

# Stephentown Historical Society

Vol. II, Issue No. V

## Newsletter

November 1987



### EARLY DAYS OF THE POST OFFICE SERVICES

The early days of the United States Post Office were greatly influenced by the politics of the day, according to those "old-timers" who ought to know. Stephentown like other small towns had their post offices and their management changed nearly as often as the political party in power.

In the early days postal services were provided mainly from local stations that were in stores or homes. Frederick N. Brown's Store and Gas Station in Stephentown was a classic example. Other stations were in Wyomanock, Garfield, Stephentown Center, West Stephentown, North Stephentown, South Stephentown, and North Stephentown Depot.

The first mail carrier was Willis Goodermote. Elizabeth Deveneau of Garfield Road, who was married to Mr. Goodermote, believes he started with his horse and carriage deliveries in the early 1929's. He later left his job and William Sweet was appointed. He served for 27 years. Eugene Vosburg was a substitute carrier for Mr. Sweet. Mr. Sweet began his mail route with a horse and wagon and a cutter (sleigh) in the winter. It is reported that while in his cutter on the East Road he was hit by a gust of wind that blew the cutter off the road and the mail blew into the field. Just before retirement, Mr. Sweet died and William Hicks was appointed and served right up 'til this past summer for a total of 38-1/2 years. Mr. Hicks started his route travels in

1949 with a Model A Ford. He well recalls the early spring muds, especially on the East Road.

The Star Route that takes the mail by contract from Stephentown to West Stephentown was first done by Elizabeth (Goodermote) Deveneau for 22 years. Clark Wemple had the contract for a while and then Ella Manns. Since Ella's death, her husband Joseph Manns has had the contract.

William Hicks recalls how the mail originally came into town by the Rutland Railroad. After the railroad shut down, the mail was bussed in from Albany by the Highway Post Office (HPO). The HPO was similar to a large Greyhound Bus with a driver and sorter on board. If a person mailed a letter in Stephentown in the morning, the letter would be delivered in Cherry Plain, Berlin or Petersburg that afternoon.

One thing that made the early routes much shorter than today were the End-Road Boxes. On such roads as Wyomanock Road and Goodrich Hollow Road, all the boxes for the houses were at the end of the road.

Mr. Hicks likes to recall how the Post Office was located in the Frederick N. Brown Grocery Store where the present Post Office is located. Hicks said that when it was still a store, one could buy gas there, get the mail, and do some shopping in the area at the end of the building where the Brown Insurance Agency is now located. In the winter there were hot radiators in the middle of the store.

The way Mr. Hicks sums up his feelings is that in the early days there was a personal touch. Today he says it is all automation and paper work. He questions if it is really progress.

## WHAT DOWNTOWN WAS LIKE - THEN

Among the early families of what we now know as Stephentown, was that of Samuel and Hannah Vary. From existing records, we know they came from England to the Beekman Patent in Dutchess County, New York. They left there around 1769, settling in this area near the Kinderhook Creek.

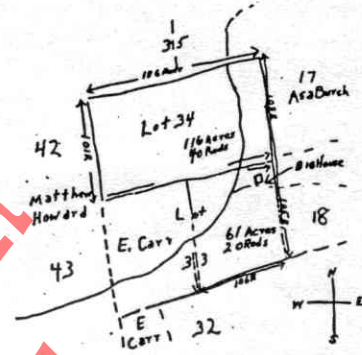
Presumably unaware that the land had been surveyed and leased under the Patroon System of the Van Rensselaers, they exercised "squatters rights" and built a house. By 1774, a temporary lease was obtained for Lot 34 and half of Lot 33 and the present home of Richard and Ellen Lewis, was built to house the growing family. Sons Richard, Samuel Jr., Nathan and Simeon were followed by three more boys and two daughters. (Records do not agree on the names of these children.)

Since Samuel held a Commission in the British Army, he was detained briefly in Albany as a "Tory Sympathizer". Evidence of bonds which secured his release are in the possession of heirs.

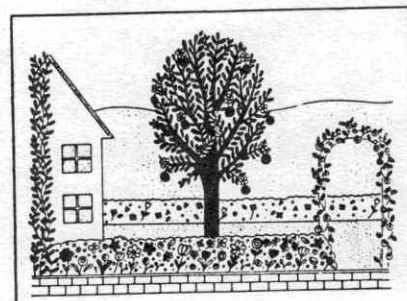
Having lived on the land for 17 years, it became possible to obtain a full lease when Stephen Van Rensselaer became of age in 1786. First the temporary lease was sold to the Patroon for 5 shillings. The final agreement stipulated "a yearly rent of 14 bushels, 3 pecks and 1 quart of good, clean, merchantable winter wheat". As tenants, the Varys were not permitted to hunt, fish, mine or cut lumber without permission.

