under them. They then placed wooden rollers between the beams, and with horsepower supplied by Caro Northrop's faithful old team, King and Jerry, the buildings were on their way to Soundview Road.

It was only a short distance, perhaps a half mile. It was rather slow work, and a lot of rope, with block and tackle, was used, but there were no long trailers such as we have today for moving buildings.

As I have said many times, it is my feeling that more buildings have been moved in Ridgefield, percentage-wise, than any other town in the area.

Just to the west of the property where the old Corner Store used to stand was the home of a very prominent attorney, Honorable George Pratt Ingersoll. He was also a very prominent Democrat, and perhaps that is why he never opened a law office in Ridgefield, which was at that time, more heavily Republican than it is now.

The Ingersoll family were not year around residents. When the cold weather set in each fall, they always went south. Well, if not south, then perhaps southwest, some 20 miles to Stamford, where it was at least three or four degrees warmer than lofty Ridgefield.

Actually George Ingersoll had a law office in New York City, as well as in Stamford. So proximity of his winter quarters to his Stamford office and the railroad station must have been a factor in his decision to migrate to the southwest each fall. Travel during the bad winter storms that we used to have over roads that were not cleared of snow as well as they are today, may have been an even more compelling reason for spending the winters in Stamford.

The major portion of Mr. Ingersoll's legal practice was conducted from his New York office, while in Stamford he was engaged as an associate counsel of the very prestigious law firm of Cummings and Lockwood. Cummings was, of course, Homer S. Cummings, another noted Democrat, who served as United States attorney general under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

There were many who wished that Attorney Ingersoll would establish an office in Ridgefield, for at that time we did not have a regular practicing attorney in town. Even our town counsel, Judge Light, came here from Norwalk when needed.

Mr. Ingersoll would, on occasion, represent a local person in need of his considerable legal expertise. One notable case was some 70 years ago, when he represented the Hornig family as a result of a fatal accident. Peter Hornig, as previously reported, died after being struck by an automobile while walking on the highway near Joe's Store. That store is now known as Country Corners.

In 1917, Gorge Pratt Ingersoll was appointed envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary of the United States to the Kingdom of Siam by President Woodrow T. Wilson. That seems like an awful long title to apply to our representative to such a small country, now known as Thailand.

Mr. Ingersoll, as well as serving a tour in the diplomatic service, held several other important posts. He was a delegate to the International Peace Conference in Washington, D.C., and was United States commissioner from Connecticut. He also served as a member of the State Board of Health and in 1910 he ran an unsuccessful campaign for Congress. His interest in politics is easily understood, as his father was elected governor of Connecticut in 1873.

The Ingersoll home on West Lane had some very important house guests. Phya Prabha Kararonvongee was appointed by the King of Siam as George Ingersoll's counterpart to this country. His name was almost as long as his title and his visit with the Ingersolls caused a great deal of excitement in town, as did a later visit by the Prince of Siam.

Following George Ingersoll's passing in the late 20's, his home was sold to Christopher and Page Kane. The place became known as the Kane Inn and was operated by the Kanes as a restaurant and provided lodging.

Actually the place was more a boarding house than an inn, as most of those who stayed there were rather permanent residents. Attorney Michael Bruno lived at the Kane Inn for several years.

Following the Kanes, Walter Tode operated the place as Tode's Inn in the 40's and 50's, and did a thriving business. Under Henry Prieger the name was changed to The Inn at Ridgefield. Several additions have been made to the place [recently Bernard's and now The Benjamin] but its original lines are still quite visible.

#288: HARVEY BISSELL AND HIS DRUG STORE

In my last column, George Pratt Ingersoll, who lived in the house that is now The Inn at Ridgefield, was described as a prominent Democrat. Mr. Ingersoll was not the only noted politician that lived in the West Lane neighborhood.

In fact, right next door in the house that is now Maureen Mayer's West Lane Inn [more recently owned by Christine Carnicelli and Danille Petrie], lived Harvey P. Bissell, a Republican whose political influence was felt all across the State of Connecticut.

Mr. Bissell came to Ridgefield just a short time before the very disastrous fire of 1895 that wiped out most of our town's business district. He had only just established the drug store that still bears his name. Bissell's Drug Store was one of the buildings that was destroyed in that terrible conflagration.

Undaunted over his great loss, Harvey Bissell started at once to reconstruct the large building that we know today [but that burned in 2005, replaced two years later with a replica]. Bissell's: was one of the first stores to be back in business.

The store did a thriving business, dispensing, not only, prescription and patented drugs, but other items as well. Whiskey is believed by many to have great medicinal value, and during the Prohibition years a drug store could serve as an oasis for certain "patients."

No one that I ever knew, ever saw a shipment of whiskey being delivered to Bissell's Drug Store. However, I remember a little sliding door that was a part of a larger basement door. The little door was just large enough to accommodate the passage of a pint bottle.

Some sort of password may have been used that would cause the little door to open, as it did not open for everyone. Perhaps it was the number of knocks made by the thirsty customer that caused the little door to slowly slide open.

At any rate, business was quite brisk, both upstairs and at the basement door.

Another product that made Bissell's a very popular place was its ice cream sodas. The syrups were all made right there on the premises. When they were properly combined with Rider's delicious ice cream, the result was a dessert that was fit for a king. It was a fact that many people traveled miles out of their way to enjoy this very tasty treat. I guess that in those days people were not overly concerned about calories.

Harvey P. Bissell was a tall man, and in his later years he was just slightly stooped. He had a rather stern facial expression that was augmented by a pair of pince-nez eyeglasses.

Actually he was a kindly man, though a new employee at the store would quickly learn that he must present a good appearance and no tomfoolery would be tolerated.

I would guess that the ever-popular "Squash" is the last one of the many who worked for Mr. Bissell who is still in Ridgefield. After being in Ridgefield only a short time, Harvey Bissell became interested in local politics.

He became a member of the Republican Town Committee and very soon became the chairman of that group. It was a post that he held for many years.

Mr. Bissell decided to run for public office and in 1901 he was elected a representative to the general assembly in Hartford. During his absences, the store was left in the very capable hands of a young local pharmacist, James J. Kelly.

Jim Kelly was later to become Mr. Bissell's business partner and this afforded Harvey even more time to devote to his political aspirations. It was not long before the state senator from this area was none other than Harvey P. Bissell. After serving three terms in the state senate, he became comptroller of the State of Connecticut. It was in this position that he became widely known and respected, while establishing a great reputation for efficiency.

Mr. Bissell was very fond of his adopted town, and wanted very much to see it grow. He was aware of the fact that good roads were a necessary ingredient in promoting the growth of any town. Therefore, his considerable energy was directed toward improving the state highways leading into Ridgefield.

His great influence was largely responsible for the several concrete roadways in our town. They were among the earliest of the state's concrete highways, and have since been covered with asphalt paving material. Though Barry Avenue and West Mountain Road were rebuilt after his passing, Harvey Bissell was the one who beat the drum to get this work done.

In July of 1923, Mr. Bissell was appointed collector of customs for the State of Connecticut by President Warren G. Harding. Only two weeks later, and before the appointment could be completed, President Harding died. President Calvin J. Coolidge revived the appointment process and Mr. Bissell served in that post with distinction.

Harvey Bissell was married to the former Flora Randall and they had a son Robert P. Robert was a lieutenant in the United States Army and served in both the Mexican Border War and World War I.

In the late 20's, Mr. Bissell retired and Mr. Kelly took over the store. Shortly after that, Mr. Kelly brought in another young pharmacist, Edgar C. Rapp. For some reason, everyone called him Dick Rapp. At any rate Dick became Mr. Kelly's partner, and later took over the store and ran the business for many years, as did Mrs. Cornelius Lee in later years.

No one ever changed the name and after more than 90 years the sign over the door still carries the name Bissell's.

Many people referred to the Bissell house on West Lane as the White House. Possibly this could be attributed to Harvey Bissell's political prowess, but it really was white for many years.

When Mr. Bissell passed on in 1929, his funeral was attended by the most prominent people in the state. All state offices were closed on that day and the flags on public buildings were flown at half staff. It was a real tribute to a man who began life as a little Connecticut farm boy.

#289: CHURCH HOUSE'S DEMISE & BLUEBIRD'S BENEFITS

This year [1988] will mark the 100th anniversary of the building of the present Congregational Church. The First Congregational Church was organized more than 275 years ago by Ridgefield's original settlers.

As most people know, the Rev. Thomas Hauley was the first pastor. A house that was built for the young pastor still stands at the corner of Main Street and Branchville Road, surrounded by a white picket fence. It is generally agreed that this building is the oldest house in Ridgefield, and The Old Indian Trading Post is the oldest structure in our town.

Reverend Hauley did not have to walk very far to conduct services, for a small meeting house was erected on the opposite corner from his home, in front of the present home of the George Goodstadt family. By the year 1800, the congregation had grown to the extent that a larger church was needed. It was built [just north of] where the Patrick Crehan family now resides [181 Main Street] and the highway passed on either side of it.

This church stayed in that location for another 88 years.

The beautiful stone work in the present church is the handiwork of the great builder, James F. Kennedy. It seems that we have mentioned "Big Jim" Kennedy several times in this column.

One thing is for sure, when he put up a building, it was made to last. This very fine structure is another example, and a lasting one, of his excellence as a builder. One can easily imagine Big Jim as he worked on during the terrible blizzard of '88 to complete this remarkable edifice on schedule.

Just to the west of the church stood a building in which its many social activities were held. The building was extensively remodeled in the 20's, and many dances and plays were held there. It was a very popular place and was known as the Congregational Church House, but was often referred to as "The Casino" or "The Playhouse," The name Playhouse seemed to be appropriate, as the Chekhov Theater Studio used the building on several occasions, and in the [late] 30's a summer stock group presented a number of plays, featuring such well known performers as Edward Everett Horton and Marie Wilson.

The building also had two bowling alleys in its basement. The well-liked and very respected Clifford A. Holleran, when he was the principal of our high school, used to take groups of students to these alleys to teach them how to bowl. It was here that I was introduced to the finer points of bowling.

There was also a sexton's house on the property, but it was removed some years ago.

Only just a few years ago, the church house was badly damaged by fire. It has been replaced by the splendid building [Lund Hall] that is now attached to the church.

Many years ago, before the bowling alleys were put into the basement of the church house, they were housed in a separate building that sat on the far western boundary of the property. This long, but narrow building fell into a state of disrepair. The roof developed a bad leak, with the result that the floor of the alleys became quite warped.

Old-time bowlers, such as Elmer Bouton and the Bennett boys —Dan, Finn, George and Dick — continued to bowl on the uneven surface. Once they had learned how to avoid the grooves in the warped boards, anyone who challenged them to a game was just fair game for them.

I never bowled with these men on the old alleys, but did so when the new alleys were installed in the church house. They were all excellent bowlers, and Elmer Bouton could bowl a good game even into his 80's.

Just to the west of the church property, in the 20's, 30's and 40's lived the Herbert Harde family. I delivered newspapers to this family many years ago, and later on they bought milk from me.

What Mr. Harde's business was I never knew. I believe that he was retired for a long period of time. He must have been a kind man and a good tipper, for though the charge per week for the newspapers was 24 cents, he always gave me a quarter and told me to keep the change.

In the large building next to the Harde house lived Ida M. Smith. Ida was the manager of H. B. Anderson's very famous Port of Missing Men. This place was later purchased by Harris Dunscombe Colt, a New York banker, who we told about in a previous column. I do not believe that the Colt family ever lived in this house. They did live for a number of years in the nearby Peter Parley House.

For the past half century, this great house has been owned by the Bacchiochi family, and it began to look as though they would not live here either. However, recently Jim and Gloria did a complete job of remodeling the building at the rear of the house and it is now their new home.

The main building has five units and it is often referred to as the Bluebird Apartments. The late Rudolph Martin had one of the apartments for many years, and many newly married couples started their lives together in the Bluebird.

Some that come quickly to mind, but by no means all, who enjoyed the friendly environment of this fine place are Ed and Mary Flanagan, Lou and Beth Price, Aiken and Dorothy Knox, Henry and Rena Travis and the Charles Kliens.

When they first came to Ridgefield, Bill and Valerie Casey also lived in the house where Jim and Gloria Bacchiochi now have their home.

I have always felt that a place like the Bluebird seemed more like home than the crowded condominiums that are so numerous today. Why can't we have more apartment houses and fewer condominiums? I am sure today's newly married couples would appreciate them. Perhaps the powers that be should make a New Year's resolution to give this some thought.

In one of my first columns, I told of the wonderful apartment in which Marie and Dick started married life. It is now 613 Main Street and many are the newlyweds who enjoyed it. It could properly be called the "Honeymoon Apartment." It had four very nice rooms and a large storage space, a garage for my car, a stable for my saddle horse, a chicken house, as well as space for a garden. All this at a rental fee of \$27.50 per month.

Of course, that was a few years ago.

#290: THE 'MR. RIDGEFIELD' OF HIS DAY

Directly across the street from the West Lane Bluebird Apartments, you will find one of Ridgefield's shortest streets. It connects West Lane with High Ridge Avenue, and is called Parley Lane. The name is derived from the fact that this little street leads to the famous Peter Parley house.

There is only one house on Parley Lane. However, that dwelling is rather important, as it was once the home of the Honorable William O. Seymour.

Just to say that William O. Seymour was a very prominent citizen of our town seems like an understatement. There seems little doubt that he was the "Mr. Ridgefield" of his day.

The Seymour family is one of Ridgefield's oldest, and can be traced right back to the original settlers. I am happy to say that several branches of the venerable Seymour family tree are still quite active in the affairs of our town. As a matter of fact, Thomas Nash, publisher of this fine weekly newspaper, is a great, great grandson of William O. Seymour. Of course, as you all know, Karl Seymour Nash, Tom's father, ran this newspaper for the past half century.

Sorry to say that the name Seymour itself has just about disappeared in Ridgefield.

William O. Seymour served in so many capacities that it would take an entire column to describe them all. Anything of importance that happened in town was sure to find him right in the middle of the activities.

Seymour was once Ridgefield's judge of probate, and was also elected several times as our representative to the General Assembly in Hartford. In 1902, he was Ridgefield's delegate to the Constitutional Convention.

Governor Phineas C. Lounsbury appointed Mr. Seymour to the State Railroad Commission. The railroad people recognized his ability as a civil engineer, and chose him to be chief engineer of The New York, New Haven and Hartford line. He later served as chief engineer on The Boston and Western Railroad.

His reputation as an expert in this field spread and he became chief engineer of construction in the building of the Wisconsin Central Railroad.

Despite the many exalted positions that William O. Seymour held during his notable career, the one that he enjoyed most was that of a teacher. He first taught in the public school system, but then started his own private school in the historic Peter Parley house, which he owned. He was, by nature, particularly well-suited to his role as a teacher.

The Peter Parley house already had a fine reputation as a seat of learning. It had previously served as a school, under the tutelage of the Rev. Samuel G. Goodrich, father of the famous Peter Parley. After the Rev. Goodrich, the school was conducted by Professor Hugh S. Banks. As might be expected, many of the students who attended this school later became prominent citizens in their communities.

Although he lived a very busy life, William O. Seymour did not neglect his religious duties, and was very active in the affairs of the Congregational Church. In fact it was just 100 years ago at the dedication of the present church that Mr. Seymour accepted the church from the building committee in the name of the church society.

It should be noted that the well-known Mrs. Howard D. Smith was a daughter of William O. Seymour. Mrs. Smith did a considerable amount of writing for *The Ridgefield Press*. She was affectionately known as “Galloping Gussie,” probably because she was always in a hurry, especially when she was on the track of a good story for the paper.

I remember Howard D. Smith when he was a pharmacist in George A. Mignery's drug store when it was located where the Yardage Shop is now [423 Main Street]. He was an old man at the time and his movements contrasted from Gussie's in that they were considerably slower.

As noted in a previous column, the chairman of Ridgefield's 200th Anniversary Celebration was none other than the Honorable William O. Seymour. His great grandson, Karl S. Nash, was the chairman of our town's 250th birthday celebration in 1958, so I felt that I was in good company as chairman in 1983, of the 275th Anniversary affair. However, I have already declined the opportunity to serve in that capacity again in the year 2008. That should be a grand party.

Just to the west of Parley Lane at 48. West Lane, is an impressive building that was the home of Jim and Gloria Bacchioni and their family for many years. This large house actually sits on an island, and is surrounded by three roads — West Lane, High Ridge Avenue.

This was once the home of the noted Dr. Cyrus Northrop. In fact he was born on this property in 1834. Dr. Northrop was destined to become another famous native son, of which Ridgefield seemed to have spawned more than its share. Though an attorney by profession, Dr. Northrop was best known as a leader in the field of education.

After graduating from Yale Law School in 1859, he served as clerk of the state Senate, but then returned to Yale, where he was professor of rhetoric and English literature for 21 years. While teaching at Yale, he also served as collector of the Port of New Haven.

His fame as an educator spread to the Northwest, and in 1884 he became president of the State University of Minnesota. Dr. Northrop is credited with playing a leading role in the growth and development of this fine institution.

Another educator to live in this house was Miss Katharine Day. Katharine taught in the New York City school system for many years and became principal of an elementary school in Yorkville. She became a member of our local Board of Education, but her ideas on education were not readily accepted by some members of the board. In fact, she was denied renomination

to the board by the Republican Town Committee. However, Katharine took her case to the caucus, where she won handily over her opponents.

#291: MORE OLD WEST LANE FAMILIES

At 45 West Lane, a very stylish old house sets a good distance back from the highway. In one section of this house, the small window panes are set at an angle and quickly capture your attention.

For many years this place was owned by the George Pratt Ingersoll family. In the early part of this century, the Ingersolls used to lease this property, generally to people who liked to spend the summer months in Ridgefield.

One of those who came here during the summer was the family of the Rev. William T. Hitchcock. Rev. Hitchcock was a minister in the Episcopal Church, and had served as pastor in several parishes across the state.

He and his wife, the former Mary Taylor, and their children, Louisa T., Anita T., and Thomas T., quickly fell in love with Ridgefield. I guess each of the children used their mother's maiden name for their middle name. They were not actually children, as they were full grown at the time.

The two daughters became so enamored with the beauty of Ridgefield that they decided to make it their permanent home. So, Louisa and Anita pooled their considerable resources, and purchased the property at 69 Main Street that is now the home of Mehdi and Raelene Ali and family.

This place was a part of Lot 23 that was awarded, by a lottery, conducted by Samuel Smith of Norwalk in 1708. The reason for the appendage (of Norwalk) was that Samuel Smith of Milford was also engaged in the lottery and was awarded Lot 8 which encompassed much of the land that is now the Community Center.

At any rate, the sisters demolished the house that stood at 69 Main Street, and built the very impressive residence that now stands there.

In their later years, the sisters decided to build a "smaller house," on the corner of Wilton Road West and Olmstead Lane. However, that is another story. It will suffice for now to say that Louisa superintended the building of the "smaller house," and she was in her 90's at the time.

Back to the house at 45 West Lane. Following the passing of George Pratt Ingersoll in 1929, his wife Alice and daughter Gertrude moved here from their home just down the street and which is now The Inn at Ridgefield [The Benjamin].

I remember Gertrude as a rather tall lady, who wore a hat with an extra wide brim that flopped around in the breeze when she drove by in her open Buick touring car.

A number of years ago, this place became the home of John Aylmer White, his wife Janet and their son Nathaniel. Both John and Janet were schoolteachers, and John commuted daily to New Canaan's St. Luke School for many years. Only recently, the White family sold their home and moved north [to New York].

Next to the house that we are talking about was a barn that has been converted into a nice residence [at 55 West Lane]. This building is just one more of the many that have been

moved to their present location. This one originally stood at the rear of Alonzo Barton Hepburn's beautiful "Altnacraig," on High Ridge Avenue.

Then, there is an open field at 63 West Lane [now a homesite], at the rear of which there is a two-family house. This place is now owned by the Fred Orrico family. Many are the families that have made their home in this house.

Recently an old picture in *The Press* showed Belden Nicholas at work in a machine shop. The shop looked an awful lot like the one that Orville Sprague once owned. This shop was described away back in Dispatch #5.

Belden and his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Nicholas, lived at 63 West Lane for many years. Sam Nicholas was a mason by trade and also played a horn in the old Orenca Band. I believe that Belden is still living in Florida.

Mr. and Mrs. Howard Beers and their son, Orrin, also lived in this house, as did Louis and Stella Mead, and Stella still lives in Ridgefield. Some of the others who lived in this house were the Patrick Bolands, the George McGoverns and the Alden Hights and many more.

Directly across the street at 58 West Lane, on the west corner of West Lane and High Ridge Avenue, is the residence of Dr. Simon M. Trutt and his family. During the period of which I am writing, it was the home of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Beech. Mr. Beech passed on in the late 20's and Mrs. Beech continued to live there for many years.

Some 25 years ago Raymond and Margaret Sawyer and their many children made their home in this house. Some may remember that the very energetic Ray Sawyer was a part of the team of underwater explorers from Columbia University that located the submarine "Thresher" in its watery grave off the New England coast.

The Sawyer family moved to Denver, Colo. a number of years ago. They were a very lively group, and when they left, things in Ridgefield slowed down considerably.

Next to the Beech house lived Frederic E. Lewis' old retired coachman, Bartholomew Keefe. I have already told about him in the story about the Lewis estate, and I must try not to repeat myself, especially when it is necessary to return to an area I have already covered.

Also in the story about the Lewis estate, I mentioned the large three-story house at 65 West Lane, and how Mr. Lewis leased this place to use it as a guest house. In 1920 this property was purchased by the State of Connecticut, and it became Station A of the Connecticut State Police.

When the barracks moved to East Ridge in the late 20's, this became the home of the Boland family, and William Boland still lives there. Bill's sisters, Mary and Elizabeth, were both local school teachers.

Bess is still living and was my teacher in first grade in 1920 at the old Titicus School, now the American Legion Home on North Salem Road. Mary, better known as Mae, was my teacher in sixth grade, when classes were conducted in the fire house during a classroom shortage in 1926.

Bill still works every day, and once was an active beekeeper. He actually made friends with the many thousands of bees that he kept in the open field next door to his home.

#292: WOMAN WHO GAVE TO A PRIEST; JOKESTER CAUGHT FIRE

As we continue down West Lane, we come to number 71, presently the home of the William Duckworth family. Back in the early 20's, a Mrs. Fabricotti made her home in this nice old house.

Mrs. [Sarah Frances] Fabricotti was a lady of great importance. I never knew what made her so important, but I do remember that she was always spoken of in glowing terms. So, I would have to guess that Mrs. Fabricotti did nice things for people, for that seems to be the way to have nice things said about you. [When she died in 1932, Mrs. Fabricotti HAD an estate worth nearly \$7 million in today's dollars and left more than \$800,000 of it to Catholic churches and priests. Among her bequests was \$10,000 — \$242,000 in today's dollars — to the Rev. Richard E. Shortell, pastor of St. Mary's Parish. Alas, Father Shortell died in 1934, before he actually received the legacy.]

This house was owned for a number of years by Robert E. Richardson Sr., and his wife, the former Edith Frances Bailey. Mr. Richardson was a retired carpenter when I knew him. He was a friendly old gentleman and always had a kind word when I delivered his newspapers.

Mr. Richardson's son, Robert E. Jr., was a very prominent man in Ridgefield. Bob was an officer in what is now The Union Trust Company [Wells Fargo], when it was called The First National Bank of Ridgefield. He was also a longtime member of the Board of Education when it was still called the School Board. Bob was chairman of that important body when I graduated from high school more than a couple of years ago.

Bob Richardson was a great baseball enthusiast. I do not recall that he ever actually played the game, but he did manage our town team for a number of years, as well as being the treasurer and chief fund-raiser for that fine organization.

Bob's knowledge of the financial world was of great benefit to a team that represented a little town of some 3,000 people. It was Bob who was successful in acquiring the backing of Waddy Lewis for the team. Waddy came through, as usual, and was a generous contributor to the welfare of a baseball team that held its own with the best in this area.

Waddy not only paid for much of the team's equipment, but also furnished the cash that attracted several big-league players, who performed with our local boys in the fall when the big league season ended. The result was that great crowds came to the games. This was all noted in Dispatch #146.

Just about everyone in town attended the games that were played on the East Ridge diamond.

Mention of the great games of many years ago reminds me of Jimmy Rogers and the fact that I have not told any stories about him for a long time. For the benefit of any new readers of this column, Jimmy Rogers was my very favorite character. Jimmy was described in an earlier column as the man who kept the people of Ridgefield laughing, even during the Great Depression [see Dispatches 46, 61, 97]. Just his appearance was enough to bring a smile to anyone's face, and his antics would cause a real healthy laugh.

Jimmy had the knack of dreaming up, and then performing, numerous zany acts that everyone enjoyed. They were accomplished at no one's expense but his own. One of his escapades almost proved to be his last.

Anything that Jimmy did was bound to attract a lot of attention, and on this occasion he expected to have a ready-made crowd. His plan was to have his performance viewed by the considerable number of baseball fans as they came along East Ridge following the game. Jimmy decided to stage his act in front of Larry “Pudd” Davis’ house. Pudd was the assistant manager of the ball team at that time, and he lived at 113 East Ridge. The house is the first on your right as you enter East Ridge from Prospect Steel.

The little house is quite close to the highway, and at the time there was a maple tree at its front. The tree was a part of Jimmy’s plan of action. Apparently Jimmy wanted to create the impression that he had been set upon by people who wanted to burn him at the stake. He put a little pile of leaves at the base of the tree and then partly covered the leaves with a cloth that had been soaked in used motor oil. His purpose was to create a large cloud of heavy black smoke.

Somehow, Jimmy was able to get himself tied to the tree. No one ever admitted to helping him out with his escapade, so we will have to assume that he was able to do all this by himself. At any rate, his plan called for perfect timing. He would wait until there were two outs in the ninth inning, then after securing himself to the tree, he would drop a lighted match into the leaves.

His frantic screams for help were sure to attract the people leaving the baseball game. On learning that Jimmy had staged the whole thing himself, everyone would have a good laugh. Everything proceeded as planned, but Jimmy had overlooked one possibility. The home team had been trailing by one run, but with two outs in the ninth, they managed to tie the game. The home team finally won the game, but it had taken a little extra time and in the meantime Jimmy was getting broiled, or at least baked.

As the crowd of baseball fans came along East Ridge, they could hear Jimmy screaming bloody murder, and by the time they reached him, Jimmy was covered with black soot from head to foot. His clothes had ignited as he was being rescued, and his pants were ruined before the fire was extinguished.

This time at least, no one laughed until some time later. It was the only time that anyone had ever seen Jimmy act the least bit serious.

However, it did not last long, and soon he was busy preparing another trick that would delight his many friends. Jimmy was a chauffeur by trade, and drove for several of the many wealthy Ridgefield families. He was never fired from a job that I know of. However, he did not stay on a job for a very long period. Perhaps he quit in search of excitement.

In between jobs, he would drive a taxi for Herb Bates when Herb operated a livery service in the building that now houses The Press. He was a ventriloquist par excellence, and delighted in fooling a store clerk. Though Jimmy was the only customer in the store, he would throw his voice in various directions, until the befuddled clerk would think that the store was full of people.

#293: TED’S TALL TALES

Reader reaction, for whatever reason, is reassuring to a writer that someone reads his column. So I just picked up another reader along the way, in the person of Bill Boland.

Bill informs me that the building that was once a barn and stood at the rear of Alonzo Barton Hepburn's High Ridge mansion, is the two family house at 63 West Lane.

That great building mover, Caro H. Northrop, deposited the barn in its present location, where it was converted into a dwelling. Bill Boland remembers seeing Caro's faithful old team, King and Jerry, as they towed the building from "Altnacraig," down High Ridge Avenue and across West Lane. I often wonder just how many build- ings Caro moved.

In writing about the Richardson house at 71 West Lane, I got off on a Jimmy Rogers story. As usual, where Jimmy is concerned, I managed to get carried away for he sure was a great character.

So back to West Lanc, and number 73, now the home of Michael and Mae (Lavatori) O'Keefe. For many years this house belonged to the late Elmer Bouton.

I told about Elmer in Dispatch #151, and how he was the superintendent for the MacDougal Hawkes family on High Ridge. Elmer lived for many years in the little house at 28 High Ridge that is now the home of the Jeffery Miller family.

Elmer Bouton had a beautiful flower garden on the western side of High Ridge and a fine vegetable garden on the eastern side of the street. It was his custom to plant his peas on Saint Patrick's Day, no matter what the weather might be at the time. If the ground was still frozen, he would make a hole with a crowbar to drop the seeds in. It must have been the right thing to do, as he always had an excellent crop.

While living on High Ridge, Elmer used to rent out his West Lanc house. Richard C. and Ruhamah (Foshay) Bennett lived at #73 for several years. Like all the Bennett boys, Dick was a very fine gardener. I have many fond memories of the great gardens at "Hillscroft" that he tended for me 40 some years ago. Dick was a fine gentleman.

The house at 73 West Lane was also the home, for several years, of Joseph and Irene (McGlynn) Zwierlein. They were a very well known couple, and moved to West Lane from Barry Avenue in the early 40's.

Joe, like Jimmy Rogers, was one of my very favorite characters, and I have already told some stories about him. In fact Joe was the central figure in columns #241, #242 and #243.

Joe Zwierlein was a big man, with a temperament that made him prone to a considerable amount of teasing. Though on occasion Joe could be quite brusque, he was actually a very affable man.

To be sure, he did not want for teasing, with Bill Boland as a neighbor. Many were the tricks that Bill would concoct to keep Joe stirred up.

The large house at 74 West Lane has been the home of Joseph and Florence Dunworth and their family for more than 30 years. It had been the home of the superintendents of the famous Lewis estate, James Ballantyne and later John W. Smith, and later still, the famous bridge expert, Ely Culbertson.

Across the way, at 75 West Lane, is one of the finest examples of turn-of-the-century architecture. It is now the home of David and Susan Mleczeko and their beautiful little daughter Lily.

I must say a word about Lily, who is now three years of age. I got to know this remarkable little girl when my pony and I took her for a ride on her birthday. Lily fell in love with "Maggie" and Maggie fell in love with Lily. Of course, I love them both. Since their first meeting, Lily has been coming to see Maggie at regular intervals, and always brings along a carrot. Maggie looks forward to these visits and whinnies when she sees Lily coming.

Recent inclement weather has prevented meetings between the little girl and the pony and Maggie became ill. However, Lily came to see Maggie the other day and the little pony has made a miraculous recovery. I would like very much to be around in the year 2003, when Lily is a sure bet to become Miss America. [Today Lily Mleckzo is executive director of the New York City non-profit, Rocking the Boat, which encourages youngsters to develop “pride, purpose, and possibility” by learning skills behind building and rowing wooden boats, sailing, and restoring the Bronx River. Among its aims is to encourage teenagers to stay in high school and then enroll in college or trade school.]

The 20th century was only a couple of years old when Theodore and Mary (Adams) Haight settled down at 75 West Lane. They, along with their son Milton, would make this the Haight family homestead for more than 80 years.

Ted was known as a painting contractor, but both he and Milton were also very fine carpenters. Story telling became an art for Ted, and he was known far and wide for his great stories, some of which may or may not have been authentic. You be the judge.

However, when there were sufficient listeners, Ted would light his ever-present pipe, and conversation would stop as everyone gathered around to hear one of his anecdotes. Ted had told these stories so many times, and his manner of delivery was so sincere that it was quite obvious that he had convinced himself that they were entirely true.

Ted drove a large Imperial 8 Chrysler, and the family did considerable traveling. He told of one time they were driving through the Blue Ridge Mountains, and stopped at a little service station for gas. The attendant appeared and dropped several pills in the gas tank. Then, over Ted's strenuous protests, the man filled the gas tank with water, all the while assuring Ted that this unusual fuel mixture would be most satisfactory. Ted said that his car performed at its best and he had better mileage than he would with gasoline.

Another time, the family was traveling through Arizona. It was after dark and suddenly the lights failed. There was some moonlight and they continued to drive across the desert, until the car came to a complete stop.

They decided to spend the night in the car and when the dawn came, they discovered they were right on the edge of the Grand Canyon.

Then there was the time when Ted was on his way to Tator's garage in South Salem. As he was going down Tator's Hill, he noticed that the left front wheel had become disengaged from the car and was rolling ahead of him. Ted said that he stepped on the gas and caught up with the wheel as he came to the next corner. The wheel slid back on the axle and he arrived safely at the garage, where repairs were made.

One of the best stories was about the time they were shingling a roof in South Salem. It was a very foggy day and as everyone knows, if it is foggy anywhere, it is the heaviest in South Salem. Finally the fog got so bad, they had to quit in the middle of the afternoon. When they returned the following day, Ted said that he discovered that they had shingled two feet off into the fog.

I always thought that Ted enjoyed these stories, every bit as much as his listeners.

#294: MORE WEST LANE FAMILIES & AN ILL-FATED INN

As you look at the very nice house at 79 West Lane, you are bound to get the feeling that here is a building that was made to last. This place is now the home of Mrs. Azelia Lavatori, whose husband Sylvester provided tender loving care for so many years to the spacious grounds at Veterans Park.

Sylvester must have spent the best part of his life grooming the vast lawns, and the beautiful gardens that once dotted this great estate. His stewardship extended way back to when it was owned by the Griffith and Lounsbury families. It was obvious that he took great pride in keeping "Groveland," as it was called, as one of Ridgefield's most noted showplaces.

For many years, the Lavatori family lived in the house on Market Street that was a part of the estate.

Mrs. Lavatori's home on West Lane was built in the early part of this century by Arthur F. Eilenstein. Mr. Eilenstein came to this country in the 1890's as a young man who had just completed his required service in the German army.

Arthur Eilenstein soon acquired a new uniform and served in the United States Army in the Spanish-American War. He was in his 80's when he passed on in the late 50's, and was credited with being the last surviving veteran of the War with Spain in Ridgefield.

He never missed appearing in the parade on Memorial Day (Decoration Day). When he got too old to march, he drove his little Model A Ford coupe, and later on rode along the parade route with the other veterans.

Known as a bricklayer by trade, Mr. Eilenstein was actually an expert at any kind of masonry work. His pretty little house is a graphic example of his fine handiwork. He also built a garage with a styling to match his house, and he had the good sense to include a very nice apartment over the garage.

That little apartment is just what Ridgefield needs more of today. I know of several young couples who were happy to start their married life in the friendly confines of this apartment. It is now the home of Kevin and Susan Kerrigan.

During the period that I am attempting to cover, the William Ayles family made their home in this apartment. Some may remember that Bill was a state trooper when Station A of the State Police was located at 65 West Lane. This made it very handy for Bill, as his place of work was only four doors from where he lived.

Bill Ayles must have been very good at his job, for at a time when all policemen seemed to be very tall, he was much shorter than the rest. Bill's brother, Bob, was a popular young athlete in the 20's and early 30's. Bob was a fine bowler and baseball player, and played left end on our Spartan football team. We used to joke that the reason they had Bob playing left end was that he was left-handed.

Another young couple that lived in this apartment was the Bill Leals, when Bill and I worked at the Conklin Dairy so many years ago. In later years, I believe Sylvester Lavatori Jr. and his wife lived there.

The very attractive house at 83 West Lane was described in Dispatch #141, and is now the home of Dr. James J. O'Toole, his wife Patricia, and their five children.

In the late teens and early 20's, this was the home of the chef who prepared the meals for the Frederic E. Lewis family. Mr. Lewis had hired the chef away from one of New York's hotels.

Prior to that time, the William Payne family had lived here for several years. Mr. Payne was a famous writer and novelist.

After Mr. Lewis passed on, things began to wind down on the Lewis estate and the chef and his family returned to New York City, and Mr. and Mrs. Thomas I. Walker came here from Rhode Island. Mr. Walker was an executive with General Electric. At one time he was in charge of that company's Rhode Island office. He passed on in the mid 30's and Mrs. Walker continued to live here for several years. [The Walkers' son was Ralph Thomas Walker, (1889-1973), a noted architect of skyscrapers whom The New York Times called "the architect of the century," for his many notable buildings in New York City and other cities. All three Walkers are buried in Fairlawn Cemetery.]

This place also had a very nice garage apartment that provided several young couples a place to start married life. Probably the Clem Pasquerella family lived here the longest. It is now the home of William and Nancy Gnewuch, and their family.

Next door, at 89 West Lane, there was once a very large brown shingled house. It was at one time the home of the John Mullen family. It became a part of the Frederic E. Lewis estate when Mr. Lewis decided to import his own physician from New York City. So Dr. Fiske came to Ridgefield and set up his office on West Lane, where it intersects with Olmstead Lane. He had a ready-made practice for he not only administered to the needs of the Lewis family, but the many people who were employed on the great estate as well.

After a few years, Dr. Fiske returned to the city and the place remained vacant for a while. Then, along came Mrs. Eloise Lindsay and her family. After using the place as a residence for a time, Mrs. Lindsay converted the place into a French restaurant, which she named La Bretagne.

It seems apparent that Mrs. Lindsay had established a very good reputation as a dispenser of French food before she arrived here. La Bretagne was soon attracting customers from the surrounding areas, and from as far away as New York City.

However, there was one draw-back to the operation. Somehow the place developed the bad habit of catching fire. It was just 30 years ago that one of the fires left the building in ruins from which it never recovered [a 1947 fire nearly destroyed the building, but it was rebuilt and the inn reopened].

The place remained in a state of disarray for some time, and then it was sold to William Peatt. After considerable sparring with Planning and Zoning, Bill got the go ahead sign for what he planned to do. So what remained of the building was demolished, and in its place we now have three, two-family houses.

Since the lack of water pressure contributed to the problem of fighting that very destructive fire, I just can't help but wonder whether there is sufficient pressure there today. I saw that fire, and the sight of that limp hose was frightening, to say the least.

#295: THE WANDERING WATERING TROUGH

As we travel along West Lane, our attention is directed to the little triangle that graces the entrance to Olmstead Lane.

There was a time when this small piece of real estate received very little attention, and was almost unnoticed. During the heyday of the F.E Lewis estate, employees from that great

showplace used to keep the grass mowed, but after the estate closed down, the little triangle was pretty much forgotten about. Then, following the disastrous flood of 1955, the great old stone watering trough was moved here.

This priceless old bit of Ridgefield's history originally stood in the center of Catoonah Street, where it intersects with Main Street. It provided a place for horses to refresh themselves and got plenty of use, especially by those who may have traveled a great distance to get to town on a hot summer's day.

Once a horse got used to stopping at the trough, it would just naturally gravitate towards it, without any guidance from the driver. When a team stopped at the trough, the two horses could drink the water about as fast as it was replenished.

Horses are very apt to plunge their noses right to the bottom of a trough, inhaling the water in large drafts. A mule, on the other hand, would approach the trough in an easy manner, and just wiggle his nose across the surface of the water, and then just sip it. The mule really has a great sense of self-preservation.

The trough that I am telling about was a gift to the town from John Ames Mitchell. Mr. Mitchell designed the trough himself, and he had the presence of mind to provide a little fount at its bottom, where a dog could also quench his thirst. This fact alone makes the horse trough rather unique, as I know of no other just like it.

Unlike the Cass Gilbert fountain, this horse trough never suffered the indignity of being knocked over by an automobile, at least as far as I know. If a wayward auto ever struck this massive piece of stonework, you can bet that the auto would have come out second best. This trough is made of solid stone and must weigh an awful lot.

Of course, during the years that it was exposed to the traffic at this busy intersection, there were not so many automobiles. There are those who would say that the drivers in those days were more courteous, or perhaps more cautious.

As horses began to pass out of the picture, as far as transportation is concerned, the trough was moved to the Titicus District. It sat at the foot of Saw Mill Hill Road, where it intersects with North Salem Road. Then came the flood of 1955, and the old bridge at this point was wiped out, as were most of the others in town.

The gorge left by the raging waters came dangerously close to the old watering trough. In order to make the necessary repairs to the highway and construct a new bridge, the trough was moved to its present location. This caused renewed interest in the little West Lane triangle.

The much traveled and very historic old watering trough deserved a suitable resting place. Under the watchful eye of Altero "Chick" Ciuccoli, the little triangle took out a new lease on life. A rail fence was built around it, and now perhaps we should call it Olmstead Park.

At any rate, we are all very proud of this little three cornered island. It looks especially good during the summer months, when the trough is loaded with pretty, ever blooming flowers that receive tender loving care from Mrs. Myles Eason.

The very attractive house at 97 West Lane, on the western corner of Olmstead Lane, is now the home of Richard and Nancy Callahan and their family. At the turn of the century, it was the home of Richard Keeler.

Dick Keeler was a well known Ridgefield farmer, and he must have been a very good one. In fact, he must have been the one they had in mind when they coined the word “eke” as a part of the English language.

Dick Keeler's farm was on Old South Salem Road. It later became a “gentleman’s farm,” after Reginald Lewis bought the place in the 20's. This property was well suited to Reggie's needs, for he was not dependent on the farm’s products for a living. He had some cows, but they furnished milk only for his family needs and for the employees on his nice private estate. He also had some beautiful horses that were strictly for pleasure riding.

It was a different thing when Dick Keeler worked this farm. He actually “eked” out a living from land that had more rocks than topsoil. I have always thought that this fine man should have received some kind of medal for getting this barren land to become productive. You can be sure that it took an awful lot of hard work.

There were several other Ridgefield farms that must have taxed the ingenuity of the farmer to the very limit. They are all gone now, with the exception of Dan McKeon’s farm up in Ridgebury, and even that one is beginning to give way to the developers.

Ridgefield’s farms, like the many great private estates, have been replaced by developments, condominiums and shopping centers. Those farms were a tribute to the many hardy souls that worked and slaved to make a living from the soil.

Of course, there were a number of farms with soil that was rich and productive. However, for most the greatest product were the stones that kept coming to the surface each year.

The farmers, with typical Yankee resourcefulness, made good use of the stones. During the winter months, they built the many stone walls that still act as boundary lines throughout the town.

Dick Keeler not only made himself a living, but did well enough so that in retirement, he and his wife, the former Anna Denton, were able to spend their winters in Florida.

Oh yes, in his busy life, he still found time to serve as Ridgefield's first selectman at the turn of the century.

Mr. Keeler passed on in the mid 20's and the house at 97 West Lane became the home of the Charles Benjamins, who had lived next door at 91 Olmstead Lane.

