

## **Just a little bit of local lore**

Jack Searles based on a conversation with and information from  
Kenneth Kysor, Cattaraugus County Historian, 1998

We are so accustomed to the delivery of our mail to our homes and offices and to the collection of mail from mailboxes, that many of us do not realize that such service was not included in the duties of the post office. Up to 1861 (with the exception of a few communities) postal service was limited to the transportation of mail from one post office to another. Mail had to be “called for” or picked up by the recipient. Further, mail was forwarded from post office to post office until it reached its destination. In a number of cities this led to the establishment of private posts—so-called “penny posts”, which performed pickup or delivery for a fee (generally 1 or 2 cents). In our area, only Buffalo had private posts during the period 1847-1850. General collection and delivery service was instituted in 1861 in Cattaraugus County, and at the turn of the century, the Rural Free Delivery System extended this additional service to rural areas.

Postal rates were high. From 1816 to 1845 the rate for a single letter sheet (envelopes were not used at that time) was six (6c) cents for distances under thirty (30) miles, ten (10c) cents for distances of thirty (30) to eighty (80) miles and for those eighty (80) to one hundred fifty (150) miles, twelve and a half (12-1/2c) cents. For distances between one hundred fifty (150) and four hundred (400) miles the rate was eighteen and one half (18-1/2c) cents and over four hundred (400) miles, twenty five (25c) cents. No wonder that at these high rates a great many letters were forwarded “outside the mails” by friends or for a short period from 1843 to 1845 by commercial independent carriers (e.g., “Pomeroy’s Letter Express”, Well’s “Letter Express”). A reduction of postal rates took place in 1845, the general rate was reduced to five (5c) cents, and for distances over three hundred (300) miles, ten (10c) cents. Another drop in the rates became effective in 1851 when the rate for letters for distances under three thousand (3000) miles was fixed at three (3c) cents.

Letters were generally sent collect until 1855 when compulsory prepayment was ordered. Since stamps were not in use until 1847 the keeping of accounts of postage's due was a highly complicated and time consuming procedure.

The postmasters were required to mark each letter with the name of the post office (and State!) and the date of receipt as well as the rate of postage. This was generally done by hand, later the written markings were supplanted by hand stamps. These vary greatly and offer an interesting field for the collector. The straight line hand stamps are among the earliest types and were used in our region into the 1830's. Then came the vogue for oval types, either plain or with embellishments. After that the circular designs made their appearance in a great variety of styles. In the rate markings there are endless variations, as well as in the "Paid" and "Free" markings.

When adhesive stamps came into use, a special device was necessary to cancel them. Sometimes the town cancel was employed, but later regulations forbade their use for this purpose. These special obliterators or "killers" were made in the simplest geometrical design and the most elaborate "fancies", employing primitive cork and wood cuts as well as carefully executed metal engravings.

Shortly before 1900 there began the first machine cancellations which are now so widely in use.

The mode of transportation of mail varied greatly. Carriers on foot or horseback were no doubt employed first, later came the wagon and the stagecoach, and from about 1835 steamboat and railroads.

Remuneration of postmasters was not uniform. Fixed salaries were paid only to postmasters in a few larger cities; the others were paid on a percentage basis, in most instances 30% of the receipts of the office. Postmasters of so-called private offices were allowed the entire receipts to encourage establishments of new offices. These "private offices" were actually too small to be profitable and were therefore granted the additional revenue. The receipts of some offices were pitifully small. Net government income from Church Tract P.O., Allegany County, for instances in 1827 was \$4.20 and in 1828 \$6.35. Some offices had even lower figures. An incentive for postmasters—sometimes by far more valuable than remuneration from receipts—was the franking privilege accorded to them. It was not uncommon for postmasters to be agents for various enterprises (lotteries!) or owners of businesses and to use their "frank" to send or receive considerable correspondence through the mails.

Locations of post offices naturally increased with progressive

settlement and organization of Cattaraugus County. In general, each town had at least one post office. The upward trend in the number of offices reached its climax shortly before the turn of the century when inauguration of the Rural Free Delivery service made many of the smaller office superfluous. This downward trend has continued to the present day.

Below is a listing of some of the early post offices in Cattaraugus County:

Andrew Van Brent 6/24/1892 and William H. Howder 3/14/1900. Service discontinued 10/3/1904 and mail forwarded to Portville beginning 10/15/1904.

