

REMEMBER WHEN...

Submitted by Village of Richfield Springs Historian Harriett Geywits

There were many changes in this area in 1958 and like most years, for some the old year hadn't been too kind and for others it had been a year of happiness. Richfield seemed to have the usual number of births, marriages, deaths, accidents, politics, business ups and down, school problems, difference of opinions, local squabbles, joys, sorrows and, of course, the weather.

The last two months of the year brought sub-zero temperatures with gale winds forcing their way between every space. It was reported to be the worst winter in the memory of the oldest inhabitant with the exception of the blizzard of 1888. There were two weekend blizzards early in February that tied up traffic, plugged roads, marooned many families for weeks, closed schools and brought business to a halt. Farmers lost thousands of dollars because they were unable to get their milk to market. The cold continued until spring. Summer brought little relief with cold rains and a short growing season. Farmers were unable to do their early spring planting. Hundreds of bushels of potatoes and root crops were left in the ground in the fall to rot. Winter came early with a blizzard and six inches of snow on October 6th.

There were more cheerful things that happened during the year, some of which were listed in the MERCURY summary of 1958. McGown Hardware of Cooperstown opened a branch store on Lake Street. Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Ruddock bought a business block on Lake Street and opened the Richfield Fabric Center. Mr. and Mrs. Peter Andorski opened the Dairy Isle on West Main Street. The Richfield branch of the State Bank of Albany was prosperous and the village had a new Mayor, Attorney William B. Parker. In December, the village took over construction and maintenance of community skating ponds in Spring Park and on Bronner Street. The legal speed limit in the village was increased to 30 m.p.h. The Garden Club observed its 20th anniversary. The fire department held a testimonial dinner to honor Albert D. Freeman, a fifty year member of the department.

The fire department had a very busy year answering local and emergency calls and aiding area communities on mutual aid calls. The Red Chimney Inn on Route 20 burned down April 12th; Jack Wilkinson's bar on Bronner Street was leveled in April; the Blue Moon Restaurant on Route 28 burned on May 23; the Garden of the Mills dance hall burned in September; a mutual aid call to the \$100,000 fire in Cooperstown was answered in November; on Thanksgiving morning the hotel at Van Hornesville called for aid; the Capece home on West Lake Road was burned on December 12th.

A major event of the year happened in the Village of Warren which saw the Christmas season of that year without a post office for the first time in over 140 years. According to the writeup in the MERCURY, the order came to close that office on December 1st, following several previous orders and postponements. Patrons in that area were now to receive their mail on the Star Route and Rural Route No. 2 out of the Richfield Springs post office.

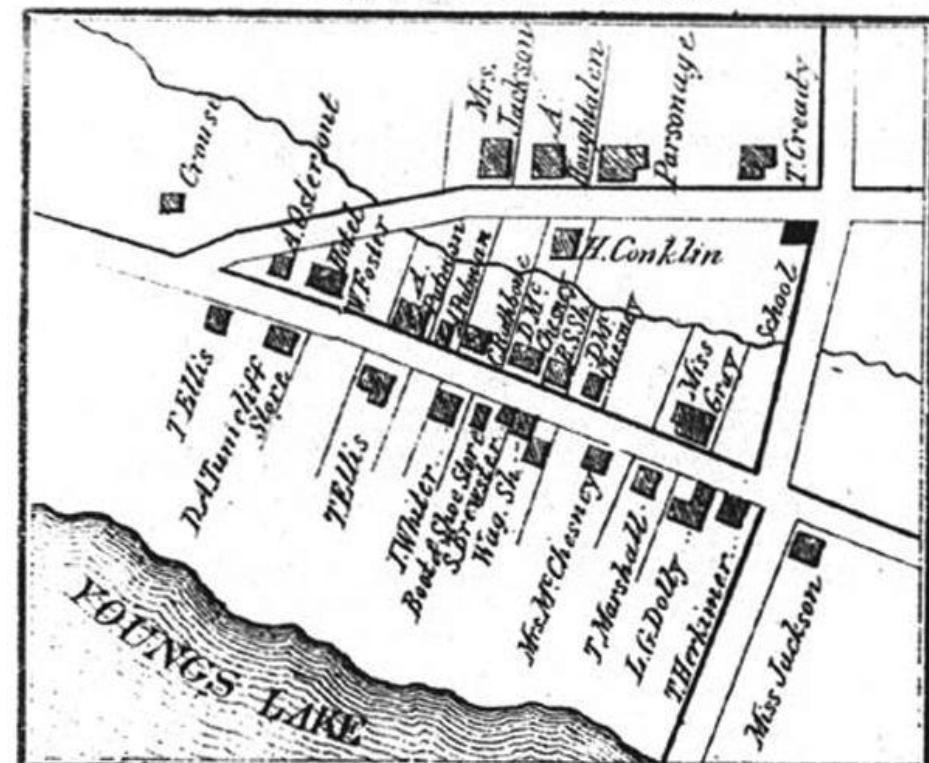
Mr. Floyd Ostrander had been postmaster for the past 28 years and he expressed his sentiment over the closing of the rural post offices when he said: "In our nation's steps to progress, the small towns are being deprived of some important factors that have contributed to their survival, but we must go along with a changing world."

Protests against the closing had been made several times during its history including a visit to see Vice President James S. Sherman some fifty years prior. The service was saved for many more years but, even with petitions by the box holders, there was to be no reprieve this time.

Many of the names of the early postmasters are still familiar in this area. Early records show that the annual combined pay was \$300 for carrying the mail four times a week from Whitestown to Canajoharie. The postmaster's pay was based on the number of stamps sold, the job being more of an accommodation to the public. Waiontha was the name the Indians gave to the area which later, because of Young's Lake and Weaver Lake on either side of the hamlet, became known as Little Lakes. This was accepted until about the early 1900s when the name was changed to Warren to avoid the confusion of the name of Little Lakes with that of Little Falls.

LITTLE LAKES

Scale 30 Rods to the Inch



Business Directory

J. S. Ellis, Carriage Manufacturer
W. Foster, Hotel Proprietor

Earliest records show Franklin Gates as the first postmaster, appointed in 1818. Amos (Moses) Shaul followed in 1824. Others that followed in the office were: John W. Tunnicliff - 1835; William Kinne - 1853; Chester Crim - 1863; Silas Conklin - 1894; following were Ralph Eckler then Lester Eckler. George Clyde was postmaster for a short time in 1902 then Clarence Armstrong took over for 25 years and included a general store along with his postal services. Floyd Ostrander followed, representing one of the longest terms on records, from 1930 to 1958.

Floyd's helpmate was his wife, Lillie. She didn't receive a salary but was 'paid' in experience with studying the new postal regulations, the ever-changing methods of accounting and the job of ordering regulation supplies. Floyd John Ostrander and Lillie E. Moyer were married in 1928. They were not the usual storekeeper-postmaster combination found in smaller places as Floyd raised young stock and white leghorns. Both rest in Highland Cemetery, Jordanville - Floyd dying in 1983 and Lillie in 1989.

This was not the first, nor the last, post office to close in the area. In earlier days, most hamlets had places within their community that served as a gathering point not only to pick up the mail or perhaps a few groceries, but also the ideal place to catch up on the news of the day. The closing of these places is an inevitable step as progress continues, but the habit of generations of going to their local village post office for the daily mail has become, for some areas, only a memory.