#296: THE WEST LANE BENJAMINS & ‘JOLLY’ JIM HALPIN

Charles W. Benjamin and his wife, the former Mary Estelle Bailey, lived for a number of years at 97 West Lane. They had previously lived with their children, Emerson, Dorothy and Alice, almost next door, at 91 Olmstead Lane.

Charlie was a carpenter by trade, and a real good one. In fact he was even better known as a fine cabinetmaker, and as a restorer of antique furniture. These are arts that require a considerable amount of skill and patience, attributes that he seemed to possess in abundance.

Much of his work was carried on in the barn at the rear of his home, from which he did a thriving business.

Charles Benjamin was also a well-known sportsman, and a crack shot, with both the rifle and the shotgun. During the period of which I am writing, the wooded areas of Ridgefield were inhabited with plenty of game, and supplied many a fine meal for local sportsmen and their families.

As the population of the town increased, open space began to decrease, and so did the hunters. Traffic has increased along with the population and it seems that more game has succumbed to the auto than ever did to the hunters.

Later in life, Charles Benjamin conducted a saw-sharpening business. Being meticulous by nature, you can just bet that when he filed your saw, you got it back in as good, or better condition than when it was new.

Charlie was blessed with a good sense of humor and it was always very pleasant to talk with him.

Mrs. Benjamin was a real estate agent back in the days when local agents could have been labeled as members of an endangered species. In the teens and 20's you could count the Ridgefield realty people on the fingers of one hand and have a few left over.

During those years, the real estate business was so slow that agents found it necessary to have at least one other source of income. Mrs. Benjamin took a position with the First National Bank of Ridgefield (now Union Trust) [Wells Fargo].

She was a fixture at the bank for 30 years and always seemed to enjoy working at the service window. She often said she liked the work as it gave her a chance to meet so many people. Just can't help but feel that she should have worked in the post office, for that is where you meet them all.

After retiring from the bank, Mrs. Benjamin devoted more time to her real estate business. Later on Colonial Realty was carried on by Emerson Benjamin and his wife, the former Irma Mae Finch. Today that same business is conducted by Mrs. Benjamin's grandson, Richard E. Benjamin. I guess that makes it a family business for more than 60 years.

Just to the west of the former Benjamin home is an open field that must be a very valuable piece of real estate. Then, at 113 West Lane, we come to a home that is also an antiques shop. It is now the home of Ralph and Gloria Perschino. This very well-preserved house, one of the oldest in Ridgefield, is home of the Red Petticoat Antiques.

This place was built by Benjamin Rockwell just about 250 years ago. Ben's father, Jonathan, was one of the original settlers, and was awarded Lot #31 on Main Street, on the north corner of what is now Rockwell Road. Like many of the original settlers, this Rockwell family came here from Norwalk.

Ben Rockwell and his brother Jonathan, also shared ownership of a lot on Main Street. However, for some reason, Ben decided to build his home on West Lane rather than Main Street. Perhaps he could not stand all that heavy Main Street traffic.

At any rate, during the period being covered, this fine old West Lane house was the home of James H. and Carolyn M. Halpin, sometimes spelled Halpine. Jim was born in a house that sat near the railroad tracks at the end of what we now call Halpin Lane [off Prospect Ridge]. He was a house painter by trade and when he retired, as World War I was drawing to a close, he and Carolyn moved to West Lane.

I seem to think that he had a wooden foot though I am not sure. I do remember that he walked with a decided limp, though he did not treat this as a handicap. In fact, Jim was a big man, with a jolly disposition.

When I first knew Jim Halpin, he drove a two-cylinder Hupmobile. It was an open car and probably had a top speed of 20 miles per hour. It sure would be a classic, if it were around today.

After the Halpins moved to West Lane, Jim purchased a Maxwell (a la Jack Benny). Like the Hupmobile, this car was a runabout, and for those unfamiliar with that term, this was an open car with one seat for two passengers. It had a canvas top, making it what we call a convertible today.

Like many of the autos of that era, Jim Halpin's Maxwell had a lot of brass trimmings, where today's cars have chrome. Jim always kept the brass well shined, and with its deep-buttoned, plush, leathered upholstery, this little car was quite attractive.

One of the features of this car was a large brass horn that greatly resembled a trumpet. To blow the horn, one must squeeze a rubber ball the size of a duckpin ball. A real good squeeze would send out a signal that could be heard at a great distance.

The horn was attached to the outside of the driver's side of the vehicle. However, Jim disconnected it and carried it on the seat next to him. Whenever he wished to sound the horn, it was not necessary to take his hand from the steering wheel. Jim would simply move his quite ample rump against the rubber ball, and the result was a clarion blast that was both loud and clear.

James Halpin passed on in the mid 1940's at 80 years of age. His brother John Halpin died two days later.

Just west of the Halpin house, a great field remained open and vacant until quite recently. There are now two new houses there that were built as homes for the Grasso and Morton families.

#297: WHEN RIDGEFIELD HAD MORE THAN 40 CHAUFFEURS

It was in the mid-1890's that John Mulvey purchased the property at 123 West Lane from the Osborne family. John was a construction worker, and was one of the many who were employed in building the great mansions that were the pride of Ridgefield.

A dozen years later in 1907, along came Daniel J. O'Shea and his family. The O'Sheas were to live in this nice house for the next half century.

Dan had come here from Ireland, and his wife, the former Jessie McDonald, had emigrated from Scotland. Dan and Jessie had four children, Dennis J., Elizabeth, Daniel G. and Isabel.

The boys sought their fortune elsewhere, but the girls wisely stayed in dear old Ridgefield. All four were blessed with their parents' excellent dispositions, and the girls in particular were very popular with the local gentry.

Any worthy local cause was sure to find the sisters helping out wherever needed. They were both great dancers and it was a real treat to see them, in their sailor suits, doing "The Sailor's Hornpipe." The girls had this dance down to perfection, and performed it in the great 1926 minstrel show. This was one of the many hits of the show, and the very enthusiastic audience caused them to dance several encores.

Elizabeth became Mrs. Harvey B. Lown, but Isabel never married and spent her later years in caring for her parents. Both girls were local school teachers, and lucky were the stu-

dents who had one of them as an instructor. They were the old-fashioned type of teacher who insisted on getting some knowledge into the head of even the poorest of students. There were a number of such teachers in those days.

Isabel, as everyone should know, went on to become the principal at Veterans Park School. A grateful town named the auditorium at [East Ridge Middle School] in her honor. It was a well deserved honor.

I would guess that two of Dan O'Shea's characteristics that I remember best were his ever-ready smile and his abundant pep. He had very quick movements, and he kind of skipped along as he walked at a rapid pace.

Perhaps it was his lightness of foot that caused his daughters to be such fine dancers. It has long been my contention that a person's style of walking is one of the strongest traits that is handed down to children. I have noticed this in many families, including my own.

Dan O'Shea was a chauffeur par excellence, and when decked out in his livery, he was a real dandy. In his day, having a liveried chauffeur was a status symbol, and of course Ridgefield had more than its share of people whose station in life was considerably higher than that of a ribbon clerk.

On many of the large private estates, living quarters were provided for the chauffeur and his family. This served two purposes; the living quarters were considered as a part of the chauffeur's salary and it also made him readily available to the beck and call of his employer. Dan being rather independent by nature never took advantage of the offered living quarters, preferring to stay at 123 West Lane.

Those in the higher echelons, not only wanted their limousines to look their very best, but the drivers as well, so they were provided with uniforms. The traditional uniform of the chauffeur was a very dark blue, with a shiny, stiff-visored cap, and looked very much like that of a policeman. Some also wore puttees, similar to those worn by a motorcycle policeman.

The Biddle sisters could have well afforded a chauffeur, but insisted instead on doing their own driving. When they finally did acquire a chauffeur, it was only because they had become too old to drive.

These fine women were pillars in Ridgefield's society, but they had their own way of doing things. I do not think they could have been labeled as "free spirits," but they sure caused a stir when their chauffeur, Cortland Emlaw, showed up wearing ordinary street clothes. They were great ladies and no one dared to admonish them.

It may be hard to believe now, but back in the 20's, when Ridgefield's population was one eighth of what it is today, there must have been at least 40 chauffeurs in town. They even had their own organization, and each year there was the Chauffeur's Ball, a gala affair, attended by the wealthy, as well as the ordinary.

Saturday was shopping day, and it was not unusual to find a number of chauffeur-driven station wagons (then called suburbans), in front of the stores on Main Street. Then on Sunday mornings, you would find limousines parked outside a church, with a group of chauffeurs standing nearby. Their conversations no doubt centered around the relative merits of a Packard over a Cadillac, a Rolls Royce over a Pierce Arrow, or a Brewster over a Renault.

I am sure that somewhere along the way, the discussion would include some interesting revelations concerning the eccentricities of their employers. Too bad we did not have tape recorders back in those days.

You may be sure that many of these [wealthy] people were well able to drive their own vehicles. I know Dr. Russell W. Lowe was a very good driver, yet he had a chauffeur drive him to make his house calls.

The Wall Street crash of 1929 did much to change all this, and some people found that a chauffeur was really not a necessity. By the time of World War II, there were only a few chauffeurs left in town.

For several years, Dan O'Shea drove for the George M. Olcott family at Casagmo. This is noteworthy because chauffeurs came and went with considerable rapidity at the Olcott household. This was especially true after the passing of Mr. Olcott, and operations at Casagmo came under the command of his daughter Mary. But that is another story.

Dan's even temper and exceptional good disposition were tested to the limit [by Miss Olcott]. When they finally wore out, Dan transferred to the employ of the famous Geraldine Farrar, who had recently moved to Ridgefield. It was a happy switch for Dan, for the vivacious "Gerry" thoroughly enjoyed his sunny disposition, and they got along just fine.

#298: THE MUSICAL CASAGRANDES

The house at 123 West Lane seemed to have a way of attracting good-natured people. If you do not believe that, just ask Marge Casagrande, whose husband bought the place some 30 years ago.

The previous owner, Dan O'Shea, had set the pace and Gene Casagrande kept it going. Gene and I have been friends, good friends, for more than 60 years. In all that time, we have never had a cross word. I would guess that you could put the blame on Gene for that. He probably never had a cross word with anyone. Therefore, my description of Gene Casagrande could no doubt be liberally sprinkled with predilection.

Gene came from a musical family. His father, Aldo Casagrande, was a member of the old Ridgefield Band, in which he played the cornet. The cornet is very much like the trumpet, and my father used to say that Aldo was the very best in the whole State of Connecticut.

Aldo played just about every brass instrument, such as the alto horn, the baritone, the trombone and tuba. He also played the bass fiddle.

However, the cornet was his forte, and when he picked up this instrument and placed it to his lips, it was as much a part of him as his fingers or toes.

I had the pleasure of playing with him in both a marching band and a dance band, and it was a very rewarding experience.

The old Ridgefield Band was also known as The Oreneca Band, and it was a very good one. However, as the members of the band grew older, it seemed as though there was no one coming along to replace them.

Then in April 1922, a raging fire wiped out most of the south side of Bailey Avenue. In so doing, the little building in which the instruments were stored and which stood just to the east of the Acorn Press building, was completely destroyed.

Aldo Casagrande could not stand having no local band, so four years later, he gathered a bunch of kids together and started to teach them how to play and enjoy the brass instruments. Arthur Seymour came forward to teach the boys who were interested in playing the reed instruments, and my father and brother Joe helped me with the drums.

After some months of individual instruction, Aldo and Arty had the boys ready to perform as a unit. Our very first public appearance was just 61 years ago, May 30, 1927, in the Decoration Day parade.

The boys had to pay their own expenses, so we did not have formal band uniforms. We did have little navy blue caps with red trim and a stiff shiny visor, over which were the initials R.B.B. in gold. We also had navy blue sweaters with red trim and white duck pants.

All in all, we at least looked alike, and we were quite proud that our first appearance was received with genuine enthusiasm by our townspeople. As the initials on our caps indicated, we were called The Ridgefield Boys Band, but later adopted the name of the old Oreneca Band. As the band improved, it became quite popular.

Soon we were engaged to play, not only in Ridgefield, but in many other towns such as Danbury, Brewster, Lake Mahopac, Poughkeepsie, Port Chester, Katonah, Yonkers, and even New York City.

By this time and still without subsidies of any kind, the boys had acquired spanking new uniforms that were green with gold trim.

We had a lot of fun, and I am sure that every one of those boys felt greatly indebted to Aldo Casagrande for his great efforts. He was a fine man.

I said earlier that Gene Casagrande came from a musical family. Actually that is an understatement. It just seemed natural that Gene would learn to play the cornet, and then he mastered the violin. His sister Ann (Girolmetti), played the piano very well, and brother Peter added to the group with his alto saxophone, while brother Arthur joined in with his trumpet.

All they needed was my brother Joe with his drums and the little dance band was complete. This was one of the most versatile musical groups you could find anywhere. If you had a preference for any type of music, they could supply it.

When they played for ballroom dancing at the old town hall, they displayed only a part of their repertoire. They played for square dancing at Odd Fellows Hall, Italian folk dancing at the Italian Hall, Swedish folk dancing at Miller's Hall in Georgetown and Polish folk dancing at Vasa Hall in Georgetown. Aldo could play an entire evening for each of these diverse groups, without ever reading a note of music.

Gene Casagrande was a star in both basketball and baseball at Ridgefield High School. This was at a time when Ridgefield was usually at or near the top of the Housatonic Valley League. What Gene lacked in height, he more than made up for with accuracy and a great competitive spirit. He would have made a good match for the tall boys of today.

The school did not have a hockey team, nor was there an indoor rink such as we have now. However, we made up teams and Lewis' Pond, New Pond and Lake Mamasasco were the sites of some real great hockey games. I think that hockey was Gene's favorite sport.

Like most kids in those days, Gene had an after-school job. He was a newspaper boy and later worked at an antiques store that was located at what is now 440 Main Street. That little building was the Old Indian Trading Post that has long since been moved south to 23 Main

Street. It is said to have been built in 1710, which would make it the oldest structure in Ridgefield.

When Gene graduated from Ridgefield High in 1931, the effects of the Great Depression were in full swing and jobs were scarce. However, Gene got a job as a route salesman for Rudy Hurzeler's Ridgefield Bakery, where Roma Pizzeria is now. The bakery was very popular and had several trucks that delivered its fine products over a wide area. Gene's route ended north all the way to Lake Mahopac, N.Y.

The experience that he gained in the bakery business was to prove invaluable to Gene when he and his partner, the late John P. Moore, opened their own meat and grocery store "Casa-More" in 1940, at 127 West Lane.

Three years later Gene was on his way to the South Pacific as a member of the United States Army.

#299: A COUNTRY STORE'S LONG HISTORY

During any major conflict, certain restrictions are brought to bear that create a change in the lifestyle of the civilian population. World War II was no exception.

Anyone over age 50 will no doubt remember that during the war, pleasure riding came to an abrupt halt. Local Ration Boards issued stamps that had to be surrendered whenever gasoline was purchased.

The same was true when tires were needed for the family auto. It also affected many food products, such as meat, sugar, coffee and many other items that were in short supply.

These shortages proved to be a problem for the storekeepers as well as their customers. Therefore, when Gene Casagrande prepared to go off with the U.S. Army, he and his partner John Moore decided to close their Casa-More store for the duration.

John and his wife, the former Rita Ryan, and their family continued to live in the apartment over the store, and the first floor of the building was rented to Dr. Herbert Cox, who must have been Ridgefield's first veterinarian. Up to that time our town was served by veterinarians from Danbury. Two that I remember were Dr. Knapp and Dr. Keresy.

So the building at 127 West Lane, which had served many years as a private residence, then as a grocery store, now became a veterinary hospital. The place had been built long before the turn of the century, and several families had made their home in this building.

The Achille Bacchiochi family lived there in the early part of this century. Mr. Bacchiochi once told me of a time when he was involved in a runaway with his gray mare, Mary. He had been doing construction work farther down West Lane at FairHaven. He was on his way home after a hard day's work, and he noticed that Mary was full of pep, and anxious to get home for her ration of hay and oats.

Mary started off at a brisk trot, and finally got up so much speed that Achille felt that he should slow her down. Alas, when he took up on the reins, one of them broke and Mary went into a gallop.

As they thundered by the Little Red School House, Achille said that he remembered being glad that school was out for the day and no children were around.

As usual, Mrs. Bacchiochi waited in front of the house to greet her husband. She heard the noise of Mary's approaching hoofs and knew that something was wrong. She waved as Mary went flying by the house, and all Mr. Bacchiochi could do was to wave in return.

Few things are more exciting than a runaway and this one lasted until Mary finally ran out of steam as she approached the business area of Main Street.

Achille laughed heartily as he recounted his harrowing experience, but you can bet that he was not laughing that day.

It was right after World War I that Howard Thomas bought the house at 127 West Lane. Howard lived upstairs with his family, and converted the first floor into a kind of country, general store. He was a good businessman, and with the famous Lewis estate right across the street, he was in a very good location.

Mrs. Lewis used to buy a large quantity of fireworks from Howard for a great public display on each 4th of July, and Howard said that he made such profit on the fireworks that his sales for the rest of the year were just gravy.

Howard was a great sport and a fine athlete. Basketball fans used to enjoy seeing him make those left-handed hook shots in the old Town Hall auditorium.

Howard Thomas ran the store through the 20's, and then the business was taken over by Carl Gustafson, who had been manager of the A&P store. Howard retained ownership of the building.

These were the troubled times of the Great Depression and Carl gave way to Paul Davis. Paul also found the going to be very rough, as did Jimmy Gaucher, who also tried to make the place go. One of them even painted the store with blue paint and called it the Blue Front, but even that did not work and they finally gave up.

It was not until Gene Casagrande and John Moore bought out Howard Thomas in 1940 that the business began to hum. Both of these gentlemen were possessed of a pleasant disposition that was augmented with a fine business acumen. It was a time when the economy was on the upswing.

With the end of the war, Gene and John reopened their store and started to rebuild the fine trade that they had temporarily relinquished.

John had a fine position with Electro Mechanical Research (EMR), a subsidiary of Schlumberger, that was located in the building on Grove Street that now houses Digitech Industries, Inc. [recently, the gym].

In the mid-50s, EMR elected to move their operations to Sarasota, and John decided to sell his share of Casa-More to Gene and move on south with his company.

It must have been a real struggle for Gene to compete with the large chain stores. However, he had a host of friends who were regular customers, and with his sunny disposition, plus a lot of hard work, he became quite successful.

Gene never seemed to have the desire to run for public office, but if he had done so, his popularity would have made him a sure winner. He did, however, find the time to serve several terms on our local Board of Finance, at a time when that was an appointed body.

Other than that, his outside interests were devoted to his two favorite organizations, the Knights of Columbus, in which he served several terms as grand knight, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars, in which he was elected commander.

So after more than 45 years of operating his nice little country store, Gene finally sold his business to Joseph Hahn. Joe was made to order as the proprietor of the West Lane Market, and he did a thriving business. However, he had other interests that appealed to him, and the store is now owned by a group headed by Michael Apazidis. [In 2024, this business is called the West Lane Pizza & Deli.]

Gene can now devote his time to golf, which is his favorite game during the summer months, and to playing cards in the winter months. We have competed in these games for many years, as I have said before, without ever a cross word. Then again, this fine man has never had a cross word with anyone.

#300: HOW TO GROW GIANT MELONS; THREE ROADS HISTORY

In Dispatch #141, I told about the large field that is just to the west of the west of the West Lane Grocery. This field has been owned by Miss Elizabeth Hull for some time, and through the years, it has acquired a bumper crop of saplings of several varieties [It is now woods owned by the Land Conservancy of Ridgefield].

When this was all a part of the Frederic E. Lewis estate, a part of the field was used to grow hay and another part was planted into a beautiful vegetable garden. Just about every vegetable known to man was grown here, and in such quantity that it could have supplied the whole town.

It was here that I first saw a watermelon actually growing on the vine. The melons were enormous and one of the several gardeners, John Robinson, told of how they were grown to such a size.

John claimed that as soon as the buds dropped and the melons started to form, he would take an awl and make a small hole in the vine near the melon. He would then take a piece of soft twine and draw it through the vine, leaving a strand about one foot long on either side of the vine. The ends of the twine were then placed in a pan of water.

The water was absorbed into the vine and directed to the melon. As the melon grew, the amount of water that it absorbed increased. John said that it was not unusual for a large melon to drink two quarts daily.

He used the same method to grow squash and pumpkins that were too large to lift, only they were fed with skim milk rather than water.

This valuable property must be just about the most desirable piece of real estate left in Ridgefield. Much to her credit, Miss Hull has protected it from being developed for many years.

The great field was also the site of the magnificent fireworks displays that Mrs. Lewis used to put on for the public each Fourth of July.

Just across the street at 140 West Lane is the home of Susan York. This was also a part of the Lewis estate and was for many years the home of Louis Waldarke and his family. Louis was the butler, or houseman, for the Lewis family.

The house was considerably smaller in those days. In the late 20's, when the economy took the big plunge, even the great estates were forced to economize. "Upaginstit" was no exception, so the little house at 140 West Lane was closed and the Waldarke family moved into the huge mansion with Mrs. Lewis.

The house remained closed until the estate disintegrated, and Manor Estates was developed. It then became the home of Peter and Peg Carboni, and their family.

Pete, who managed the A&P Liquor Store for a number of years, was a member of the Carboni family whose name was synonymous with many sporting events in the 20's, 30's and 40's.

The place has undergone significant changes in recent years, some were made by the Tiedgen family and some by the present owner. Additions were made to the little house, and the newly attached garage has made this a rather imposing structure.

Back to the south side of the highway we come to the very attractive little compound at 165 West Lane. It is now the home of Scott and Deborah Rhoades. Since their home sits at the focal point of three roads, Silver Spring, South Salem and West Lane, the family name seems to fit very well.

This place was owned many years ago by John Coffey and was known at that time as "The Coffey House of the Three Roads." Later, and for half a century, it was the home of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Collier. Mr. Collier was a prominent dealer in antiques and was noted for restoring 18th Century furniture.

Mrs. Collier was a retired school teacher, and was an active member of several local organizations, including the Keeler Tavern Preservation Society. I recall that when we reenacted the Battle of Ridgefield on July 4, 1966, Mrs. Collier acted the part of a nurse. The film of that event shows her administering first aid to a supposedly wounded British soldier. She was a lady of great compassion and did not notice the soldier's red coat.

A more recent owner of this place was Peter Henning. Peter is a professional photographer, as well as a director of TV documentaries. One of his documentaries was made at the Elms Inn a couple of years ago with Christopher Plummer and myself. I have been waiting to see it on TV, but apparently it has not attracted any sponsors up to now.

Next we come to the famous "Little Red Schoolhouse." This precious little bit of Ridgefield's wonderful history has somehow escaped the fate of our other one-room school houses that have been moved, made into residences, or demolished.

To a great extent we owe its excellent preservation to the diligence of the garden clubs. The school is open each year to the public, and every local student should make a visit so they can properly appreciate the modern schools that they are privileged to attend today.

They will find no computers, or indoor plumbing, or even electricity. They would, however, find slates on which to write and do their calculations. There is also a large fireplace that students would have to take turns in tending during the cold winter months.

Yet, from these rather primitive surroundings emerged some students who went on to become quite famous people. To just name a few, there was the great Peter Parley, and the two Lounsbury brothers that were later to become governors of Connecticut [they attended Farmingville and Florida schoolhouses].

I have a copy of a most interesting brochure that was put out in 1914 for the laying of the cornerstone of the "big" school on East Ridge, now occupied by Boehringer Ingelheim [Chef's Warehouse in 2024]. It is hard to believe, but at that time, there were no less than 14 schoolhouses in Ridgefield, and they accommodated almost 500 students. The students are all listed in the brochure and the name Venus is liberally sprinkled among them.

The Little Red Schoolhouse had 43 students, so they must have attended in shifts. Of those students of 74 years ago at this little school, we know that Lyman Anderson, Aldo Bacchiochi, Milton Haight, Marie Kilcoyne, Isabelle Mullen, Jack O'Keeffe, Helen Tobin and Catherine Tobin are still with us. There may be more but these we know personally.

#301: TOWN'S FIRST CATHOLICS; THE FOUNDER OF LIFE

Before we pass by the "Little Red Schoolhouse" on West Lane, I should mention that one of the several local blacksmith shops was located on the same plot of ground. It sat [in the 19th Century] on the eastern end of the triangle that separates the three highways.

For many years, the blacksmith that ran this shop was James Seymour. The name Seymour must appear many times in any history of Ridgefield, and it goes right back to 1708 and the original settlers. It is sad that the name has just about disappeared from our town in recent years, though there are still a number of native Ridgefielders whose ancestors bore that proud name.

In bygone days, the blacksmith was considered a very important man in any town. People depended on them, not only to keep their horses well shod, but to furnish them with various tools as well as hardware products for their homes. As every student should know, "The Village Smithy" was immortalized in the poem of that name by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

It seems fitting that James Seymour's blacksmith shop stood near the Red Schoolhouse, for children could learn much from this ingenious mechanic. I would bet that a number of the students, especially the boys, found some reason to visit the shop and watch the blacksmith at work.

The two buildings were close enough so that the children could easily hear the ringing sound of Mr. Seymour's anvil, as he pounded a piece of metal into shape. It was a pleasant sound and almost as though he was playing a tune.

James Seymour did not have to walk very far to reach his place of business. He owned and lived in the house almost directly across the street at 191 West Lane. This place is now the home of the Frederic Johnson family. It was known for many years as the Brophy house. [To make way for a new and much larger house about 15 years ago, this 18th Century house was dismantled and is stored in a container until someone figures out what to do with it.]

It is generally agreed that the James Brophy family was the first Catholic family to settle in Ridgefield. It was just 140 years ago this coming Thanksgiving Day that the James Brophy family arrived here from Ireland.

The Brophys lived in a house on Branchville Road, just across from where East Ridge connects with that highway. Father Thomas Ryan visited the Brophy home and said Mass there.

It is believed that the very first Mass was said in the Ridgebury area, by one of the chaplains that accompanied Count de Rochambeau and his French Army. As everyone knows, Rochambeau was marching his troops from Newport, Rhode Island, to the Hudson, and on July 1, 1781, they passed through the northern part of our town. It so happened that July 1 was Rochambeau's 56th birthday, and since he was leading 4,800 troops, it was no doubt a very festive occasion.

At any rate, it was one year after the James Brophy family arrived in Ridgefield that his brother Andrew and his family settled here on Pin Pack Road. The importance of this was that Andrew had a son named John, who was to become one of Ridgefield's most prominent citizens.

John Brophy was eight years old when his family came here, and he was quickly enrolled as a student at old Titicus School (now the Legion [Hall]). The Gilbert tannery was located only a few yards down the road, and it was not long before young John had a part-time job, pulling hides from the huge vats, in which they were being cured.

Though he worked long hours, John did not neglect his studies and it was late at night before he was able to complete his homework.

John Brophy was truly a very remarkable man and any history of Ridgefield must include the many ways in which he served his adopted community, and the State of Connecticut.

Mr. Brophy was a charter member of Marquette Council Knights of Columbus, and a charter member of the Ridgefield Grange. He was one of the original directors of The First National Bank of Ridgefield. He served two terms as our representative to the General Assembly at Hartford. For 12 years, John Brophy served as a commissioner of Fairfield County, and for 16 years, he was Inspector of Customs at the port of New York.

In 1893, John Brophy was elected Ridgefield's first selectman, an office in which he served with distinction for eight terms.

When the old town hall was destroyed by the disastrous fire of 1895, Mr. Brophy was quick to organize and direct the building of our present town hall. Many of his ideas were incorporated in this fine old structure.

While John Brophy was still a boy, his family moved from Pin Pack Road to 191 West Lane, thus it became known for so many years as the Brophy House. Of course, John then was transferred to the Little Red Schoolhouse and went on to become one of its most illustrious graduates.

Just across West Lane, at number 192, is an attractive building that was once a stable and then a garage for the John Ames Mitchell family. As was the custom on the large estates, the second floor of this building contained living quarters for the employees. This is now the home of Greta Welti, but at the time of which I am writing, Thomas Reiley lived there.

Tom was the gardener for the Mitchells, and the gardens that he tended were among the best in a town noted for its botanical splendor. He was a happy little fellow, with a ready smile.

Tom was once struck by a car as he walked along West Lane. Though he survived the accident, he walked with a limp until he passed on in 1931

The large and beautiful mansion at 194 West Lane is now the home of the Francoise Harkavy family. In the early part of this century, it was a part of the James Ames Mitchell estate.

Mr. Mitchell started, and was editor and publisher of *Life* magazine. He was an accomplished cartoonist and illustrator, and was also noted as a very fine architect. He headed the local, annual horse show and when that event showed a profit, Mr. Mitchell and his committee donated it toward the building of the famous horse watering trough that was described in a recent column. John Mitchell furnished the balance of the money needed and then drew the plans for what has become one of Ridgefield's historic treasures.

Oh yes, like most of the estates at the time, this one had a name — "Windover."

#302: FLEET OF FOOT, RICH OF VOICE

In telling about the John Ames Mitchell estate, I should mention that this great place was also the site of some very fine barn dances.

After the haymows [the part of the barn where hay was stored], had been cleared of hay [in late spring or early summer], it was common practice on many of the private estates for those who were employed there to invite their neighbors and friends for an evening of fun and dancing. It was an annual social event that they all looked forward to with pleasure.

The pretty building at 192 West Lane was where such things were held on the Mitchell estate. After acquaintances were renewed and pleasantries were passed, the dancing would start.

James O'Keeffe, who was superintendent on the nearby Swords estate, was an expert violinist, as was his son, Richard, who also played the mandolin and banjo. They would furnish the music for a lively evening of both square and round dancing, interspersed with some Virginia reels and Irish folk dancing.

No evening would be complete without a special performance by John McCarthy. John had been a coachman for the Mitchell family and was one of those who had successfully made the transition from a horseman to become the chauffeur for the Mitchells.

He had come here from County Kerry, and like most Kerry men, John was an excellent dancer. At some time during the festivities, the other dancers would form a circle on the dance floor, and they would then urge John to prove that he was still nimble, despite an advanced age. John was not one to ever disappoint the crowd of merrymakers.

Somewhere in his repertoire, John was sure to include his favorite dance, "The Stack of Barley." As he lightly flitted across the floor of the haymow, the music of the fiddlers was almost lost in the thunderous applause from the on-lookers.

John McCarthy was a pleasant man, with a ready smile and it was a real pleasure to know him.

The social functions of 50 or 60 years ago were probably very quaint when compared with those of today. However, there are those of us who feel that we could do with a little more of that quaintness. After being exposed to the ear-shattering noise that now passes for music, especially that which the rock groups are feeding the public via all sorts of electronic equipment, a return to a softer style would seem most welcome.

It might even change our lifestyle for the better. Let's bring back the real musicians for a respite from all this.

I did mention the beautiful formal gardens that extended out to the west of the Mitchell mansion and should also relate that there were many arbors, trellises and archways among the flower beds. They created a kind of Old World atmosphere.

The mansion itself was set at an angle that allowed for a fine view to the west. One can easily imagine how pleasant it must be to sit in that large drawing room and watch the sun slowly sink behind the distant mountains.

There are a number of new houses along this part of West Lane. At least they had not been built before, or during the period that I am covering.

Then there is Sycamore Lane that was developed in recent years by Morgan Helie. This property was all once a part of the Mitchell estate, and a portion was where the gardens that we just mentioned were located. So the people living here must have very rich soil.

Across the street, and just to the west of the home of Norman and Elsie Craig (who we told about in Dispatch #94) is number 209 West Lane. This imposing mansion is now the home of Anthony and Jill Clapes. Jill is active in several local organizations and serves with me on the Historic District Commission.

It was in 1901 that Lillian Loomis Dempsey bought this property from John Brophy, and built this fine 22-room mansion that in 1924 became the home of the great Geraldine Farrar.

If you do not know of the fabulous “Gerry,” then you would be unaware that she was the very first American Superstar of the Metropolitan Opera Company. The lively and very interesting history of this remarkable lady has been told many times, but just in case you are not familiar with it, I will review it once more.

Geraldine Farrar was born on Feb. 28, 1882, in Melrose, Mass., an attractive suburb of Boston. She was the only child of Sidney and Henrietta Farrar. Her parents both had very good voices and were active in the local musical affairs of Melrose.

No one was particularly surprised when little Geraldine started to sing almost before she could walk. Obviously she inherited the vocal talents of her parents, especially from her father, for Sid had a very powerful voice. I remember hearing him talk, in what he felt was a very moderate tone, while I thought he was shouting.

Sidney Farrar had a small business in Boston, which he conducted during the winter months. However, his summers were devoted to baseball, a sport that he loved very much. He was not just a journeyman ball player and his talents were such that he made it all the way to the Big Leagues.

Gerry was still a little girl when Sid signed a contract to play first base for the Philadelphia Phillies in the National League. At any rate, between his business and his baseball playing, Sidney Farrar had very little time to spend with his daughter.

So the early training of Geraldine was left in the very capable hands of her pretty mother. Henrietta was only 18 when her daughter was born, and Gerry said one time that they were almost like sisters.

Geraldine became somewhat of a local celebrity while still a child, and participated in impromptu performances at local churches and community centers, with her mother accompanying her on the piano.

Much as she loved to display her own talents, Gerry also enjoyed watching her father play baseball, and attended as many games as possible.

I asked her one time if it was true that she went though the ballpark stands looking for tin foil to help pay for her singing lessons.

She gave a hearty laugh and asked, “Where did you hear that story?”

However, she did not deny it.

#303: GERRY, THE GERMAN PRINCE & SINGING WITH CARUSO

The word “prodigy” was attached to Geraldine Farrar when she was still a little girl. However, her mother, Henrietta, felt strongly that Gerry should be brought along slowly, so to protect her daughter, she downplayed such adulation at every turn.

As part of her early training, Gerry accompanied her mother to the Boston Opera House. As it turned out, the very first opera they saw was *Carmen*, with Emma Calve in the leading role.

Gerry was fascinated by all the pageantry and of course, Carmen was one of the roles in which she herself would become world-famous. The impression of that first opera was great and Gerry always felt Calve was the best Carmen.

The time came when Henrietta could teach her daughter no more, and she was sent off to teachers in Boston and New York. Geraldine was an apt student and worked hard at her lessons, while attending the opera whenever possible. Along the way, Gerry's singing was heard by several artists, and they were of the opinion that she should study in Europe.

It was one year before the turn of the century that the Farrars took off for Paris. Gerry had learned both the French and Italian language and sang in each language with ease. Her voice, however, was not suited to the French method of teaching, so they decided to move on to Berlin, and after one season in Paris, they did just that.

The move to Berlin meant a crash course in German for Gerry. It was not easy, but in a short time she was able to sing in passable German. An audition was arranged, to which Graf von Hoechberg, intendant of the Royal Berlin, was invited.

Her German was not all that good, and it was the first time that she sang with an orchestra directed by the noted Karl Muck, but Gerry was an instant hit. Later that same evening, Miss Farrar signed a contract making her a member of the Royal Berlin Opera. Until her German was perfected, she sang her leading roles in either French or Italian.

At the tender age of 19, Geraldine Farrar, who would go on to become the first American superstar with the Metropolitan, made her debut in the role of Marguerite in *Faust* with the Royal Berlin Opera Company. To say that she was a success, is putting it mildly.

Up to this time, opera stars were not necessarily beautiful. Their voice was the most important ingredient. Here was a star that combined a superlative soprano voice, with breathtaking beauty, as well as a real acting ability and a very warm personality.

The Berliners took Gerry to their hearts, receiving her with tumultuous applause. She also became a great favorite with the royal family. In fact, in those early days of her career, much was made of the friendship between Miss Farrar and the crown prince. To be sure, this young man, who was also only 19 at the time, fell head over heels in love with the beautiful Gerry, and it touched off a major international press scandal.

However, Miss Farrar was staunchly defended by the American press in Berlin, and that young lady had no inclination for dalliance — her career was most important to her. However, she did remain friendly with the prince and the royal family, who had treated her with much kindness. It was well that she did; as a member of the Berlin Opera, she would need that friendship.

By 1906, Geraldine Farrar's fame had spread across two continents and she was invited by Heinrich Conrad to join New York's Metropolitan Opera Company. However, there was the problem of her contract with the Berlin, and that organization was not about to dispense with their star performer. The intendant flatly refused to present her request for a leave of absence to the Kaiser.

The intendant underestimated the determination of this young lady, who proceeded to go right over his head, and spoke to the Kaiser herself. His Majesty was understanding and granted her request, on the condition that she return each spring — for a season in Berlin. This she did each year until the outbreak of World War I in 1914.

Miss Farrar arrived in New York in November 1906, and found the gentlemen of the press more interested in her association with the prince. So, you can see that reporters have not changed that much over the years.

At any rate, Gerry received a hearty welcome from old friends and well wishers, and one week later made her Metropolitan debut in Gounod's *Romeo et Juliette*. From then on it was just a series of triumphs for this great American beauty.

The following years she became America's first Madame Butterfly in a production supervised by the composer Giacomo Puccini. The great Arturo Toscanini conducted the orchestra, and was later said to be romantically linked with Gerry. Others who appeared in key roles in this production were Louise Homer, Antonio Scotti, and the incomparable Enrico Caruso. This was an all-star cast, if there ever was one.

Gerry once said that the very first time she appeared with Caruso, she was so enthralled by his impeccable voice, she almost missed her entrance cue.

The team of Farrar and Caruso is felt by many to have been the very finest that the world of opera has ever had to offer. Though these stars had a mutual admiration for each other, their ideas as to the technique to be employed were sometimes quite different.

Many prima donnas can be difficult to deal with. They operate from a pedestal, from which their every whim must be catered to. It was in such an atmosphere that this great team found themselves, as they strove for perfection.

There was the time in the middle of a performance when Gerry surprised the audience — as well as Caruso — by giving him a sharp slap in the face. Being a real gentleman, Enrico went on with the show and hid his embarrassment, but the newspapers had a field day with the incident.

#304: GERRY GOES TO HOLLYWOOD

There is still much more to tell about the interesting life of Geraldine Farrar, so I will continue before resuming our trip down West Lane.

The great lady's triumphs in opera seemed endless, but in the early part of this century movies were making inroads into the world of entertainment. Opera stars, as well as stars of the stage, were being lured to Hollywood by the big money and the glamor that it had to offer.

Several efforts were made to get the beautiful Gerry to perform before the camera. So it was not surprising when she succumbed to the allurements of "TinselTown," and headed west to California.

Remember, this was at a time when there were only silent movies, so her magnificent voice was not really the main factor in the efforts by movie moguls to get Gerry on film. Rather, it was her fame, her natural beauty and her acting ability that made her a movie star.

Geraldine Farrar made eight films and her debut in movie land was in a production of *Carmen*, a role that she had perfected on the stage. It should be noted that despite their greatness as operatic luminaries, Enrico Caruso and Mary Garden were complete failures before the cameras, Gerry gave great credit to the famous Cecil B. DeMille for her success on the silver screen, as it was he who directed most of her films.

However, the astounding thing was that she soon proceeded to outshine such leading men as Wallace Reid and Milton Sills. For those who are too young to remember those

handsome gentlemen, I can only say that they were the Clark Gable, or the Paul Newman of that time.

Of her eight films, Gerry's favorite was as Joan of Arc, in the picture, "Joan the Woman." Would it not have been wonderful if that incomparable soprano voice, and that breathtaking beauty could have been captured and preserved in color, on the sound films of today?

Another of Miss Farrar's attributes was her boundless energy, which she retained even in her later years. It enabled her to fulfill her commitments to Hollywood and the New York Metropolitan Opera. Crisscrossing the nation as Gerry did must have been an arduous task in the days before the jet plane.

It was at this time that Gerry met and fell in love with another famous movie star, Lou Tellegen. With a superb physique and a Barrymore-like profile, Tellegen had been leading man to the great Sarah Bernhardt.

Their marriage was done in typical Hollywood style, and made headlines across the country. The newlyweds acted together in several pictures, but the word incompatibility began to creep into stories about them. The marriage ended in a much publicized divorce in 1923, when divorces were not as commonplace as they are today.

The previous year, in April of 1922, Gerry retired from the Metropolitan. It was a matinee performance of Leoncavallo's all but forgotten "ZaZa." She was 40 at the time, and though she said that she was leaving opera because she wanted to, she was well aware that it was time to go. She had overused that great voice, and there were the unmistakable signs of age and wear.

That last performance at the Met must have been something to witness. It was said to be one of the most emotionally charged events of the century. Scalpers had a field day and were charging \$200 for a pair of tickets. They were immediately sold out and thousands were turned away. One can only imagine what those tickets would have brought today. Remember, in 1922, there was no inflation compared to today.

When the opera was over, Miss Farrar was mobbed by thousands of admirers who escorted her open car up Broadway. It must have been a triumphal procession. Her adoring audience included a multitude of "Gerryflappers," who did not want to let her go.

An old doorman at the opera house said, "There has never been anything like this here before."

The same year that Gerry retired, her father Sidney bought his "Farrar's Forty Acres" [some say "Thirty Acres"] estate on North Salem Road in Ridgefield. When Gerry came to visit her father, she was smitten by what she saw, and like so many others had done before and since, she fell in love with Ridgefield.

Just one year later, Miss Farrar moved to "Fairhaven," her fine estate at 209 West Lane. The name of this great place is engraved in the large stone abutment that stands at its entrance.

She used to refer to her home as "early McKinley," and it was during his time that it was built. Gerry brought with her Miss Sylvia Blein, who was her longtime companion, and Margaret Gallatly, her longtime maid. Sylvia had come here from France and Margaret was a native of Aberdeen.

Also on the staff at Fairhaven was Joseph Conti, who as superintendent would look after the estate for many years. Joe and his wife Iride lived in the nice garage apartment with their two daughters, Mary and Dora. Of course, you already know that Dora [Cassavechia] is our present town clerk, and Mary is Mrs. Mario Marcheggiani.

Gerry could drive an auto very well but in Ridgefield at that time you were just not with it if you did not have a chauffeur, so Dan O'Shea was pressed into service. Miss Farrar quickly became involved in our town's social life and her chauffeur was kept very busy. After Dan came Fritz Rux and I think her last chauffeur was Hugh Clark.

Oh yes, the little car shown in the picture with her, that appeared in *The Press* a couple of weeks ago, was a Crosley. The Crosley was popular during World War II, as it was a good gas saver and Gerry was doing her part to conserve fuel.

