

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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A CENTURY OF R F D



R F D, that's Rural Free Delivery, a postal service which we have come to take for granted. Now a century old, it is something in the rural areas we have all grown up with and have become accustomed to. But in earlier times before this convenient service was available, farmers had to travel to the nearest post office to pick up their mail. In the history of Orleans County there have been close to sixty post offices established at various communities. Most of these are now discontinued. To name a few of the more "exotic" ones, we had post offices at: Honest Hill in the Town of Clarendon, Hindsberg, now what we might call a ghost town in the Town of Murray, Kendall Mills in the Town of Kendall, Sawyer, Point Breeze, Lakeside park and Carylton in the Town of Carlton, West Gaines in the Town of Gaines; Farmington in the Town of Barre, Oak Orchard in the Town of Ridgeway, Shelby Basin in the Town of Shelby and County Line in the Town of Yates.

As R F D took over, fewer post offices were needed in the rural areas, bringing our county count of post offices at present down to ten.

For our nation's farmers it was often a hardship to go and get their mail which is why they petitioned the U.S. Government through their Congressman and such civic groups as the Grange to have the mail delivered in rural areas. After all, free delivery in the cities had started in 1863.

Consequently, Postmaster General John Wanamaker advocated the idea in 1891, but it was not until 1896 that experimental delivery of rural mail first occurred. It was during Grover Cleveland's second administration that \$39,000 was appropriated to establish R F D. PMG William L. Wilson of West Virginia established the first official RFD routes out of his hometown of Charles Town, W.V. and the nearby towns of Uvilla and Halltown. A postman's route covered approximately 25 miles and served around 100 families. It was also required that patrons set up boxes for their delivery. These boxes were usually placed on trees or fence posts along passable roads. By 1897, 28 states had R.F.D.

However, there is a local connection to this postal history. It seems that back in 1896 one county in each state was chosen as a delivery experiment site. Genesee County was selected



for New York State and it was further decided that the first three N.Y.S. routes were established out of Elba which commenced on October 15, 1896.

The first three carriers who were appointed, were Russell Crosby, Truman Barr and Newton Phelps. Their starting salary was \$300.00 per year, with no additional compensation for horse feed. Along with delivery and collecting mail, these carriers were also permitted to do minor errands along the route, such as delivering eggs into town or nails back out to a farmer doing repairs. This was allowed as long as mailmen kept to a regular schedule. By the turn of the century, wives of carriers were approved as substitutes for carriers because "the horse knew the way".

The first carriers did not have a postal wagon such as the one we see here. These weren't approved until 1899 after which time this was the conveyance most widely used by R.F.D. carriers. The other picture shows my grandfather Nahum Lattin at his mail box around 1910 retrieving the mail from the R.F.D. service.

Credit is due to the Just Wing It QWL-EI Team for information used in this article.

NOTICE—A tour of Mt. Albion Cemetery will be held on Sunday Oct. 13 at 2:00 p.m.