

BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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“THE BRIGHTON AREA RECEIVES MAIL” continued

The transport of mail by the railroad, ended the era of the stagecoach along the Grand River Trail. The mail bag was left at the depot to be taken to the post office at 132 W. Main. The June, 1909, obituary of Gilbert W. Abrams states he “...carried mail between the train and the post office for about eight years”, probably between 1895-1902. A clipping informs us Art Hutchings brought mail from the railroad to the post office (c. 1902), resigning in March, 1905. J.D. Smith took his place.

Since the appointment by the Federal government of Wilbur Fisher as Post Master, November 5, 1836, the Brighton Post Office has been served by a number of local men. Robert G. Power, February 8, 1838, took over, to be followed by James B. Lee, May 25, 1848. At the risk of turning off our readers, but because these early Brightonites should be recognized, the following served as Post Master for a year or more: John G. Spencer, John T. Smith, Stephen K. Jones, Benjamin T.O. Clark, Nicholas Kennedy, George W. Stewart, Willard C. Brown, Frank M. Blatchford, Clio S. Case, Earl Brown, Gerald R. Pitkir, Guy E. Pitkin, J. Al Bosworth. With the appointment of Emil Engel, May 30, 1980-1995, and an eye toward brevity, this list is concluded for this research. These men can be considered as having some responsibility in Brighton’s growth. They were merchants, farmers and mechanics, doctors, attorneys and grocers, among other occupations.

The isolation of rural families in the 18th—19th centuries is inconceivable in this 21st century. Devoid of today’s instant communication possibilities, the farmer’s links to the rest of the world were newspapers and mail, which were delivered to the local post office. The time and effort involved to pick up mail

meant a trip to town and back, often a day’s travel. Such a trip would probably also include the purchase of food, clothing, equipment and its repair, etc. It could be several weeks, or even months, before mail was picked up.

The concept of rural free delivery was first promoted in the early 1890s by the Post Master General John Wanamaker. Not everyone believed this plan could work. It was considered impractical and too expensive to have a carrier travel over poor roads, through forest and around swamps to deliver mail; braving weather year round. As can be surmised, rural residents were all for Rural Free Delivery (RFD).

A major side effect of RFD was the stimulation for the development of America’s systems of roads. To qualify for RFD, local governments had to see that passable roads were constructed. Occasionally farmers banded together and improved their neighborhood roads in order to qualify.

RFD became a major factor in serving as a connection between rural and industrial America. The cultural and social changes which came to America are most stunning. To be continued.....

(Compiled by Marieanna Bair from: 1880 History of Livingston County; “From Settlement to City, Brighton, 1832-1945” by Carol McMacken; writings of Bill Pless; clippings. Additions/corrections requested. 810-229-6402.)