Miss Farrar was an avid reader and through the years compiled a great library that must have been worth a fortune. She was also very fond of animals and had two little dachshunds and I think their names were Luca and Booby. At one time she had a cocker spaniel that she called Bijou. Dora says that they are buried on the grounds of Fairhaven.

Geraldine Farrar did not become a recluse after retiring from the Met. For several years she traveled back and forth across the country in her Pullman car, performing concerts along the way. Then, in the fall of 1931, at the conclusion of a Carnegie Hall concert, she surprised her audience with a few simply spoken words of farewell. She never sang in public again, despite the urging of her legions of fans.

You should know that she brought the great Toscanini and his symphony orchestra to perform a benefit concert in the Ridgefield Playhouse, where the Village Bank is now. There were those who felt sure that she would favor the audience with a song on this momentous occasion, but they were disappointed.

During World War II Gerry joined the American Women's Voluntary Services and as a member of the Red Cross, she served as chairman of Voluntary Services for Civil Defense. She was active in scrap drives, and the Red Cross Blood Bank and just seemed to be involved in every worthwhile cause.

It was my privilege to know this great lady and among my most prized possessions are some letters, written in her large scrawling hand, one of which contained a group picture in which we both appear.

In 1954, Miss Farrar and Miss Sylvia moved from Fairhaven to a smaller home on New Street. It was here that she died March 12, 1967. She was 85 years of age.

It was said that at one time, when a group had gathered for tea, someone brought up the subject of life after death, and Gerry was heard to say, "I shall not be afraid. I shall be very curious."

#305: OLD PRESCHOOL, FDR'S PEN PAL, CLIMBING FOR SWIGS

Just to the west of Fairhaven, there was a small house that I think had been converted from a farm outbuilding to a dwelling. At any rate, the building went through several changes, over the past half century. It is now 223 West Lane and is the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Harry J. Twine.

At one time this building served as a private school as well as a dwelling. It was about the time that World War II was raging in Europe, but before that conflict erupted in Southeast Asia. The school was much like a pre-school, or kindergarten, as the pupils were all little ones.

The school started with just a half dozen pupils at the home of Dan and Louise McKeon in Ridgebury. Apparently the idea must have struck a very responsive chord, for the little school just grew like Topsy, and at one time it had more than 40 pupils.

As student enrollment increased, it naturally followed that larger classroom facilities were needed. Then there came a time when it was necessary to move the school to Market Street. There it was located in a building that had been the home of Sam Perry, at the rear of the present offices of the District Nursing Association.

Enrollment continued to increase and the school moved to 223 West Lane. Children from the families of the McKcons, Grants and the Donnellys were among the students attending this school.

Mrs. Welch, a very accomplished teacher, was engaged to instruct the children. She is credited with giving her pupils a fine start in the academic world. However, as the war intensified, and our country became actively involved, the little school became another of its victims.

There was a very old house, directly across the street, about where the home of the Peter Lotus family is now. Mr. and Mrs. William Brown and their sizable family lived here in the 30's. The house remained empty for several years after the Brown family moved to Catoonah Street, to the house that in later years was to become the Rusty Nail restaurant.

Bill Brown was a prolific writer of letters, and his numerous missives were not limited to letters to the editor, though they were many. Bill wrote to some quite famous people, and he must have done a good job of it, for his letters always seemed to elicit an answer.

He was never at a loss for words, or solutions to problems that ranged from those of local interest to foreign affairs. One of Bill Brown's favorite pen pals was none other than President Franklin D. Roosevelt. F.D.R. never failed to answer, and Bill would proudly display any letter that came from the White House.

In the meantime, the old house on West Lane continued to deteriorate. It was eventually torn down and replaced by the relatively new house that now stands there.

I believe that it was the late Harold O. Davis who built some of the newer houses on West Lane. However, during the period we are covering, there were no more homes until we get to 256 West Lane. In the early part of this century, this was the home of Mr. and Mrs. John Mullen Sr., and their children John Jr., Margaret, Arthur, Isabel and Edward. Isabel is the only remaining member of this nice family, and presently lives at Ballard Green. I recall that she was a member of the cast of that great 1926 Minstrel Show in the old Town Hall.

There are still some descendants of John Sr., in Ridgefield. A grandson James E. Mullen, and his wife, the former Lynn Casagrande, live with their three children at 119 West Lane. They were not mentioned as we came along that section of West Lane, as their home is of quite recent vintage.

A grand-daughter, Patricia, and her husband Francis Simoneau, raised their four children at 9 Lafayette Avenue.

John Mullen Sr. was a painter by trade, and like in so many old Ridgefield families, his three sons all followed in his footsteps. John Jr. later became the representative of the painters union, and later still, became the business agent for all of the local labor unions.

John was also quite a storyteller and once told me about the two Behnke brothers, Bill and Bronco, who lived further down West Lane and just over the state line. The brothers were little fellows and were experts at tree climbing. John said that they were just like a couple of squirrels.

They were both very fond of hard cider. Cider was very popular during the era of Prohibition, and before the apple trees were subjected to the extensive spraying programs. So, the Mullens had a barrel of cider, but they would not give any to the Behnkes until the brothers gave an exhibition of their climbing prowess.

There was a large maple tree in front of the Mullen house, and Bill and Bronco had to climb to the top of the tree. While they were thus engaged, John would put a jug of cider at the foot of the tree. The brothers would then descend to a lower branch, from which as part of the ritual, they would hang by their legs, reach down and scoop up the jug. They were then free to enjoy the very potent apple juice.

Across the street, on the south side of West Lane, there were no buildings back in the 30's, from the aforementioned school to what is now 269 West Lane. It was a long and rather narrow field that served as a pasture for a wonderful bob-tailed horse named Davey. In case you did not know, Davey was the retired saddle horse of Henry C. Swords.

Not only were there no buildings in this field, it was also long before Memory Lane was built across it. Davey had the whole place to himself. My favorite pastime, when I was a little kid, was to sit on the stone wall fence and watch Davey as he munched on the lush green grass. Davey, though very old, was a beautiful bay and he seemed to thoroughly enjoy his retirement.

#306: WHEN HORSES WERE REALLY SPECIAL

Before Henry C. Swords passed on, he made sure that his favorite saddle horse, Davey, would be well taken care of. During the winter months, Davey was housed in a very comfortable stable, with a large box stall. Then there was the tender loving care provided by the horseman, John Mugavin. John was very good at his trade.

In the warm weather, Davey had one entire pasture lot reserved for him. He did not have to share it with the other horses, and was allowed to cavort to his heart's delight in the long field where Memory Lane is now. His mornings were spent in munching the lush grass, in what he came to learn was his private domain. During the afternoon, Davey could be seen dozing in the shade in the eastern end of the field.

However, Davey did have one problem during the fly season. His little bobbed tail was not long enough to combat the pesky insects.

As a little kid, I was naive enough to believe that Davey had been short-changed by Mother Nature. It would be an understatement to say that I was disillusioned when later on it was explained to me that his tail had actually been docked.

To find that Davey, in the name of prevailing fashions of the day, had been deprived of his only means of fending off his tormentors was sad indeed. I can still see him swishing that little stubby tail, back and forth, in a fruitless attempt to protect himself from the annoying flies.

On the western end of this field we come to the great barn where Davey and his stable mates were safe from the flies and other forms of annoyance. This fine building, at 269 West Lane, is now the home of Martin and Frances Stuttmann. It is my considered opinion that this is one of the very best structures in this area.

It was built by George G. Haven, just at the turn of this century. This was a time when wealthy people were building Ridgefield's large estates, and they seemed to try to outdo each other in the quality of buildings.

Mr. Haven, who was a great lover of horses, felt that they were entitled to enjoy a building that would be as fine as any mansion, so cost was no object in the construction of his horse barn.

Jack O'Keefe grew up on this great place and he tells of how at one time there were 13 horses on the estate. Some were for driving and some for riding, and since there was also a farm, there was also a team of draft horses, although they were kept in another barn.

Among Mr. Haven's horses were four very beautiful blacks, and they drew a coach, driven in what was called a four-in-hand by the coachman, John Connors. John was known as Ridgefield's premier horseman and it was said that he could turn that coach and four around on a dime.

John Connors always carried a very long whip that could reach the lead team, but it was only carried for show. However, he knew how to use it, and my father once told me that John could flick a fly off any one of the horses with that whip, without ever touching the horse. People along Main Street used to stop and stare in admiration as this great team and coach went passing by.

As I have said before, those who owned real good horses liked to show them off, and many were the races that were held right here on Main Street. Some of those who raced on a Sunday afternoon were Dr. Van Saun, Edward P. Dutton, William R. Keeler and, of course, George G. Haven, who was generally the winner. So you can see that Main Street has been a raceway for many years — the only difference being that automobiles have replaced the horses as competitors.

I should tell of how, when John Morganti came to this country so many years ago, his first job was helping to care for Mr. Haven's horses. John then went into the army in World War I, and on his return worked as a foreman for the Charles Sturges Construction Company. They built three dams in the Bennett's Farm area. John must have liked the work, for he soon formed his own construction company that today is known far and wide as Morganti, Inc.

So back to the fine building at 269 West Lane. As a young boy, I visited this place just as often as possible. It was owned at that time by the Henry C. Swords family. The horse-drawn carriages had been replaced by the automobile, so the coach horses had disappeared.

However, the Swords family still retained some of the saddle horses and they were beauties. I guess that Mr. Swords wanted his horses to be considered as members of the family, for they were not assigned lengthy names such as race horses have. Besides Davey, there was Betty, Willis, Tom and Harry, but no Dick.

Upstairs in that fine horse barn, there were two very nice apartments that were separated by a large hay mow. One apartment was for John McGrath, who had successfully made the transition from coachman to chauffeur, and the other was for the horseman, John Mugavin.

The hay mow, like so many others on the private estates, was the scene of many a barn dance. The music was provided by fiddler James O'Keefe and his son, Richard. After a few years of having the hay pushed around on it, the floor of a hay mow took on a shine that made it ideal for dancing. It was the custom for owners of these estates to attend these dances, and participate in the lively festivities.

However, it was the first floor of this building that thoroughly fascinated me, for of course that was where the horses were kept. There were both box stalls and straight stalls, and they were made to give the horses every comfort.

The first thing you would see as you stepped through the very large entrance door and onto the brick floor, was a large glassed in cabinet that served as a trophy case. This was where the many awards that the horses had won were put on display.

There was also a large tack room from which wafted the very pleasant aroma of the soft and very well-kept leather. All in all, you could easily get the feeling that here was a rather special place where luxury was combined with security and everything was right in the world.

#307: THE HANDSOME HAVEN HOME

The very neatest household could not have been any more tidy than George Haven's horse barn at 269 West Lane. The sleek and happy horses reflected the excellent care that they received.

Nothing was spared in keeping that stable and the horses in first-class condition. Even the straw that was used for bedding had to be bright and just the right color. Outside of each box stall and at the end of each straight stall, there hung a large iron ring, to which the horses were tied while receiving their daily grooming.

At the close of each day, the horseman would grasp a handful of the shiny yellow straw and draw it through each ring. Then with a deft twist, John would tie a knot in the straw and allow it to hang. It was strictly ornamental, but it did add to the final window dressing.

Oh yes, there was also a dog and a cat, as no first-class stable would be without them. Though it was natural for them to have a certain amount of animosity, they learned to get along and had a mutual respect for one another. However, their places to spend the night were separated, with the dog at one end of the stable and the cat at the other.

When the horses were bedded down for the night, this charming stable took on an air of tranquility. A peaceful quietness descended with each horse in its stall and the dog and cat curled up in their beds. It was a scene that was worthy of a lithograph by the famous Nathaniel Currier and his partner, James Merritt Ives.

In the late 40's and early 50's, Ridgefield's great private estates were in the process of being disassembled. It was a period during which these fine places could be purchased for the proverbial "song." People just did not seem to want the upkeep of the great mansions, and the many acres that went with them.

We seem to have come full cycle as the houses being built today compare in size with some of yesterday's mansions and just keep getting bigger all the time. So the period about which I have been writing might properly be called Ridgefield's "Golden Era," and like all good things, it just seemed to be coming to an end.

When the former Haven estate on West Lane was in the process of being developed, the horse stable was the first to become a part of the transition. Some alterations were made to this fine building and it became the residence of the Howard Willets family. Then, after Morgan Helie started to develop the surrounding property, he also took over the former horse stable.

In the late 50's, the converted barn became the home of Ward and Virginia Pitkin. This proved to be fortunate, as Virginia Pitkin was an accomplished interior decorator as well as a landscape engineer. To her everlasting credit, Mrs. Pitkin put her considerable talents to work, with the result that much of the charm of the place was preserved. She did her level best to retain the splendid atmosphere of bygone days.

The Pitkins were customers of Dic-Rie Dairy, and this gave me the opportunity to view the alterations as they progressed. It was with great satisfaction that I noted the interior of the box stalls were transformed into very nice bedrooms, but the exterior remained the same, giving the impression that the place was still a horse stable.

Fortunately, the Stuttermans, present owners of the place, also have a real sense of preservation. It is comforting to know that one of our very favorite buildings is in good hands.

Before moving on to the Haven mansion, it should be noted that in the late 40's, the property across West Lane from the entrance to the place just described was purchased by Mrs. Olive Eddy. It had been a part of the James Mullen family's holding. Mrs. Eddy had the very nice house built that now carries the number 272 West Lane. It was one of the first "newer" homes built in this area and is now the home of the Thomas J. Craddock family.

The former Haven mansion sits on the corner of West Lane and Country Club Road. For many years, this place carried a West Lane address. However, when the Planning and Zoning Commission renumbered the entire town some 15 years ago, the address was changed to 27. Country Club Road. The factor used in determining a person's address was changed to the street which connects with that person's driveway.

At any rate, this fine mansion is now the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Ralph J. Delli-Bovi. Ralph, as no doubt you already know, is a very noted artist, and proved that he had an eye for beauty when he bought this great place.

What we now call Country Club Road was once a private driveway, serving both the Haven family and the next door Cary family. The entrances to both the previously described horse stable and the mansion are marked by great stone pillars, built so many years ago by James Kennedy.

Country Club Road, so named because its south end borders Silver Spring Country Club, came into being when the property south of the mansion was being developed some 30 years ago. George G. Haven bought this property at about the turn of the century, and continued to buy surrounding property until he had a sizable estate.

Mr. Haven was a Wall Street broker with the very prestigious firm of Strong and Sturges. Though not of a flamboyant nature, it was said that he could lose a million dollars one day and then make it back — and more — the next, without drawing a long breath.

Mr. Haven was a kindly man and very well liked by all who knew him. Whenever you spoke with one of his employees, they always referred to him in glowing terms, which is the true test of a good employer. He liked people, but really loved horses.

When Mr. Haven set about enlarging his mansion, he was no doubt aided and abetted by William Creagh, who was his superintendent at that time.

#308: REMINISCENCES ABOUT ‘HOMEWOOD’

[Note: Dick had missed a week due to an emergency hospital stay.]

My favorite insurance company [Prudential] runs an ad that encourages people to buy a piece of the “Rock” Somehow, I acquired a stone and I guess that can be considered a piece of a rock. You can be sure that I did not order it, do not want it, and in fact I cannot wait to get rid of it.

This particular stone proved to be quite painful, as it just happens to be of the kidney variety. Sometimes you may feel that you have an ailment that is rather unusual, and then you find that many others suffer from the same malady.

One thing that all of these people seem to agree on is that a kidney stone is just about the most painful thing a person can have.

At first I thought that I might be one of a kind, but now I find that I am actually one in a thousand. I am told that one in every thousand will develop a kidney stone at some time or another.

One of these days — and soon I hope — I will be heading for the Lahey Clinic in Boston, where they will administer a treatment that is called Extracorporeal Shock Wave Lithotripter. They say that procedure will take about as long as it does to pronounce its name. That is very comforting and I think I will continue to practice saying it — rapidly.

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Some years ago, in Dispatch #36, I wrote about the old Ridgefield Railroad Station. In so doing, I told the story of a boy who came to the station one day, driving a donkey. The boy had come to pick up his grandmother who was coming for a visit. His name was Frank J. Scallon.

Frank passed on last year at the age of 88. Someone sent a copy of that Dispatch to Frank and apparently he enjoyed reading it.

He was born just over the state line in North Salem, but spent his formative years in Ridgefield and attended the original Scotland school and Titicus School. Frank remembered me, though I was just a baby when he left Ridgefield. At any rate, he called me and asked me to write his life’s history.

At first I declined, but after several phone calls, I went to meet him at his home in Norwalk. It was good that I did, for his story turned out to be so fascinating that I soon agreed to put it in writing.

During my numerous interviews with Mr. Scallon, it became increasingly obvious that this was no ordinary man. His entire life seems to have been devoted to service for his fellow man.

No doubt Frank Scallon’s greatest achievement was his invention of the Midget Louver, a small, round metal gadget which is placed in the side of a building for the purpose of controlling condensation.

However, he is equally proud of the fact that he was able to form the Frank J. Scallon Urology Foundation, with Dr. Paul Maloney as its director. Little did I realize at the time that I would one day be a patient of this fine foundation. So it really is a small world.

Four years ago a triple by-pass did not prevent this writer from completing his column, but this little piece of rock brought everything to a complete standstill. Perhaps I should call it the Rolling Stone. so, while waiting for my turn at Lahey Clinic, I will attempt to continue our journey down West Lane.

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When we left off, I was telling about George G. Haven and the additions that were made to his mansion at 27 Country Club Road.

William Creagh was superintendent on the Haven estate in the early days of the century. Bill was a carpenter by trade and I am confident that he had a great deal of input as to the many alterations that were made to the great house.

He was a man with a great deal of knowledge, and he did not believe in wasting it. Those around Mr. Creagh were sure to be influenced by his very strong personality. He was a veteran of the Spanish American War, and during World War I, he served as a sergeant in the Home Guard. Because of his military background, many referred to him as General.

William and his fine wife, the former Mary Ann Brady, were blessed with six very nice children: Margaret, Catherine, William Jr., and Mary were born on the Haven estate. Agnes was born at Colonel Louis D. Conley's Outpost Farm, where her father was also superintendent. Alice (Mrs. Francis Brown) was born at the Creagh family homestead at 22 North Salem Road, where her sister Mary still lives.

Both Mary and Alice are retired Ridgefield school teachers. One of the nice things about this little story is the fact that after more than 70 years, Mary and Alice still correspond with descendants of George G. Haven. Genuine friend- ships such as this are not as numerous today. As they say, "times have changed."

The cottage where the Creagh family lived on the Haven estate was destroyed by fire about 75 years ago. The family lived temporarily where the West Lane Grocery Store is now, while a new cottage was built. This cottage still stands near the mansion.

The Creagh family moved to Outpost Farm before World War I. William Creagh took the position of superintendent for Colonel Louis D. Conley when that great estate was being put together.

James O'Keeffe became the superintendent for Mr. Haven and remained in that position until the place, which was called "Homewood," ceased to be a private estate. This was another fine family that made its mark in the history of Ridgefield.

The children of James and Honora O'Keeffe were Richard, John, Eileen and Patrick. I have already told about Richard, in Dispatch #227, and how he and his brothers all worked for their father on the estate. I should mention that the children were born in good old County Kildare.

Eileen still lives, I believe, in neighboring New Canaan and John is my good neighbor at 12 Olmstead Lane. Jack, as we call him, is highly intelligent and is always a joy to talk to. He is an expert in the field of horticulture and aspiring gardeners could learn a lot from this fine man.

Jack keeps abreast of what is going on and can give his own very clear analysis of what is good and not good in today's world. Those who worked on the great private estates were kind of a special breed, and the O'Keeffe family was a shining example of that it takes to keep a showplace like Homewood looking its very best.

#309: THE MULTITALENTED PAT O'KEEFFE

Just the other day, I received a phone call from a lady who grew up on the beautiful estate that was known as "Homewood." The caller was Mrs. William White, and she is the former Aileen O'Keeffe.

Aileen is a retired school teacher, and friend of long standing. She is further proof of how *The Ridgefield Press* gets around, as she has been following our trip down West Lane from her home in Stamford. Aileen is also a good example of how former Ridgefielders never lose interest in their old hometown.

As expected, Aileen had many more kind words for the George G. Haven family, and the Henry C. Swords family. The Swords family followed the Haven family at Homewood, after the close of World War I. It seems pretty well agreed that these were two of the very finest of the Ridgefield families during our town's "Golden Years."

Aileen informed me that Country Club Road was always considered to be a public highway, although during the years we are covering, its main purpose was that of a driveway serving both Homewood and the next door "Wild Flower Farm" [Wildfarms]. This road, at one time, stretched from West Lane south to where Silver Spring Country Club is now and finally connected with Silver Spring Road.

Aileen remembers walking the length of this road, as a child. She told of how she picked wild berries along the way, and said that they were much sweeter than the cultivated varieties. Years before, there had been several little farms in this area and as she walked along, Aileen said that the foundations of the farm buildings were still quite visible. The wells that had served the farms were still open. They were filled in later on, to prevent some unwary person from falling into them.

Aileen also admonished me to remember that her family's name was spelled with both a double E, and a double F. There is a tendency to use only one F.

The three O'Keeffe boys did not have to travel far to find their life partners. Richard married Sarah Wims and Jack married Mary Ellen Snee. Both Mary Ellen and Sarah were also employed at Homewood. Patrick had only to go next door to Geraldine Farrar's "Fairhaven" where he found May O'Loughlin. May was best known as Bobbie, though I am not sure where the nickname came from.

Pat O'Keeffe has passed on, but he will be well-remembered for his active participation in the affairs of Ridgefield. He was a carpenter by trade, but like his brothers, Pat had a solid background in horticulture and estate work that he acquired at Homewood from his father. In fact, at one time he was superintendent right next door at "Dunrovin" when that estate was owned by William Matheus Sullivan.

As a botanist, Pat was able to produce some great floral displays at the flower shows.

Pat was a fine athlete and though he loved to play baseball and basketball he was better known as a fine amateur boxer. I recall one occasion when the old Ridgefield Athletic Club was active in the late 20's and early 30's, and the club sponsored a gymnastic show at the old Congregational Church House.

Francis W. Collins owned the Ridgefield Water Supply Company at the time, and he was a member of the New York Athletic Club. The director of athletics at NYAC was the famous Arthur Donovan. Arthur was a friend of Mr. Collins and was persuaded by him to come to the show. Donovan was a son of "Iron Mike" Donovan, who operated his own very well-known gymnasium in New York City. However, Arthur was probably best remembered as an excellent boxing referee. He was the third man in the ring in most of the great Joe Louis championship bouts.

The program started with various gymnastic events, but the great crowd had gathered to witness the boxing matches. So a ring was set up and Mr. Collins and Donovan put on a rather spirited sparring match. It was of short duration as Mr. Collins was quite elderly at the time.

Then an offer was extended to those in attendance to put on the gloves with Arthur. Donovan. Several took advantage of the opportunity to test the skills of this master boxer. One was the late Charles Weitzel, who had been an amateur boxer, and he gave a good account of himself.

Then came Pat O'Keeffe, whose many friends had been urging him to get into the ring. Pat and Donovan only went about three rounds, but when it was over Donovan was high in his praise of Pat and urged him to follow a career in boxing.

However, Pat's ambition did not run in that direction. It was at a time when many people were very uncertain as to what they would be doing next. During the Depression years, many people found themselves working at something that did not relate in any way to what they had been trained to do. Pat O'Keeffe was no exception.

So this fine athlete, carpenter and horticulturist, started a new automobile dealership and garage on Catoonah Street, across from the firehouse, in the huge building that had been Whitlock's and then Sperry's livery stable. That great old building has long since passed from the scene. It was the victim of a very heavy snowfall that the roof was unable to support.

Pat also had a leaning toward a political life and devoted many years in that arena. During that time he served in several positions, including membership on the Board of Selectmen, the Board of Education, the Board of Assessors, the Board of Tax Review and as a Justice of the Peace. Pat also used his knowledge of construction to serve as the clerk of the works on several local building projects, one of which I believe was the Ridgefield Boys' Club.

I guess it would be safe to say that Patrick O'Keeffe has paid his dues to his old hometown.

#310: MELBERT CARY, RENAISSANCE MAN

It was considered a great loss when, after World War I, the Haven family moved from Ridgefield. However, that loss was greatly minimized when their estate, Homewood, passed into the hands of Henry C. Swords and his family.

The Swords family was of the same fine caliber as the greatly admired Haven family. Mr. Swords was a New York banker, and apparently a very successful one. Mr. Swords was very

fond of horses and his daughter, Elizabeth, was a real fine horse-woman, so you can be sure that the great stable remained intact, as did the rest of this very nice estate.

Like most of the large estates, Homewood also had its own farm. These farms were not just for show, they were expected to be productive.

Food that was produced was used by the owners and the help that lived on the estate, as well as the livestock on the farm. The home-grown food was valued highly by those who had formerly lived in a large city.

Some of those who assisted the O'Keeffes in maintaining Homewood were Curtis Leighton and Thomas Potter. Both Curtis and Tom later became foremen on our local road maintenance crew.

It seemed that most of the great private estates had at least one Dodge product, and Homewood was no exception. There was a Dodge truck on the place that must have been purchased in the 30's. I believe that Ralph Delli-Bovi, the present owner of Homewood, still has that fine old Dodge truck, and after a half century, it still runs well. As some like to say, "They don't build them like they used to."

Of course, this truck, like all the many Dodges in Ridgefield, came from George T. Tator's garage in South Salem. George was one of the very largest Dodge dealers on the eastern seaboard. He had an excellent reputation, and his sales in Ridgefield did much to add to his fame as a salesman.

George's son, Charles, still operates Tator's Garage in South Salem after some 75 years.

When Mr. and Mrs. Henry C. Swords, and their daughter, Elizabeth, came to Homewood, they took over a rather large estate that had been put together by George G. Haven. Then Mr. Swords purchased some more of the surrounding property, making the estate even larger.

After the passing of Mr. and Mrs. Swords, Homewood was taken over by their daughter. By this time, Elizabeth was married to Wheaton Grant. The Grants kept Homewood operating for several years and they were blessed with three very cute little daughters. Two of them were identical twins, who I believe now live in England.

In the late 40's and early 50's, there was a buyer's market as far as real estate was concerned, and many of the large estates were put up for sale. Like so many of their friends, the Grants felt that it was time to sell their beautiful home and move on.

Mr. Grant was a geologist by profession, and had a hankering to settle down in Virginia. Perhaps there were more stones to study in Virginia, but I doubt it. Sure it was great horse country, but certainly no better than what we have to offer right here in Ridgefield.

At any rate, the move to Virginia was made and the demise of Ridgefield's great estates began in earnest.

I am happy to report that Dorothy Grant, who had become Mrs. David Halmstad, had the good common sense to stay in Ridgefield. So, we still have a representative of that fine family with us. Dorothy operates "The Paperback Trader" located in the "Old Ice House" complex, on Danbury Road.

Right next door to Homewood was another large estate that was called "Wildflower Farm." It was the home of Melbert B. Cary [who, according to later evidence, actually called his

estate Wildfarms, not Wildflower Farm]. It was indeed very unfortunate that the very large and very ornate mansion on this estate was completely destroyed by fire several years ago.

Mr. Cary was a lawyer by profession, and was a man of great enthusiasm and unbounded energy. He was a native of Racine, Wisc. and graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Princeton in 1872.

After several years as assistant general counsel of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway, he came to New York and established the law firm of Cary, Miller and McEwen. He became president of the board of trustees of New York Homeopathic College and Flower Hospital and served in that capacity from 1905 to 1918. The affairs of that institution were at a very low ebb when he assumed that position, and he was given much credit for the prominence that it later achieved under his direction.

Mr. Cary came to Ridgefield just before the turn of the century. He was a true believer in the two-party system, and became an avid Democrat.

His interest in politics broadened rapidly, from local, to district, and then became state wide. He served as chairman of the Democratic State Central Committee from 1898 to 1902. In this capacity he learned first hand that little old Ridgefield played a very important part in Connecticut politics, for our own George E. Lounsbury was serving as governor of the state at that time.

In 1902, Mr. Cary let everyone know that Ridgefield also had an active, though small, Democratic party by becoming the candidate for governor of his party. However, his was the minority party in those years, and he lost the election to George P. McLean of Simsbury.

Melbert Cary was also a rather prolific author, and two of his books, "The Connecticut Constitution," and "The Woman Without A Country," were popular in the early part of this [20th] century.

Wildflower Farm extended west from Country Club Road to the New York state line, on both sides of West Lane. The farm and farm buildings were on the north side of West Lane. Two large barns have long since been converted to private dwellings. One at 334 West Lane is now the home of the Albert W. VanNess family. The other, at 336 West Lane, is now the residence of the Andreas Scott-Hansen family.

There was also a very large chicken house on that side of the highway, but I guess it disappeared some years ago.

#311: WHEN WILDFARMS BECAME DUNROVIN

Melbert B. Cary passed on at age 93, after a long and busy life. He was a very prominent attorney, a hospital administrator, an author, and a noted politician.

Mr. Cary also became heavily involved as a Wall Street investor while living in Ridgefield at [Wildfarms]. Enthusiastic investors came to be known as the "Bulls" of Wall Street and he would qualify as one who would fit neatly into this category.

There were times in the early part of this century when the world of finance sent out some unmistakable signals that it might be ailing. Then came the Panic of 1907 and 1908, and Mr. Cary was one of those who suffered serious financial setbacks. This may have been the reason that he decided to part with [Wildfarms].

Before this all happened, a rather important event occurred in the Cary family. In what was one of the great social pageants of the time, the Cary's son, Melbert B. Jr., was married to Mary Flagler. Mary was the daughter of the much-married Harry Harkness Flagler.

In case you are not familiar with who Harry Flagler was, you should know that when he was not getting married, he was busy at developing the state of Florida. He probably did more than any other individual in promoting the growth of that state.

Harry left his brand on many of the things he did, and "Snow Birds" on their visits to Florida will come across his name in many areas. There is Flagler County and Flagler Beach, as well as other things that were the result of this man's tremendous drive.

It was Harry Flagler who built the railroads that brought people to Florida and he is noted especially for the railroad that stretched across the Florida Keys. He also built several very large hotels that attracted many to the Sunshine State.

[Wildfarms] was not on the market very long. With the departure of the Cary family, this fine estate passed into the hands of the family of Joseph Epes Brown and his wife, Lavina. The Browns kept the place in tip-top shape, and added a cottage for their butler. This cottage, at 300 West Lane, is now the home of the Edmund J. McCarthys.

The Green brothers, Rufus and Clark, were caretakers, for the Brown family and lived in the apartments at the barns that were previously described. They had a nice team of bay horses named Jerry and Prince. Rufus Green later became superintendent for Mrs. Poor on her great farm, just over the state line in Lewisboro.

There is one very sad story concerning [Wildfarms]. One of the families that lived there had a very handsome son, who was engaged to marry a local girl. This beautiful girl was a member of a very prominent family. However, she suffered from a genetic ailment, and on the day of the wedding, as she was putting on her trousseau, her mind snapped, and the wedding had to be canceled.

Probably the best known of the owners of Wildfarms was the late William Matheus Sullivan. It was the mid-30's when he took over this fine estate. He had been looking for a place like this for some time, and as an indication that his search was over, he changed the name from Wildfarms to "Dunrovin." Then he showed real good sense by engaging Patrick O'Keeffe to run the place.

Mr. Sullivan was a very prominent New York City lawyer, and one of his clients was The New York Metropolitan Opera Company. He may have always had an interest in music, but one thing was sure, his interest really intensified when he became associated with the Met.

As soon as the purchase of his Ridgefield estate was finalized, Mr. Sullivan set about the renovation of the mansion. This was done under the direction of Archie Lubetkin, who was Mr. Sullivan's friend and constant companion for 42 years. The very ornate exterior of the mansion was not changed very much, as it was the fancy, hand-carved trimming that attracted him in the first place. The interior of the mansion was another matter and it underwent a complete renovation.

Mr. Sullivan had been a world traveler, and during his extensive travels, he acquired some very valuable furniture and many works of art. As soon as his mansion was ready for occupancy, he stocked it with his many prized possessions.

During his travels, Mr. Sullivan never failed to attend the opera, in the capitals of each foreign country. It was his opinion that the Metropolitan in New York furnished the very best music that he ever heard. This comment was always followed with the remark that his praise of the Met was in no way influenced by his association with that very noted organization.

As soon as he and Mr. Lubetkin were settled in their new home, Mr. Sullivan turned his attention to the excellent carriage house that stood on the property. The building was greatly enlarged and then transformed into a concert music hall, which he promptly dubbed “The Playhouse at Dunrovin.”

This very classy building, which he had modeled after Frederick The Great’s Opera House in Germany, became the scene of some great summer music festivals. The acoustics were superb and the place was beautifully decorated.

One of the first things that a visitor would notice was a Van Dyck original, “The Holy Family,” which was hung in the lobby of the playhouse.

The opening concert at the playhouse was for the benefit of the Danbury Hospital, and it raised \$5,000 at a time when the Great Depression was still being felt. Some of those attending were our own Geraldine Farrar, Grace Moore, Lily Pons, and Lawrence Tibbett. With famous people like that in attendance, you just knew that it would be a successful operation.

#312: THE SMILING LILY PONS AND THE DOGS OF DUNROVIN

William Matheus Sullivan was fond of music, flowers, dogs, and Lily Pons, though not necessarily in that order. In fact he had the cottage at 300 West Lane enlarged, and Lily used it as her summer home for several years. It was she who applied the name “Sky Cottage” to that cute little house.

With such personages as Mr. Sullivan at “Dunrovin,” Lily Pons at “Sky Cottage,” and Geraldine Farrar, just down the road at “Fairhaven,” it is surprising that the name of the road was not changed from West Lane to Metropolitan Avenue. These noted products of the Met all lived within a quarter of a mile from each other.

Gerry was also very fond of Lily (wasn’t everyone?), and called her the “little Cinderella.” This was in reference to Lily’s tiny feet.

We were privileged to have the opportunity of seeing Lily on several occasions when she came into town to shop. I remember meeting her in Bissell’s Drug Store once and she seemed rather shy. However, when she smiled, the whole place seemed to light up and the old store will never be that bright again.

Sky Cottage later became the home of the David Westheims. This very fine gentleman owned several stores that specialized in the very best of ladies apparel. One of his stores was located in New Canaan, and operated under the name Martha West.

Mr. Westheim also put an addition on the cottage. He and Mrs. Westheim lived here for several years before moving to California. They had a butler for many years, and his name was Henry O’Brien.

Henry had been a professional boxer, and had a really good record. He lived to be very old, but no one knew exactly how old he was, and Henry would not tell. However, he performed in the ring for more than 20 years back in the early part of this century. He was a very good natured man and was a great favorite with the local people, especially the storekeepers.

As a result of Mr. Sullivan's fondness for flowers, the gardens at Dunrovin were not only rejuvenated, but greatly extended as well. Though he had many varieties of both perennials and annuals, his favorite seemed to be gladiolus. They were beauties, and his display at New York's World Fair in 1939 was a prizewinner.

At one time there were four dogs at Dunrovin, three English sheep dogs and a skye terrier. The little terrier was totally blind, and he was also quite vicious. He would snap at, and bite if possible, just about anything that moved. Though he could not see, his hearing was very acute and once he had you located, he did not hesitate to attack.

On one occasion, while making a delivery to the mansion, I had to enter a room in which the little dog was the only other occupant. He wasted no time in attempting to grab my leg, and I had to stand on a box to avoid being bitten. The frustrated terrier raced around the room looking for me and he must have thought that I had a wooden leg. I guess the word terrier must have been derived from the word terror. At any rate, I was saved from the onslaught when Archie Lubetkin came to my rescue.

Another incident that almost got me in real trouble concerned one of Mr. Sullivan's sheep dogs. This dog was named "Rush," and one day, he rushed out to meet me as I drove up the driveway to the mansion. Now, as you already know, an English sheep dog is about half the size of a pony, and has a considerable amount of shaggy hair, some of which falls down over its eyes and must impair the dog's vision to some extent.

There was a rather steep bank on one side of the driveway with a drop of several feet. As Rush rushed out, he either forgot about the drop from the bank, or else he failed to see it in time. At any rate, he was traveling too fast to stop and came tumbling down, head over heels, in front of my vehicle.

The brakes were quickly applied, but I was sure that I had run over the dog and could well imagine being charged with dog slaughter, and perhaps being banished to some maximum security prison. It was with a feeling of great relief that I opened the door of the vehicle to find Rush was waiting there to be petted. He was a very good natured dog and I was very happy to see that he was all right.

You see, Rush had been a present to Mr. Sullivan from King Edward VIII, so he was not an ordinary dog. You may remember that Edward had become famous when he was the young Prince of Wales for falling off his polo pony.

He became even more famous in later life when, as Edward Albert Christian George Andrew Patrick David, King of Great Britain and Ireland, he renounced the throne, as he said, "for the woman I love." The woman he loved was, of course, the American divorcee, Wallis Warfield Simpson, and his announcement shook the British Empire to its foundation.

Edward was a very likable person, and there seems little doubt that he was the most popular of the members of the British Royal family. So you can readily see my concern over the welfare of this great shaggy-haired dog.

Before moving on from Dunrovin, I should mention that when this fine estate was owned by Joseph Epes Brown, he planted 30 or 40 trees along the north side of West Lane. They extended along the highway, from Sky Cottage, around that large S curve, west to the end of the property line.

The trees were mountain ash and they were trimmed back every year, so that during the winter months they were just tree trunks, about ten feet tall, with a large knob at the top. The trimmed trees stood as sentinels, guarding the property along the highway. During all those years many of these trees have died off, but four or five of them still remain as reminders of bygone days.

#313: THE STATE-LINE ESTATE AND ITS OUTBUILDINGS

As we continue down West Lane, and past the Dunrovin estate, there is an open field on the north side of the highway. Your attention may be directed toward a rather steep side hill, in the middle of which you will note some stone work. This is the face of a root cellar (or dirt cellar, as some call it).

This structure was built right into the hillside some 80 years ago. Though it is a rather large underground room, only the entry can be seen from the highway. Except for the wooden door, it is made entirely of stone and the floor is left unpaved, and this may be the reason that it is sometimes called a dirt cellar.

In yesteryear, before the advent of freezers and refrigerators, the root cellar served as a means of preserving certain foodstuffs during the winter months. When properly prepared and stored, many vegetables kept very well until the gardens again supplied fresh produce.

This particular root cellar was a part of the huge estate that was once owned by Dr. George Gregory Shelton. It is so well constructed that I would guess that it could be used as a bomb-proof shelter.

The only larger root cellar that I have ever seen is one that Colonel Louis D. Conley built on Bennett's Farm Road at Fox Hill. The entrance to that enormous root cellar is also still visible as you drive by.

Dr. Shelton was a very prominent New York City physician, though he practiced there only 17 years. He retired at age 47, and came here to live in 1900, after purchasing what had been called the Birdsall Farm. The greater portion of the estate was over the line in New York State, but Dr. Shelton always considered himself to be a Ridgefielder.

One of the first things the doctor did was to establish a fine orchard that still stands and produces, just a short distance farther on. He then named his estate "The Orchard," and in later years it was called Orchard Hill and Hobby Hill.

One of the few buildings on the Connecticut side of the state line is the cottage at 380 West Lane and which sits about 25 yards east of the line. Much of its construction is of stone and it presents a very sturdy appearance.

In the 20's, this was the home of Irving and Ethel Conklin when Irving was Dr. Shelton's superintendent and Ethel was the doctor's secretary. Come to think of it, on July 1, 1928, just 60 years ago tomorrow, the Conklins moved from this cottage to the large house on the corner of Ramapoo Road and Overlook Drive, where Irving would establish the very well known Conklin Dairy.

Like most of the large estates, The Orchard had its own farm. The farm buildings were located just across West Lane from the superintendent's cottage. There were five or six buildings that made up the farm complex and they have all disappeared through the years. A disastrous fire, of very questionable origin, destroyed several of the barns in the late 30s.

One of the last of the buildings to disappear was the ice house. As you passed through the two stone pillars (they are still there) at the entrance to the little lane that led to the farm buildings, the ice house was the first building that you would see, though it was built mostly below ground. In fact, while only six or seven feet of the ice house appeared above ground, it nestled at least 10 feet underground.

There were two small ponds on the estate, from which ice was harvested but they did not furnish enough ice to fill this ice house, so ice was also cut from Raymond's Pond on Elmwood Road in Lewisboro.

Two teams of horses and a Dodge truck were used to haul the ice from the ponds to the ice house. I well remember Nani Principi and Gino Petroni, packing the huge cakes of ice away, in this ice house. Though it was zero weather, these men worked in their undershirts and they perspired freely, as they struggled with 300 pound cakes of ice.

It was necessary to pack sawdust around each cake to prevent them from sticking together while in storage.

Harvesting the ice was very hard work, but before modern refrigeration, the old fashioned ice box (like the one used by the Kramdens on the Honeymooners) was the only way of preserving food during the hot summer months. Incidentally, if you have the opportunity to buy one of those old ice boxes, they make a great conversation piece.

Less than 20 yards east of where the old ice house stood, there is now a house, at 383 West Lane. It is now the residence of William and Joan Barrett, and is considerably larger than when it was a part of the Shelton estate, several additions having been made in recent years.

At one time, this house sat about 250 yards over the state line and on the north side of West Lane. It was then the home of the Louis M. Courtney family. Louis Sr. was the herdsman on the estate. He was a native of Virginia and was very much a fine southern gentleman.

When the Conklins moved to Ramapoo Road, the Courtney family followed suit and moved to 70 Ramapoo Road. Mr. Courtney then became the herdsman at the Conklin Dairy Farm. He was a fine person and just about the most dependable man that I ever knew.

The Courtneys had a son, Louis Jr., who was a very interesting person. He suffered from an ailment that caused his lips to twitch and oftentimes his hands would shake. It may have been some kind of palsy, but though he was very conscious of his problem, he never mentioned it and I never knew what it was. The doctors prescribed some powerful drugs for him and he was constantly popping pills.

Louis had a fine crop of curly red hair and there were those who thought that he resembled Rudy Vallee, a popular band leader at the time. He did not allow his ailment to curtail his activities and he became a very fine gymnast. On many occasions he would entertain during rest periods of the basketball games in the old town hall and the crowds were always greatly appreciative of his gymnastic ability.