**Carrollton** located in the town of Carrollton. Formerly Tunungwant Mills with Abner O. Hunt as postmaster beginning 7/27/1848. Mail was forwarded to Limestone beginning 5/11/1850.

Formerly **Tuna** with Charles J. Horne, Jr (5/22/1862) and W.J. Wright (6/29/1865) as postmasters until service was discontinued on 3/16/1866.

W.J. Wright (11/10/1868) and Peter Boyle (12/10/1868) were postmasters until the post office was discontinued on 5/11/1870. The office was reopened under Peter Boyle (6/22/1871) in 1871 and continued under a series of postmasters including:

- Mary A. Tyrrell (1/25/1872);
- Margaret Boyle (9/29/1884);
- Allen Johnson (1/22/1886);
- Cora B. Evans (11/265/1891);
- Agnes Watson (7/8/1895);
- Katherine Watson (5/11/1915);
- Francis Federman (3/2/1931);
- Ruby R. Remington (4/9/1931); until discontinued on 11/30/1931 when the mail was forwarded to Killbuck, NY.

**Cattaraugus** located in the Town of Napoli. Timothy Everett was the first and only postmaster beginning 2/26/1828. On 6/2/1828 mail was rerouted to West Cold Spring.

**Cattaraugus located in the Town of New Albion** in the Village of Cattaraugus. This post office open 6/17/1851 with Saloman L. Johnson as the first postmaster. Subsequent postmasters through the 1950s included:

- Oren L. Johnson (6/17/1853);
- Carlton H. Cotract (3/28/1861);
- George Straight (4/22/1864);
- Lucius H. Maltbie (1/28/1873);
- Salomon L. Johnson (5/11/1877);
- James H. Jewett (8/5/1885);
- Morris J. Hoag (10/19/1889);
- Charles D. Straight (1/14/1893);
- Frank D. Jewett (2/14/1895);
- Herbert B. Easton (3/3/1899);
- Charles H. Rich (6/18/1906);
- S. Jackson Fuller (3/3/1915);
- Charles W. Brock (10/1/1923);
- Jesse B. Kilburn (2/18/1936);
- and Mrs. Bernice M. Murphy (11/30/1954).

### **Post Offices of Gowanda**

South side located in the Town of Persia in Cattaraugus County.

#### **~P.O. Perrysburg 1**

- Benjamin Waterman (9/24/1822)
- Changed to Lodi 4/8/1825.

#### **~P.O. Lodi**

- Benjamin Waterman (4/8/1825) changed to Dunham 4/6/1827.

#### **~P.O. Dunham**

- Benjamin Waterman (4/6/1827) changed to West Lodi (2/18/1830).

#### **~P.O. West Lodi**

- Phineas Spencer (1/29/1830)
- changed to Persia 1 (4/22/1831)

#### **~P.O. Persia 1**

- Phineas Spencer (4/22/1831);
- A.L. Chaffee (10/23/1839);
- Ralph Plumb (6/16/1841);
- John B. Wilber (12/21/1843);
- changed to Gowanda (10/9/1848).

## **~P.O. Gowanda**

- John B. Wilber (10/9/1848)

## **Great Valley**

Located in the Town of Great Valley. This post office opened on 12/18/1823 with Henry Wooseter as Postmaster. He was followed by:

- Benjamin Chamberlain
- Francis Green (2/13/1838);
- Daniel Farrington (8/26/1841);
- William J. Nelson (4/23/1852);
- Arch. H. McKaller (1/31/1854);
- Denis White (12/6/1854);
- Andrew Norton (5/4/1855);
- Augustus Wilcox (9/27/1867);
- Frederick Cramer (11/8/1869);
- George Howland (4/14/1875);
- Luke B. Lattin (1/26/1876);
- John C. Chase (7/19/1880);
- Michel T. Ryan (1/25/1886);
- William S. Morton (4/19/1889);
- Quincy D. Brown (10/19/1893);
- Israel Richards (7/3/1897);
- William W. Mahle (7/15/1915);
- Michael Ryan (3/14/1919);
- Charles Gillman (11/4/1922);
- Frank W. Marble (3/27/1923);
- Lowell F. Searl (10/31/1925);
- Doris F. Raiber (7/10/1926);
- Glen W. Raiber (11/19/1926);
- Rena B. Halliday (10/30/1931);
- James McAndrew (6/7/1934);
- Mrs Julia McAndrew (8/2/1935);
- Mrs. Martha M. Ward (10/17/1937);
- and Mrs. Doris A. Curtis (6/30/1954).