Records show that Samuel served as Town Supervisor from 1795 to 1797. He died in 1807 at age 67. His wife, Hannah, died in 1824 at age 81. (Their stones can be found in the Garfield Cemetery.) Family members had married and scattered except for Nathan who moved to West Stephentown and Simeon who was deeded the lease to the homestead.

The following information and the map were taken from the publication "The Old Colonial, A Dream Come True" written by Rev. Ernest Smith of New Lebanon, owner of the big house. A copy of this publication may be borrowed from the Stephentown Historical Society.



Old Surveyers Map not drawn to scale. The road running east and west past the Vary house had not been built. Later it was constructed as a wagon path and called the Eastern Union Turnpike, and still later it would be called Route 43. Running north and south was a road over Presbyterian Hill. It came from New Lebanon and was an extension of West Street. It extended north past the Volpe's residence and past the Southard's residence and past the Vary's residence about 300 feet to the east of the Old Colonial. It is now discontinued. The Vary farm took in most of what is today the Stephentown business center. In those days it was all heavily wooded and the business was at Stephentown Flats, known as Garfield.



ARE YOU A MEMBER OF THE STEPHENTOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY?

**JOIN UP TODAY!**

'87-'88 Membership Categories and Dues are as follows:

Individual Member	\$ 3.00
Contributing Member	\$ 15.00
Business/Organization	\$ 25.00
Life Member	\$ 100.00

Dues will be payable annually each January. Checks payable to S.H.S., c/o Sylvia Leibensperger, Box 313, West Rd., Stephentown, N.Y. , 12168.

Meetings are held at the Town Hall on the first Monday evening of each month. Read The Echo and watch bulletin boards for up-to-date information.

**TRIVIA QUIZ FOR KIDS AND NEWCOMERS**

How did Stephentown get its name?  
(In 1784, Stephentown was named in honor of the Patroon, Stephen Van Rensselaer, III.)

What was the name of the railroad that ran through Stephentown?  
(The Rutland Railroad Company.)

Name some important local industries in Stephentown during its early days.  
(Dairy farming, mills for manufacturing, sawing wood and grinding grain - gristmills, and charcoal making.)

What is the oldest church in Stephentown?  
(The Free Will Baptist Church, serving its congregation since September 13, 1783.)

Answers and lots more can be found in the Bicentennial Album and Album I offered for sale by the Historical Society.



This old house -

Serenely settled on a hilltop on the north side of Rte 43, west of Stone Bridge, this is the most recently added new "old house" to Stephentown's growing number. Allen Brill, a long time weekend resident, has done a tasteful job of restoration and rehabilitation. He has preserved the herringbone wood pattern on the dining room wall and ceiling and changed it into a bright and cheery country kitchen. He's also made a virtue out of necessity, removing the old hung chimney, replacing it with a cupola attic vent and thus saving the roof line on the dining wing of the house.

Judging from construction methods and materials, the dining wing was built by Fisher Green around 1900. Green was Grandfather to Ralph Barrett, from whose widow, Hazel Barrett, Brill purchased the farm. The dining wing, used as the family dining room, with a later extension was used as a general store. Later still a post office was included in the store.

An 1886 deed shows that Green bought from Walter Church the right to rents and all other interests held by Church, thus giving Green clear title to the property. Lessees had the right to sell the leasehold paying back to the owner a share of the proceeds, with the new lessee continuing to pay rent. The deed indicates that Joseph Maxson was a previous holder of the property and other old records indicate that Maxson was in possession as early as 1784.

Who built the original house? Was there another lessee between Maxson and Green? A search of the Van Rensselaer or Church papers may tell the answer. Each remains a search for another time.

Descendents of former Stephentown residents who live across the country are seeking all kinds of information. Many want to know the location of old homes. It has been difficult to pin point the exact location until recently. The Historical Society now has copies of most of the Van Rensselaer papers. These papers include surveys and remarks which make it possible to conclude whether the family lived in what is now Stephentown proper or in one of the areas which broke away to form a new town.

...did you know...

Deacon Isaac Newton was originally buried in the Farrington Cemetery (Hotel Road) and later, to get him away from the Hotel and liquor, was re-interred in the Stephentown Cemetery.

Officers:

President: Jane Dwyer  
 Vice President: Ini Prior  
 Recording Secy: Linda Holder  
 Corresponding Secy: Dick Lewis  
 Treasurer: Ellen Lewis

Editors: Virginia Atwater,  
 Dick Lewis, & Laura Zwack

FOR GIFT GIVING

Bicentennial Album	\$ 6.00
Reflections (Stephen Van Rensselaer) Album I	\$ 10.00
Bicentennial Plate	\$ 4.00
	\$ 4.00

Phone 733-5061 or 733-5235



©  
 Stephentown  
 Historical  
 Society