#314: THE MANY PERFORMANCES OF A GENUINE CHARACTER

In mentioning the Courtney house that was moved from over the state line to 383 West Lane, I should have mentioned that it then became the home of Mr. and Mrs. Julius Latanzi Jr. Jay, as he was best known, played the saxophone in the Oreneca marching band with us and also

played in dance bands as well. He was a real good sax player, as were most of those who were taught by the late Andrew Bloomer, and there were many. Andy was a real fine teacher.

Lewis M. Courtney Jr., who had lived in the aforementioned house when it was over in New York State, was a very good salesman. At one time he was a Fuller brush salesman, when that firm was very prominent in this area. During the dark days of the Depression, Lewis also went door to door selling needles.

Lewis was exceptionally good at reciting poetry, and on several occasions, his recitations were heard over radio station WICC in Bridgeport. If we had television in those days he would have been a big hit, for to really appreciate his efforts, you had to see him as he was reciting.

Two of his favorite poems were "Casey at the Bat" and "The Face on the Barroom Floor." While reciting, Lewis would act out the umpire and go through all the gesticulations that an umpire might employ. He would then swing an imaginary bat, as the Mighty Casey struck out.

He was even more expressive while doing the "Face on the Barroom Floor," and at the end of the poem, Lewis would fall flat on his face. This, of course, was all lost to everyone but the studio employees.

Lewis needed no urging to perform and many of the sales that he made while going from door-to-door were the result of his giving an impromptu display of his very expressive poetic talents.

Somewhere along the line, Lewis developed a keen desire to imitate other performers, especially those who might do some unusual trick. He seemed to think that just by watching someone else do a particular thing, he would then be able to do it.

He accompanied a group of young fellows one night to a roller skating rink in Bridgeport. He watched for a while and then decided to give it a try. Lewis soon found out that this was one thing you could not learn by merely observing others doing it. It was only after a number of falls that he became a skater.

On another occasion, Lewis attended the Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey Circus. His attention was strongly attracted to a performer who rode around the ring while standing on the backs of two horses. It seemed like a trick which he could easily master, so Lewis was determined to try it, at the very first opportunity. The fact that he had no experience with handling a horse did not deter him in the least.

One evening, after work on the Shelton estate was over for the day, Lewis brought out a team of horses and made ready for his ride. They were draft horses, so their broad backs provided a wide platform for him to stand on. It was also a great help that the horses were gentle.

Lewis got the two horses to stand together and then scrambled up on their backs. They started off at a walk and everything seemed to go well, so Lewis decided to urge them into a trot. However, this all took place in the orchard, and it was the wrong place to try the trick. While at a trot, one horse went on one side of a tree and the other horse went on the opposite side of the tree.

As you no doubt have already guessed, we found Lewis sitting on one of the lower limbs of the tree. In the meantime, the horses were peacefully munching the lush grass of the orchard, and Lewis had lost his desire to become a trick rider.

The Great Danbury Fair was in its heyday at the time and one of its many attractions was a side show that featured a man who appeared to be able to blow fire from his mouth. Lewis was fascinated by this stunt, and when he got home, he could not wait to try it. He had noted that the man had put a small amount of flammable liquid in his mouth and then he blew the liquid at a lighted match that was placed some 4 or 5 feet away.

Lewis practiced the trick and was able to perform it successfully a couple of times and then decided to do it publicly in front of the town hall. It was almost a tragedy, as apparently some of the liquid spilled over on Lewis' shirt. In less than a second the shirt was ablaze and only quick action on the part of the onlookers saved Lewis from a horrible fate. I do not think that he ever tried that stunt again.

All in all I guess that Lewis could be considered one of Ridgefield's real characters back in the 20's and 30's, and we had some good ones.

Just to the west of the superintendent's cottage on the Shelton estate was just about the very finest perennial garden in this area. Fortunato (Fred) Canestrari was the gardener on this fine estate for well over a half century, and this was Fred's baby. He took great pride in the fact that he always had some color in this exceptional garden, from early spring until late fall.

You can still see the outline of this garden, just inside the stone wall, after you cross the state line. I guess there are still a couple of the original plantings growing there.

Fred had just about every perennial known to man in this garden. My favorites were the delphiniums. They were the Giant Pacific Hybrids and they stood well over five feet in height.

One of the owners of the estate in later years decided to sacrifice much of the garden in favor of some chickens. Perhaps this was because of a food shortage at some time. At any rate, a couple of the chicken houses that replaced the flowers are still standing, though they have been empty for a long time. Just beyond the garden was the fine mansion where Dr. Shelton, his wife, the former Ida Sherman, and their children, Harriet May and Allen W. lived.

Sad to say, the mansion is now gone, and it was a beauty.

#315: WIFE DEPARTS, HOUSE FALLS, PRESTONE MAN ARRIVES

Dr. George Gregory Shelton may have been either a great success in his profession, or he may have been independently wealthy to begin with. Whichever the case may be, he practiced medicine a relatively short time and retired early, at age 47.

One thing is sure, Dr. Shelton must have been very well off when he purchased the large estate that he would call "The Orchard." He then acquired additional land in the surrounding area and his estate must have totaled well over 750 acres.

Dr. Shelton's holdings extended west from the state line, on both sides of West Lane. It went beyond Elmwood Road and almost to the Bell estate. The Bell mansion, which sits on the corner of West Lane and Route 123, is now a restaurant [later the home of the Jewish Family Congregation of South Salem, which moved to Ridgefield in a merger with Temple Shearith Israel to become Congregation Shir Shalom.]

Dr. Shelton had a fine dry wall built around his property some 80 years ago and it is still in good shape today.

In telling about Wildfarms in Dispatch 311, I told of a very stylish wedding, in which Melbert Cary's son married the daughter of Harry Harkness Flagler. Flagler's name crops up

again concerning Dr. Shelton, who was a personal friend of his. It was noted that Flagler had several wives, and one of them had some kind of problem. She was committed to an institution by Dr. Shelton and Harry continued to get married.

If you are ever in St. Augustine, Florida, you must take a trip on one of those horse-drawn carriages that take you around the city. The old drivers are quite knowledgeable, and while the horse clip-clops through the narrow streets, he will point out many things of interest. Some of the things he will tell you about are the accomplishments of Harry Flagler, such as hotels and churches that he built.

At one point he will stop near an old cemetery and show you the grave of at least one of Harry's wives.

Dr. Shelton's mansion sat less than 100 yards over the state line on West Lane. I always thought it was a very pretty house, but apparently Jimmy Doubleday did not like it. He bought the estate in the late 30's and as was his habit, he tore down the mansion. It was just one of several fine structures that would succumb to Jimmy's penchant for replacing old mansions with more modern homes.

So it was not long after Jimmy purchased the estate in the late 30's that workmen were busy taking down the Shelton mansion. There were those who did not feel that the new mansions were any more livable than the originals. In the case of the Shelton mansion, the one that replaced it was not built on the original site.

The old mansion stood quite close to West Lane, whereas the new one was built some 200 yards back from the highway, and only the roof is visible as you drive by. The new mansion then became the home of Jimmy and Betty (Ballard) Doubleday and it surely is a fine structure. However, they never seemed to stay in one place very long, and after a few years, the estate was again placed on the market, and the new owners were the Robert Hoffmans.

Bob Hoffman was a retired vice president and chairman of the board of Union Carbide and Carbon. He and his wife Margaret (Marge) were noted for their many philanthropies. They became very popular, especially with any fundraiser that had a worthwhile project.

They were also very active in helping individuals, who had come upon hard times and numerous people in Ridgefield benefited from their generosity.

Incidentally, among many other accomplishments, Bob was credited with discovering "Prestone" and it became one of Union Carbide's most popular products. Those who are too young to remember the problems associated with preventing the radiators of automobiles from freezing, cannot really appreciate the products used today.

Prestone must have been the forerunner of the many brands of anti-freeze that are now available. It was while managing a Carbide plant in Texas that Bob noticed a liquid byproduct that did not freeze, even in the coldest weather. Up to that time, alcohol was used as an anti-freeze and radiators were constantly boiling over. When this happened the car was enveloped in steam and after inhaling these fumes a driver could be accused of DWI.

In the mid 50's Bob and Marge felt that the estate was much bigger than they needed and they sold the place to the Converse family. They moved to a beautiful apartment on Park Avenue in New York, with the understanding that if the Converse family decided to sell, Bob would have the first refusal. Sure enough, at the end of the year, the Converse family wanted to move on and the Hoffmans were anxious to get back to their beautiful estate.

Unfortunately, while in the process of moving back here, Bob had a heart attack and passed on. It was a great loss and we are not apt to see his like again for a long time.

Bob, like Dr. Shelton, always liked to think of himself as being a Ridgefielder, even though their mansions were over the state line. I find that to be quite understandable.

I receive a number of inquiries about Ridgefield, and just the other day someone asked which one of the many famous people who lived here did the most to put our town on the map. My answer was that Ridgefield was very much on the map and known throughout the country, long before the so-called famous people started to arrive.

It should be noted that Dr. Shelton became president of The First National Bank of Ridgefield (now The Union Trust Company). He succeeded George M. Olcott of Casagmo when Mr. Olcott passed on in 1917.

Dr. Shelton's garage, a very large structure with apartments on the second floor, stood right next to the original mansion. It has recently been converted into an apartment house and studio by the present owner AJ. Abrams. Just beyond the garage, there is a brown shingled house that was once the home of the Johnson family and beyond it, used to sit the little Courtney house that was moved over the state line into Connecticut.

#316: THE AMAZING ABBE FAMILY

The story concerning the little house that was moved over the state line into Connecticut would not be complete without telling about a very interesting family that once lived in it. This house remained empty for some time after the Courtney family moved to 70 Ramapoo Road in 1928.

It was in the very dark days of the Great Depression that James and Polly Shorrock Abbe, and their three small children, came to live in this house. James [was a photographer] and Mrs. Abbe [was a former Ziegfeld dancer and actress] at a time when people were just not spending a lot of money for their particular products.

Young people today are inclined to be quite skeptical when you tell them stories about how difficult it was to make a living and provide the bare essentials for a family back in the 30's.

However, the problems encountered by the Abbe family were not uncommon. Even those with the exceptional talents of the Abbe family found it very difficult to keep sufficient food on the table.

They were customers of the Conklin Dairy, so I had the opportunity of seeing first-hand how they had to struggle to survive.

In Dispatch #92, I told of the great Blizzard of February 1934, and how it was the third day of the terrible storm before Ernest Sturges and I were able to make it over the state line with a horse-drawn sleigh that was packed with dairy products. Perhaps it is worth retelling, for that was a long time ago and you might have missed it.

At any rate, the first house that we visited after crossing the line was that of the Abbe family, and they were in dire straits. They were out of both fuel and food, and it was 20 degrees below zero at the time. The entire family was seated around a pot-bellied stove. They had pulled the carpeting up from the floor and wrapped it around themselves, for whatever little protection it could provide.

They had run out of coal the previous day and had used what wooden furniture they could spare to feed the little stove. Now they were throwing old newspapers into the stove, but all the papers did was to make a large “swoosh” as they disappeared up the chimney, taking most of the heat along with them.

It was so cold in that house that a bottle of iodine that sat on a table froze and broke.

To say that this family was glad to see us would be a gross understatement. Their plight was enough to bring tears to anyone’s eyes.

Ernie and I made sure that they had at least enough dairy products to tide them over until someone could come to their assistance.

It was shortly thereafter that the Abbe family moved out and we heard that they went west. They left behind a milk bill of \$34.10. That amount may seem trivial today, but in the 30’s it was considered a lot of money. We had no address to which the bill could be sent and after a while it was pretty much forgotten, for we never expected to hear from the family again.

Apparently we had underestimated the intentions of this fine family, for two years later, a check in the exact amount arrived in the mail with a Colorado postmark.

James Abbe became associated with the North American Alliance of Newspapers, which was being run by a fellow Ridgefielder, John Wheeler. He was assigned as a war correspondent and sent to Spain to cover the revolution that was taking place there. James must have made a good name for himself, for many other assignments came his way, and he and his little family travelled all over the world. It must have been a great experience for the children and they studied the habits and customs of people in the many countries that they visited. They became experts on ethnic foods and the way that they were prepared. Perhaps their experiences during the storm of ’34 stimulated their interest in food.

Patience, Richard and Johnny Abbe all followed in their [mother’s] footsteps, and became well-known writers. While they were still quite young, the three children collaborated on a book entitled *Around the World in Eleven Years*. It was a delightful story and became a great hit, and best seller.

[*Around the World in Eleven Years*, published in 1936, tells the story of the children’s nomadic childhood in Europe, following their father, photographer James Abbe, from France to Germany, Austria, Russia and England, returning to the United States for the first time when Patience was 11 years old. The book was a big best-seller, going through 16 printings in its first year.]

Patience was not only an accomplished writer, but also became a very talented dancer. *Vogue* magazine once had a two-page spread, showing Patience in several dancing poses.

Once the Abbe children hit the public’s eye, Hollywood became very interested in them. Soon all three were cast in the movie “High Wind in Jamaica.”

When the family finally settled down, I believe it was in Castle Park, Colo., on a rather large cattle ranch, James continued to [photograph] and became a columnist for the Castle Rock Record-Journal. One thing is sure — this was a family that succeeded, despite some trying times.

[The Abbe children had attended the East Ridge School in Ridgefield while living on West Lane. They followed their first book with a second in 1937, called *Of All Places!* and describing their experiences in Hollywood. Said a New York Times book reviewer: “Personal experiences and comments rattle on with the unexpectedness and disarming candor of the first

book, with the Abbes' own blend of naïveté and sophistication, and with touches of genuine charm. Spoiled children, the Abbes say, are those who 'stay up to 10 o'clock every night, go to a movie every day, and whine.' The Abbes do none of those things. They live while they live, and enjoy the world."

[Patience grew up to be a journalist, sculptor and conservationist. Richard became a California state judge, and John, a conservationist and state employment agency manager. All have died.]

...

Just across West Lane, from where the Shelton mansion used to stand, is another mansion that was once part of Dr. Shelton's estate. It was called "West Lawn" and may have been intended as a guest house. It once had a great wrap-around porch that has been altered through the years and now has actually three porches, one on either end of the building and one in the center.

In the early part of this century West Lawn was leased by Colonel Louis D. Conley for one year. While the Conley family lived at West Lawn, the Colonel used that year to tramp through the hills and dales, valleys and wooded areas of Ridgefield, searching for a suitable place to build a home for his family.

Of course, everyone knows, he selected a most imposing site for the great mansion that later became Fox Hill Inn. It was a perfect setting for a tremendous view, and became the centerpiece of his famous Outpost Farm.

It was probably the finest and most beautiful mansion I have ever seen in this area. I will never forgive IBM for tearing down that magnificent structure.

#317: THE FAMOUS 'GYPSY' OF WEST LANE

Most of Dr. George G. Shelton's large estate was in New York State, so it is necessary to cross the state to tell about this fine place. Dr. Shelton's second mansion, or guest house, was called "Westlawn," and it is the first house on the left, after crossing the line.

At the time of Dr. Shelton's passing in 1925, this very attractive old mansion was being leased to Miss Amy Low Huntington. It always seemed as though West Lawn was an awful big place for just one person, but she had several domestics living with her.

Miss Huntington was a wealthy woman, and was known for the many contributions that she made to worthwhile causes.

In the late 20's Miss Huntington left Westlawn and moved to the prestigious, red brick mansion with the terraced lawn on the corner of Peaceable Street and High Ridge. This place is now listed as 19 Peaceable Street, though it could just as well have a High Ridge address, in as much as the entrance is on that famous street.

I have already told of Miss Huntington in Dispatch #193, so we will go back to West Lane and the Shelton estate.

Westlawn was not vacant for very long for as soon as Miss Huntington departed, Mrs. Shelton sold the place to Konrad Bercovici.

Konrad and his wife Naomi had two daughters, Rada and Mirel and two sons, Gorky and Rion. They were certainly one of the most interesting families in this area, and caused a real stir when they moved into Westlawn.

Konrad Bercovici was born in Romania in 1881, and considered himself to be a “gypsy” by choice, though to my knowledge, he never said what his nationality actually was. One thing for sure is, as a youth, he spent much of his time among the Romany, and he became an expert on the customs and lifestyle of the nomadic tribes that roamed central Europe.

Bercovici later became a very prolific writer, and was especially noted for his stories about the [Romani]. His book, *Story of the Gypsies*, which he wrote in 1928, was one of his best-known works. It also must have been quite profitable, for it was at this time that he purchased Westlawn, and the many acres of fine land that went with it.

During Konrad’s youth there was a period of great turbulence in central Europe and his parents decided to move the family to the relative safety of France. He had already shown signs of becoming a very talented young man, and became so proficient as an organist that he was invited to give a recital at the great Cathedral of Notre Dame.

Long before he turned to writing as a profession, Bercovici gained a wealth of experience in various fields of employment. At one time he was a door-to-door salesman, a furniture repairman, and even helped to paint the frame of the Eiffel Tower.

It was more of the same, when, at age 23, Konrad decided to migrate to this country. Here, in New York City, he shoveled snow from the city streets, played the piano in a nickelodeon, and even tried his hand at doing the work of a blacksmith.

He was an avid reader and no matter what he was employed at, he always found time to improve himself.

Konrad Bercovici presented a demeanor that quickly caught your attention. His hair was an undisciplined black mane that was allowed to grow at its own convenience, as was his large moustache. He had very dark and piercing eyes that seemed to encourage you to keep your distance.

Despite this rather ominous portrayal, he was actually a gentle person. He was friendly, though I got the impression that he would prefer to keep to himself.

Though not a partygoer, he was called on to make many public appearances and made several talks to our local service clubs. His talks were always very interesting and punctuated with forceful gestures.

Konrad also appeared on television. One of his last public appearances was as a guest on The Betty Furness show just a few weeks before he passed on.

Besides his many books, Mr. Bercovici wrote for several newspapers and even covered sports for the *New York Morning World*. As he became more prominent in the literary field, he was called to Hollywood and was acclaimed for the scripts that he produced for the movie industry.

Though his fame came mostly from his many writings, Konrad received nationwide publicity from a court case in which he sued Charlie Chaplin. The case had to do with Charlie’s motion picture, “The Great Dictator.” Bercovici charged that Charlie had stolen the idea of the picture from one of his writings, and he won the suit.

I guess that the favorite sport of the Bercovici family was tennis. At any rate, Konrad called on Irving Conklin to build a tennis court about 50 yards west of his home. When the court was completed, it got lots of use by the Bercovicis and the Kallos family that lived nearby.

The girls engaged in another sport that they seemed to enjoy. We were getting the hay in one day, when they came racing across the hay field and into a wooded area. If their purpose was to attract attention, they were quite successful. They were very scantily attired (for those days), and as you can imagine, all work by the haymakers ceased until the girls disappeared from view.

The Bercovici family was here only a short time when they were involved in a freak accident on Danbury Road. They were in a very large touring car — I think it was a Duesenberg. The weather was clear, but it had rained and the road surface was slick.

This was long before seat belts were used and the canvas top of the car was down, and the family dog, a German shepherd, was perched on the rear seat. The driver lost control of the car as they went down the hill just north of the Limestone Filling Station. The car turned over after leaving the highway and everyone went flying through the air.

No one was seriously injured, but the dog ran off and quickly reverted to the wild. Several days were spent trying to corral him, but to no avail. I am sorry to report that it was determined that the dog could never again be domesticated, and he had to be destroyed.

#318: CATTLE DRIVES AND A BARN BLAZE

When Konrad Bercovici took over West Lawn in 1928, there was a considerable amount of very nice farm land that went with it. However, Konrad was too busy with his writing to engage in any farming.

Irving Conklin used much of the farm land to augment his rapidly growing dairy business that was located on Ramapoo Road. Irv, as previously noted, had been the superintendent on the place when it was a part of the estate of Dr. George G. Shelton, and knew it was good farmland.

The stock on the farm, with one notable exception, had all been sold off at auction before the Bercovici family moved to Westlawn. The exception was a very fine team of horses, named Lady and Jim, who were needed to cut the hay and keep the place in shape.

This little team of blacks — and we use the term little, for they were not very big as draft horses go — had been imported from Canada just after World War I. Horsemen referred to Lady and Jim as “Canadian Chunks” because of their stocky build.

Lady and Jim had a combined weight of only 2,450 pounds. However, they were able to draw a load of loose hay that weighed 4,750 pounds all the way from the North Salem, N.Y. state line, to the state line on West Lane. That was a long haul, but they were equal to it.

In 1932, Ridgefield had a large parade, marking the 200th anniversary of George Washington's birth. There were numerous floats, many of which were horse drawn. Lady and Jim were the lead team in a four-horse hitch, drawing a tally-ho in which rode Karl S. Nash, dressed in colonial garb as General Washington. That was even before Karl became editor of *The Ridgefield Press*.

I have always felt that Lady and Jim were mother and son. Lady, as her name implies, was very gentle and mild mannered. Jim was quite fiery, and a little on the mischievous side. Despite their different dispositions, they worked well together and it was a pleasure to drive them.

The last time I saw those great little horses they must have been in their late 20's, and still going strong.

In telling about the Bercovici family, it should be noted that Mrs. Bercovici (Naomi) was a very talented painter of both portraits and landscapes. Her children were also quite talented; although I never got to know Rada or Rion, I know that Mirel developed into a fine artist.

As a young man, the other son, Gorky, got the idea that he would like to try his hand at farming. It was in the heart of the Great Depression, and not the ideal time to venture in a business for anyone who had not been thoroughly trained. This was especially true of farming.

At any rate, Gorky examined the various categories of farm life and came to the conclusion that chicken farming would be to his liking. There were a couple of small chicken houses on the farm, but Gorky decided they were not large enough for the operation he had in mind. So the cow barn was converted into a very large chicken house.

Like the old saying "Do not put all your eggs in one basket," there is also a tried-and-true axiom that says "Do not put all your chickens in one chicken house," at least if you are planning to have a great number of chickens.

I am reminded of a chicken farmer who bought a new car. On his first trip into town, an old friend noticed the new car and said, "There must be lots of money in the chicken business." With that the farmer retorted, "Yes, there sure should be, for I put plenty into it."

One of the dangers of keeping a great number of chickens in the same room is that there is bound to be considerable crowding and any kind of disease would run through the entire flock like wildfire. Whether this was the case with Gorky is not clear, but I do know that a number of the chickens died, and his experiment was short-lived.

In the mid 30's, I was mowing the hay on the Bulkley estate on West Mountain and I could see a great cloud of smoke rising several miles to the south. The smoke was soon replaced by a gigantic mass of flames. It turned out to be Gorky's chicken house that was burning and it was a most disastrous fire and the large barn was completely destroyed, with all its contents.

It was labeled a fire of undetermined origin, and the firemen were hampered in their efforts by not receiving an early warning and by a lack of sufficient water with which to fight the fire.

Our firemen did their very best, but the fire had gotten too much of a head start and they had to devote much of their valiant efforts in saving the surrounding buildings. There was assistance by the Vista and South Salem fire departments and a fire truck came all the way from New Canaan. So there was plenty of manpower and lots of machinery, but the destruction of that nice barn was complete.

That ended the last attempt to do any farming at Westlawn, except for harvesting the hay on the place. Some years later, we planted corn on the large fields on the north side of West Lane, opposite Elmwood Road, but that was a one-shot deal and then trees were allowed to grow on what had been very productive fields.

In recent years several new homes have been built where once there were beautiful stands of corn and hay, and once again farming on what was once a great estate became a thing of the past.

In the 1930's, Irving Conklin used some of these great fields for pasturing his heifers. This provided a rather exciting adventure, for the heifers had to be driven along the highway,

from the Conklin Dairy Farm on Ramapoo Road to the fields on West Lane, in the spring of the year and then driven back home in the fall.

If you can imagine 20 or more heifers being herded, cowboy style, along West Lane and High Ridge Avenue, you would then get a picture that was mindful of the old West. The drive was not as long as the ones from Texas to Kansas City, but it had all the elements for excitement.

Creatures of the bovine world have never been accused of having a super intellect, and these heifers had a particular disdain for the paved highway. Although motorists were always patient and gave them the right of way, the heifers much preferred to race across the lawns along the way and they rarely missed one on the drive to and from home.

#319: NATURE'S TASTY GIFTS & PAINFUL HAZARDS

Just to the west of the Bercovici mansion at Westlawn, there is now a short road that was named Stonewall Court. The road passes directly through and over the tennis court that I helped to build some 50 years ago.

Since it replaced the tennis court, that may have been the reason that "Court" was included in the name, rather than street, or avenue, or lane, or road. It was a fine court, and got a considerable amount of play in the days when there were not so many places where you could enjoy a good game of tennis.

To the south and west of the court, there were several hayfields and pasture lots. Cows are quite selective in their eating habits, and no matter how hungry they might be, when turned out to pasture, they will eat around the weeds and brambles.

This leaves the pasture lot with a rather unkempt appearance, as opposed to the nearby hayfields that always looked so tidy after the hay had been harvested. Therefore, when the haying season was over, a teamster, with his horses drawing a two-wheeled mowing machine, was assigned to cut down the offending shrubs and weeds.

The pasture lot, just to the south of the tennis court, had a great number of very productive blackberry bushes. These luscious berries made the very finest jelly that I have ever tasted.

In those days Ridgefield had a large number of blackberry patches, especially along Barrack Hill Road, as you neared the famous Port of Missing Men. During the summer months, both young and old turned out to gather in the sweet berries. A large box or basket was placed near a clump of the bushes, into which the berries were deposited from a small "picking can."

Many a boy or girl made a tidy sum by peddling the berries door to door, if they could resist the temptation to eat them as they were being picked. Some kids compromised by eating one and then putting the next one in the can. Then there were those who were all business and would never ever eat what they knew they could sell.

I well remember how my mother would put the berries into a cheesecloth bag and boil them on the kitchen stove. The bag was then suspended over the kitchen sink, and the delicious juice drained into a container for making jelly. The house would fill with the delightful aroma of the cooking berries, and there was really nothing else quite like it.

You can buy blackberry jelly in your favorite supermarket today, but it does not compare with the homemade variety. I would guess today who would got to the trouble of picking the

berries and then making the jelly. However, the taste of that homemade jelly is just one of the many nice things the kids will never have the pleasure of experiencing.

Of course, with the growth of the town, the berry patches began to disappear, and it probably would be difficult to find one today. Mowing the berry patch did not discourage the bushes from growing, and next year they would come right back again. Some even burned over the berry patches, but this seemed to actually increase their growth.

One thing that they could not contend with was the developers' bulldozer.

At any rate, on one occasion as the bushes at Westlawn were being mowed down, Mr. Courtney, the herdsman, was bringing in the cows at milking time. On the way to the cow barn he had to pass near to where the mowing was being done.

Unbeknownst to either him, or the teamster, there was a hornets' nest in one of the bushes. Now, a white-faced hornet rarely goes looking for trouble, but when they are disturbed, they will look for someone to attack. As the mower cut the bush where the nest was hung, the nest came crashing to the ground. There is the expression "mad as a hornet," and it really suits these flying creatures.

They came out of the fallen nest in great numbers, and one of them landed on the back of Mr. Courtney's neck. If you have never been stung by a white-faced homer, you can consider yourself to be very lucky.

I was stung just once, in the darkened horse barn at Westlawn, and it was an experience that I will never forget. At first I was convinced that one of the horses had kicked me, and I was sure that my arm was broken. Later we discovered the nest in the barn that had not been used for some time.

No other insect that I know of can cause such terrible pain. The sting of a honey bee, or a yellow jacket, or a wasp, can be quite painful. However, the white-face attacks with great ferocity and drives its stinger home with real force.

I know of one instance where a horse was attacked by several hornets and they actually knocked the poor horse to the ground.

The neck is a particularly vulnerable spot on which to be stung, and poor Mr. Courtney fell as though he had been pole-axed. In minutes his tongue had swollen so much that he could not keep it in his mouth. Fortunately, the teamster witnessed what had happened, and shouted for help.

This was long before Ridgefield had an ambulance and even longer before we had medics, or walkie-talkies, and it was some time before help arrived. So, they rushed Mr. Courtney to Dr. Woodford, who had only recently moved to Ridgefield.

To make matters worse, the good doctor was on a house call at the time. That was in the days when they still made house calls. However, Dr. Woodford rushed back to his office and by now Mr. Courtney was only semiconscious, and in real bad shape.

The doctor quickly gave him an injection and it was more than an hour before the swelling in his tongue started to subside. It was even longer before he was considered to be out of danger.

Someone said that he felt that it was a good thing that the teamster was right there when the accident occurred. Someone else offered the opinion that if he had not been there, the accident would not have happened.

#320: LEWISBORO BARS AND THE STILL THAT EXPLODED

It was not my intention to go meandering over into New York state. However, there were some interesting people who lived just over the line, so perhaps I should go just a little farther.

West Lane, which starts at our much maligned Cass Gilbert fountain, extends beyond the state line, to where it connects with Route 123. At the time of which I am writing, there were several fine hayfields on both sides of West Lane after we pass the Bercovici mansion.

One that was especially productive is on the corner of West Lane and Elmwood Road. This field stretched south along Elmwood for at least a thousand feet and was a part of the Shelton estate.

In the spring of 1938, we plowed, harrowed and graded this field and then seeded it to oats. It was no doubt the finest field of oats that I have ever seen.

There is something about an oat field that quickly attracts your attention as you drive by, no matter what stage of its development. The kernels of oats are quick to germinate, and soon after the seeding, the surface of the field looks like a great green carpet.

In good soil the stalks of oats will grow rapidly and may reach a height of three feet or more. Then when the breezes blow the stalks to and fro, the swaying oats resemble the ocean waves.

I have already described the harvesting of the oats from this field in Dispatch #230, so I will not repeat the story about the great loads of oats. It will suffice to say that half a century later, one of the stone pillars marking the entrance to the field is still leaning to the east. This may have been the result of the huge loads of oats that were squeezed through the narrow entrance.

A pretty white house now sits in the middle of what I still refer to as the oat field. In the mid 40's, this place became the home of Philip and Eleanor Masterson.

Phil's is a success story that is worth telling. His parents both passed on when he was still a young boy, and he dropped out of school at the seventh grade.

He was an ambitious boy and was soon employed as an office boy in the Brooklyn assessor's office. Phil kept his eyes and ears open and soon learned how the appraising of real estate was done. He went to school at night and completed his high school education.

After a couple of years Phil transferred to the probate office, where he learned the appraisal of entire estates. While still a young man, he opened his own appraisal office under the name the Philip P. Masterson Company. He established such a fine reputation as an appraiser that lawyers for some of the large estates began to seek his services.

Phil's business grew to such an extent that he moved his office to Manhattan. Word of his ability spread and he soon became a leader in a competitive business. His appraisals were done so well that they were rarely ever questioned in the federal courts, and there came a time where he did more business than the other appraisers in the area combined.

Just some of the large estates that were appraised by the Philip P. Masterson Company were those of John Pierpont Morgan, Arthur Curtiss James, Hetty Green, Procter and Gamble, Harry Payne Whitney, Andrew Carnegie, and Marshall Field.

Phil thoroughly enjoyed telling about his rise to the top of his field, and how it was done without benefit of a college education.

Oh yes, his company did one local appraisal. It was the estate of Samuel Rubel, who lived on West Mountain in the mansion [called Sunset Hall] that is now the home of the Robert Vaughns [the Dick Cavetts]. I am proud to say that I played a small part in that appraisal.

On the opposite corner of Elmwood Road stands a very old house that was the home of previously mentioned Billy and Bronco Behnke. This house in later years fell into a sad state of disrepair and was restored by Mr. and Mrs. Gelert.

Farther down Elmwood Road, there was a large farm that had a very tall windmill. It pumped water into a tank that must have held more than 500 gallons, and supplied water for the farm's livestock.

There came a time when the mechanism that operated the windmill needed to be greased, and Irving Conklin volunteered to do the job. The giant fan was secured so that it could not turn during the operation, and Irv, with a helper, climbed the ladder to the top of the windmill. Then, just as the grease was being applied, the fan broke loose and started to turn. Only the quick action on the part of the helper saved Irv from a disastrous fall from that 60-foot structure.

This farm also had a silo that matched the windmill in height. Some bootleggers decided to use the silo to make liquor and they had a very successful operation going for some time, apparently without the knowledge of the authorities.

One night the still blew up, setting fire to the silo. It was a spectacular fire and could be easily seen for many miles around.

The mash did not burn as rapidly as the wooden sides of the silo, but it gave off overpowering fumes that seemed quite welcome to some of the crowd that gathered to watch the conflagration. Just a few whiffs of that pungent aroma were equal to consuming a large amount of whiskey.

West Lane turns to the left at its intersection with Spring Hill Road, and the house on this corner is where Fred Canestrari and his family lived when he first came to work on the Shelton estate many years ago.

Spring Hill is a short road and at the bottom of the hill, where it connects with Route 123, there is a small house that was known as the 5 and 10. It operated all through the Prohibition years and beer was 5 cents and whiskey was 10 cents. New York state had a number of such places just over the line that seemed to be immune to the liquor laws.

No story of this area would be complete without telling about Kohler's. If on approaching Spring Hill you turned left on West Lane, there would be only one house on the east side of the road, until you entered Route 123. That house still stands there, but several newer homes have been built around it in recent years.

This house had a circular driveway that passed through a rather large parking area at the rear of the house. There is a porch, the floor of which is only about a foot above the ground. The porch has an overhanging roof that is quite ornate.

This was the home of John and Frieda Kohler, from which they operated a fine oasis for thirsty travelers. John served Loewer's beer and it was considered the very best in this area.

It was another place that did not close during Prohibition, and numbered among its patrons were some of Ridgefield's wealthy residents. They would arrive in their chauffeur-driven

limousines and park at the rear of the house. The drivers entered the back door and returned with a tray full of foamy drinks.

Frieda passed on some 20 years before John and he finally sold his lucrative business to his nephew, Fritz Yonkes. I would guess that Fritz was John's only nephew, but he more than made up for that by having the largest number of nieces that anyone could possibly have. After selling his business John moved to a house across the street and each weekend a niece came to visit.

This went on for several years, and though they did not reveal a marked family resemblance, they all had a couple of things in common. They were all quite young and they were all very pretty.

#321: THE OLD MAPLEWOOD INN AND A DEAD HORSE TRADE

In our travels around the town that Ridgefield was a half century ago, we have gone from Country Comers, along North Salem Road to the New York state line. Then we journeyed along Barry Avenue and West Mountain Road, again to the state line.

As we traversed West Lane, we started at the much-maligned Cass Gilbert fountain, and reached the New York state line for a third time, and even crossed it for a mile or so.

Another very important entrance to Ridgefield from the north is the heavily traveled highway known as Danbury Road. Just across the town line on the Danbury side, and about 100 yards on the right, there was once a very well-known inn called Maplewood.

The inn itself is now gone. It was a large sprawling building of wood construction, and a number of years ago it was the victim of a bad fire and eventually torn down. Maplewood had been run as an inn for many years by Benjamin and Phoebe Selleck. Maplewood became a real popular meeting place because of its proximity to both Danbury and Ridgefield.

Ben Selleck not only operated the inn, he was also a very good farmer. His farm extended along both sides of the highway, and included land in both of the towns. There is a small lake, just to the south of where the old inn used to stand. Water flowed over a dam near the highway and under a bridge that crossed the road. Travelers used to water their horses in the brook that was formed from the overflow. You could drive your horse down on one side of the bridge to the brook, and then drive out the other.

The old wooden bridge has long since been replaced by one of concrete material. There was a much greater volume of water in those days and it was used to power a gristmill and a sawmill.

The present owner [1988] of this historic property is William Pcatt. Bill can show you where the mills stood, and point out some of the timbers from the buildings that still lie in the soil near the bridge.

Travel over what is now Routes 7 and 35 was not something that one looked forward to in the days when the trip was made by horse and wagon. This was especially true on the Danbury side of the line, where you had to pass through Sugar Hollow. It was a swampy area and it was not unusual for sections of the road to sink into the mire.

Today, because of the very heavy traffic on this road, the ride to Danbury is not a pleasure trip, but the road is being improved and Danbury will soon be qualified to be considered as an important part of the greater Ridgefield area.

It was possible to get a good meal at the old Maplewood Inn, and lodging was available as well as liquid refreshment. It was said that tea was not the strongest of the liquid refreshments served at the inn.

The place changed hands several times since the Sellecks have passed on, and several buildings were erected to replace the old inn. Joseph Stavola operated a restaurant here for a few years, and Daniel Tobin and Dominic Gaeta added some more buildings to operate as a motel.

Alfred Jeffers also ran the place for some time. Along the way the name was changed several times, from Maplewood Inn to Lakeside Tavern [under Jeffers], The Foundry, DownUnder and Triangles Cafe. It was called The Foundry because there actually was a foundry on the premises at one time.

The little building nearest the highway once served as an office for the motel. It now has a sign that reads Maplewood Glass Works and in this building a glass blower actually plies his trade. There is also a pet grooming shop, a lunch room, a bar and a clothing store.

At the rear of the complex there are several buildings that made up the motel. They have now been converted by Mr. Peatt into attractive office buildings.

In its role as a meeting place many years ago, the inn catered to people who did not want to make the entire trip from one town to the other. It was also a handy place for business men from both towns to meet. One can easily imagine the many deals that were consummated in the friendly confines of the old inn.

One rather unusual business deal that took place at Maplewood had to do with a trade. I guess you could call it a classic example of Yankee ingenuity, or the guile that was sometimes used by the old horse traders.

Years ago, when people decided that they would like a new horse, it was not uncommon for them to just trade the horse for another one. In many instances this was done by a procedure known as trading "sight unseen." Despite the implication, it is a good bet that one or both of the traders had actually seen the other's horse at some time.

Peter Walker had lived for some years in the house that still stands at 40 Grove Street. He was a brother of Uncle Jack Walker, who we hope to write about some time. Pete moved to Danbury, taking with him a fine dappled gray horse. Perhaps I should say the horse took Pete to Danbury.

Fred Leeson lived at what is now 219 High Ridge Avenue and he had a slick bay horse, but his horse was ailing. He remembered Pete Walker's dappled gray and called Pete to offer a trade "sight unseen."

Pete agreed to the deal and it was decided that they would meet the following week at Maplewood to make the exchange. Unfortunately, the ailment from which Fred's horse was suffering got considerably worse, and on the day on which the trade was to be made, the poor horse died.

Fred said to himself, a deal is a deal, and after all it was to be "sight unseen." So he borrowed another horse and put the dead horse in his wagon, and started for Maplewood. However, unbeknownst to Fred, one of his neighbors who had witnessed the demise of the horse called Pete to inform him of what had happened.

Fred arrived at the inn a few minutes before Pete, and as Pete drove up to the inn, Fred noticed that he was driving a jet black horse.

“Where is your horse?” asked Fred.

“Right here,” said Pete and pointed to the back of his wagon, in which he had placed a sawhorse.

The two men laughed and went into the inn for refreshments.

How would you like to buy a used car from one of these gentlemen?

#322: THE MAGNIFICENT ESTATE OF A TINFOIL TYCOON

Just across from where the old Maplewood Inn stood on Route 7, there is a very impressive entrance to Bennett's Farm Road. It gives the impression that it would lead to a great private estate, and a number of years ago it did just that. Incidentally, this section of Bennett's Farm was known as Maplewood Drive at one time.

This entrance was widened more than 70 years ago by the late Colonel Louis D. Conley, whose magnificent mansion once stood at the very top of the hill. He landscaped the entrance and planted a cluster of spruce trees on a triangle close to the highway, creating a dual entrance or exit. The trees were removed a few years ago and the triangle, along with the entrance, has been repaved.

The colonel had a fine stone wall constructed along the road and it added to the feeling that you had entered a private drive. As you drive up the hill from the main highway, the landscape appears to be pretty much of a jungle today. It sure is a far cry from what used to be — probably the largest lawn in this area. That great lawn and its several terraces was always well manicured, and a thing of real beauty.

Just before you reached the top of the hill, on the left there was a white house that was used by the Colonel's brothers, John and Edward, as their summer home. Just beyond this house was a large garage where the Conley family kept their automobiles, and just beyond that building was the large barn where a fine herd of Guernsey cows was housed.

This was all part of Colonel Conley's Outpost Farm, and when portions of it were being sold off some 35 years ago, the cow barn was purchased by Sidney Sarner. Sarner was a doctor of some kind and came here from New Jersey. He remodeled the cow barn, and called it an experimental laboratory.

Many were the rumors and the wild stories that emanated from this place. There was a story that experiments were carried on in an effort to cross a chicken with a duck. Another had to do with attempts to cross much larger animals.

[Sarner maintained he was establishing an experimental farm via the Sidney Sarner Foundation for “scientific farming and experimentation in land fertilization,” and would be importing young wild and domestic animals from the “wilds of northern Canada and from parts of the United States” with the aim of seeing if they would cross-breed, creating new and hardy varieties. The foundation said one of the experiments was to determine whether wild animals could be tamed and made useful to man if raised under controlled conditions.]

One thing was sure, there were an awful lot of animals kept in this building. In fact, there were so many different species, the place was like a menagerie.

It seemed as if the operation ran into some zoning problems, and there were some court cases. Whatever the reason, the laboratory eventually closed down.

Directly across the road from the cow barn, there was a driveway that took you right to the very top of the hill, and to the site of what I have always felt was the grandest of all the great mansions in the area. It is hard to believe that it is now gone, demolished. How could anyone destroy a thing of such beauty?

Colonel Conley spent a whole year tramping through the undeveloped, wooded areas of Ridgefield, in search of a place to build his family's mansion. The one he selected showed that he had excellent taste.

Some of the great private estates offered a view of New York state, and from some you could easily see Long Island Sound, and the Island itself. Outpost Farm had a view to the south and east of the rolling hills and ridges of Redding from one side, and to the north on the other side. It was a very peaceful setting.

When asked about his selection of this site, the colonel said, "I have seen all that I want of the other views, I just want to see the beautiful, and untouched, Connecticut landscape."

There seems no question that the colonel could afford the extensive holdings that he would acquire in the years to come. As a young man he joined his grandfather, John Conley, in the operation of the Conley Tinfoil Company. The company grew to be a very successful enterprise, and just about the largest of its kind. Mrs. Conley was the former Elise Ehret, a scion of the fine family that owned the famous Ehret Brewery.

The Colonel and Mrs. Conley and their four children, Richard, Louis Jr., Elise and John, came to Outpost Farm more than 75 years ago. This family was held in the highest esteem by the townspeople. Ridgefield was good to them and certainly they were good to Ridgefield.