### **Great Valley Center**

Located in the Town of Great Valley. The first and only Postmaster was George E. Howland who opened the post office on 5/18/1876. The post office was discontinued on 3/26/1877.

### **Guy's Tavern**

Located in the Town of New Albion on Lot 33, Town 4 Range VIII from Little Valley. The first and last postmaster was Robert Guy who opened the post office on 4/19/1827. Service was discontinued on 4/28/1830.

### **New Albion**

Located in the Town of New Albion. The first Postmaster was Andrew Horth who opened the post office on 7/30/1832. He was followed by:

- George Worder (4/7/1935);
- Solomon G. Wright (10/31/1839);
- Jonathan Jewett (2/9/ 1846);
- John R. Wescott (6/26/1849);
- John A. Kinnicutt (8/6/1850);
- Reuben J. Waters (6/17/1853);
- Whitney Jewett (6/30/1855);
- John Kinnicutt (8/16/1855);
- James Jewett (12/29/1856);
- Reuben J. Waters (3/16/1858);
- Francis Allen (5/10/1861);
- George Hunter (5/7/1863);
- Ronne A. Andrews (2/8/1871);
- Lucius D. Hill (1/20/1873);
- Morris D. Crandall (5/15/1882);
- Anson C. Kennicott (10/12/1883);
- Adelvert D. Davis (12/8/1884);
- James L. Merritt (2/26/1886);
- Jonathan Jewett (9/22/1886);
- Frederick H. Burmaster (4/6/1888);
- Edgar W. Waite (7/26/1889);
- Levy H. Hill (12/19/1889);
- James W. Watson (5/16/1904);

- Stephen C. Watson (5/12/1914);
- Bertha M. Watson (3/21/1916) who discontinued the post office on 6/15/1933. Mail was rerouted to Cattaraugus.

### **Nine Mile Run**

Located in the Town of Allegany near Vandalia. First opened by Ronaldo D. Ingalsby on 12/28/1837 and discontinued on 5/29/1839.

Post Office was reopened by Charles D. Foote on 2/1/1841 and discontinued on 3/1/1842.

### **North Perrysburgh**

Located in the Town of Perrysburg. Post Office opened by Charles Blacknet on 1/30/1833. He was succeeded by George Parsons on 12/20/1851. Mr Parson discontinued service on 12/20/1851.

### **Olean**

Located in the Town of Olean . Also called Hamilton and Olean Point. The Post Office was opened on 5/23/1816 by Postmaster Philo Cleveland. He was succeeded by:

- Horatio Orton (11/10/1817);
- Sylvanus Russell (11/20/1820);
- D. Swain;
- Henry Bryan (1/6/1826);
- Frederick S. Martin (before 1833);
- David Day (11/14/1839);
- Olcott B. Boardman (7/11/1849);
- David Day (5/23/1853);
- Henry W. Fish (12/16/1857);
- Rufus L. Page (3/27/1861);
- James G. Johnson (10/25/1870);
- George N. Forbes (2/3/1877);
- Wilson R. Page (12/20/1881);
- Calvin S. Stowell (1/27/1886);
- Wilson R. Page (1/27/1890);
- Frank L. Stowell (4/11/1894);
- George M. Mayer (3/31/1898);
- Edward Troy (5/6/1910);

- H.D. Sibley (3/13/1915);
- Copeland E. Smith (5/19/1924);
- Dennis W. Keating (9/30/1933);
- Mrs Margaret E. Keating (2/1/1935);
- John Joseph Shortell (9/16/1941);
- James V. Rogers (9/15/1952);
- and Donald R. Harrison (5/15/1953).

Many “thanks!!!!” for the efforts of Mr. Kenneth Kysor the Historian for Cattaraugus County. Ken maintains his office in the Cattaraugus County Museum which is located on Court Street in Little Valley, New York across the street from the Cattaraugus County Office Building. If you happen to be in Little Valley why not stop in and say “Hi!” to Ken. He is a tremendous resource on local history and always willing to answer questions to the best of his ability. While visiting with Ken don’t forget to visit the Cattaraugus County Museum. The Museum has a wonderful collection of local memorabilia as well as many educational displays. There is no cost for touring the Museum, however, donations are appreciated!