Richard Conley has passed on, but his widow, the former Grace Sturges, still lives on their Rocking Chair Ranch, in Patagonia, Ariz.

His sister Elise and her husband, W. Bingham Cox, live in New York City, and make regular trips back to the old hometown. Elise is the only one left of this great family that has contributed so much to the history of our town.

The colonel must have stood about 6 foot 1 inch and ramrod straight, as did his son Richard Louis Jr., and John was even taller, and Elise was quite tall. The senior Mrs. Conley was not a tiny woman, she just appeared to be when surrounded by her family.

They were all fine looking people and Louis Jr. was about as handsome as any man that I have ever seen. His perfectly proportioned 6 foot 4 inch frame was topped by a head of closely cropped, curly red hair, and he had a most pleasing personality.

Louis Jr. married Catherine Schumann, and she was a very beautiful girl. Like his father, Louis had a military bearing, and when this very handsome couple walked down the street, all eyes were on them. To say that they stood out in a crowd would be a gross understatement.

Like many families, the Conleys had their share of sorrow and theirs came in the form of a disastrous airplane crash. Louis Jr. was a pilot and flew his own plane. On this fateful occasion the young man had just taken off from Norwalk airport when the plane went into a nose dive and a very promising career was cut short.

It was always a very exciting event when a member of one of Ridgefield's wealthy families got married. Marie and I were talking recently about some of the beautiful local weddings and it was her opinion that the wedding of W. Bingham Cox and Elise topped the list.

“Bing,” as Elise calls him, is still a very handsome man, and Elise has that regal bearing that lets you know that they are something special.

#323: COL CONLEY AND THE FIGHTING 69TH

Colonel Louis Daniel Conley had two brothers, John and Edward. They had the same aristocratic demeanor that was a natural trait of this very prominent family.

John Conley was a little older and, in his advanced age, used a cane and he walked with a slight stoop. As a young fellow, I always thought that he was the picture of a very nice old grandfather.

Edward Conley was straight as an arrow and his gray mustache was twirled to a sharp point on either side. This created the impression that he might have been rather severe. Actually he was a real jovial character, always pleasant to talk to and enjoyed being called “Uncle Ed.”

The two brothers had their own chauffeur, Harry Menzies, who drove them in their black Lincoln Zephyr to St. Mary’s Church each Sunday morning, and oftentimes during the week. While the brothers attended Mass, Harry tended the two little terriers that accompanied them wherever they went.

Harry blended in well with the Conleys for they were all quite tall and Harry must have been about 6 feet 5 inches tall. Harry had a pleasant manner and was treated like one of the family.

The Colonel himself had a countenance that went along with his title and his military bearing. His close-cropped mustache added to the feeling that this must be a very serious man. I remember him as being a very kindly and soft-spoken gentleman. He was only 56 when he passed on and his death was a great loss, not only to his family, but also to the town that he loved so well.

The famous 69th Regiment became well-known as a crack military force during the Civil War. It was called the Irish Brigade because of the ethnic background of its members.

During World War I, the regiment earned the nickname “The Fighting 69th.” The [motto] of the 69th Regiment during the Civil War [was] “Gentle When Stroked - Fierce When Provoked.” The regimental flag said “Riamh Nar Dhruid O Sbairn Lann” or, “Who Never Retreated Clash of Spears.”

It was considered an honor and a privilege to belong to this volunteer unit of the New York National Guard. This was true, even if you were just a buck private. To be an officer in this splendid military force was a distinction that was much sought after.

As a young man, Louis D. Conley became a member of the 69th Regiment. His extraordinary talents caused him to rapidly advance as an officer in the unit. He served in the Spanish American War and in the early part of this century he advanced to the rank of colonel, and then became the commander of the noted regiment.

Mexico had suffered serious internal problems for many years, and by 1916, bandits such as Pancho Villa were ravaging the countryside, and had become a real threat to the interests of the United States in that troubled country. The fighting often spilled over the border into Texas.

President Woodrow Wilson considered the situation to be so serious that he dispatched American military forces commanded by General John J. “Black Jack” Pershing to the Mexican

border. The 69th Regiment, under Colonel Conley, was one of the very first units to volunteer its services.

The officers of the regiment had to pass a physical examination and on the eve of its departure for the border, General Wood of the War Department informed Colonel Conley that he would be relieved of his command. The only reason given was a “physical disability,” perhaps a heart murmur.

The Colonel was extremely popular with the officers and the troops, many of whom wept openly when they heard the news of his removal. Colonel Conley accompanied his regiment to McAllen, Texas, where he then turned over his command to an officer of the regular army. Then, amidst a very emotional and tearful ceremony, he bid farewell to his troops and returned to New York to appeal the action of the War Department.

It turned out to be one of the most celebrated cases in the early years of this century, and the New York newspapers carried banner headlines on their front pages concerning the matter. There were several who sought the exalted title of commander of the 69th Regiment, and they pulled all the necessary strings to acquire it. Colonel Conley “stuck to his guns” and finally he was granted a second physical. However, the results were the same and the Army doctors again declared that he had a physical disability.

Then, as might be expected, the affair turned political, with both the mayor of New York City and the governor of the state becoming involved. The problem even reached the White House, where President Wilson found it necessary to uphold the action of the War Department.

The result was that after 16 years of faithful service, Colonel Conley was mustered out of the National Guard.

Unfortunately, according to recent newspaper articles, the guard is still involved politically today. That is a shame for the National Guard serves an honorable and very worthwhile purpose.

As it turned out, the action at the Mexican border was rather mild and could not have had a serious effect on the Colonel's health. Casualties among the troops were limited to a great extent to the terrible heat and horrid drinking water. Perhaps it was a tune-up for what was to follow.

World War I was raging in Europe at the time, and when the United States entered that great conflict the following year, the troops that Colonel Conley had trained again served with distinction. He made another attempt to be reinstated, but was denied the opportunity of participating in “The War to Save Democracy.”

So he returned to his beloved Outpost Farm to commence the establishment of the famous Outpost Nurseries. It would seem that the energy he applied to managing what was to become just about the largest nursery in the world would equal that expended as commander of the 69th Regiment.

Although Colonel Conley died a relatively young man, his demise in 1930 was not caused by any malady that was discovered by the Army doctors.

His funeral was one of the largest ever held in Ridgefield. The Mass was said by his close friend, the Rev. Richard E. Shortell, assisted by Father Francis P. Duffy, the famous chaplain of the Fighting 69th Regiment.

#324: A MAGNIFICENT ESTATE AND ITS MANY CARETAKERS

Having completed his year-long search through the hills of Ridgefield, looking for the place on what was then known as Maplewood Road, and now is called Bennett's Farm Road, it is doubtful that Col. Louis D. Conley could have found a more majestic site.

The hilltop provided a spectacular view of the relatively untouched surrounding countryside, as well as the privacy that he sought.

The Colonel wasted no time in acquiring large tracts of land, from the estate of Isaac Selleck, as well as land from Emma David, Simeon Keeler, William Smith, and Andrew Bates. This was some years before he started the famous Outpost Nursery, which caused the purchase of a great many more additional acres.

So, the Colonel's original holdings were meant to make up his own private estate, which would come to be known as Outpost Farm. Several fine buildings were erected to house the farm's livestock, including a large cow barn, a horse barn, a sheep barn, and chicken houses.

There were also houses for the families that worked on the estate, and a garage to house several automobiles.

While all this was going on, construction of the great mansion was started. The name of the architect who drew the plans for the mansion is unknown to me, but he must have been the tops in his field. An attempt was made to duplicate this magnificent structure in recent years by John Yervant, when he built his Fox Hill Inn in Brookfield. John made a good try, but he found that despite the expenditure of a great deal of money, the original could not be matched.

The majestic front of the building gave it a look of such grandeur as to titillate the interest of any lover of fine architecture. Soft, tan leather paneling graced the walls of the great entrance hall and gave one a feeling of warmth, as one entered the place.

Like the dining area, the kitchen was worthy of a real fine hotel. It would serve the Conley family and their guests well, and in later years, the visitors, when it became the well-known Fox Hill Inn. Most of the mansions in the area had ample kitchens, but this one must have been the greatest.

It took a great deal of help to operate such a large estate, and Outpost Farm had a great number of employees, some of whom lived on the place. Albert Servadio, father of Incz, Ada, Joseph, and "Tao," was the caretaker and he and his family lived on the estate, in the house that is now the home of fellow *Press* writer, Linette Burton.

To Albert was entrusted the care of the splendid grounds, and the gorgeous sunken Italian garden that spread its beauty at the front of the mansion. This he did well for some 33 years, and with great pride.

Albert had plenty of helpers, two of whom were Mr. Swarm and Attilio Casavechia, who also lived with their families on the grounds of the place. They mowed and manicured the gigantic terraced lawn that extended from the front of the mansion, down the hill and almost to the Danbury Road. Sorry to say that the splendid lawn is long since gone and in its place is an unsightly mass of weeds and bushes.

Joseph Baldaserini and his family also lived on the estate. Joe was the herdsman, and under his care was a fine herd of purebred Guernsey cows. He also had assistants, one of whom was Frank Scallon, who in later life invented the Midget Louver. I mentioned Frank in Dispatch #308, and you may read some more about him soon.

While at work, Joe Baldascrini always wore a neat pair of pinstriped overalls. They were a kind of uniform preferred by dairymen, as opposed to the regular blue overalls worn by other workmen.

Like the Servadios, the Baldaserinis had four children, three boys and a girl, Primo, Gina, Paul, and Gino. It was the custom in those days for all members of families on the large estates to take an active part in the operations, and so it was at Outpost Farm. All the children were given their assignments, and at one time both Mrs. Servadio and Mrs. Baldaserini provided their culinary expertise in the great kitchen at Outpost. It was truly a family affair.

Later on, and for many years, Mary Carboni became the major-domo, at dispensing food for the Conley family.

Many of the children still live in Ridgefield. Inez Servadio, now Mrs. John Carboni, lives at 10 Greenfield Avenue. Her sister, Ada, now Mrs. Gordon Knapp, lives at 34 Oscaleta Road.

Joseph is actually Albert Jr., but always has been called Joe to distinguish him from his father. Joe worked at Outpost Nursery before he entered the U.S. Army, in which he served as a non-commissioned officer for many years. After retirement from the Army, Joe returned to Ridgefield and became associated with the Woodcock Nursery that succeeded the Outpost Nursery. Joe and his wife live at 46 Soundview Road.

Primo Baldaserini and his wife, Elena, still live at 113 Hillsdale Avenue. "Preem," as his friends called him, was a carpenter by trade, but when someone saw him carrying a ton of lumber, it was suggested that he join the nursery where he could transplant 25-foot trees with his bare hands.

After a number of years at nursery work, Preem returned to his trade and helped to build many of the houses that replaced much of the nursery, especially in the Buck Hill area. Preem's brother, Gino, lives with his wife Joan, at 15 Mountain View Avenue. Gene, as he was best known spent many years making golf clubs and now in his retirement has the opportunity to use them.

Their brother Paul [Baker] is the area's favorite toastmaster, and once worked for this newspaper. After service in the U.S. Army, Paul became a popular announcer on radio station WLAD and now operates his own TV station, while living with his family in Danbury, a suburb of Ridgefield.

#325: THE HURRICANE THAT WHITENED PAUL'S HAIR

With your kind permission, I will interrupt the story about the Outpost enterprises to recall an incident that happened just 50 years ago yesterday. It has to do with a terrible hurricane that struck this area on Wednesday, Sept. 21, 1938.

This story actually starts more than a year before when a super mechanic, Paul Raymond, decided to build himself a rather large motorboat. Paul was an avid hunter and fisherman, and never was quite so happy as when he was hunting a red fox, or fishing for flounder or bluefish. His favorite place to fish was in the waters of Long Island Sound.

Raymond's Garage was an auto repair shop, located in the old barn that still stands [not in 2025], just to your right as you enter Gilbert Street from Main Street. Paul was ably assisted

by Aldo Bacchiochi, another top-flight mechanic. They not only took care of autos, but also fixed just about anything from an ailing eggbeater to the pumps of the water company.

So Paul started construction of a ship that would meet his own specifications. The work was done in the basement of the garage, and many people visited to watch Paul as he skillfully labored on what would probably be his greatest achievement.

Once the hull had taken shape, a fine marine engine was installed and the ship received several coats of spar varnish. It was a beauty and Paul decided to name it Muriel, the name of one of his daughters.

I asked Paul why most ships were named after a lady, and he said that it was probably because it took a man to handle them. This retort came from a man who could never be accused of being a male chauvinist.

All that was left to do now was the testing to see if the Muriel was seaworthy. The ship was some 40 feet in length, so a large trailer, which Paul also constructed, carried it to Westport.

As expected, the boat took to the water just like a duck, and several fishing expeditions were enjoyed that summer by Paul and his cronies, without any problems.

In mid-September of 1938, a very large storm was brewing in the Bahamas, similar to the one that has been named Gilbert, and which has just [1988] devastated Jamaica. Names were not assigned to hurricanes in those days, but some were quickly coined when this storm hit our Eastern Seaboard.

There was considerable damage in Florida and Georgia, but then the storm veered out into the Atlantic and it was felt that it would bypass this area. So a fishing party was organized and very early on Wednesday, Sept. 21, Paul and his friends, Albert Rux and Byron Sherwood, met Ernest Scofield and Floyd Allen on the dock at Westport. Floyd was an old sea captain, with a thorough knowledge of the waters of the Sound.

Some stars were still shining when the Muriel, with its five passengers, sailed out onto the very calm waters of Long Island Sound. They carried no radio and so did not hear the latest weather reports that the huge and treacherous storm had decided to have another crack at the mainland.

This time the storm hit Cape May and careened northward, with winds of more than 90 miles per hour. It increased in intensity as it roared up the coast toward New England.

The fishermen were several miles off Old Saybrook when the winds started to pick up, and they thought that they were getting some of the tailwinds of the big storm. By mid-afternoon the wind was approaching gale force. In no time at all, the bright blue sky had turned pitch black, and the men decided they had better seek some shelter until the storm passed. Actually they were almost in the eye of the storm and the worst was yet to come.

Captain Allen suggested that they head for Plum Island, which was much nearer than Old Saybrook. This is a small island where the Army maintained a barracks and an old powder house. The barracks were on the far side of the island, so they traveled at full speed for the powder house, which had a good dock.

It was getting kind of scary, for as they neared the island, the waves were washing over the sides of the Muriel. On reaching the dock they found other boats tied up there, but no living person was in sight. On the island Paul made sure that the Muriel was tightly secured, and after they disembarked, they started for the shelter of the powder house.

By now the wind was blowing so hard that it was impossible to walk. There was a narrow-gauge railroad track, and they crawled along it, using the rails and ties for security.

Upon reaching the powder house, they learned that there was no electricity and it had become so dark that visibility was nil. Adding to the problem was the fact that the water had risen so much that it was now pouring into the first floor, and they had to use a ladder to reach the second floor. There the terrified men spent the night.

In the morning they were happy to find the Muriel still tied up at the dock, though the other boats had all been smashed to bits. It was surely a tribute to Paul Raymond's ability at boat building.

Much later the wind slackened and they made their way to the Army barracks, where they found eight frightened soldiers. The soldiers tried to send a message to the mainland on their shortwave radio, but power had been disrupted for many miles, and remained so for several days.

The barracks was in no better shape than the powder house and the roof had been completely blown off the building. There was great concern for the safety of the fishermen, and it was not until Friday that a shortwave message finally got through, telling of their harrowing experience.

The men arrived home in Ridgefield on Sunday the 25th, to find that our town had not been spared. Trees and power lines were down all over the place, though the greatest damage was along the shoreline where houses had been blown down and in some instances moved across the highway.

It was necessary to import tree men from Massachusetts to clear the debris. Leo Pimpair was in charge of one group that included Philip Piser, William "Smokey" Morris, Joseph Sheehy, Tony Shagatani, and a fellow called Whitey.

Like everyone else, these fellows fell in love with Ridgefield as well as with some of our local girls. Phil married May Moore, Smokey married Rosella Ferguson, and Joe married Theresa Knoche.

That storm caused Paul Raymond's hair to turn gray overnight and that is understandable.

#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 scurrying 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 disappeared 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 II 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 Jespersen.

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 take 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 concerning 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 Addressi 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 ears.

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 one 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 time 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 Casey 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 years, 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 me.

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.

One 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.

Lester 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 Anne 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 1.

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 times 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

brehtaking 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 Fahey, 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, I 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 Ridgefield 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 genera-

tion 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 took 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 instances.

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 Cornen 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 Cornen 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 Cugenesis 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 horns. 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 I 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 operated 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 II 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 attracted 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 wife 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 Francis D. Martin family. See how Marty's name keeps cropping up.

Francis Rowland continued his career as an architect, but unfortunately 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 person 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 Ernest 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 Hights 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 been 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 Nazzareno 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 transformed 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 location, 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 corner 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 to \$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 I 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.

• • •

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.

INDEX

The numbers below refer to the column numbers, not page numbers.. Note that the indexer cites many illustrations that accompanied the columns appearing in *The Press* and that were included in the photocopied compilation. Some of these illustrations were included in the 366 Dick's Dispatch postings on Old Ridgefield, but often, different or additional ones were employed. (No images were included in the PDF compilations; those are text-only files.) The original illustrations may be viewed in the photocopied binder edition, available at the Ridgefield Library and the historical society. Many may also be viewed in digitized issues of *The Press* available at news.google.com/newspapers, although quite a few of these images may be less crisp than they were in the original newspaper. All of the columns and their images may also be viewed on microfilm available at The Ridgefield Library.

A

A&P (Grocery Store), 100
Abbe, James, 316
Abbe, John, Johnny, 315
Abbe, Patience, 316
Abbe, Polly (Mrs. James), 316
Abbe, Richard, 316
Abbott, Arletta (nee Larmon), 23
Abbott, Florence, daughter of George, 249
Abbott, George, 248, 249
Abbott, Kate Barry (Mrs. George), 248, 249
Abbott, Larmon W., 23
Abbott, Louis (Lou), son of George, 48, 249
Ablon Ralph E., 206, 354
Abrams, A.J., 315
Ackworth Cottage, (Mary Linda Bradley estate) 285
Acorn Press, see Ridgefield Press
Adams & Keeler Livery Stable, 32, 132, 237;
see also Sperry's Livery Stable
Adams Express Co., see Am. Railway Express
Adams, Franklin P., 170

Adams, Mrs. Franklin P. (nee Root), 170
 Adams, Howland, 18, 32, 104, 210, 255
 Adams, Joseph (Joe), 18, 32, 132, 255
 Adams, Joseph Jr., 32
 Adessi Jewelry Store, 91 illus., 94
 Airdrift Farm, (John McLaury estate), 234
 Aldrich Museum, 76, 131
 Aldrich, Larry, 103
 Alexander Hamilton High School, see Center School
 Algonquin Indians, 204
 Ali, Mehdi & Raeline, 291
 Alkiewicz, Andrew W., 273
 Allan, Barbara Stabe (Mrs. Mark), 354
 Allan, Betty Matthews (Mrs. Donald), 354
 Allan, Donald G., (Don), 158, 354
 Allan, Edwin B. (Eddy), 67, 72, 354 illus.
 Allan, Edwin Muir, Sr., 206, 354
 Allan, Ella, 67
 Allan, Jean Blair (Mrs. Edwin, Sr.), 354
 Allan, Joan Smith (Mrs. Edwin B.), 255, 354 illus.
 Allan, Mark, son of Don, 354
 Allans' Mens Store (Allans' Block), 119, 182
 Allee, Dr. William H., 84, 246
 Allee, Mrs. William H., 145
 Allen, Floyd, 325
 Allen, Dr. H.W., 217
 Allen, Sereno, 238, 239
 Allen, William (Bill), 72, 298 illus.
 Almgren, Gunnar, 330
 Aloha (Holt & Huntington estate), 192, 193, 195
 Altnacraig (Hepburn estate), 22, 32, 156, 159 illus., 160, 162 illus., 183, 185, 186, 195, 196, 200, 291, 293
 Altnacraig Convalescent Home, (also Nursing Home), 156, 159 illus.
 Amatuzzi Bros., 351
 American Legion, 6, 201, 336, 366 illus.
 American Legion Auxiliary, 138
 American Railway Express, 39, 83, 137, 144, 339
 American Women Volunteer Service, 302illus., 304, 341
 Anderson, J. Ebert (Bert), 83, 115, 126, 171
 Anderson, C. P., 202
 Anderson, Elmer, 192
 Anderson, Henry B., 69, 134, 135, 136, 137, 156, 274, 276, 281, 289
 Anderson, Mrs. Henry B., 134

Anderson, J. Ebert, 171
Anderson, Lyman, 62, 300
Anderson, Maurice, 126
Anderson, Rodney, 126
Anderson, William, 152, 217
Andre, Major John, 153
Annesi, John, 138
Apazidis, Michael, 299
Archer, Donald, 328
Argenio, Carmine (Buck), 212, 214, 348
Arigideen Farm, (McKeon farm), 245
Arnold, Gen. Benedict, 2, 212, 213
Arnold, Paul D. and Elizabeth, 271
Arvay, Albert, 155
Ashbee, Charles Francis (Uncle Charlie), 183 illus.
Ashbee, Ida Smith (Mrs. Charles), 183
Ashland Cottage, 84
Ashplant, William H., 283
Asketh, Jordan, 345
Auchincloss, Gordon, 127
Avery, Tredwell, 346
Ayles, Bob, 294
Ayles, William (Bill), 294

B

B&B Floor Covering Co. (Bloomer & Bellagamba), 232, 365
Bacchiochi, Achille, 3, 20, 86, 101, 299
Bacchiochi, Aldo, 300, 325
Bacchiochi, Gloria (Mrs. James), 178, 289, 290
Bacchiochi, Inc., 47, 59 illus., 85, 88, 90, 102, 140, 155, 223, 270
Bacchiochi, James (Jim), 57, 71 illus., 97, 114, 178, 184, 205, 289, 290
Bacchiochi, John (Johnny), 84, 86,
Bacchiochi, Joseph (Joe), 197, 220, 222
Bacon, Francis D., 202
Baggott, Tom, 245
Bailey Ave. School, see Center School
Bailey, Eldridge N., 69, 135, 136
Bailey, Frank, 62, 218, 229
Bailey, George, 229, 354
Bailey Inn, 119, 237
Bailey, Mary Lambert (Mrs. Theodore), 267
Bailey, Robinson (Robin), 229, 230

Bailey, Theodore B. (Ted), 267, 268, 335
Baird, Amy, 98
Baker, Amos and Sarah Stebbins, 113
Baker, James & Colleen, 354
Baker, Louis, 102, 216, 247
Baker, Paul, 213; see also Baldaserini, Paul
Baker, Teresa Buckley (Mrs. Louis), 216, 247, 249
Baldaserini, Elena (Mrs. Primo), 324, 356
Baldaserini, Geno (Jinx), son of Joseph, 324, 327, 354
Baldaserini, Gina, daughter of Joseph, 324,
Baldaserini, Joan (Mrs. Geno), 324, 354
Baldaserini, Jack, 51
Baldaserini, Joseph, 324, 357
Baldaserini, Nancy, daughter of Geno, 354
Baldaserini, Paul, son of Joseph, 324
Baldaserini, Primo (Preem), son of Joseph, 200, 227, 324, 326, 356
Ballantyne, James, 137, 139, 144, 293
Ballard Building, see Martin Block
Ballard, Mrs. Edward L. (nee Biglow), 13, 76, 116, 199, 203
Ballard Park, 72, 76, 107, 217, 285
Ballou, Lance, 166
Banks, Hugh S., 152, 290
Barber, Edward J., 272
Barker, Frederick Merrill, 327
Barnes, Robert, 263
Barrett, Agnes Leary (Mrs. Lou), 5
Barrett, Lou, 5, 257
Barrett, William and Joan, 313
Barry, John and Mary Ann, 247
Barry, Robert, son of John, 238, 247, 248 illus., 250
Bartolucci, Enzo and Elsie Torcellini, 270, 341, 357
Bassett, Cleveland, 25
Bassett, Clifford, 10
Bassett, Preston, 6, 114, 152, 195, 216, 277
Bates, Andrew, 324
Bates, Camilla, 358
Bates, Carlton, 358
Bates, Florence (Mrs. Herbert), 261
Bates, Fred Jr., 358
Bates, Fred Sr. (sheriff), 358, 359
Bates, Harry, 358
Bates, Herbert S. (Herb), 1 illus., 31, 46, 89, 100, 292
Bates, Jennnie (Mrs. Fred Sr.), 358

Bates, Julia, 358
Bates Livery Service, (also Bates Taxi & Garage), 44, 60, 63, 218, 250
Bates, Marion, 358
Bates, Natalie, 358
Bates, Percy, 358
Bates Taxi & Garage, (also Bates Livery Service), 44, 60, 63, 218, 250
Bates, Thornton (Thorny), 358
Bates, William (architect), 237
Battle of Ridgefield, (1777), 2, 151, 191, 344, 346
Battle of Ridgefield, (1986), 212, 213, 214 illus., 215
Baxter, Charles H. (Charley), 5, 218, 268
Baxter, D. Crosby, 5, 268
Baxter, Frank, 5, 15
Baxter, Mary Senese (Mrs. Charles), 268
Baynham, Albert (Al), 123
Beal, Roger, 213
Beard, George, 276, 278
Beardsley, Mildred, 54
Beckwith, Christine, 203, 206
Bedient, Daisy Smith (Mrs. Francis), 239
Bedient, David F., father of Francis, 69, 239
Bedient, Francis (Beedie), 45, 123 239,
Bedient, Leona (Beedie), sister of Beedie, 16 illus., 239
Bedient's Hardware, 2, 16, 45, 63, 64, 213, 217, 218, 232, 239, 240
Bedini, Alexander, 15
Bedini, Contracting Co., 3, 12, 85
Bedini, Ferdinand, 12, 16, 298 illus.
Bedini, Molio, 298 illus.
Bedini, Silvio, 12
Bedini, Tecla, 54 illus.
Bedini, Vincent (Jimmy), 12, 15, 20
Beech, Edward, 291
Beers, Cyrus, 346
Beers, David, 346
Beers, Henry I., son of Cyrus, 346
Beers, Howard, 102, 291
Beers, Orin, 103, 291, 351
Begin, Jimmy, 82
Behnke, Bill, 305, 320
Behnke, Bronco, 305, 320
Belardinelli, Rose Serfilippi, 68, 97
Belbusti, Armando, 357
Belin, David & Mary, 341

Bell Estate (Lewisboro), 102, 254
Bell, Dr. Joseph, 184
Bell, Robert, 10, 330
Bellagamba, Dino, 6 illus., 53, 341
Bellagamba, Florence (Mrs. Dino), 341
Bellagamba, Helen (Mrs. James), 22
Bellagamba, James (Jimmy, Jim), 22, 232, 365
Bellagamba, Joseph, 360
Bellagamba, Mrs. Nazzareno, 365
Bellagamba, Steve, son of Jim, 365
Belmont (restr.), see also Fairfield Lunch, 40, 261
Benel, Harold F., 150
Benjamin, Alice, 296
Benjamin, Charles, W., 295, 296
Benjamin, Dorothy, 296
Benjamin, Emerson, 296, 341
Benjamin Franklin 5 & 10 cent store, 182
Benjamin Franklin School, see also Big School & High School, 54, 64, 122
Benjamin, Irma Mae Finch (Mrs. Emerson), 296, 341
Benjamin, Mary Estelle Bailey (Mrs. Charles), 296
Benjamin, Richard, 296
Benedict, Andrew, 151
Benedict, Aunt Delight, 151
Benedict, Joseph, 130, 157
Benedict, Jesse, 233
Benedict, Maude (Mrs. Jesse), 233
Benedict, William, 91 illus.
Benka, Lillian, 156
Bennedick, James, 130, 131
Bennett, Daniel (Dan), 102, 228, 289
Bennett, Charles, 10
Bennett, Finn, 228, 289
Bennett, George S., 23, 154, 228, 289
Bennett, Harry, 2, 70
Bennett, Lois, 340 illus.
Bennett, Lottie (Mrs. Norman), 249
Bennett, Richard (Dick), 174, 176, 228, 289, 293
Bennett, Ruhamah Foshay (Mrs. Richard), 293
Benninger, Albert, 190, 266
Bennison, Wm. E., 330
Benrus Watch Co. , 332 illus., 333
Bent Garth (Gerald Gray estate), 195
Benusis, Dr. John T., 207, 208

Bercovici, Gorky, 317, 318
 Bercovici, Konrad, 317 illus., 318, 319, 320
 Bercovici, Mirel, 317 illus., 318
 Bercovici, Naomi (Mrs. Konrad), 317, 318
 Bercovici, Rada, 317, 318
 Bercovici, Rion, 317
 Bergland, Paul & Pauline Reynolds, 220
 Bertalovitz, Gary, 335
 Bertotti, Corrine, 51
 Bertotti, Domenica, 51
 Bertotti, Santina, 51
 Bertotti Store, 51
 Besse, Alice, 356
 Besse, George & Dawn, 356
 Bessette, Doris (Mrs. Raymond), 196, 197
 Bessette, Raymond, 156, 166, 196, 197
 Best, Bede, 240
 Biagiotti, Al, 13
 Bicentennial Parade 1932, 16 illus.
 Bicker, George, 17
 Biddle, Christine, 206, 297, 354
 Biddle, Edna, 206, 297
 Biddle, Edward R., 206, 354
 Biddle, Harriet (Mrs. Edward), 206, 297, 354
 Biddle, Henry W., 206
 Big School, see Center School
 Big Shop, 59, 119
 Biglow, Lucius (family), 116, 339
 Biglow Building, see Martin Block
 Birch Pond, see Mamanasco Lake
 Birdsall, Charles, 4, 25
 Birdsall Farm, (Shelton estate), 313
 Birdsall, Ralph, 4
 Birarelli, Father Danesi, 98
 Bishop, Foster Foote, 154
 Bishop, Sarah, 275, 277, 278
 Bissell, Flora Randall (Mrs. Harvey), 288
 Bissell, Harvey P., 35, 98, 160, 168, 287illus., 288 illus.
 Bissell, Robert P., 288
 Bissell's Drug Store, 35, 60, 63, 80, 82, 91, 91illus., 97-100, 168, 190, 218, 273 illus., 287 illus.,
 288 illus., 312
 Blacksmithing, 37, 119 illus., 120, 121, 124, 125, 127, 130
 Blackwell, James Madison, 101 illus., 104

Blaine, James Gillespie III, 168, 169
Blein, Sylvia, 304
Bloomer, Andrew Sr., 45, 73, 117, 123, 184, 232, 239, 314
Bloomer, Andrew Jr., 232, 365
Bloomer, Anna Stauffer (Mrs. Andrew Sr.), 232
Bloomer, Edna, 232
Bloomer, Elizabeth Weitzel (Mrs. Andrew Jr.), 232
Bloomer, Frank, son of Andrew Sr., bro of George Sr., 160, 232
Bloomer, George Jr., 106, 232
Bloomer, George Sr., 104, 105, 232
Bloomer, Kaye, daughter of Andrew Jr., 232
Bloomer, Thomas (Tom), son of Andrew Jr., 232
Bluebird Inn & Apartments, 289 illus., 290
Bluefront Grocery Store, see Casa-More
Blumenthal, Stephen, 271
Boland, Elizabeth (Bess), 6 illus., 291
Boland, Mary (May), 122, 123, 291
Boland, Pat, 142
Boland, Patrick, 291
Boland William (Bill), 6, 140, 152, 235, 291, 293
Bolling, Bill, 64
Bonnett, Dr.Sara, 51
Boshnack, Harry, 233
Bouffard, D.K., 263
Bouton, Elmer, 151, 216, 289, 293
Bouton, William (Bill), 11, 359
Bowie, Ed, 100
Boy Scouts, 62, 204,
Boyce, Charlotte Davis (Mrs. Willis), 219, 223
Boyce, Lottie Davis, 114, 117, 135, 249
Boyce, Walter, son of Willis, 113, 114, 115
Boyce, Willis, 117, 135, 219, 336
Boyd, Thomas, , 23
Bradley, Carolina Lawson (Mrs. Wm. Harrison), 285
Bradley, Ester Burr, 107
Bradley, Marion Anna, 285
Bradley, Mary Linda, 107, 285
Bradley, Col. Philip Burr, 76, 107, 113, 263, 285
Bradley, Wm. Harrison, 69, 107, 195, 263, 285 illus.
Bradley, Judge Wm. Henry, father of Wm. Harrison, 107, 285
Bradt, Wm. & Christine, 192, 266
Brady, Andrew, 11, 275
Brady, Andrew Jr., 275

Brady, James ("Diamond Jim"), 60, 358
Brady, Margaret, 275
Brady, Patricia, 275
Brady, Sim, 103
Branca Ralph, 52
Brannigan, Rev. Michael J., 5, 41
Braun, Elizabeth, 72
Breed, Nelson, 206
Breezy Nook (A.B. Hepburn estate), 195
Brennan family, 26
Broadhurst, Al, 117, 230
Brooks, Arthur, 14
Brooks, Sylvia, 54
Brophy, Andrew, 301
Brophy, James, 301
Brophy, John, son of Andrew, 74, 301
Brother Ambrose, 219
Brown, Alice Creagh (Mrs. Francis), 29, 308
Brown, Donald & Beatrice Scott, 32
Brown Dorothy J., 246
Brown, Ellsworth F. (Brownie), 115, 122, 240, 241
Brown, Francis, 83, 153 illus., 360
Brown, Fred, 353
Brown, George, 33, 34, 218
Brown, Mrs. George (nee Keeler), 218
Brown, James, 131
Brown, Joseph Epes, 311, 312
Brown, Lavina (Mrs. Joseph), 311
Brown, Leander, 346
Brown, Louis, Jr., 58
Brown, Louis, Sr., 58
Brown, Mary Alice Rowland, 352, 353, 354
Brown, Susie, 7 illus.
Brown, William (Bill), 133, 253, 305
Browne, Walter R., 152
Browne, Winifred, 215
Brownlee, Mrs. Adelaide, 161
Browse, Josephine, 127
Browse, Vira, 127
Browse, William Jr. (Bill), 127
Browse, William Sr., 127
Brundage & Benedicts (store) B&B, Busy Bee, 194, 217, 218, 228, 233
Brundage, Edwin, son of Fred, 228, 298 illus..

Brundage, Fred, 228, 233
Brundage, Jennie Pehrson (Mrs. Fred), 228
Brundage, Lawrence, 67, 89, 228
Brundage, Ralph, 67, 100, 228
Brundage, Walter, son of Fred, 228
Brunetti & Gasperini Store, 51 illus..
Brunetti, Dante, 51, 354
Brunetti, Ernest, 51 illus., 143
Brunetti, Joseph (Joe), 51, 100, 346 illus.
Brunetti's Market, 51, 100, 107, 346 illus., 350, 359
Bruno, Michael E., 155, 287
Brush, Donald K., 244
Bryer, Jerry, 216, 330
Bryon, Dr. B. Adelmer (Barney), 119, 217, 223, 231
Bryon Park (development), 217, 227, 231, 232, 233, 235, 247, 249
Buccitti, Ann (Mrs. Armando), 341, 357
Buccitti, Armando, 341
Buch, Emily, 263, 278
Buckley, Fred, 328
Budinski, Morris, 104, 105, 106
Buffalo Creek Acres, 20, 21
Buhl, Bob, 114
Bulkley, Jonathan, 23, 26, 203, 275, 276 illus., 278, 318
Bulkley, Sarah L. Todd (Mrs. Jonathan), 276 illus., 278, 279
Bunker, William, 280
Burchard, Rev. Samuel Dickinson, 168
Burdick, Eleanor, 4 illus., 67, 138
Burger, Sidney, 263
Burke, Mary Keeler, 262
Burke, Rita, 262
Burr, Aaron, 107
Burr Store (J. Howard Burr's Men Clothing Store), 97, 273 illus.
Burt, Benjamin (Ben), 130, 131
Burt, Seaborn, 130
Burton, Linette, 324, 327
Buschy, Sgt., 140
Butchering, 111
Butler, Dorothy Conron (Mrs. James), 269
Butler, James Jr., 269
Butler Store, 269
B.V. Ranch (restaurant), 93

C

Caddell, Loren, 32
Cahil, Eddie, 18
Cain, Charles, 103, 203, 233, 350
Cain, Dorothy DeVantry (Mrs. Charles), 350
Caisson Wells Co., 345
Calhoun, Michael, 151, 155
Calihan, Frances Venus (Mrs. John), 8, 67
Calihan, Jean, 4
Calihan, Joan, 4
Callahan, Margaret, 122
Callahan, Nancy (Mrs. Richard), 295
Callahan, Richard, 101, 295
Camp, Charles, 357
Camp, George & Alice, 357
Camp, George Jr., 357
Camp, Mary, 357
Camp, Peter, 357
Candlelight Shop, 228
Canestrari, Fortunato (Fred), 314, 320
Canestrari, Levio, 346 illus.
Cannon Ball House, see Keeler Tavern, 211
Carboni, Albert, 324
Carboni, Adrian (Ade), 30 illus., 34, 48, 49, 50
Carboni, Alda (Mrs. Vasinto), 228
Carboni, Benvenuto and Assunta, 34, 48, 49, 68, 184, 360
Carboni, Catherine Creagh (Mrs. Octavius), 29, 308, 360
Carboni, Dorothy (Mrs. Olinto), 50
Carboni, Dino & Elsie Zandri, 70, 233, 234
Carboni, Inez Servadio (Mrs. John), 228, 324
Carboni, John, son of Vinnico, 228, 298 illus.
Carboni, John Jr., 228
Carboni, Joseph, 20, 298 illus.
Carboni, Laura Bellagamba (Mrs. Reno), 356
Carboni, Marino, 54 illus., 228, 298 illus.
Carboni, Margaret McGlynn (Peg) (Mrs. Peter), 4, 300, 360
Carboni, Mary, 324
Carboni, Octavius J. (Tabby, Bones), 30 illus., 34, 48, 49, 50, 51 illus., 68, 93, 146, 204, 216, 242, 360
Carboni, Navio P. (Pete) (Bones), 1, 34, 49, 50, 53, 84, 96, 146, 232, 300, 360
Carboni, Olinto (Lynce, Bones), 1 illus., 34, 49, 50, 75, 96, 146, 232
Carboni, Paul, 228

Carboni, Quinto, 249, 343
 Carboni, Reno (Bones), 7 illus., 34, 49, 50, 51, 146, 232, 356
 Carboni, Richard (Dick), 261, 266
 Carboni, Robert, son of Octavius, 48, 68
 Carboni, Vasinto (Vinnie), son of Vinnico, 228
 Carboni, Vincent, 228
 Carboni, Vinnico, 228
 Carboni's Italian Market, 49, 51
 Carey, Charles, 202
 Carey, Florence Hamilton (Mrs. Martin), 160
 Carey, Martin Fraser, 160
 Carey, Melbert, 224 illus.
 Cargon, William H., 48
 Carini, Dominic, 360
 Carini, John, 6 illus., 7 illus., 360
 Carini, Mary, 360
 Carini, Santi, 360
 Carley, Fred, 144
 Carlson, Steven, 36 illus.
 Carnall, Agnes Kelly (Mrs. Arthur), 174, 220, 222
 Carnall, Arthur J., 67 illus., 91, 92, 183, 204
 Carnival Shop, 63
 Carpenter, Katherine LaSalle (Mrs. Samuel), 269
 Carpenter, Nellie J. Crouse (Mrs. Samuel), 269
 Carpenter, Samuel Emlen, 216 illus., 222, 233, 269
 Carr, Marty, 261
 Carroll, Edward Jr., grandson of Chas. Elliott, 355
 Carroll, Edward Sr., 355
 Carroll, Karen Elliott (Mrs. Edward), 355
 Carroll, Leo, 78, 102, 140, 216, 221, 332 illus.
 Carroll, Lois Elliott (Mrs. Edward, Sr.), 355
 Cary, Mary Flagler (Mrs. Melbert Jr.), 311, 315
 Cary, Melbert B. Jr., 310, 311, 315
 Cary, Melbert B. Sr., 307, 311, 315
 Casa-More (grocery store), 119, 128, 141, 142, 246, 298, 299
 Casagmo (Olcott estate), 2 illus., 22, 33, 34, 58, 113, 115, 119, 135, 136, 153, 171, 195, 220, 224
 illus., 229, 297, 315, 327, 344, 361
 Casagrande, Aldo, 59, 60, 117, 184, 223, 228, 237, 298 illus., 355
 Casagrande, Arthur, 298
 Casagrande, Virginio (Gene), 53, 68, 103, 119, 184, 198, 205, 246, 298 illus., 299
 Casagrande, Gordon & Karen, 53, 72
 Casagrande, Katherine Finch (Cookie) (Mrs. Peter), 335
 Casagrande, Marge (Mrs. Gene), 298

Casagrande, Peter, 298 illus.
Casagrande, Yole, 217
Case, Paul, 260, 328
Casey, Charles, 1, 21, 27
Casey, Francis, 334, 335, 344
Casey, Valerie (Mrs. Wm.), 1, 113, 115, 289
Casey, William H. (Bill), 1, 113 illus., 114 illus., 115, 289
Casino (The) see also Congregational Church, 289
Cass Gilbert Fountain, 295, 320, 321
Casavecchia, John, 105, 107
Cassavechia, Attilio, 324
Cassavechia, Dora Conti, daughter of Joe, 17, 30 illus., 228, 304, 337
Cassavechia, Lena, 7 illus.
Cassavechia, Quinto, 17
Cassavechia, Rico, 26, 54 illus.
Catoonah Chief, 53, 130, 217, 234
Catoonah Street Girls Basketball Team, 285
Caudatowa (MacDougall Hawkes estate), 195
Causa, Tony, 51
Cedar Lane Farm (Alice Williams estate), 58
Center School, 7, 12, 49, 64, 67 illus.
Central Garage, see also Pamby Motors, 203, 233, 350
Cernoch, Lawrence J., 249
Cesca, Thomas & Celia, 357
Chamberlain, Roy, 4
Chamberlain, Stewart, 7 illus.
Chandler, T.C. & Dorothy, 351
Chapin, Henry, 342
Chaplin, Oona O'Neill, 16
Chapman, LeRoy, 106, 198
Chauffeurs' Ball, 14, 73, 209, 297, 355 illus.
Chekhov, Anton, 17
Chekhov, Michael, 17
Chekhov Theatre Studio, 17, 289
Chimney Sweeps, 99
Chisolm, Benjamin Ogden (B.O.), 50, 196, 203, 204, 205, 216, 220, 327, 350
Chisolm, Bessie Rhoades (Mrs. Benjamin), 203, 204, 205
Chrisafis, Anna, 74
Chrisafis, Eve, 74
Chrisafis, Peter (Big Pete), 74, 75, 241, 261
Christafaro, John, 48, 53, 68
Christianson, Andrew, 63
Christian Brothers School, 219

Christian Science Church, 119
Christmas, 82
Christopharo, Mary, 54 illus.
Christopher, Bernie, 50, 92, 100, 242
Christopher, Bill, 92
Christopher, Jimmy, 92
Christopher, John, 240
Christopher, Margaret Creagh (Mrs. Thomas), 29, 308
Christopher, Susie, 81
Church, Bill, 213, 214
Ciccarone, Johnny, 347
Citizen of the Year, 13, 183, 201, 277
Ciuccoli, Altero (Chick), 1, 2, 7 illus., 20, 28, 232, 295, 298 illus.
Ciuccoli, Amelkri (Chick), son of Ciro, 28, 29, 362
Ciuccoli, Ciro, 28, 29, 254, 362
Ciuccoli, Lydia, 28
Ciuccoli, Mary Rossini, 7 illus., 28
Ciuccoli, Minnie (Mrs. Altero), 20
Ciuccoli, Nello (Chick), 28, 213
Ciuccoli, William (Chick), 28
Ciuccarelli, Orlando (Chick), 127
Clapes, Anthony & Jill, 302
Clapp, Lois Sterry (Mrs. David), 340
Clark, Ann Neil (Mrs. Thomas), 365
Clark, Charles, 272
Clark, Foster, 272
Clark, Hugh, 304
Clark, Mary, 70
Clark, Nancy, daughter of Toni, 365
Clark, Rachel, 272
Clark, Thomas (Tom), 3, 33, 34, 342, 365
Clark, Wallace, 272
Clark, William Travis, 286
Clarke, Flossie, 48
Clarke, George, 48
Claus, Alton, 1
Claus, Fred, 5, 33, 34, 35, 37
Cleveland, Cynthia, 214
Cleves, Mabel, 6, 54 illus.
Clynes, Rev. James E., 341
Coal Dealers, 39
Coe, Ada Burdick (Mrs. Charles, Jr.), 230
Coe, Charles, Jr., 229, 230, 360

Coe, Charles, Sr., 229, 230, 360
Coe, Mary Bailey (Mrs. Charles, Sr.), 229, 360
Coffey House of One Three Roads, 300
Coffey, Jimmy, 210
Coffey, John, 300
Coffey, Joseph, 2
Coffin, Ann Woodford (Mrs. J Gordon), 91,
Coffin, Barry, 267
Cogswell, Archie, 10
Cogswell, Richard, (Dick), 263
Coleman, Lawrence, son of Michael, 45, 217, 239
Coleman, Michael, 61, 217
Coleman, Mildred Denton (Mrs. Lawrence), 217, 231
Coleman's Lunch Wagon, 60, 61, 62, 217
Coles, Charles (Charlie), 71, 208, 210, 211
Coller, Lulu (Pat) (Mrs. Robert), 214, 300
Coller, Robert, 300
Collins, Anne, daughter of Francis, 158
Collins, Francis, 101, 102, 136, 157, 158, 309
Collins, Francis, Jr., 158
Collins, Nancy Westheim (Mrs. Francis W.), 102, 157
Collischonn, Helen Sterry (Mrs. Bud), 340
Colonial Realty, 296
Colonial Tourists, or Colonial Tea House, see also Gilbert House, 114 illus., 115
Colt, Elizabeth Browne (Mrs. Harris), 152
Colt, Harris Dunscombe, 152, 216
Colt, Harris Dunscombe, Jr., 152, 289
Colt, Theresa Strickland (Mrs. Harris, Jr.), 152
Community Center, 86, 88, 153, 216, 225, 272, 286, 291
Community Freezer, 348
Comstock, Sam, 79
Congregation of Notre Dame, 168, 179, 202, 249, 273
Congregational Church, 100, 113, 119, 163, 183, 235, 256, 257, 277, 289, 290, 309, 351
Conklin Dairy Farm, 16, 44, 86, 91, 92, 99, 110, 143, 148, 169, 175, 210, 226, 235, 241, 242,
246, 260, 313, 316, 318, 335, 354
Conklin, Irving, 16 illus., 18, 29, 30, 44, 62, 71, 91, 157 illus., 158, 160, 169, 175, 205, 207, 218,
226, 230, 232, 247, 255, 260, 273, 274, 313, 317, 318, 320
Conklin, Ethel (Mrs. Irving), 91, 110, 219, 313
Conley, Bernice, 7 illus., 54 illus.
Conley, Eddie, 122
Conley, Edwin (Uncle Ed), brother of Louis, 322, 323, 327, 329
Conley, Elise Ehret (Mrs. Louis), 322
Conley, Grace Sturges (Mrs. Richard), 322,

Conley, John, son of Louis, 322
Conley, John (Uncle John), brother of Louis, 322, 323, 327
Conley, Colonel Louis Daniel, 29, 43, 114, 308, 313, 316, 322, 323, 324 illus., 326, 327, 328, 329, 330, 334, 335, 341, 342, 345
Conley, Louis, Jr. & Catherine Schumann, 322
Conley, Richard E., son of Louis, 273, 322, 328, 329, 341
Conn-Air, 273
Connell, Francis, 216, 238
Connery, Catherine, 216
Connor, Clifton, 336
Connors, John, 306
Conron, Cecelia (Mrs. Joseph), 170, 269
Conron, Joseph, 169, 170, 269
Conron, Raymond, 170, 269
Conron's Pond, 270
Constantini, Gus, 350
Constantini, Walter, son of Gus, 350
Constantini, Wilma, 54 illus.
Contessa, Armadeo (Matty), 64
Contessa, Joseph (Joe), 64, 362
Contessa, Norma Fossi (Mrs. Joseph), 362
Conti, Anazita, son of Gus, 228
Conti, Augustus (Gus), 228
Conti, Ernest, 10, 228, 237
Conti, Ernest, Jr., 228
Conti, Fred, 228
Conti, Geno, son of Gus, 30 illus., 228
Conti, Jean Zandri (Mrs. Fred), 228
Conti, Joseph & Iride, 228, 304
Conti, Leonora, 237
Conti, Mary (Mrs. Ernest), 237
Converse Family, 315
Cooney, Mary, 82, 97
Copes, Fred, 137
Copes, Joseph (Joe), 137
Copes, Lawrence, 137
Copp, John, 234
Corbett, Arthur, 40
Corbin, Leonard & Madeleine, 273, 281
Corlies, Benjamin, 206
Cornen, Cyrus, 144
Cornen, Peter P. & Lydia Ann Beers, 346
Cornen, Cyrus Jr., 346

Corner Store (Main & West Lane), 4, 286, 287
Corrie, John, 30, 32
Corrie, Marion (Mrs. John), 30
Costa, Al, 365
Costanzi, Jimmy, 68
Costanzi, Varisto, 202
Cott's Liquor Store, 91 illus.
Coughlin, John F. (Jack), 40, 336
Country Corners, 622 Main St, see Joe's Store
Courtney, Louis (Lou), 18, 66, 184, 313, 314, 315, 316, 319
Courtney, Louis, Jr., 313, 314
Cousa, Sam, 249
Cox Estate, 21
Cox, Dr. Herbert (Vet), 299
Cox, W. Bingham (Bing) & Elsie Conely, 322, 326
Craddock, Thomas J., 307
Craig, Elsie Fossi (Mrs. Norman), 94, 161, 178, 302
Craig, Helen (Mrs. Ross), 94
Craig, Karen, 94, 161
Craig, Lori, 94, 161
Craig, Norman, 94, 141, 161, 178, 302
Craig, William (Bill), 94, 161
Craig's Jewelry Store, 94, 96, 213
Cramp, Judge Ralph E., 155, 283
Crane, Thaddeus, 19, 20, 218, 220
Cranston, Jack, 5, 65, 68, 134, 135, 219, 268
Cranston, Julia Mullen (Mrs. Jack), 219
Creagh, Agnes, 7 illus., 29, 308
Creagh, Mary, daughter of Wm., 5, 29, 308
Creagh, Mary Anne Brady (Mrs. Wm), 29, 308
Creagh, William (General), 23, 29, 30, 307, 308, 326, 354
Creagh, William Jr., 29, 308, 358
Crehan, Diane (Mrs. Patrick), 161
Crehan, Patrick James, 130, 151, 161, 215, 289
Crepet, Henry, 10
Crissey, Walter, 144
Croce, Jack, 263
Crofut, Beverly, 234
Crofut, Mabel Selleck (Mrs. Joel), 234
Crofut, Marvin, 234
Crofut, Phoebe Selleck, 234, 321
Crofut, Stanley (Stan), 234
Crosby, Bob, 14 illus., 355 illus.

Crossman's Jewelry Store, 74
Crossman, Llewellyn, 74
Crouchley, Benjamin F., 62, 136
Crouchley, Charles D. (Pop), 24, 30, 48, 62, 71, 354, 359
Crouchley, Charles Jr., (Chad), 15, 82, 67
Crouchley Ralph, 15, 62, 240
Crouchely's Plumbing Store, 62, 64, 91 illus., 194
Cugene, Nicholas, 347
Culbertson, Almon & Xenia, 147
Culbertson, Bruce Ely, 147
Culbertson, Ely, 147 illus., 148, 150, 293
Culbertson, Josephine Murphy Dillon (Mrs. Ely), 147
Culbertson, Joyce Nadya, 147
Culbertson, Nadya (Mrs. Ely), 147
Culbertson, Sascha, brother of Ely, 147 illus.
Culhane, Patrick, 273
Cumming, Don, 67
Cumming, James (Jim), 138
Cumming, Margaret (Mrs. James) (Ma), 138, 145
Cumming, William J. (Bill), 67 illus., 138
Cummings, Helen McGlynn, 4, 32
Cummings, Henry, 138
Curley, Elizabeth Geehan (Mrs. Thomas), 261
Curley, Thomas (Tom), 8, 41, 261
Curry, Mary Quinn, 271
Curry, Robert, 271
Curtiss, John, 246
Cутten, Mrs. Sunny, 281, 282
Cypher, Grace Williams, 8 illus., 9, 12 illus.

D

Dain, Frank, 48, 161
Dain, Margaret, 161
Danbury Fair, 77, 189, 213, 254, 259, 314
Danbury, Norwalk & NY Railroad, 254 illus.
Dann, Jordan Dr. (vet), 326
Darling, Marlene Carroll, 355
Dauchy House (470 Main St.), 48 illus.
Dauchy, Jeremiah, 76
David, Emma, 324
Davidson, Louise, 189
Davies, Ann, 54 illus., 246

Davies, Linda, 246
Davies, William Jr., 246
Davies, William Sr. & Jane, 246
Davis, Archibald V & Sylvia Barhite, 216
Davis, Donald, 327
Davis, Elizabeth (Lizzie), 216
Davis, Emily Gilbert, 113, 114, 115
Davis, Fred, 67 illus.
Davis, George, 200
Davis, Harold O., 117, 262, 305
Davis, John E. Jr., 153
Davis, John E. Sr., 153
Davis, Larry (Pudd), 146, 292
Davis, Mary Alice, 216
Davis, Maud (Mrs. John Jr.), 153, 211
Davis, Neville, 204
Davis, Mrs. Neville, see Lee, Priscilla
Davis, Paul, 246, 299
Davis, Philip, 246
Davis, Roy W., 3, 246, 249, 361
Davis, Victor, 117
Dawes, Thomas, 16
Day, Katherine, 290
Dayton, Charles, 338
December, Joseph, 98, 100
Deeks, Roy, 213
Deeks, Roger, 213
DeFranco, Russ, 355 illus.
Deiches, Nancy Westheim (Mrs. Walter), 102, 112
Deiches, Walter, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112
DeLuca's Shoe Store, 97, 273 illus.
DeLuca, Frank, 20
DeLuca, James, 346 illus.
DeLuca's Shoe Store, 97, 273 illus.
Della-Bovi, Marge (Mrs. Ralph), 29
Della-Bovi, Ralph, Jr., 29, 174, 227, 307 illus., 310 illus.
Dempsey, John, 332 illus.
Dempsey, Lillian Loomis, 302
Denton, Samuel S., 15, 35, 39, 116, 160, 217, 229, 361, 365
dePyster, Mrs. Johnston, 151
Desmond, Jeremiah, 6
DeVantry, Blanche (Mrs. Louis), 350
DeVantry, Louis, 181, 203, 204, 233, 350

Dic-Rie Dairy, 186, 252, 307
DiFranco, Russ, 14 illus., 342 illus.
Dillon, Carleton, 23, 24
DiMearia, Pat, 98
Dingee, Arthur, 122, 261
Dingee, Eleanor (Mrs. William), 261
Dingee Electric Inc., 72, 261, 266
Dingee, Richard, son of Wm., 261
Dingee, Robert, son of Wm., 261
Dingee, Roswell, 261
Dingee, William, 261, 266
Diniz, Alcino & Norma, 341
DiOrio, James, 346 illus.
DisPence, Stephen, 117
District Nurse Assoc. (D.N.A.), 145, 201, 204, 272
Dixon, Courtland P., 8, 12, 13
Dixon, Jimmy, 91, 100
Dobbie, Mrs. James, 263
Dodson, Alfred, 58, 132
Dodson, John, 53
Dodson, Harry, 58, 132, 133
Dolan, Martin & Mary, 138
Dolan, Dr. Walter T., 4
Dollar, John (Blacksmith), 121
Donnelly, Ellen (Mrs. Joseph), 270
Donnelly, Joseph H. (Joe), 94, 178, 236, 270, 305
Donovan, Arthur, 309
Doty, Dr. William, 59, 92
Doubleday, Alice Moffitt (Mrs. George), 9, 12, 202, 273
Doubleday, Chester, 202, 255
Doubleday, Elizabeth (Betty) (Mrs. James), 170, 215, 270, 315
Doubleday, George, 14, 160, 196, 202, 203, 205, 220, 223, 253, 254, 255, 271
Doubleday, James (Jimmy), 170, 202, 205, 215, 269, 270, 315
Doubleday, Mary May White (Mrs. George), 202, 205
Dougherty, Alice, daughter of David Sr., 273, 337
Dougherty, Charley, 190
Dougherty, David Sr., 273
Dougherty, David Jr., 272, 273 illus.
Dougherty, William (Bill), 62, 218, 272, 273
Dowling, John Edward (Ed), 55, 155, 189, 344
Dowling, Michael, father of Ed, 126, 225
Down Under, see Maplewood Inn
Dowsers, 267, 268

Driscoll, Jim, 225
 DuBois, Dr. Robert, 95
 Dubuque, James (Jim), 98
 Duckworth, Wm., 292
 Duford, LeRoy, 328
 Duncan, Gertrude Miller (Mrs. John), 354
 Duncan, John, 275, 354
 Dunlap, "Red," 232
 Dunleavy, Joseph, 10, 228
 Dunleavy, Leonora Conti (Mrs. Joseph), 10, 228
 Dunrovin, (Wm. Sullivan estate), see also Wildflower Farm, Wildfarms, 309, 311 illus., 312, 313
 Dunworth, Florence (Mrs. Joseph), 293
 Dunworth, Joseph, 141, 148, 149, 257, 293
 Durant, Annie, 2
 Dutton, Edward Payson, 22, 80, 120, 162 illus., 163 illus., 164 illus., 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 185, 186 illus, 190, 192, 193, 195, 196, 235, 306
 Dutton, Julia Sleeper (Fannie) (Mrs. E. P.), 162, 167, 168
 Dwelley, W. Parker, 210
 Dyckman House, 116
 Dyer, William P., (Bill) & Georgette, 215

E

Eaglesham, Ross & Mary, 272
 Earl, Consuela Vanderbilt, 279
 Earle, Colonel, 341
 Eason, Kathleen (Mrs. Myles), 295
 East Ridge School, see also High School, 82, 300
 Eddy, Olive, 307
 Edel, Peter, 84
 Edmond, William, 9, 214
 Edwards, Donald, 12
 Edwards, N. Donald, 12
 Egan, Tom, 137
 Eight Lakes Estates, (development), 69, 135, 136
 Eilenstein, Arthur & Lisa, 294 illus.
 Elevator House, 58, 59
 Eleven Levels, 271
 Elliott, Betty (Mrs. Charles Jr.), 233
 Elliott, Charles F., 37, 38, 83, 191, 226, 233, 355, 356, 360
 Elliott, Charles Jr. (Chuck), 83, 233, 357
 Elliss, Shoman, 27
 Elms Inn, 43, 90 illus., 161, 300, 343, 366

Emerson, Eva, 263
Emlaw, Cortland, 206, 297
Emmett, Dr. Bache McEvers & Anne, 272
Engler, Robert & Mary, 341
Enright, Ellen, 145
Eppoliti, Mrs. Alfredo, 28
Eppoliti, Edgardo, 4, 24 illus, 25 illus, 362
Eppoliti, Marcia Nash (Mrs. Edgardo), 24 illus., 25 illus.
Eppoliti, Michael (Mike), 25
Erklauer, Henry, 326
Ernst, Albert, 253
Ettinger, James, 153, 154, 195
Eustis, John, 95
Evans, Burchard, 14 illus, 355 illus.
Evans, Mrs. Elmer, 100
Executive Pavilion, 351

F

Fabricotti, Mrs., 292
Fahey, James (Jimmy), 339
Fahey, Patrick & Bridget, 339 illus.
Fair, Ada, 17
Fairgrounds (Ridgefield, 366 Wilton Rd), 232
Fairbanks, Russell, 212, 213
Fairfield County Trust, see Union Trust
Fairfield Lunch, 63, 74, 97, 261
Fairhaven (Geraldine Farrar estate), 304, 305, 309, 312
Fairlawn Cemetery, 28
Falcinelli, Louis, 357
Fannin, Frank, 243 illus.
Farrar, Geraldine, 11, 275, 297, 302 illus., 303 illus., 304, 309, 311, 312
Farrar, Henrietta (Mrs. Sidney), 302, 303
Farrar, Sidney, 11, 275, 302, 304
Fasola, George, 242
Faubel, Arthur, 18
Feduzi, Helen (Mrs. Louis), 341
Feduzi, Louis (Lou), 27, 341, 356
Feduzi, Louise, 356
Feduzi, Sandro, 27
Felsenberg (Wm. H. Bradley estate), 195, 285 Illus.
Ferguson, Elbert (Al), 35, 116
Ferry, Arthur, 40, 204, 219, 336, 354

Ferry, Christine, 7 illus., 54 illus., 354
Ferry, Lyndon, son of Arthur, 354
Ferry, Minni (Mrs. Arthur), 354
Ficker, Ralph & Carol, 266
Fife & Drum (restaurant), 333, 347
Fifth Conn. Regiment of the Continental Line, 53, 72, 76, 212, 285
Finan, Col. Bernard J., 262
Finan, Bernard Jr., 262
Finch, Alice (Mrs. Harold), 335
Finch, Barry, 210
Finch, Ernest, 223, 253
Finch, Harold E., 96, 238, 335
Finch, Louis (Bub), 127, 334, 335
Finch, Patricia Newman (Mrs. Louis), 334
Finch, Winifred, 335
Finch's Cigar Store, see United Cigar Store
Findley, Edward, 137
Fire of 1895, 69 illus., 71
Firemen's Ball, 73, 240
First National Bank & Trust Co., see Union Trust
First National Grocery Store, 91 illus.
Fischer, Marcus (Mark), 360
Fish & Game Society, 144
Fish, Grace (Mrs. Raymond), 232
Fish, Raymond, 90, 232
Fish, Raymond Jr., 232
Fish, Robert (Bob), 232
Fishcialetti, Eugeni (Janey), 142, 360, 365
Fisher, Clarence, 271
Fisher, Clarence Jr., 271
Fisher, Dorothy, daughter of Clarence, 271
Fisher, George, 76
Fisher, Gloria, daughter of Clarence, 271
Fisher, Norman, 6 illus., 153 illus.,
Fiske, Dr., 141, 294
Fitzpatrick, Mrs., 153 illus.
Flagler, Harry Harkness, 311, 315
The Flamesmen Drum & Bugle Corps, 266
Flanagan, Edmund (Ed), 289, 337, 349
Flanagan, Mary Venus (Mrs. Edmund), 6, 29, 82, 289, 337, 339, 349
Fleming, Richard (Dick), 209
Fleming, Richard Jr., 209
Flood, Andrew, 233

Flood of 1868, 9
Foley, Mrs., 116
Foote, Hastings, 154, 193
Foote, Sterling & Anne Jenner, 154
Foote, Sterling Jr., 154, 193
Forbes, Griswald, 264
Forbes, Nina Newton, mother of Griswald, 264
Ford, Wharton, 73, 240
Forshay, Fred, 34
Forshay, Michael, 34
Forsyth, Gordon, 156
Fort Hill (James Kennedy home), 22, 23, 28, 32
Forty Acres (Sidney Farrar estate), 304
Fossi, Ann Sweeney (Mrs. Lou), 363
Fossi, Dominic & Ida, 357
Fossi, Jimmy, 72
Fossi, Louis J. (Lou), 62, 357, 363
Foster, Carl, 95
Foster, Judge, 95
Foundry (The), see Maplewood Inn
Fountain, see Cass Gilbert Fountain
Four Chimneys (Van Etten estate), 195
Fox Hill Complex, 343 illus., 344, 345
Fox Hill Restaurant & Inn, 316, 324 illus., 326, 327 illus., 353
Fox, Mary, 117, 222
Fox, Michael, 6 illus.
Frances Cleaners, 216 illus., 222, 233, 250, 269
Franceschini, Bruno (Prunes), 17
Franceschini, Columbo, 17
Franceschini, Jerry & Rose, 349
Franceschini, Lindo, 17
Franceschini, Peter, 358
Franceschini, Phyllis Tulipani (Mrs. Siero), 179 illus., 204
Franceschini, Siero (Si), 17, 204
Franklin, Fabian & Christine Ladd, 250
Franklin, Margaret Ladd, 250
Franks, Dorothy, 72
Franzmann, John, 204
Fraser, Arthur C., 271, 281
Fraser, Ralph (Boss), 330
Fraser, Rose McLane (Mrs. Arthur), 271
Fraser, James R., 161
Fraser's Pond, 271

Frattini, Andy, 71, 132
Frattini, Charles (Charlie), 54 illus., 362
Frattini, Lina Salvestrini (Mrs. Charles), 362
Freer, Edward (Ed), 2, 216
Freer, Howard C., 91, 93, 123, 216, 350, 359
Freer, John, 2, 216
Freer, Marion Herzog (Mrs. John), 329
Freivogel Dorothy (Mrs. Richard), 341
Freivogel, Richard (Dick), 106, 341
Freund, Sanford, 161
Fricke, Richard J., 210
Frinder, Fritz, 122, 240
Frulla, Alex, 21
Frulla, Andrew, 21, 22
Frulla, Armando, 21
Frulla, Elda, 7 illus.
Frulla, Eugenio, 41
Frulla, Fred, 357
Frulla, Jack, 6 illus., 53
Frulla, Mario (Muggsy), 10, 20, 87, 351
Fry, Stephen, 346

G

Gaddis Restaurant (Grove Street), 359
Gaeta, Anthony Jr. (Tony), 42
Gaeta, Mrs. James, 246
Gaeta, Dominic, 321
Gaeta Building, 116, 117
Gabbianelli, Frank, 96
Gabbianelli, Peter, son of Frank, 97
Gabbianelli, Raymond, 6 illus., 7 illus.
Gabbianelli Shoe Store, 96
Gabel, Fred, 202
Gage Block, 69
Gaines Food Company, see also Outpost Kennel, 330
Gallatly, Margaret, 304
Galli, Jack, 223
Garbin, Ethel Zandri (Mrs. John), 218
Garbin, John, 37, 57, 218
Garden School, see Center School
Garrard, Patrick & Alice, 275
Gasperini, Nazzareno (Nanny), 51 illus., 135

Gasperini, Mrs. Nazzareno, 51, 55
Gaucher, Jimmy, 299
Gay, Fred, 79
Gay, Henry, 197
Gazek, Mary McGowan, 32
Gearhart, David & Edith Bloomer, 232
Geehan, James, son of Patrick, 261
Geehan, Patrick & Bridget, 261
Gelert, Mr. & Mrs., 320
Gengarely, Walter, 359
Geoghan, Michael (Mike), 142
Geoppler, Lorraine, 7 illus., 32
George L. Rockwell Jr. Electrical Store, 64
Gerald Gaffney's Plumbing Shop, 64
Geria, Andrew & Mary, 84
Gianotti, Peter, 59
Giardini, Delphine (Del), 54 illus.
Giardini, Dino, 115, 133, 166, 267, 298, 335
Gibbons, James & Hope Foote, 154
Gibney, Joseph, 43, 342, 343
Giddings, Margaret, 10
Gilbert, Aaron (Kick) and Abbie, 1
Gilbert, Abner Jr., 113, 114
Gilbert, Abner III, 113
Gilbert, Addie, 30
Gilbert, Frances Lewis (Mrs. Abner III), 113
Gilbert, Frank I., 3, 96
Gilbert, Harry, 1
Gilbert Homestead, see also Pierrepont House, 115
Gilbert House, (536 Main St), 113 illus., 115
Gilbert, Isaac & Mary Rowland, 115
Gilbert, Jabez Mix (Uncle Mix), 10, 24
Gilbert, Jennie Pehrson (Mrs. Wm), 113, 114, 115
Gilbert, Laura Baker (Mrs. Abner Jr.), 113
Gilbert Lizzie (Mrs. William), 113
Gilbert Mills, 9
Gilbert, Percy, 1
Gilbert, Roland L. (Rollie), 1, 2 illus., 3 illus., 135
Gilbert Tannery, 301
Gilbert, Victor (Skinker), 87, 238
Gilbert, Wm A., 9, 113, 114
Gilbert, Willis S., 1, 336
Gilchrist, Edward and Marilyn, 334

Gilkes, Lillian, 189
Gillum, Pinky, 18
Girl Scout Camp, 277, 279
Girolmetti, Aldo (Al), 48, 94, 198, 223, 330
Girolmetti, Anne Cassagrande (Mrs. Aldo), 48, 223, 298
Girolmetti, Diane, daughter of John, 364
Girolmetti, Dorothy (Dort), 341
Girolmetti, Elvira (Lil), 223
Girolmetti, Frank, 202, 223
Girolmetti, John, son of Mario, 275, 341, 363
Girolmetti, John Jr., 364
Girolmetti, Louis, son of Mario, 363, 364
Girolmetti, Lynn, daughter of John, 364
Girolmetti, Marie (Mrs. Mario), 363
Girolmetti, Mario, 3, 275, 363, 364
Girolmetti, Mary, 229, 360, 363, 364
Girolmetti, Stephen, son of John, 364
Girolmetti, Tina, 223
Glidden, Leland, 274
Gluck, Gottlob, 228
Gnewuch, Wm. & Nancy, 294
Godbout, Dick, 212, 214 illus.
Goldsmith, Harold, 355
Goldsmith, Helen (Mrs. Donald), 97
Goldwitz, Samuel (Sam) & Selma, 284
Goodrich, Rev. Samuel G., 151, 152, 277,
Goodrich, Samuel G. Jr. (Peter Parley), 151, 152, 195, 277, 290, 300
Goodstadt, George & Alexandra, 263, 278, 289
Goodwin, Abbott, 354
Goodwin, Frank, 354
Goodwin, Geoffrey, son of Frank, 354
Goodwin, Harry, 62, 218, 354
Goodwin, Hazel (Mrs. Harry), 354
Goodwin, John, son of Frank, 354
Goodwin, Kathleen, daughter of Frank, 354
Gottlieb, Morris, 238, 239
Governor's Mansion, see Community Center
Graham, Daniel, 331
Graham, David & Florence, 270
GranCentral Store (grocery) 21 Governor St., 49
Grand Hotel, see also Chisolm, B.O., 204, 205, 216
Grange see Ridgefield Grange
Grant, Elizabeth Swords (Mrs. Wheaton), 227, 310

Grant, Wheaton, 174, 227, 305, 310
Grasso, Jack, 296
Gray Court College, 140 illus., 143 illus., 149
Gray, Jessie Callum, 149
Gray, Louisa, 151, 155
Gray, Mrs. Gerald, 195
Gray, Philip M., 15
Gray, Tunney, 151
Green, Clark, 311
Green Edson K. & Carolyn Roberts, 196
Green, Rufus, 311
Greene, Henry, 157
Greene, Marion, 222, 233
Greene, Sgt. Wm., 157
Grennan, Augustus (Gus), 274
Grey Shingles (G. Herrick estate), 195, 266
Griems, Herbert Spencer, 206, 287
Griffith, Mrs. (nee Lounsbury), 216, 294
Gristedes Grocery (was Perry's Market, Walter Stewart's Store, S.D. Keeler Store), 219, 227
Grommes, Peter, 12, 222
Groveland (Lounsbury Mansion), 294
Grunig, George, 94
Gund, Adolf, 21
Gunn, John (Johnny), 3, 91, 98
Gunn, Teresa (Mrs. John), 3
Gurney, Thomas, 366 illus
Gustafson, Carl, 194, 299

H

Hackert & Monti Building (409 Main), 80
Hackert, James (Jim), 212, 268
Haggert, Thomas, 107
Hahn, Joseph, 246, 299
Hahn, Moxie, 9, 240
Haight, Alden, 4, 291
Haight, Marion Roberts (Ski) (Mrs. John I), 356
Haight, Dorothy, daughter of Ernest Sr., 4
Haight, Ernest Jr., 4
Haight, Ernest Sr., 4
Haight, Mrs. Gertrude, mother of John II, 153 illus.
Haight, John II, (police chief), 214, 356, 360
Haight, John Jr. (John III), 214

Haight, Mary Adams (Mrs. Theodore), 293
Haight, Milton, 293, 300
Haight, Theodore (Ted), 293, 334
Hall, A. Bolton, 190 illus., 191
Hall, Joseph, 330
Hall, Mrs., 115
Halmstad, Dorothy Grant (Mrs. David), 310
Halpern, George R. & Ellen Jane, 193
Halpin, Carolyn M. (Mrs. James), 296
Halpin, James H., 69, 296
Hamilton, Burgoyne, son of Charles O., 160
Hamilton, Charles Alfred, 22, 39, 160, 161, 162 illus., 167, 168, 273
Hamilton, Charles Jr. (Sonny), son of Charles Alfred, 160
Hamilton, Mrs. Charles (nee Roberts) (Sonny), 160
Hamilton High School, see Ridgefield High School
Hampden, Paul, 15, 261
Hampden, Walter, 261
Hanna, William, 95
Hannaman, C. Park, 272
Happy Store, 82
Harde, Herbert, 289
Hardeen, see Weiss, Theodore
Harding, Duncan, 2
Harkavy, Francoise, 301
Harmon, Patrick, 210
Harris, Gary, 190
Harris, Ruth, 223
Hart, Mary, 72
Hartmann, Elsa, daughter of Joseph, 32, 67
Hartmann, Joseph (photographer), 1, 32, 67, 69, 89, 101
Haven, George G., 29, 80, 120, 162, 227, 306, 307 illus., 308, 309, 310
Hawk, William S., 237 illus.
Hawkes, Eva V.C. Morris (Mrs. MacDougall), 153
Hawkes, MacDougall, 153, 195, 293
Hawley House, 161, 211, 214
Hawley, Rev. Thomas, 131, 211, 289
Hawley, William, 114
Hayes, Clifford, 329
Hayloft Restaurant (South Salem), 223
Haynes, John, 205 illus.
Hearthstone Inn, see also Outpost Inn, 343
Heaton, Syn N., 271
Heim, Vivian Hull, 340 illus.

Heissan, Dr. Joseph, 70
Helie, Morgan, 302, 307
Hilller, Dr. John, 198, 351
Hemlock Hills (development), 345
Hendricks, Robert, 67 illus.
Hennessey, Rev. Thomas, 233
Hennings, Peter, 300
Hennion family, 17, 359
Hepburn, Alonzo Barton, 151, 156, 157 illus., 158, 159, 160, 162, 167, 192, 195, 196, 291, 293
Hepburn, Beulah, 156
Hepburn, Cardelia, 156
Hepburn, Emily (Mrs. A. Barton), 156, 157, 159, 160, 161, 186
Herr, Jack, 72
Heritage Farm (Keeler Farm, later Baggot, Nod Rd), 244
Herrick, Gerard P., 22, 190, 191, 192, 266
Herrick, Lois, (Mrs. Gerard P.), 151, 190, 191, 192, 195
Herrick, Scott, 190, 193
Herrick, Susan, 190, 193
Herzog, Charles, 329
Hibbart, Earl, 119
Hibbart, Joseph W., 9, 275
Hibbart's Market, 37, 83
Hickock, Benjamin, 215
Higgins, John, 331
High Ridge Institute for Boys, 114
Hillaire (Conron estate), 269, 270
Hillscroft Farm (Van Etten estate), 18, 83, 85, 113, 127, 128, 133, 169, 170 illus., 171, 172 illus., 173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 185, 188, 228, 266, 269, 270, 293
Hilsenrad, Philip, 12
Hilton, Michael P., 248, 250
Historic District Commission, 302
Hitchcock, Anita T., 291, 358
Hitchcock, Louisa T., 291, 358
Hitchcock, Mary Taylor (Mrs. Wm.), 291
Hitchcock, Rev. Wm. T., 291
Hitchcock, Thomas (Tommy), 85, 169, 291
Hobby Hill, see The Orchard
Hobby, John, 11, 142, 205 illus.
Hoffer, John, 328, 330
Hoffer, Richard, 330
Hoffman, Adloph, 50
Hoffman, Robert & Margaret (Marge), 315
Holbrooke, John & Alice Doubleday, 255

Holcomb, Dr. Walter(Vet), 176, 178
Holleran, Clifford A. (Kip), 4, 64, 65, 67, 68, 235, 289, 346 illus.
Holleran, Grace White (Mrs. Clifford), 4, 6, 8, 235
Holleran, Michael, 263
Holmes, Beatrice, 255
Holmes, Clara, 255
Holmes, Irving, 255
Holmes, Jennie, 85
Holmes, Matthew (Matt), 53, 58, 121, 132
Holmes, Orville W., 136
Holt, Charles Henry, 168, 192, 193
Holt, Ed, 115, 164
Holt, Ellen Ives (Mrs. Charles), 192
Holt, Louise, 4
Holub, Edward, son of Milo, 102, 171
Holub, Milo & Jenny, 102, 171
Holy Ghost Fathers Novitiate (Prospect Ridge), 41, 178
Home Guard, 138, 336
Homestead Realty, 51
Homewood (Haven & Swords estate), 227, 308, 309, 310 illus.
Hopper, Richard Jr., 101
Hopper, Richard Sr., 101, 102
Horan, William, 42 illus.
Horblit, Harrison, 259, 274, 275
Hornig, Augusta (Mrs. Peter), 33
Hornig, Flora, 33
Hornig, Gertrude, 33
Hornig, Peter, 33, 34, 35, 287, 350
Horticultural Society, 102
Hose Co., see Ridgefield Fire Dept
Hosea, Robert, 23
Hosmer, Estell dePeyster, 215
Hotchkiss, Mr., 125
Hotchkiss, F., 54 illus.
Houdini, Harry, 281, 284
House, George, 47, 191
Howard, Dick & Lilly, 347
Howe, Epenetus, 10 illus., 228
Hoyt, Charles, 140
Hoyt, Dick K., 286, 287
Hoyt, Gertrude Thomas (Mrs. Lawrence), 119
Hoyt, Henrietta Smith, 239
Hoyt, Irene, 145

Hoyt, Jared, 277
Hoyt, Richard, 3
Hoyt, Thomas (proprietor), 131
Hubbard, John, 93
Huber, Clarence, 10
Huber, George & Julia, 10, 218
Huber, George Jr., 10
Huber, Mary, 10, 219, 220
Hull, Elsie Rux (Mrs. Harry), 117, 336, 340 illus.
Hull, Elizabeth, 300
Hull, Harry D., 336, 340
Hull, Harry E., son of Harry D., 85, 86, 87, 133, 233, 336 illus., 337 illus., 338 illus., 340, 341
Hull, Marcia, daughter of Harry E., 340
Humphrey, William J., 98
Humphreys, Edith (Mrs. Percy), 34, 361
Humphreys, Jennie (Mrs. W. Reginald), 35
Humphreys, Lloyd, 34, 348, 361
Humphreys, Percy, 3, 6 illus., 7 illus., 34, 35, 91, 158, 246, 360, 361
Humphreys, Percy Jr., 34, 361
Humphreys, Phoebe (Mrs. William), 35, 70
Humphreys, W. Reginald (Reggie), 35, 239
Humphreys, William J. (Willie), 35
Humphreys Taxi, 35
Hunt, Doris, 91
Hunt, John, 16, 36
Huntington, Amy Low, 192, 193, 195, 217 317
Hurzeler, Bertha, 115
Hurzeler, Marie, 115
Hurzeler, Mrs. Rudolph, mother of Marie, 115
Hurzeler, Rudolph (Rudy), 30, 115, 298
Hurzeler, Ruth, 4, 78
Hutchinson, Estell, daughter of Robert Sr., 2,
Hutchinson, Margaret, daughter of Robert Sr., 2, 193
Hutchinson, Robert Sr., 12
Hutchinson, Robert Jr. (Bob), 6 illus., 7 illus.,
Huton, Jan H., 20
Hyatt, John & Mary McCarthy, 221
Hyde, Brian, son of Ed, 96
Hyde, Douglas, son of Ed, 96
Hyde, Edward, 96
Hyde, Elizabeth Alvina, sister of Mabel, 152, 195, 217, 246
Hyde, Mabel Louise, 152, 153, 195, 217, 246

I

Iacurci, Andre & Patricia, 335
IBM, International Business Machines, 327 illus.
Indian Rock Farm (N. Salem Rd), 17
Ingersoll, George Pratt, 33, 149, 202, 222, 287, 288, 291, 334
Ingold Estate (West Mt.), 218
Ingold, William Forbes, 272
Inkster, Dr. James, 169
Inn at Ridgefield, see also Tode's Inn, Kane's Inn, 149, 183, 222, 233, 291, 334
Ippoliti, Edgardo, 345
Iradel Farm (Earl estate), 279
Italian American Mutual Aid Society (IAMAS), 9, 23, 50, 55, 59, 184, 242, 298, 356
Izzo, Dr. Charles, 262

J

Jack Sullivan's Restaurant, see Nina's
Jackson, Richard (Dick) & Eleanor, 19, 211
Jackson, Fielding, 215
Jackson, Richard A., mother of Fielding, 81, 215
Jacob, Marion Wakeman (Mrs. Sereno), 238
Jacob, Merritt, son of Sereno, 238
Jacob, Sally, daughter of Sereno, 238
Jacob, Sereno Jr., 238
Jacob, Sereno Thorp Sr., 216, 238
James, Arthur Curtis & Harriet Eddy Parsons, 187
Jankowski, Henry, 198, 199
Jeffers, Alfred, 321
Jenner, Josephine (Mrs. William), 154
Jenner, William A., 154, 156, 195, 228
Jennings, Albin & Polly Dauchy, 342 illus.
Jensen, Chris & Elsie, 359
Jespersen, Greta (Mrs. Otto), 42
Jespersen, Otto (The Great Dane), 10, 42, 213, 214 illus., 330
Jesse Lee Memorial Church, see Methodist Church.
Jessup, Theodore C., 15, 158
Jewish Fraternal Order, 150
Joe's Corner, see Joe's Store
Joe's Store (622 Main St.), 1 illus., 2 illus., 2, 32, 33, 35, 229, 287, 359, 361, 363, 364, 365
Joffie, Louis, 69, 89, 123
Johnson, Anne, 98

Johnson, Joseph & Barbara Lee, 70
Johnson, Lynn, daughter of Barbara, 70
Johnson, Lee, son of Barbara, 70
Johnson, George, 229
Johnson, Frederic, 301
Jones, Arlene, daughter of John, 263
Jones, David L., 16
Jones, Elizabeth Ann, daughter of John, 263
Jones, Jeanette McManus (Mrs. John T.), 209, 222, 263
Jones, John T. (Jack), 96, 209, 222, 263 illus.
Jones, Monica, daughter of John, 263
Jones, Nancy, 222
Jones, Steffi, 53, 72
Jones, Virginia, daughter of John, 263
Joseph, James (Jimmy Joe), 1, 2
Joseph, Mustapha C. (later changed to Michael), 1 illus., 359, 365
Judson, Lisa, 98
June, Lewis, 19

K

Kaiser, Charlotte, daughter of George, 255
Kaiser, Corinne, daughter of George, 255
Kaiser, George & Rose, 255
Kaiser, George Jr., 255
Kaiser, James, son of George, 255
Kaiser, John, son of George, 255
Kaiser, Joseph, son of George, 255
Kaiser, Patricia, daughter of George, 255
Kaiser, RoseMary, daughter of George, 255
Kallos, Oliver, 317
Kane, Christopher (Chris), 149, 220, 222, 287
Kane Inn, 149, 222, 233, 287
Kane, Mildred, 6
Kane, Page (Mrs. Christopher), 117, 222, 287
Knapp, Dr., 210
Karlons, Helen, 156
Kasper, Joseph, 204
Kasper, Mary McGlynn (Mrs. Ralph), 4, 6, 7 illus., 31, 241
Kasper, Ralph, 4, 6, 153 illus., 204
Katis, Dr. James G., 283
K.E.B. Gas station (Keeler, Elliott & Brown), see Mobil Gas station
Kean, Geoffrey, 72

Keane, Bill, 14 illus., 342 illus., 355 illus.
Keefe, Bartholomew (Bart), 140, 291
Keeler, Albert, son of Howard, 265
Keeler, Arthur, son of Joseph F., 262, 263, 265
Keeler, Anna Denton (Mrs. Richard), 295
Keeler, Bernard F. & Mary Scanlon, 262
Keeler, Bernard R. (Dick), son of Bernard F., 262
Keeler, Catherine, daughter of Bernard F., 262
Keeler, Christine, daughter of Joseph F., 265
Keeler Contractors, 85
Keeler, Doris, daughter of Edward, 265
Keeler, Ebenezer W. (Eben, 1870's), 69, 206
Keeler, Edward & Jane, 265, 358
Keeler, Elisha, 117, 212, 214 illus., 298 illus.
Keeler, Esther, 262, 263, 265
Keeler, Harvey, 117
Keeler, Helen Jane, 98, 265
Keeler, Hobart, 92
Keeler, Howard & Sadie Elliott, son of Arthur, 265
Keeler, Irving, 16, 62, 227, 245, 273
Keeler, John, 237
Keeler, Joseph F., son of Bernard F., 262, 265, 349
Keeler, Katherine Brard (Mrs. Arthur), 263
Keeler, Lyman, 90
Keeler, Margaret, daughter of Edward, 265
Keeler, Mary Fahey (Granny) (Mrs. Warren), 262
Keeler, Mortimer C., 62, 192, 205 illus., 244, 245
Keeler, Nancy, daughter of Ray, 265
Keeler, Col Nehemiah, 6
Keeler, Pamela, daughter of Ray, 265
Keeler, Raymond (Ray), 47, 62, 63, 64, 96, 226, 232, 265, 266, 281
Keeler, Richard (Dick), 101, 146, 295
Keeler, Roy, 265
Keeler, Ruby Holabird (Mrs. Raymond), 265
Keeler, Russell, son of Ray, 265
Keeler, S.D., 58, 80, 82, 83, 84, 91 illus., 199, 218, 219, 227, 286
Keeler, Samuel, 236
Keeler, Samuel Jr. (proprietor), 131
Keeler, Samuel Sr. (proprietor), 131
Keeler Tavern, 76, 131, 211, 212, 213, 242,
Keeler Tavern Preservation Society, 211, 212, 213, 300
Keeler, Teresa Sfondrini (Mrs. Joseph F.), 265
Keeler, Tim (bank president), 212, 214 illus., 298 illus.

Keeler, Timothy (proprietor), 75, 212
Keeler, Thadeus, 286
Keeler, Warren, 83, 224, 262, 264, 279, 360
Keeler, William R., 32, 76, 120, 123, 132, 265, 306
Keeller, Simmeon, 324
Kehoe, John, 100
Kehoe, Mame Scallon (Mrs. Thomas), 266
Kehoe, Steven, 6 illus.
Kehoe, Thomas (Tom), 17, 26, 89, 210, 266, 344
Kelley, Alfred, 286
Kelley, Esther Nash, 25
Kellogg Mansion, 254
Kelly, James J., 98, 288
Kelly, John C. (Police Comm), 50, 102, 140, 225
Kennedy, Agnes, daughter of James, 22
Kennedy, Ann, daughter of James, 22
Kennedy, Elizabeth, daughter of James, 22
Kennedy, Frank, son of James, 22
Kennedy, James F. (Big Jim), 22, 23, 25, 28, 32, 39, 136, 163, 164, 166, 167, 223, 224, 235, 254, 289, 307
Kennedy, Margaret, daughter of James, 22, 32, 235
Kennedy, Richard, son of James, 22
Kennedy, Thomas, son of James, 22
Kent, Clark, 303
Keogh, John, 359
Kerrigan, Kevin & Susan, 294
Kersey, Dr. (vet), 210, 299
Kiam, Victor, 332
Kiernan, John J., 20
Kiernan, Mrs. John, 70
Kilcoyne, Jimmy, 229
Kilcoyne, Luke, 74, 75, 160
Kilcoyne, Margaret, 17, 160, 253
Kilcoyne, Marie, 17, 253 illus., 300
Kilcoyne, Tom, 198
Kiley, Michael, 210
Kindergarten School, see Center School
King, J. Howard, 74, 203, 207, 215
King, John Howard, 153, 154, 156, 190, 203
King, Lt. Joshua, 76, 153, 285
King Neptune (restaurant), 213
King, Rufus, 74
Kirk, George, 144

Kirksey, Jean, 190, 192
Kittle, Robert, 351
Kiwanis Club, 268
Kliens, Charles, 289
Knapp, Ada Servadio (Mrs. Gordon), 324
Knapp, Albert (Al), 42, 43
Knapp Bros. (trees), 220
Knapp, Delmar, 6 illus., 7 illus.
Knapp, Dr. (vet), 157, 176, 299
Knapp, George G., 4, 35, 286
Knapp, Josephine Nicholas (Josie) (Mrs. George), 4, 286
Knapp, Mabel Taylor (Mrs. Mally), 80, 97
Knapp, Mally, 50, 80, 97
Knights of Columbus, 5, 9, 32, 55, 73, 75, 84, 241, 242, 262, 299, 301
Knoche Bros., 58, 229, 230, 258, 363
Knoche, Charles & Debbie Morganti, 258
Knoche, Charlie, 58
Knoche, Edward, 258
Knoche Electric, Inc., 258
Knoche, Elizabeth (Sister Mary Albert), 258
Knoche, Helen Golden (Mrs. Terrance), 258
Knoche, John, 258
Knoche, Joseph (Joey), 258
Knoche, Joseph Albert (young Joe), 258
Knoche, Joseph J. (old Joe), 258, 259, 260
Knoche, Margaret Quinn (Mrs. Joseph Albert), 258, 271
Knoche, Mary Hickey (Mrs. Joseph J.), 258
Knoche, Patricia Sheehan (Mrs. Joseph), 258
Knoche, Philip, 218, 256, 258
Knoche, Robert (Bob), son of Terrance, 257, 258
Knoche, Terrance (Terry), 224, 258, 274
Knoche, Terrance Jr., 258
Knortz, Herbert, 143
Knox, Aiken, 279, 289
Knox, Dorothy (Mrs. Aiken), 289
Kobe, Francis X., 256
Kohler, John & Frieda, 320
Kohler's Restaurant, 14
Korker, Paul, 183, 255
Kraft Estate (Mr. Kaplan), 108
Kraus, Hans P., 257
Krotz, Raymond, 48
Kruelski, Edward, 208

Ku Klux Klan, 66, 73, 257
Kuhlman, Otto & Hilda, 4
Kysor, Dane, 213, 214

L

LaBretagne (restaurant), 141, 294
LaCava, Paul & Mary, 347
Ladd, Constance, 161
Lakeland Hills (development), 355
Lakeside Tavern, see Maplewood Inn
Lally, Bob, 303
Lancaster, Frank, 117
Landegger Estate, 157
Landon, Danial A. (Chip), 3, 72
Landon, Mary (MooMoo) Mrs. Daniel), 3, 72, 189
Lane, Dick, 217
Lane, John, 192
Lannon, Johnny, 135
Larrabee, Charles, 192, 194
Larrabee, Hazel, daughter of Charles, 192
Last Man's Club, 271
Laszig, Imgard Johanna (Mrs. Paul), 84, 274
Laszig, Paul, 84, 203, 274, 355
Latanzi, Emilia, 54 illus.
Latanzi, Julius, 54 illus., 60, 298 illus.
Latanzi, Julius Jr. (Jay), 314
Latanzi, Sylvia, 44
Lavatori, Aldo, 363
Lavatori, Angelina, daughter of Nany, 3, 363
Lavatori, Gene, son of Nany, 2, 3, 363
Lavatori, Gloria, daughter of Nany, 3, 363
Lavatori, Gustanza Nina (Mrs. Nazzareno), 3, 363, 364
Lavatori, John, son of Nany, 2,3, 351, 363
Lavatori, Margaret, daughter of Nany, 3, 363
Lavatori, Nazzareno (Nany), 3, 275, 363, 364
Lavatori, Ponziano, son of Nany, 3, 363
Lavatori, Sylvester & Azelia, 294
Lawrence, John, 153
Lazrus, Julian, 332 illus.
Lazrus, Oscar, 332 illus.
League of Women Voters, 13
Leahy, John (Danbury Fair), 213

Leals, Bill, 294
Leary, Ada (Mrs. John), 98, 218
Leary, Agnes, daughter of Patrick, 5
Leary, Betty, daughter of Fred, 5
Leary, Fred & Elizabeth, son of Patrick, 5
Leary, Florence Fleming (Mrs. Fred Jr.), 209
Leary, Fred Jr. (Freddy), 5, 209
Leary, John Patrick, son of Patrick, 5, 218, 224
Leary, John (Jack), son of Fred, 1, 5, 7 illus.,
Leary, Lawrence (Larry), son of Patrick, 5, 6 illus., 7 illus., 54 illus.
Leary, Patrick (Pat), 5, 35
Leary, Phillip (Phil), son of Patrick, 5, 35
Leary, Winnie, daughter of Fred, 5
LeBarr, Arthur, 358, 359
Lecher, Carl, 270
Lee Farm, 70, 71
Lee, Fred C., father of Bob, 70
Lee, Priscilla Chisolm Davis (Mrs. Cornelius), 98, 100, 179 illus., 204, 288
Lee, Robert A., 2, 70 illus., 71, 341
Lee, Mrs. Robert (nee Maher), 70
Leeman, George & Evelyn, 17
Leeson, Elmer, 16, 348
Leeson, Fred, 321
Leighton, Curtis, 79, 86, 87, 158, 310
Leighton, Jacqueline, 253
Leir, Henry J., 43, 278
Lent, Annie Van Wagnor, 53, 60
Lenz, Sidney S., 147
Leonard, Elizabeth (Liz), 72
Lewis, Elizabeth W., 365
Lewis Estate, see Upagenstit
Lewis, Frederick E., 33, 59, 69, 83, 102, 135, 137, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 145 illus., 146, 147,
149, 150, 195, 200, 228, 241, 257, 291, 293, 294, 295, 299 300, 327, 354, 360
Lewis Fund, 101, 137, 146
Lewis, Mary Russell (Mrs. Frederick E.), 3, 94, 137 illus, 139, 140, 143, 145, 146, 147, 299, 300
Lewis Pond, 59
Lewis, Reginald Mentourn (Reggie), 9, 101, 102, 108, 137, 146, 147, 149, 228, 295
Lewis, Stanley & Helen, 151, 161
Lewis, Wadsworth Russell (Waddy), 55, 101, 137, 146, 257, 292
Liberta's Liquor Store, 91 illus
Lietel, John, 153
Lietel, Tish, daughter of John, 153
Light, Elijah E., 11, 21

Light, Judge John H., 3, 95, 236, 287
Light, Howard & Gladys Birdsall, 4
Ligos, Donald, 222, 223, 227
Ligos, Patricia Girolmetti (Mrs. Donald), 223
Limestone School, 334 illus., 344
Limestone Service Station, 267, 268, 276, 334 illus., 335, 344, 359
Lincoln, Robert & Margaret Nash, 10
Lindeke, Mary, 155
Lindsay, Eloise, 141, 294
Lindsay, Mort, 18
Lions Club, 64, 94, 183, 209, 342
Lippolt, Otto, 345
Little Brook Stables (Selleck's), 70, 71, 234
Little Red Onion House, 8
Little Red Schoolhouse, 128, 151, 299, 300, 301
Livingston, Geraldine Gray (Mrs. Robert), 151, 155
Livingston, Robert Teviot, 155
Lobdell, Claude, 67 illus.
Lockwood, Elizabeth (Big Lib), 335, 336
Lockwood, Elizabeth (Lil Lib), 335
Lockwood, Hannah, 257
Lodge, John, 225
Log Cabin, see May Brooks Log Cabin
Loomis, William, 196
Lorenzini, Richard, 58
Lorna Doone Restaurant, 2, 91 illus.
Lotterele, Fritz & Bridget, 100, 204
Lotus, Peter, 305
Lounsbury, George E., 236, 300, 310
Lounsbury, Gov. Phineas L., 64, 71, 216, 235, 272, 274, 286, 290, 294, 300
Lounsbury House, see Community Center
Lou's Package Store, 341, 356
Low, Ethelbest Ide, 193
Lowe, Dr. Russell W., 33, 34, 80, 98, 160, 175, 217, 297
Lowenstein, Ralph, 213
Lown, Elizabeth O'Shea (Mrs. Harvey), 6, 94, 95, 253, 297
Lown, Harvey, 94 illus., 95, 145
Lowney, Jim, 52
Lubetkin, Archie, 311, 312
Luce, Henry & Clare Boothe, 257
Lucente, James, 21
Luigi's Restaurant, 268
Luke, Mary, 193

Lund, Fred, 160
Lusk, Joan, 9
Lusk, Rev. Wm. Browne (Daddy), 155
Lynch, Bill, 83
Lynch, Bridget Fahey (Mrs. Richard), 339 illus.
Lynch, Dennis, 279
Lynch, Elsie, 67 illus.
Lynch, Lucy Moffitt (Mrs. John), 13, 14, 160, 179, 202, 273 illus.
Lynch, John Hampton, 168, 249, 273 illus., 281
Lynch, John H. Jr. & Emilene Danforth Starr, 273
Lynch, Stella, 52, 194 illus.
Lyons, Jude, 32
Lyons, John, 286

M

MacDonald, Donald T. (Mac) & Joan McCarthy, 265
MacDonald, Major, 58
MacDonald, Patricia, daughter of Donald, 265
MacDonald, Robert, son of Donald, 265
MacManus, Frank A., 280
Mahoney, Frances, 194, 217
Mahoney, John, 227
Mahoney, Julia Fahey (Mrs. Daniel), 339 illus.
Mahoney, Marie, daughter of John, 227
Mahoney, Mary Clark (Mrs. John), 227
Main, Douglas, 21
Main, Zebulon S., 21 illus.
Main, Louise Torcellini (Mrs. Douglas), 357
Maine, Bruce, 254
Mallucci, Aleo, 54 illus.
Mamasasco Farm (Miss Richardson), 13, 15, 17
Mamasasco Lake (Birch Pond), 8, 12, 13, 130
Maneck, Margaret B., 343
Manion, John, 41
Manna, Arduino (Jack), 357
Manna, Richard, son of Arduino, 357
Manning, Sue, 366 illus.
Manor Estates, 69, 141, 150, 300, 354
Manresa (Jesuit retreat house), 12
Mansfield, Dr. H.P., 2, 48 illus., 217, 353
Mansfield, Helen, daughter of Ray, 272, 274
Mansfield, Ray, 274

Maplewood Farm (Sturges Selleck), 234
Maplewood Glass Works, 321
Maplewood Inn/Hotel, 234, 321 illus., 322
Maranelli, Marty, 100
Marcheggiani, Mary Conti (Mrs. Mario), 228, 304
Marconi, Dorothy Fossi (Mrs. Paul), 363
Marconi, Lena (Mrs. Nano), 17
Marconi, Nano, 17, 57
Marconi, Paul, 11, 21, 57, 273, 363
Marinelli, Leno, 60, 298 illus.
Marinelli, Marty, 250
Mario's Restaurant, see Nina's
Marketing Management, 331
Mark's Auto Parts Store, 358
Martin Block (Telephone building), 19, 83, 218,
Martin, Doris Godfrey (Mrs. Francis), 15, 100, 117, 352 illus., 353
Martin, Francis (Marty), 13, 15, 16, 24, 48, 74, 92, 94, 96, 100, 117, 198, 211, 213, 214, 216,
232, 249, 350 illus., 351, 352 illus., 353
Martin, Herman, 241
Martin, Hosmer, 161
Martin, June Pasco (Mrs. Philip), 352 illus.
Martin, Dr. Philip, son of Francis, 59, 92, 100, 346 illus. 352 illus
Martin Robert, 161
Martin, Rudolph, 216, 289
Martin, Stephen (Steve), 213
Martin, Townsend B., 157
Mary's Restaurant, see Nina's
Masonic Building, 89, 93, 94, 365
Masonic Lodge, 73, 89, 94, 98
Massamini, Mike, 84, 148
Massey, Raymond, 178
Masten, Edgar Jr., 8, 61, 350
Masten, Edgar Sr., 4, 123
Masterson, Eleanor (Mrs. Philip), 230, 320
Masterson, Philip P. (Phil), 57, 187, 230, 320
Matthews, Norman, 330
Mattil, Michael, 144
Maxwell, Bobby, 134, 145 illus.
May Brooks Log Cabin, 343
Mayer, Elmer, 100
Mayer, Maureen, 288
Mayflower Swing Band, 14 illus., 153, 240, 342 illus., 355 illus.
Maynard, Effingham, 14, 207 illus., 208 illus., 209, 210, 211, 263

Maynard, Helen, 208, 209, 211, 215
Maynard, Mary H., 208, 209, 211, 215
Mazzi, Mrs. Vincent (nee Gasperini), 51
McAleer, Patrick, 271
McAllister, Cap, 90, 358, 359
McCabe, Joseph (Joe), 11, 363
McCann, Carrie, 107
McCarthy, Barbara, 96
McCarthy Bros Plumbing, 253, 263
McCarthy, Dennis, 265
McCarthy, Edmund J., 311
McCarthy, Helen Keeler (Mrs. Dennis), 221,
McCarthy, Katherine (Mrs. John), 221
McCarthy, Jerry, 202, 220
McCarthy, John J., 220, 221, 222, 302
McCarthy, Robert Emmett (Bob), 220
McClellan, John, 334, 335
McClellan, Raymond (Ray, Buck), 90, 334,
McCrystal, John, 64
McCue, Thomas, 130, 140
McElwee, Mac, 77
McGlynn, Agnes Reardon (Mrs. John Edward), 227
McGlynn & Ryan Plumbings, 4, 96, 100
McGlynn, Annie, 256
McGlynn, Charles & Katherine Kearney, 227
McGlynn, Francis, son of John E. Sr., 227
McGlynn, John Edward Jr. (Jack), son of Ed, 227, 346 illus.
McGlynn, John Edward Sr. (Ed), son of Michael T., 227
McGlynn, Joseph, 96
McGlynn, Louis Santini (Elsie) (Mrs. Richard), 54, 55
McGlynn, Marion, 249
McGlynn, Margaret, 2, 222, 224
McGlynn, Mary Isabelle, dau of John E. Sr., 227
McGlynn, Michael T. (Painter Mike), 1 illus., 222, 227, 241, 256, 257
McGlynn, Michael (Tinker Mike), 1 illus., 31, 96, 257
McGlynn, Richard, son of Thomas, 31, 96
McGlynn, Robert, son of John E. Sr., 227
McGlynn, Thomas (Tom), son of Tinker Mike, 31, 96
McGovern, George, 291
McGowan, John, 232
McGrath, Jane Bloomer, 232
McGrath, John, 14, 306
McHarg, Henry K., 244

McInerney, Walter, 132
McKay, Daniel (Dan), 14, 208, 209, 263
McKeever, Ed, 52
McKeever, Steve, 52
McKenna, Arthur (Art), 213
McKenna, Marge (Mrs. Arthur), 214
McKeon, Daniel (Dan), 26, 72, 211, 245, 295, 305
McKeon, Louise (Mrs. Daniel), 211, 214, 305
McKnight, Alice, 190, 192
McLaury, John, 234
McLinden, Rosemary, 96
McMahon, Brien (U.S. senator), 282
McManus, Augusta Meyer (Totsy, Mrs. Joseph), 263
McManus, Catherine, daughter of Joseph, 263
McManus, Eilien, daughter of James, 225
McManus, Fred, son of Peter, 224
McManus, James J., 222, 224, 225, 263 illus.
McManus, Jane Ann, daughter of Joseph, 263
McManus, Jeanette, daughter of Peter, 222,
McManus, Joseph (JoJo), son of Peter, 207, 224, 263
McManus, Joseph Jr., 263
McManus, Mark, son of James, 225, 358
McManus, Mary, daughter of Joseph, 263
McManus, Mary Connelly (Mrs. Peter), 223, 224, 225, 263
McManus, Maureen, daughter of James, 225
McManus, Michael, son of Joseph, 263
McManus, Michelle, daughter of James, 225
McManus, Monica, daughter of Peter, 222, 224, 225
McManus, Netta, 216, 225
McManus, Patricia Potter (Patsy, Mrs. James), 102, 222, 225, 272
McManus, Peter (judge), 22, 50, 68, 88, 102, 216, 223, 224 illus., 225, 226, 242, 263, 281
McManus, Peter, son of James, 225
McManus, Richard, son of Peter, 224
McManus, Sheena, daughter of James, 225
McPike, Frank, 72
Mead, Ann (Mrs. Harold), 48
Mead, Edward, 220
Mead, Henry (Hen), 80
Mead, H.E., 69
Mead, Harold (Buck), 38, 48, 83
Mead, Louis & Stella, 291
Mead, Dr. Robert (dentist), 214
Mead, Theodore, 37

Meals On Wheels, 84, 274
Meals On Wheels Corp., see also Outpost Inn, 343
Media Manor (development), 221
Meisner, Paul, 166, 197
Meisner, Sadye (Mrs. Paul), 197
Menzies, Harry, & Vera Carboni, 323, 326
Mercer, Dr. Jack, 75
Merklin, Fred, 329
Messer, Henry, 75, 358
Methodist Church (Jesse Lee Memorial Church), 10, 80, 113, 193, 201, 213, 214
Mewald, James (Jim), 349 355
Meyers, Gerald, 366 illus.
Meyers, Paul J., 215
Mignerey Drug Store, 92
Mignerey, George, 4, 290
Mike's Barber Shop, 93
Milberg, Simon J., 221
Miller, Allen, 1
Miller, Arthur, 257, 258
Miller, Charles & Martha, 338 illus.
Miller, Edith Terpeny (Mrs. Wm), 354
Miller, Frank, 33, 139
Miller, George, 347, 354
Miller, Gertrude, 7 illus., 354
Miller, Jack (orchestra), 73, 117
Miller, Dr. Jeffrey, 151, 293
Miller, Marjorie (Mrs. George), 347
Miller, Mary Ellen Knoche (Mrs. Arthur), 258
Miller, William, brother of George, 347, 354
Miller, William Jr., 354, 355
Miller's Department Store, 233
Miller's Hall (Georgetown), 298
Millionaires Row, 151, 153, 156, 195, 198
Mills, Alfred, 11
Mills, Herb, 219
Mills, Ogden, 135, 276
Mink, George, 201
Minnerly, Ed Jr., 144, 146, 360
Minnerly, Frank, 140, 144, 146
Minnerly, Edward Sr., father of Frank, 137, 144
Minnerly, Fred, 139, 144, 146
Minnerly, Harry (Tige), 40, 68, 146
Minnerly, John, 40

Minot, Dr. Henry, 170, 270
Mitchell, Bob, 114, 115
Mitchell, Genevieve, daughter of John, 222, 247, 253
Mitchell, John, 220
Mitchell, John Ames, 216, 222, 295 illus., 301, 302
Mitchell, Madeline, daughter of John, 222, 247, 253
Mitchell, Mary Carboni (Mrs. James), 34, 50, 324
Mitchell, Richard, 213
Mitchell, Rita, daughter of John, 222, 247
Mleczko, Lily, daughter of David, 293
Mleczko, David & Susan, 293
Mobil Gas Station (Socony) (K.E. B. Keeler Elliott & Brown), 203, 349 illus., 359 illus., 360, 362
Modigliani, Amedeo, 317 illus.
Moffett, Phyliss, 272
Moissener, Joseph, 36 illus.
Molles, Ronald, 214
Montanari, Ciro, 202
Montanari, Eliz Glennon Swanson (Mrs. Peter), 223
Montanari, Fred, 223, 253, 255
Montanari, Italo, 327, 346 illus.
Montanari, Nancy (Mrs. Fred), 255
Montgomery, Barry, 245
Monument Works, 4, 5
Moore, Alice Finch (Mrs. David), 335
Moore, Andrew, 6, 334, 344
Moore, Clare, 351
Moore, Glen, 213, 214 illus.
Moore, John P., 57, 84, 246, 298, 299
Moore, May, 117
Moore, Rita Ryan (Mrs. John), 4, 299
Morelli, Abraham (Abe), 239
Morena, Joseph T., 247, 249
Morgan, Bayeux (Bay) & Florence, 347
Morgan, Bud, 346 illus.
Morgan, John & Theresa Walsh, 235
Morganti, Elizabeth (Mrs. John), 237, 349
Morganti, Gloria, daughter of John, 349
Morganti, Inc., (contractors), 72, 85, 245, 306, 332, 349, 357
Morganti, John, 110, 237, 306, 349
Morganti, John Jr., 349
Morganti, Joseph, 349
Morganti, Paul, 15, 78, 87, 221, 233, 237, 338, 349, 357

Morganti, Robert, 349
Morris, A. Newbold, 153
Morris, James N. & Elizabeth, 167
Morris, Robert (Bob), 212
Morris, William (Smokey) & Rosella Ferguson, 325
Morrisroe, Ann, daughter of John, 354
Morrisroe, Francis (Bud), 117, 354
Morrisroe, John Jr. (Jack), 2, 29, 354, 355
Morrisroe, John & Margaret Brown, 354
Morrisroe, Mary (Mrs. John Jr.), 354
Mortensen, Eugene, 82 illus.
Morton, Michael, 296
Moser, John, 83, 203, 349 illus., 350, 359
Moser, Ralph, son of John, 349
Moser, Ruth, daughter of John, 349
Moser, Sara (Mrs. John), 349
Moser, Virginia, daughter of John, 349
Moses, Madelyn, 10
Moylan, Francis, 30, 166, 219, 222, 346 illus., 360
Moylan, Frank, 30, 62, 216, 339
Moylan, Joseph, 30
Moylan, Margaret Fahey (Mrs. Frank), 30, 339 illus.
Moylan, Pauline (Mrs. Francis), 219, 360
Mugavero, Jerry, 93, 96
Mugavero, Peter, son of Jerry, 93
Mugavero, Vincent & Bernice, 93
Mugavin, John, 306
Mulford, Dr. Roland Jessup, 15
Mulford School, see also Ridgefield School, 12, 15
Mulin, Arthur, son of John, 97, 305
Mullen, Edward, son of John, 305
Mullen, James, 141, 219, 305, 307
Mullen, Isabelle, daughter of John, 300, 305
Mullen, John, 294, 305
Mullen, John Jr., 305
Mullen, Lynn Casagrande (Mrs. James), 305
Mullen, Margaret, daughter of John, 305
Mullen, Marion McGlynn (Mrs. Arthur), 97
Mulvaney, George Sr., father of Bob, 43, 157
Mulvaney, Joe, 346 illus.
Mulvaney, Mary Maylon (Mrs. Robert), 6, 30, 153 illus.
Mulvaney, Robert (Bob), 30, 79, 122, 157, 166
Mulvey, Jim & Dearie McKeeever, 52

Mulvey, John, 297
Mural, Minosh, 280
Murray, Coleman, 193, 351
Myers, Edwin, 352
Myers, Jerry, 72
Myers, Paul, 215
Myers, Pauline (Mrs. Edwin), 67, 352, 353
Myers, Pauline (Polly), daughter of Edwin, 215
Myers, Robert (Bob), son of Edwin, 352

N

Nace, Mr., 2
Nalley, Jack, 5, 28, 268
Nanny's Restaurant, see Nina's
Naranauto (George H. Newton estate), 195
Narranoke (Indian), 131
Nash, Charles S., 134
Nash, Betty Grace Boyd (Mrs. Karl), 23
Nash, John D., 23, 27 illus., 76, 89, 93, 100, 232
Nash, Howard P., 23, 27
Nash, Karl Seymour, 10, 16 illus., 23, 27, 67, 72, 89, 93, 100, 235, 290, 318
Nash, Luther, 27
Nash, Thomas, son of Karl, 72, 290
Nast, Christian 215
National League of Women's Service, 285
Neligan, Dr. Patrick, 8, 218, 272, 285
Nelson, 58
Nelson, Mr. & Mrs., 10
Nesbitt, Matt, 1
Neumann, Harry, 2, 91, 101, 146, 254
Neumann Real Estate, 91 illus.
Nevins, Con, 80
New England Institute Medical Research Laboratory, 198, 351
New Pond, 9, 232, 246
New York, New Haven & Hartford R.R., 254
New York Westchester & Boston R.R. see also N.Y. New Haven & Hartford R.R., 254,
Newton, George Henry, 2, 195, 246, 264
Nicholas, Belden, 291
Nicholas, Lucille, 6
Nicholas, Samuel (Sam), 3, 35, 291
Nichols, David & Jacqueline, 270
Nickerson, Mabel, 6, 54 illus.

Nina's Restaurant, 3 illus., 364
Nixon, Patricia Ryan, 13
Noel, W. Lee, 215
Norris, Steven (Curly), 103
Northrop, Arthur, brother of Caro, 121
Northrop, Caro H., 32, 35, 116, 121, 160, 161, 186, 188, 287 365
Northrop, Charles B., 136
Northrop, Cyrus, 235, 236, 290
Northrop, Elma, daughter of Elmer, 54 illus.
Northrop, John, 215
Northrop, Ken, 54 illus., 353
Northrop, Reed, son of Caro, 116, 287
Northrop, Tom Scott, son of Caro, 287
Norton, Roy, 273
Nutholme (Francis Bacon estate), 202

O

Oak Knoll (Remington Forbes Estate), 264
O'Brien, Henry, 312
O'Connor, Andy, 66, 117, 219, 224
O'Connor, S.C., 93
Odd Fellows, 74, 80, 116, 117, 118, 129, 144, 215, 230, 260, 298, 352
Oexle, William (Bill) & Lee, 23
O'Hara, Helen Coffey, 132
O'Hearn, Katherine, 6, 247, 253
O'Hearn, Mary, 247, 253
O'Keefe, Aileen, 227, 308
O'Keefe, Charles (Arch), 326
O'Keefe, Michael & Mae Lavatore, 293
O'Keefe, Honora (Mrs. James), 308
O'Keefe, James, 227, 270, 302, 306, 308
O'Keefe, John (Jack), 144, 227, 300, 306, 309
O'Keefe, Mary Ellen Snee (Mrs. John), 309
O'Keefe, May O'Loughlin (Bobby) Mrs. Patrick), 309
O'Keefe, Patrick (Pat), son of James, 75, 133, 227, 308, 309, 311
O'Keefe, Richard, (Dick), son of James, 79, 227, 302, 306, 308, 309
O'Keefe, Sara Winns (Mrs. J.R.), 227, 309
O'Keefe, Thomas, son of Jack, 227
Olcott, George M., see also Casagmo, 22, 33, 115, 195, 224, 297, 315, 327, 344, 365
Olcott, Mary, (Miss), daughter of George, 115, 138, 153, 171, 203, 297, 344
Olcott, Mary (Mrs.), 11, 58
Old Hundred, see Aldrich Museum

Old Ice House (restaurant & stores), 275, 310, 341, 361, 363, 364, 365
Old Indian Trading Post, 58, 289, 298
Oliphant, Elmer Q., 183
Olmstead, Daniel, 131
Olmstead, Capt. David, 340
Olmstead, Walter (Walt), 37, 38
Olsen, Olaf, 201
O'Mara, Tom, 72
On The Ridge (E.P. Dutton estate), 195
Onassis, Jacqueline Kennedy, 12
O'Neill, Eugene, 16
O'Neill, Oona, 16
Orchard, The, (Dr. Sheltons estate, also Hobby Hill), 108, 110, 313, 314, 315, 316
Order of St. Thomas Aquinas, 12
Oreneca (Indians), 131
Oreneca Band (formerly Ridgefield Band), 3, 23, 59, 60, 205 illus., 223, 228, 237, 246, 249, 291, 298 illus., 355
Oreneca Inn, 116, 117
Orrico, Fred, 291
Osborn, Annie Talman (Mrs. R.W.), 48
Osborn House, 48 illus.
Osborn, Richard Waldo, 48, 49, 114, 297
Osborn, Winifred, 48
Osborn, Winnie, 48
Osborne & Barnes, 33, 35
O'Shea, Daniel G., son of Daniel J., 297
O'Shea, Daniel J., 297, 298, 304
O'Shea, Dennis, J., son of Daniel, 297
O'Shea, Isabel, 94, 253, 297
O'Shea, Jessie McDonald (Mrs. Daniel), 297
O'Toole, Dr. James T. & Patricia, 141, 294
Outpost Camp, 329
Outpost Farm (Conley estate), 29, 308, 316, 322 illus., 324, 325, 326 illus., 327, 328
Outpost Inn, 43, 52, 209, 342 illus., 343, 344, 345, 346
Outpost Kennel, 330 illus.
Outpost Nurseries, 114, 257, 260, 324, 328 illus., 329, 330, 333, 334, 335, 341, 342, 344
Outpost Pond, 341, 342 illus., 343 illus.
Outpost Saw Mill, 328, 329, 330, 347
Overfield, William, 158
Overlook (Wm. Jenner estate), 154, 195
Overton, Lucy C., 206

P

Paccadolmi, Argeo, 298 illus.
Paccadolmi, Mike, 161
Pacific, Joseph & Mary Ellen, 341
Paddock, Dr. Archibald, 11, 365
Paddock, Harry, 365
Palau, Henry, 102
Palmer, Charles, 336, 337
Pambianchi, Armando (Matty), 133, 350
Pambianchi, Harry, 100, 350
Pambianchi, Leo, 100, 133, 250, 261, 350
Pambianchi, Michael, son of Matty, 350
Pambianchi, Otto, 350
Pambianchi, Torquinio, 133
Pamby Motors, 133, 350, 360
Pancotti, Gaetano & Sadie Pambianchi, 250
Pancotti, Gino, son of Gaetano, 250
Pancotti, Harry, son of Gaetano, 250
Pancotti, Louis, son of Gaetano, 250
Pancotti, Louise, daughter of Gaetano, 250
Pancotti, Marie, daughter of Gaetano, 250
Pancotti, Reno, son of Gaetano, 250
Pancotti, Rudolph Anthony (Rudy), son of Gaetano, 250
Pancotti, Vincent & Corinne Kaiser, 250
Papageorge, George, 74
Papageorge, John, 74, 261
Paperback Trader (bookstore), 310
Paris, Donald, son or Robert, 110, 271
Paris Hair Stylists, 32
Paris, Lloyd, son of Robert, 271
Paris, Richard, son of Walter, 58, 271
Paris, Robert, 271
Paris, Robert Jr., 271
Paris, Walter, 271
Parks, Ernie, 62
Parks, Frank, 54 illus.
Parks, Frank Jr., 119
Parm, Herbert (Herb) & Cora, 193
Parry, Mary, 155
Partrick, Almon, 6 illus.
Partrick, Gertrude Humphreys (Mrs. Merle), 34, 216, 217, 361
Pasquarella, Clem Sr., 142, 294, 341

Paterniani, Mrs. Primo (nee Gasperini), 51
Patten, William (Bill), 102, 105, 107, 108, 110, 149, 177, 183 illus.
Patterson, Samuel, 97
Paul, David, 344, 345
Paulist Fathers, Congregation of the Mission of St. Vincent DePaul, 283
Pavey, Frank, 196
Payne, Fred (Freddie), 237
Payne, William, 294
Peace Party, 114
Peaceable Acres (Albert Wiggins & Dudley Roberts estate), 196, 197
Peatt, Agnes Fisher, 6
Peatt Park, 29, 353, 355
Peatt, William Sr., 8, 12, 13, 141, 294, 321, 355
Peck, Fred, 347, 349
Peck, Olive, 7 illus.
Pegler, Westbrook, 12
Pehrson, Arthur (Art) & Minnie Murphy, 4
Pelham, John, 258
Perkin-Elmer Instrument Group, 332, 333
Perregaux, Harry, 19, 218
Perragaux, Ruth Miller (Mrs. Harry), 19, 33, 218
Perry, David & Wendy Johnson, 70
Perry, James H., 2, 114, 343
Perry, Joe, 73
Perry, Nathan, 232
Perry, Sam, 199, 305
Perry's Market, 91 illus., 219, 227
Perschino, Ralph & Gloria, 296
Peter Parley, see Goodrich, Samuel Jr.
Peter Parley House, also Peter Park House, 6, 114, 151, 152, 153, 195, 216, 277, 289, 290
Peter's Barber Shop, 93
Peterson, Judi, 98
Petroni, Gino, 313
Petroni, Romeo, 2, 154, 155, 221, 265, 341, 357
Pettitt, Billy, 89
Pettit, Louise Person, 4
Pettit, Mr., 47
Phelan, Elsie, daughter of Grover, 26
Phelan, Grover S. & Harriet M. Whitlock, 26, 266
Phelan, Harry, son of Grover, 26
Phelan, Marion, daughter of Grover, 26
Phelan, Ray, son of Grover, 26, 266
Phelan, Stewart, 6 illus., 7 illus.,

Phelan, Yolanda Salvia (Mrs. Ray), 266
Phillips, William, 185, 211
Phineas Lounsbury Engine Co., see Ridgefield Fire Dept.
Piasta, Catherine Keeler (Mrs. Stanley), 262
Piasta, Stanley, 262, 330
Pierandri, Dwino, 198, 298 illus.
Pierandri, Helen D., 220
Pierandi, John & Mary Rose, 355
Pierce, Franklin, 326, 333, 342
Pierrepont House, see also Gilbert Homestead, 113, 115
Pierrepont, John Jay, 115
Pierrepont, Seth Low, 19, 199, 227
Pilgrim Lodge #46, 80
Pimpair, Leo, 325
Pinchbeck, Joseph (Joe), 102, 160, 213
Piser, May Moore (Mrs. Philip), 114
Piser, Philip, 114, 119, 325
Pitkin, Ward & Virginia, 307
Playhouse, see Congregational Church
The Playhouse at Dunrovin, 311
Plummer, Christopher, 300
Plummer, Gordon, 213
Pollock, Jack, 77
Polverari, Gino, 1, 6 illus., 348
Polverari, Armanda, 7 illus.
Polverari, Michael, 362
Polverari, Primo, son of Mike, 361, 362
Pompeo, Roberti, 200
Pongetti, Attilio, 51, 55
Pons, Lily, 311, 312
Pontello, Michael & Agatha Mugavero, 93
Poole, J.O., 116
Poor, Mrs. Walter, 311
Poor House, see Town Farm
Poor Old Cliff's, see also Hayes, Clifford, 329
Pope, Charles, 72
Pork Hollow Farm (Pegler estate), 12
Port of Missing Men, 33, 34, 51, 55, 69, 135 illus., 136, 205, 208, 281, 289, 362
Poshadel, August & Adele, 355
Post, Helen Minturn, 190 illus., 191
Post Office, see U.S. Post Office
Potter, Christopher, 256
Potter, Helen (Nellie, Mrs. Patrick), 102, 256

Potter, Patrick (Pat), 10, 102, 256, 257, 271
Potter, Rita, 101, 102, 256, 272
Potter, Tom, 79, 256, 310
Prentice, Helen, 67
Prescott, Marjorie Wiggins, 200
Price, Beth (Mrs. Louis), 289
Price, Louis (Lou), 48, 90, 289
Prieger, Henry, 287
Principi, Andrew, 17
Principi, Evelino (Evo), 7 illus., 262, 298 illus., 346 illus.
Principi, James (Jimmy) & Anne McGlynn, 227
Principi, Nani, 313
Promoters Club, see also Lions Club, 94, 183
Provino, Frank, 212, 214 illus.
Publishers Row, 151, 168, 192, 195

Q

Quinlan, John, 69
Quinn, Kevin, 268

R

Rabin, Edward & Dorothy, 97
Rabin, Kim, daughter of Jerry, 97
Rabin, Jerry & Sandy, 97
Rabin, Todd, son of Jerry, 97
Radio Station WREF, 346
Raifstanger, John, 34
Railroad, Ridgefield R.R. Station, 36 illus., 37, 38, 39, 41, 42 illus., 44 illus., 45, 46, 47, 48, 308
Rainey, Patrick, 247
Rainsford, Dr. William, 266
Ralston, Marshall, 37, 47, 358
Ramapoo Indians, 53, 130, 234
Randall, Richard, 113
Randolph, Francis F. Jr. (Frank), son of Francis, 278
Randolph, Sarah Bulkley (Mrs. Francis F. Sr), 277, 278
Rapp, Edgar C. (Dick), 92, 98, 288
Rathjen, Jerry, 114, 115, 330
Raven, W. Barry, 336
Raymond, Muriel, 325
Raymond, Paul, 325

Raymond's Garage, 325
Red Cross, 3, 73, 88, 94, 145, 272, 285, 304, 341, 353
Red Schoolhouse, see Little Red Schoolhouse
Red Lion Restaurant, 330
Read, J. Louis & Assunta, 197
Reed, Amos, 115
Reed, Charlie, 115
Reed, Erwin, 54 illus.
Reed, Essie, 115
Regan, Elizabeth, daughter of John, 169
Regan, Helena, 6
Regan, James, 216
Regan, Johanna, 77, 216
Regan, John, 169
Regan, Mary, daughter of John, 6, 169
Regney, Noel & Gloria, 161
Reide, Gottlob, 83, 228
Reidinger, Charles W. (Charley), 30, 62, 64, 218, 229, 256, 354, 356
Reiley, Thomas, 301
Remington, Frederic Sackrider, 238, 264 illus.
Remington, Pierre, father of Frederic, 264
Reynolds, Allen & Margaret Northrup, 220
Reynolds, Allen Jr., 220
Reynolds, Clinton, 23
Reynolds, Dorothy, 153 illus.
Reynolds, Irene, 220
Reynolds, George, 13
Rhine, George W., 21
Rhoades, Scott & Deborah, 300
Ribicoff, Abraham (governor), 225
Rich, Dave, 67, 192
Richard Randall Co. (store), 113
Richards, Elvine, 161, 216
Richards, Jimmy, 137
Richardson, Anne S., 13 illus., 14, 15, 17, 188
Richardson, Edith Frances Bailey, 292
Richardson, John (Woodcock John), 18
Richardson, Robert E. (Bob), 67 illus., 95, 146, 292
Richardson, Robert E. Jr., 292
Rideout, Sheila (Mrs. Edwin), 214
Ridgebury School, 12 illus., 51, 77
Ridgefield Athletic Assoc., 75, 241, 309, 358
Ridgefield Bakery, 18, 30, 115, 298, 365

Ridgefield Band, see also Oreneca Band, 3, 4, 5, 35, 298, 361
Ridgefield Bank, see Ridgefield Savings Bank
Ridgefield Baptist Church, 341
Ridgefield Baseball Team, 145, 146
Ridgefield Bicentennial 1908, 235, 236
Ridgefield Board of Education, 13, 257, 262, 265
Ridgefield Boys Band, see Oreneca Band
Ridgefield Boys Club, 13, 62, 202, 204, 309
Ridgefield Boys School, see also Mulford School, 15, 16, 17, 19, 353
Ridgefield Cemetery, 5
Ridgefield Chamber of Commerce, see Chamber of Commerce
Ridgefield Civilian Defense, 59
Ridgefield Committee on Home Economics, 285
Ridgefield Community Center, see Community Center
Ridgefield Country Day School, 250
Ridgefield Country Club (restaurant), 149, 150
Ridgefield Country Club, 2, 156, 162, 196, 198, 200, 202, 350 illus.
Ridgefield Electric Co., 134, 135, 219
Ridgefield Fair & Cattle Show, 183
Ridgefield Fire Department, 10, 20, 23, 55, 62, 71, 80, 96, 102, 115, 117, 132 illus., 134, 141, 148, 167, 197, 201, 219, 222, 240, 241, 246, 250, 261, 266
Ridgefield Family Y, 93
Ridgefield Garden Club, 13, 159, 190, 202, 204, 206
Ridgefield Golf Club, see Ridgefield Country Club
Ridgefield Grange No. 167, 220, 301, 353
Ridgefield Guild of Artists, 53
Ridgefield Hardware Store, 97, 183 illus., 199, 273 illus.
Ridgefield Health Resort, 150
Ridgefield High School, 17, 40, 59, 66, 67, 68, 73, 223, 240, 262, 346 illus., 355, 360
Ridgefield Illuminating Co., 134, 166
Ridgefield Inn (on Main St., early 1900's), 116
Ridgefield Inn, 150
Ridgefield Kiwanis, 327
Ridgefield Land Improvement Co., 116
Ridgefield Library, 114, 119, 130, 135, 142, 145, 167, 171, 235, 323
Ridgefield Lumber Co. (Ridgefield Supply Co.), 21, 37, 38, 39, 40, 44 illus., 48, 114, 140, 215, 249, 254 illus., 362
Ridgefield Mandolin Club, 253
Ridgefield Market, 249 illus.
Ridgefield, N.Y. Railroad Corp., 254
Ridgefield News Store (Squash's), 60, 62, 76, 90, 91 illus.
Ridgefield Parent Teachers Assoc., 353
Ridgefield Parks & Recreation Commission, 13

Ridgefield Playhouse (Movie), 114, 117, 204
Ridgefield Police Dept., 10, 60
Ridgefield Preservation Trust, 323
Ridgefield Power Equipment Co., 119
Ridgefield Press, 3, 5, 23, 36, 67, 71, 78, 85, 87 89, 93, 100, 116, 232, 260, 298, 309, 318
Ridgefield Public Works Dept., 30
Ridgefield Publishing & Printing Co., 331
Ridgefield Railroad Station, see Railroad
Ridgefield Rotary, 183, 204
Ridgefield Silversmith, 198, 351
Ridgefield Savings Bank, 3, 24, 48, 70, 76, 89, 213, 257, 333
Ridgefield Spartans (football team), 50, 73, 127, 222, 294
Ridgefield Supply Co., see Ridgefield Lumber
Ridgefield Symphonette, 360
Ridgefield Tennis Club, 347
Ridgefield Thrift Shop, see Thrift Shop
Ridgefield Tonsorial Parlor, see Mike's Barber
Ridgefield Town Hall, 44, 59, 60, 65, 66, 67, 69 illus., 73 illus., 74, 75, 76, 77, 79, 81, 84, 86, 87, 88, 134, 204, 240
Ridgefield Veterinary Hospital, 326
Ridgefield Volunteer Fire Dept., see Ridgefield Fire Dept.
Ridgefield Water Supply Co., 69, 134, 136, 154, 157, 158, 216, 258, 274, 309, 341, 345
Ridgefield Zoning Board of Appeals, 150
Ridgefield Zoning Commission, 150
Ridolfi, Lou (Luigi), 268
Riede, Gottlob, 171
Rief, Bertha, daughter of George, 25
Rief, Charles, son of George, 25
Rief, Elizabeth, daughter of George, 25
Rief, George & Teresa, 25
Rief, George Jr., 25
Rief, Louis, son of George, 25
Riggs, Dana, 330
Riley, Anna Claus, 6
Riley, Anthony Claus, 153 illus.
Rimple, Bill, 198
Ripley, James H., 253, 254, 255
Rippowam Farm (Bulkley estate), 275, 276 illus., 278
Ritch, Dave, 6 illus., 31
Roach, Joseph A. (Joe), 4, 5, 75, 95, 241
Roach, May Keefe (Mrs. Joseph), 4
Roach, Ned, father of Joseph, 4, 35
Roach, RoseMary, daughter of Joseph, 4

Roache, Bob & Joyce Bailey, 230
Roberti, Alex, 139
Roberti, Pompeo (Pompy), 139, 204
Roberti, Valtero (Val), 205, 298 illus.
Roberts, Aldo, son of Joseph, 23, 362
Roberts, Alice May Stevens (Mrs. Earl), 356
Roberts, Arthur, son of Joseph, 23, 362, 363
Roberts, Betty, daughter of Earl, 356
Roberts, Carrie (Mrs. Dudley), 196
Roberts, Dr. Dudley D., 196, 197, 198, 199, 200, 255
Roberts, Dudley Jr., 196
Roberts, Earl, 94, 270, 356 illus., 357
Roberts, Everett, son of Earl, 356
Roberts, Henry Steele, son of Dudley, 196, 197, 255
Roberts, Joseph (Joe), 11, 23, 362, 363
Roberts, Louise, daughter of Joseph, 23, 362
Roberts, Mary Seldon (Mrs. Henry S.), 196, 197
Roberts, Owen Josephus, 160
Roberts Pond, 363
Robertson, Roberta Barry, 247, 248, 250
Robinson, Daniel (Dan), 1, 217
Robinson, Gilbert, 7 illus.
Robinson, John, 142, 300
Robinson, Vern, 213
Robinson, Wayne, 212
Rochambeau, Count de, 301
Rockelein, Conrad, 84, 351, 352, 355
Rockelein, Madeline (Mrs. Conrad), 352
Rockwell, Benjamin, 296
Rockwell, George L., 1, 13, 76, 277, 346
Rockwell, Mrs. George L., 13
Rockwell, George L. Jr., 263 illus.
Rockwell, Isabelle, 13
Rockwell, Jennie, 274, 275
Rockwell, Jonathon (proprietor), 131, 296
Rockwell, Winthrop E. (Win), 90, 95, 336, 337
Rodier, William, 328
Rogers, Bernie, 11
Rogers, Bill, 106, 107
Rogers, Jimmy, 46, 60, 61, 62, 97, 118, 132, 292, 293
Roma Pizzeria, 218, 351
Romeo, Fred, 53, 68, 91, 98, 218
Romeo, James, 346 illus.

Romeo, Mike, 198
Romeo, Nicholas (Nick), 18, 100, 359
Romero, Fred, 41
Rooney, Matthew, 343
Rooseau, Colonel, 153
Root, Charles T., 169, 170, 269
Rosa, Kathryn Venus (Mrs. Paul), 48, 211, 214
Rosa, Paul, 59, 211
Rosencrans, Alvin & Eva, 270
Ross, Alex, 329
Ross, C. Chandler, 196, 198, 199, 200
Ross, Mayte, (Mrs. C. Chandler), 200
Rossini, Orazio (Ratsy), 53, 100, 250, 363
Rotary Club, 13, 183, 201, 204, 226, 266, 277, 328
Rotherforth, Lester, 335
Round Pond, 274
Rowland, Alice McSherry (Mrs. Joseph), 2, 115, 353
Rowland, Dorothy Waldarke (Mrs. Francis), 353
Rowland, Francis, 6 illus., 352, 353
Rowland, Joseph S., 115, 352, 353, 354, 355
Rowland, Leah Burnetti (Mrs. Francis), 51, 353
Roy, Anne Rotherforth (Mrs. William), 335
Roy, Margy, daughter of William, 82
Roy, Mimi, daughter of William, 82
Roy, William, 82, 278
Roy, William Jr. (Bill, Ike), 278
Royal, William, 185
Rubel, Samuel, 282, 283, 320
Ruehl, Donald, 212
Ruggles, Lydia (Mrs. Sidney), 116
Ruiz, Manuel, 14 illus., 355 illus.
Russell, Charley, 115, 158, 275
Russell, Mrs. Ellsworth, 10
Rusty Nail Restaurant, 130, 305
Rux, Albert (Al), 79, 325
Rux, Charlotte, 340 illus.
Rux, Fritz, 304
Ryan, Ethel McGlynn (Mrs. William), 4, 31, 241, 361
Ryan, Father Thomas, 301
Ryan, James E. (Jimmy), 4, 216
Ryan, Thomas Fortune, 233
Ryan, Rita, 7 illus., 54 illus.
Ryan, Thomas W. (Tom), 4, 13, 123

Ryan, William H. (Will), 4, 5, 96
Ryan's Store, 144

S

Sachem Hill, see Sunset Hall
Safford, Jean, (Mrs. Theodore), 115
Safford, Dr. Theodore, 115, 169, 180
St. John, Matthias, 131
St. Mary's Ladies Aid Society, 353
St. Mary's Church, 5, 22, 41, 96, 125, 126 illus., 202, 222, 235, 241, 253, 263 illus., 283, 356
St. Mary's School, 70, 116, 234, 235, 252
St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, 13, 64, 80, 155, 183, 204, 206, 249
Salerno, Bart, 348
Salter, Thomas, 204, 220
Salveson, Thomas (Tom), 14, 273
Salvestrini, Aldo, 96
Sanders, Jack, 186
Sandman, Charlotte, 114, 115
Sanford, Burr, 123, 124
SanGiovanni, Edward, 351
Santella, Bix, 73
Santini, Aldo, son of Orazio, 53, 54, 57
Santini, Alex (Lick), son of Orazio, 53, 54 illus., 55 illus., 56, 57, 58, 146, 233, 348
Santini, Frank, son of Orazio, 53, 54
Santini, Joseph, 53
Santini, Julius, son of Orazio, 53, 54
Santini, Orazio, 53, 54
Santini, Rose, daughter of Orazio, 54
Santini, Vivian (Mrs. Alex), 55, 57
Sargent, Keeler, 54 illus.
Sarner, Sidney, 322
Sauves, Leon, 13, 17
Savin Hill (Rainsford estate, N.Y.) (now LeChateau), 108, 266
Sawyer, Raymond (Ray) & Margaret, 197, 291
Scaglia, Anna, 7 illus.
Scaglia, BettyAnn, 349
Scaglia, Flora (Mrs. Michael), 349
Scaglia, Flora, daughter of Michael, 349
Scaglia, John, son of Michael, 349
Scaglia, Kate, daughter of Michael, 349
Scaglia, Lillian, daughter of Michael, 349
Scaglia, Michael, 6 illus., 349

Scaglia, Michael Jr., 349
Scaglia, Rose, daughter of Michael, 349
Scala, John, 43, 156, 209, 342, 343
Scala, Mario, son of John, 106
Scala, Richard (Dick), son of John, 106, 212, 213
Scala, Robert (Bob), son of John, 147, 209, 343
Scalise, George, 12
Scallon, Frank J., 36, 308, 324
Scanlon, Mary, 262
Scherf, Elsa, 227
Schlumberger Doll, 299
Schmalholz, Jennie Blaine, 168
Schmidt, Edward (Eddie), 55, 63, 84
Schmitt, Annie (Mrs. Edward), 63
Scholes, D. Smith, 27
School House, see Little Red School House
Schoyer, Edna, 13
Schreyer, Edward, 280
Schroeder, Peter, 272
Schultz, Oscar, 123
Schultz's Market, 83, 91
Schuster, George, 26
Schwartz, Mortimer, 152, 195, 246
Scofield, Carleton, 89, 93
Scofield, Ebenezer (Eben), 239
Scofield, Ernest, 325
Scofield, Gilbert, 7 illus.
Scofield, Stewart, 16
Scotland School, 8, 12 illus., 19, 21, 308
Scotland District, 19, 76, 113
Scott & Lewis (automobiles), 100
Scott & Rice (lawyers), 221
Scott Block (Ernest, westside), 62, 76, 94, 96, 138, 249
Scott Block (George, eastside), 94, 96, 249
Scott, Charles, & Frances, 161, 193
Scott Coal Co, 249
Scott, David, son of George G., 3
Scott, Donald, son of Tom, 32, 174, 178, 264,
Scott, Dorothy, daughter of Edward, 4
Scott, Edward (Ed), son of George G., 3, 4,
Scott, Edward P. Jr. (Eddie), 4, 357
Scott, Ernest, 39, 62, 90, 94, 222, 233, 249
Scott, Faustina, daughter of George G., 3

Scott, Francis, son of Thomas, 32, 174, 178
Scott, Gene, 127, 128
Scott, George G. (Judge), 1 illus., 3 illus., 19, 84, 94, 100, 249, 256
Scott, George Jr., 3, 100, 107
Scott, Hamilton B. (Ham), 19
Scott, Harold, son of Thomas, 32, 174, 178
Scott, Hezakah, 19
Scott, Hiram (Sonny), son of George, 256
Scott, Hiram K. (Hi), father of George, 3, 7 illus., 19, 76, 98, 107, 256
Scott, Hiram K. Jr., brother of George, 98, 256
Scott, Howard B., 235, 236
Scott, John (painter), 19
Scott, John E. (Buddy), son of Ernest, 249
Scott, Marie Walsh (Mrs. Ernest), 249
Scott, Marion (Mrs. Hiram), 107, 256
Scott, Mildred Northrop (Mrs. Thomas), 32
Scott, Nathan, 19
Scott, Russell, great grand son of George, son of Sidney, 256
Scott, Samuel (Sam), 19
Scott, Sarah Wettingfeld (Mrs. Thomas Jr.), 272
Scott, Sidney, grandson of George, son of Edward, 4, 256
Scott, Thomas (Tommy), 32, 35, 224, 272, 287
Scott, Thomas Jr., 272
Scott, Walter, 18, 177
Scott, Winfield, 20
Scott-Hausen, Andreas, 310
Scott's Automobile Agency, 359
Scribner, Mr., 192
Scripps, Robert P., 9, 102, 146, 196, 197
Seamor, Matthew, 131
Searles Brothers, 9
Seeley, Sylvanus, 340
Seelig, George, 157
Seeman, Henry, 28
Seeman, Max, 28
Seeman, Otto, 26
Selleck, Benjamin Sturges (Sturg), 70, 71, 234, 321
Selleck, Rev. Charles G., 234
Selleck, Isaac, 324, 326
Selleck, Jessie Elizabeth Keeler (Mrs. Benjamin S.), 234
Selleck, Jarvis, 234
Selleck, Johathan, 234
Selleck, Sturges, 234

Serfilippi Contractors, 85 illus.
Serfilippi, Frank, 79
Serfilippi, Peter, 139
Serfilippi, Reno, 298 illus.
Serfilippi, Richard, 21
Servadio, Albert, 324
Servadio, Mathew (Tao), 324
Servadio, Nancy, 233, 337
Servadio, Joseph (Albert Jr.), son of Albert, 324
Settlers Rock, 8, 28 illus.
Severini, Charles (Charley), 29, 362
Severini, Genolli (Lolly), 298 illus., 346 illus.
Seymour and Barhite (store), 114
Seymour, Arthur (Artie), 117, 198
Seymour, Clifford, 83, 133, 160, 174, 178, 220
Seymour, Frank, 37, 48, 140
Seymour, James, 301
Seymour, Margaret (Curly), 253
Seymour, Robert (Twitter), 95
Seymour, Rufus, 119
Seymour, William O., 6, 114, 152, 235, 236,
Sfondrini, Arthur & Tina Girolmetti, 223
Shading, Hazel, 7 illus.
Shagatani, Tony, 325
Shallow Brook Farm (Chandler Ross estate), 200
Shane, Ted, 23
Shapiro, Joseph, 271
Shapley, Carl, 343, 344
Shapley, Dr. Harlow, 343
Shapley Schools International, 343, 344
Shaughnessy, Marion Smith (Mrs. Thomas), 220
Shaughnessy, Thomas (Tom), 71 illus., 216, 220, 268, 271
Shaw, Franklin, 330
Shaw, Herb, 103
Shaw, Patricia Brady (Pat) (Mrs. Franklin), 275, 285
Shean, Clarence, 2
Sheehan, Jack, 249
Sheehy, Joseph (Joe), 64, 84, 258, 325
Sheehy, Teresa Knoche (Mrs. Joseph), 258,
Shelton, Allen W., son of Dr. George, 314
Shelton, Dr. George Gregory (The Orchard), 16, 62, 105, 192, 218, 230, 254, 275, 313, 314, 315,
317, 318, 320, 327
Shelton, Harriet May, daughter of Dr. George, 314

Shelton, Ida Sherman (Mrs. George), 314
Sheridan, Arthur C., 168
Sheridan, Charley, 178
Sheridan, James, 216, 238
Sherry, John (Jack), 39, 160, 161, 162 illus., 186
Sherwood, Bryon, 227, 229, 230, 325
Sherwood, Daniel (Dan), 12, 130
Shields, Rev. Hugh, 98
Shields, Audrey (Mrs. Reed), 153
Shields, Reed, 15, 55, 153
Shields, Mrs. Van Allen, 70, 214
Shipley, William (Bill), 104
Sholes, D. Smith, 76, 286
Short, Mike, 59
Shortell, Rev. Richard E., 41, 98, 125, 126 illus., 155, 323
Shorty's Barber Shop, 145
Sileo, Francis & Mary, 219
Silliman, General Gold S., 212, 213, 214
Silver Spring Country Club, 55, 149, 160, 198, 227, 309, 350
Simons, Edward W. (Ed), 83, 170, 171, 266, 269
Simoneau, Francis & Patricia, 305
Sjovall, Gwendolyn Tulipani, 179 illus.
Skeleton Farm, 11
Skillen, Mrs. Gerald R., 2
Sky Cottage (Lily Pons estate), 312
Slapin, Charley, 178
Slavin, Walter, 271
Small, John, 87
Smith, Ebenezer, 130
Smith, Edward (Ed), 219, 220
Smith, Edward H., 160, 286
Smith, Edward L, son of Edward H., 286
Smith, Evelyn, Mrs. (Smith's Tavern), 167
Smith, Fred, 240
Smith, Gertrude Whitlock (Mrs. Fred), 194, 240
Smith, Harvey E., 76
Smith, Harvey K., 116
Smith, Howard D & Galloping Gussie (nee Seymour), 290
Smith, Mrs. Ida M., 135, 152, 289
Smith, Beatrice (Mrs. James), 18, 255
Smith, Mrs. Charles, 9
Smith, Duncan M., 23, 90, 91, 98
Smith, James H., 12, 18, 183, 255, 257, 335

Smith, James Jr., 18
Smith, John W. (Jack), 139, 232, 241, 257, 293
Smith, Mrs. John, 139
Smith, Louis G., 17
Smith, Mary, 20
Smith, Myrna (Minnie), 18
Smith, Peter, 213
Smith, Samuel (proprietor) (Milford), 291
Smith, Samuel (proprietor) (Norwalk), 291
Smith Tavern (Amos Smith), 114
Smith, Thomas (proprietor), 131
Smith, Thomas (Tom), 14, 17, 19
Smith, William (Bunky), 18, 324
Smith's Drugstore, 100
Snoecks, Samuel & Elizabeth (Pa & Ma), 138
Snowstorms, 85, 86, 90, 91, 92
Solley, Dr. Fred P., 13, 17, 18
Solley, Dr. Fred W., 17, 18
Solley, Robert, 17, 18
Soloff, Robert, 170, 269
Sorcinelli, Esuperanzio, 68
Sossei, Dr., 102, 146
Spartans Football, see Ridgefield Spartans
Sperry, Bert (B.E.), 39, 58, 71, 123, 132, 133
Sperry, Fleet, 123, 132, 210
Sperry, William (Bill), son of Fleet, 132
Sperry (B.E.) Livery Stable, 71, 122, 123, 124, 132 illus., 133 illus., 144, 309
Spoldi, Steven, 349
Sportsman Inn (The), 34
Sprague, Orville, 5, 11, 291
Squash's, see Ridgefield News Store
Stahl, Fred & Meredith, 270
Stannard, Charles, 14, 39, 40, 160
Stannard, Porter, 102, 224
Stark, Orris & Betty, 275
Starr, Louis Morris, 43
State Police Barrack Station A, 23, 140
Stash, Ernest (Ernie), 9, 75, 102, 240, 243
Stavola, Joseph, 321
Steak House, see also Red Lion Restaurant, 330
Stebbins, Benjamin, 113, 119, 220
Steele, Mary, 2, 58, 70, 347
Sterry, Allen W.H. & Luella Hull, 117, 340

Steinhaus, Alfred E., 161
 Sterling, Betty, daughter of Charles, 260
 Sterling, Charles (Charlie), 73, 117, 260, 352
 Sterling, Frances, daughter of Charles, 260
 Sterry, Allan, 117, 340
 Sterry, Louis, 340
 Stevens, Alfred W. (Al), 365
 Stevens, Charles (Putty), 2 illus., 3, 30, 31, 365
 Stevens, Lon, 2 illus., 3, 246, 361
 Stevens, William (Will), 2 illus., 3, 32, 35, 246, 361
 Stewart, Walter, 199
 Stewart, Walter Store, 219, 227
 Stokes, James A., 281
 Stolle, Carl, 16, 177
 Stone, Annie, 263
 Stone, Ellen, 263
 Stone Hill Dairy, 16
 Stonecrest (development), 255
 Stonehenge Inn, 87, 233
 Stonehouse, see also Outpost Nurseries, 328 illus.
 Storer, Albert H., 166
 Storey, Margery, 271
 Stratton, Dr. E.A., 41
 Street, Dexter, 212, 213
 Strouse, Frances Zandri (Frances' Cleaners), 250
 Struzik, Emil, 231
 Studwell, Frank, 206
 Sturges & Gommies (painters), 222
 Sturges, Charline, daughter of John N., 226
 Sturges, David, son of Earl, 222
 Sturges, Donald Charles, son of John, 226, 336, 340
 Sturges, Earl, son of John S., 166, 222, 336, 340
 Sturges, Ernest (Ernie), son of John S., 83, 91, 92, 97, 127, 165, 174, 222, 226, 232, 261, 279, 316, 334 illus., 336, 355
 Sturges, Esther (Mrs. Ernest), 97, 226
 Sturges, Ella G. Hull (Mrs. John S.), 336
 Sturges, Gus, 123, 124, 127
 Sturges, James Howard, son of John, 226, 336, 340
 Sturges, John Nilson II, son of Ernest, 226, 279, 336
 Sturges, John S., 336, 340
 Sturges, Priscilla, daughter of Ernest, 226
 Sturges, Rita (Mrs. Earl), 222
 Sturges, Robert, son of Earl, 222

Sturges, Sylvia Pinchbeck (Mrs. John N.), 226
 Sturges, Sylvia Jane, daughter of Ernest, 226
 Sturges, William (Bill), 183, 271
 Stuttman, Martin & Frances, 306, 307
 Sullivan, Bill, 62, 80
 Sullivan, Ed, 82, 194
 Sullivan, Lt. Jack, 71, 364
 Sullivan, Jim, 67, 243
 Sullivan, John L. (postmaster), 66, 232
 Sullivan, Katherine Fahey (Mrs. William), 339 illus.
 Sullivan, William Matheus, 309, 311, 312
 Sunset Hall, Sunset Hill (Stokes/Cutten estate), 281 illus., 282, 283, 284
 Sutherland, C. Lindsay, 246
 Swanson, Albert, 69, 154 illus., 155, 192, 195
 Swanson, Debbie Lynn Ramey (Mrs. Robert), 223
 Swanson, Carl, 223
 Swanson, Ernest & Alice McCoy, 223
 Swanson, Ernest Jr., 223
 Swanson, Robert (Bob), son of Ernest, 223,
 Swarm, Mr., 324
 Sweaters Etcetera, 97, 99
 Sweeney, Edward, 206
 Sweeney, James, 193
 Swinging Bridge, 69, 278
 Swords, Henry C., 14, 120, 227, 302, 305, 306, 309, 310

T

Tanton, Claire (Mrs. Harvey), 341
 Tanton, Harvey, 87, 114, 328, 341
 Tarbell family, 17
 Tarsi, Attilio (Tilio), 6 illus., 23
 Tarsi, Geno, 23, 298 illus.
 Tarsi, Lena, 7 illus., 23
 Tarsi, Silvio (Si), 23
 Tator, Charles, son of George, 310
 Tator, George, 1, 2, 10, 18, 102, 151, 243 illus., 293, 310
 Taylor, Frank (Steppy), 34, 79, 80 illus., 81, 97, 239
 Taylor, Moses, 137
 Tea House, see Port of Missing Men
 Telephone Building, see Martin Block
 Tell, Samuel, 185
 Tellegen, Louis (Lou), 304

Temple Shearith Israel, 202, 253, 273
Templeton, Bob, 114
Tenney, Scott, 270
Terpenny, Harry, 16 illus., 39, 91, 230, 342
Thomas, Albert N., father of Elijah, 119
Thomas, Arthur, 153 illus., 220
Thomas, Bessie (Mrs. Arthur), 220
Thomas, Edna, daughter of George, 119
Thomas, Elijah, father of George, 119
Thomas, Elizabeth (Lizzie), 54 illus., 220, 353
Thomas, Esther, daughter of Harry, 119
Thomas, Fred, 37, 220
Thomas, George M., father of Harry, 119
Thomas, Gordon, 220
Thomas, Harry Marvin (blacksmith), 8, 10, 37, 96, 101, 119 illus., 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129 illus., 137, 188, 194, 210, 220, 267
Thomas, Howard, son of George, 119, 137, 141, 299
Thomas, Mrs. Howard Lapsley, 134, 220
Thomas, Margareta Belle Seymour (Mrs. Fred), 220
Thomas, Marie, daughter of Harry, 119
Thomas, Minolia, (Mrs. Harry), 119
Thomas, Seymour, 220, 298 illus., 353
Thompson, James, 116
Thompson, Victor & Ethel, 360
Thonis, Peter, 263
Thrift Shop, 10, 71, 89, 121, 125, 274
Tilio's Tavern, 51
Titicus River, 9, 20, 24, 25
Titicus School, 5, 6 illus., 7 illus., 8, 27, 28 illus., 32, 82, 122, 153 illus., 241, 291, 301, 308, 361
Titicus Store, 26, 27 illus., 28
Titus, Durrel, 19, 213
Tobin, Catherine, 300
Tobin, Daniel, 224, 321
Tobin, Helen, 300
Todd, Charles (Charley), 77
Todd, Mary, 77
Todd, Rufus, 77
Tode, Walter, 149, 287
Tode's Inn, see Inn at Ridgefield
Tones, Laura, 97
Tonetti, Guiseppe, 49, 51
Tonetti's Bakery, 60
Torcellini Contractor, 85

Torcellini, Donald, 17, 107, 356, 359
Torcellini, Gino, 105, 107
Torcellini, Nazzereno, 357
Torcellini, Velma (Mrs. Gino), 63
Torcellini, Yolanda Frulla (Mrs. Donald), 17, 356, 357
Torrey, Lyle B., 200
Town Center School, see Center School
Town Farm (Poor House), 19, 21
Town Hall, see Ridgefield Town Hall
Town School, see Center School
Town Spirit Shop, 53
Toy Caboose, 48
Tramer, Albert O. & Gloria, 343
Travaglini, Aldo (Squash, Big Squash), 53, 60, 91, 98, 190, 218, 273 illus., 286, 288
Travaglini, Louis (Little Squash, Potch), 60, 286, 298 illus.
Travaglini, Luqetta, 60, 286
Travostino, Albert (Bake), 64
Travostino, Albert Jr. (Bake), 64
Travostino, Peter (Bake) , son of Albert, 64
Travis, Henry & Rena, 289
Travontino, Antonio, 237
Triangle (The), see Maplewood Inn
Trotta, Father, 283
Trottoli, Peter, 237
Trutt, Dr. Simon M., 291
Tryon, General William, 10, 11, 213, 214
Tuccio, Robert (Bob) & Barbara Branchini, 271
Tuccio, Jerry, 202, 271
Tucker, Harry, 102
Tulipani, Albert (Al), 67, 117, 179 illus., 346 illus.
Tulipani, Aldo, 117, 179 illus.
Tulipani, Alfred, 117, 179 illus., 346 illus.
Tulipani, Georgine (Mrs. Robert), 357
Tulipani, John (Johnny), 117, 139, 179 illus.
Tulipani, Joseph, 101, 179 illus., 200, 346 illus.
Tulipani, Julius, 23, 136, 200, 204, 216, 286, 328, 357
Tulipani, Robert, 179 illus., 357
Tulipani, Toni (Mrs. Albert), 67
Tunney, Gene, 74
Tuoti, George, 114, 328
Turnbridge, Major, 43
Tunick, Josh, 72
Tuttle, William, 104

Twin Ridge (development), 62, 245
Twine, Harry J., 305

U

Union Trust Co., 24, 57, 59, 95, 99, 146, 205 illus., 216, 253, 274, 292, 296, 301, 315
United Cigar Store (also called Finch's United Cigar Store), see also Ridgefield News Store, 96, 273 illus.
United Nations, 282
U.S. Post Office, 76, 80, 91 illus.
Unwin, Edward, 156
Upagenstitt (Frederick Lewis estate), 137, 139, 140 illus., 141, 142 illus., 143 illus., 144 illus., 147 illus., 148, 149, 150, 195, 257, 300

V

Vaast, Vic, 73
Valden, Charles, brother of Louis, 24
Valden, David, father of Louis & Charles, 24
Valden, David Harvey, 9, 24, 48, 183 illus.
Valden, Donald, son of David Harvey, 24
Valden House, 24 illus., 25 illus.
Valden, Louis L., 24, 25
Vallez, Pierre, 280
Van Etten, Dr. Royal, 83, 85, 169, 171, 172 illus., 174, 175, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 185, 186 illus., 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, 219, 221
VanEtten, Louise (Mrs. Royal), 171, 173, 180, 181, 188, 189, 195
VanEtten, Royal C. Jr., 171
VanNess, Albert W., 310
VanPoznak, Dr. Frederick, 169
VanSaun, Dr. Edwin B., 2, 18, 120, 123, 162, 306
VanWagner, Annie Lent (Mrs. Irving), 53, 60
VanWagner, Irving, 53, 60, 249
VanWagner, William (Bill), 53
Vance & O'Dell (dancers), 14
Vance, Lee, 104, 105, 106, 109, 111, 112, 232, 282
Vance, Lee Jr., 282
Vance, Phyllis (Mrs. Lee), 282
Vasa Hall (Georgetown), 298
Vaughn, Robert & Linda, 281, 283, 320
Vega, Fernando, 251, 252
Vega, Manuel Jr. (Manolo), 251, 252

Vega, Marguerita, 251
 Vega, Mercedes, 251
 Vega, Jose, 251
 Vega, Pedro, 251
 Vega, Ricardo, 251
 Vega, Rosita, 251
 Vega-Pinchet, Manuelo Sr., 250, 251, 252
 Veloz & Yolanda (dancers), 14, 240
 Ventres, Dale, 119, 253
 Ventres, Doris Hoyt (Mrs. George), 119
 Venus Brothers, see also Mobil Gas Station, 145, 335, 344, 359
 Venus, Charles A. (Charlie), father of Dick, 3, 8, 36 illus., 37, 52, 71, 80, 85, 144, 162, 192, 219, 239, 246, 298, 339, 346, 361
 Venus, Charles Jr. (Charlie), brother of Dick, 41, 82, 83 illus., 107, 180, 243, 339, 361
 Venus, Elizabeth Ann (Lizzie) daughter of Dick, 82, 177, 178 illus., 184
 Venus, Estelle Lynch (Mrs. James A.), 256
 Venus, Faith, daughter of Charles Jr., 180
 Venus, Frances, sister of Dick, 8, 67 illus., 339 illus.
 Venus, James (Gus), 48, 61, 84, 104, 122, 224, 237, 256, 339
 Venus, Mrs. John, 138
 Venus, John, brother of Dick, 41, 82, 102, 165, 206, 243, 244, 255, 267, 335, 339
 Venus, Joseph (Joe), brother of Dick, 52, 68, 82, 117, 153 illus., 219, 267, 298, 335, 339
 Venus, Marie Bishop (Mrs. Richard), 3, 14, 47, 57, 67, 71, 73, 77, 82 illus., 154, 169, 178, 181, 184, 189, 216, 230, 241, 270, 289, 322, 327, 349, 364, 365
 Venus, Mary Elizabeth Fahey (Mrs. Charles Sr.), mother of Dick, 2, 82, 224, 319, 339 illus.
 Venus, Michael (Mike), 72, 98
 Venus, Paul, 1, 60, 98, 229, 237, 249 illus., 286, 339
 Venus, Richard E. (Dick), see following illustrations 6, 7, 14, 54, 67, 71, 82, 129, 153, 157, 194, 263, 289, 298, 323, 342, 355, 366
 Venus, Richard Jr., 98, 178 illus., 221
 Venus, Stella Lynch (Mrs. James), 52, 84
 Venus, William (Bill), brother of Dick, 12, 145, 339
 Verna, Faust, 346 illus.
 Veterans of Foreign Wars, 299, 366 illus.
 Veterans Park School, 64, 94, 294, 297
 Viele, Howard J., 150
 Villa, The (Doubleday estate), 253, 254
 Village Bank & Trust Co., 167, 204, 304
 Village Grille, see also Fairfield Lunch, 261
 Village Improvement Society, 8, 13, 204
 Visiting Nurse Assoc., see District Nurse Assoc.
 Vita Semplice, see also Hillscroft Farm, 269
 Vitalli, Gino, 298 illus.

Volk, Frank (orchestra), 73, 117
Voluntary Services for Civil Defense, 304
Voss, John, 193
Vozzo, Gary, 276

W

Wade, Edith, daughter of Munson, 20
Wade, Lizzie (Mrs. Munson), 20
Wade, Munson, 20
Wadsworth Lewis Fund, 204
Wagner, Dr., 169
Wagoner, Philip Dakin (P.D.), 84, 259, 274, 275
Waite, Fred, 21
Waite, Horace, 21
Waite, Leo, 274
Wakeman, Charlotte J. (Biddy), 67 illus.
Waldarke, Dorothy, daughter of Louis, 139, 337, 354
Waldarke, Lena (Mrs. Louis), 143, 354
Waldarke, Louis, 139, 142, 300, 354, 355
Waldarke, Paul, 14 illus., 139, 141, 142, 153, 184, 205, 342 illus., 353, 354, 355 illus.
Waldee Farms, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 111, 112, 177
Walker, Clara Bloomer (Mrs. Horace), 232
Walker, Charles Wade, 82, 117, 241
Walker, Mrs. Harriet, 113, 115
Walker, Horace, 62, 133, 197, 232
Walker, John (Jack), 16, 37, 40, 41, 80, 135, 239, 321, 336, 358, 359
Walker, Johanna Fahey (Mrs. John L.), 40, 339 illus.
Walker, Jasper (Jap), 8 illus., 9
Walker, Peter, 321
Walker, Stanley (Stan), 223, 253
Walker, Thomas I., 294
Walker, Walter (Chuck), 40, 54 illus.
Walker's Moving & Storage, 358
Wallace, Henry A., 189
Wallington, Frank, 232
Walnut Grove Dairy, 16
Walsh, Gordon Sr., 215, 335
Walsh, Judge James F., 235, 236, 249
Walters, Bertha Davis (Mrs. Jacob), 246, 249, 253
Walters, Edith, daughter of Jacob, 54 illus., 249
Walters, Ethel Martin (Mrs. John), 241
Walters, Gerald (Gerry), son of Jacob, 249, 253

Walters, Jacob (Jake), 89, 93, 100, 246, 249, 250, 253
Walters, Jacqueline Leighton (Jackie) Mrs. Gerald), 253
Walters, Jane, 253
Walters, John, 100, 241, 249, 250, 278, 359
Walters, Philip (Phil), son of Jacob, 54 illus., 249
Ward Acres (also Ward Farm), 2, 140, 198, 200, 201 illus.
Ward, Ethel Haney (Mrs. William), 200
Ward, George E., 253
Ward, Jack Boyd, 200, 201, 350
Wardenburg, Barbara, 23
Warner, Frank, 3
Wascher, William (Bill), 271
Washington, Charlie, 71, 132
Washington, George, 76
Waterman, Rev. Leonard P., 341
Waterbury, David (1706), 234
Watt, David, 226
Weaver, Adriene Benninger (Mrs. Wilfred), 190, 266
Weaver, Fred, 266
Weaver, Eric, 266
Weaver, Keith, son of Wilfred, 266
Weaver, Maurice, 249, 266
Weaver, Myrtice, 227
Weaver, Wilfred (Woofie), 261, 266
Webb, William, 351
Weidner, Henry, 249
Weinberg, Robert C., 280
Weinberger, Ingeborg (Mrs. William), 152
Weinberger, Marion, 152
Weinberger, William (Billie), 152, 153, 246
Weir, George, 37, 218
Weir, J. Alden, 258
Weiss, Dr. Leopold (Leo), 281, 284
Weiss, Dr. Theodore (Hardien), 281
Weitzel, Charles, 309
Welch, Mrs., 305
Wellings, William, 21
Wellington, Cary, 220
Welsh, Vernon & Glenna, 211, 212, 214
Welti, Greta, 301
West, Charles, 72
West Lane Grocery Store, see Casa-More
West Lane Inn, 168, 287 illus., 288 illus., 289 illus.

West Lane Market & Spirits, see Casa-More
West Lawn (owned by Dr. Shelton, later Konrad Bercovici), 316, 317, 318, 319, 320
Westheim, David, 133, 312
West Mt. Country Day School, see also Ridgefield Country Day School, 250
West Mt. School, 6, 8
Westchester Northern R.R., see also Ridgefield N.Y. R.R., 254
Westmoreland (George Doubleday estate), 202, 253, 254, 255
Wettingfeld, Mrs., 153 illus.
Wettingfeld, Katherine, 11
Wheaton, Blanche, 161
Wheeler, John, 316
Wheeler, Rev. Harold E., 341
Whelan, Nora Fahey (Mrs. Patrick), 339 illus.
Whipstick Farm, 101, 157, 158, 159
White, Eileen O'Keeffe (Mrs. William), 227, 308, 309
White, John Aylmer & Janet, 291
White, Nataniel, son John, 291
White, Sanford, 207
White Spot Restaurant, 55, 63
Whitlock, Arthur, son of Morris, 8, 132
Whitlock, Hazel, 67 illus.
Whitlock, Henry, 364
Whitlock, Jack, 45, 123, 232, 239
Whitlock, Morris B., son of Henry, 35, 132, 364
Whitlock, Ruth Smith, 239
Whitlock's Livery Stable (Morris), 8, 37, 309, 363, 364
Wickopee Farm or Cottage, 204, 205
Widmer, Beth Kemble, 173
Wiggins, Albert H., 22, 80, 156, 166, 196, 200
Wilcox, Mary McGlynn (Mrs. Robert), 4
Wildenstein Family, 279
Wilder, Robert, 30
Wilder, General Wilber, 366 illus.
Wildflower Farm (Melbert Cary estate), 224 illus, 309, 310, 311 illus, 315
Wildlife Artists Inc., 27 illus.
Willenbring, Gene, 356
Willetts, Mrs. Macy, 214
Williams, Alice C., 58
Williams, Fred, 8, 115, 174
Williams, Mrs. Fred, 8, 12 illus.
Williams, Howard, 115
Willetts, Howard, 307
Willis, Lorin, 95

Willis, Paul, 98
Wills, Ruth, 4, 67, 138
Wilmot, Jeremy, 323 inset
Wilson, Benjamin (proprietor), 131
Wilson, Chauncey, 102
Wilson, Ernest O., 16, 30
Wilson, George L., 33, 34
Wilson, Grace, 67 illus.
Wilson, Malcomb S., 210, 228
Windover (John Mitchell estate), 301, 302
Winn, Lester, 75, 249
Winters Family, 255
Winterwood, see Sunset Hall
Winthrop, William (Bill), 210
Wittman, Joseph & Emilene Lynch (Dolly), 273
Wolforth, Robert, 294 illus.
Women's Volunteer Services, 204
Woodcock, Anne (Mrs. Joseph), 328
Woodcock, Joseph Mortimer (Woody), 114, 115, 263, 328 illus.
Woodcock Nurseries, 324, 328
Woodford, Dr. Francis B. (Fritz), 3, 91, 157, 188, 221, 267, 319
Woodford, Joan, 91
Woodford, Julia (Mrs. Francis), 91
Wooster, General David, 11, 213
Workman, David W., 3, 89, 93, 241
Workman, Mrs. David, 3, 145
Workman, Kenneth, 7 illus.
Wright, Owen & Evelyn, 115
Wright, Peter, son of Owen, 115
Wright, Yvette, daughter of Owen, 115
Wurtz, Adam, 23
Wycoff, Clarence P., 279

X, Y, Z

Yardage Shop, 92
Yanity, Dr. Peter, 33, 242
Yankee Ridge (shops), 48 illus.
Yasko, Edward & Amy, 266
Yates, Mabel, 194
Yellow Shutters (antique shop), 329
Yervant, John, 324, 327 illus.
Yervant, Felice (Mrs. John), 327

Yonkes, Fritz, 320
York, Susan, 300
Young, Fred, 19
Young, Joseph (Joe), son of Fred, 12, 17, 19, 28, 111, 212, 214, 218, 264
Young, Richard, 330
Young's Feed Store, 142, 354 35
Zandri, Angelo (Beebe), 245, 246
Zandri, Edward (Ed), 341
Zandri, Frances, 216
Zandri, G.M. (Pres), 53, 59, 67
Zandri, Jerry, 57, 98
Zandri, Lee, son of Silvio, 59
Zandri, Levio (Lev) & Mary Dowling, 3, 32, 59
Zandri, Linda, 59
Zandri, Louis & Lillian, 341
Zandri, Primo, 51
Zandri, Silvio, 54 illus., 59, 298 illus.
Zandri, William (Billy), son of Levio, 32
Zarrow, Francis & Helaine, 193
Zarrow, Mariam, daughter of Francis, 193
Zarrow, Mathew, son of Francis, 193
Zinsser, August & Mary, 102, 146
Zvoncovic, Steve, 114
Zwierlein, Irene McGlynn (Mrs. Joseph), 31, 241, 242, 245, 293
Zwierlein, Joseph A. (Big Joe), 3, 31, 33, 146, 241, 242, 243, 244, 245, 293
Zwierlein, Thomas Joseph (Tom-Joe), 241