

14482

by Lynne Belluscio

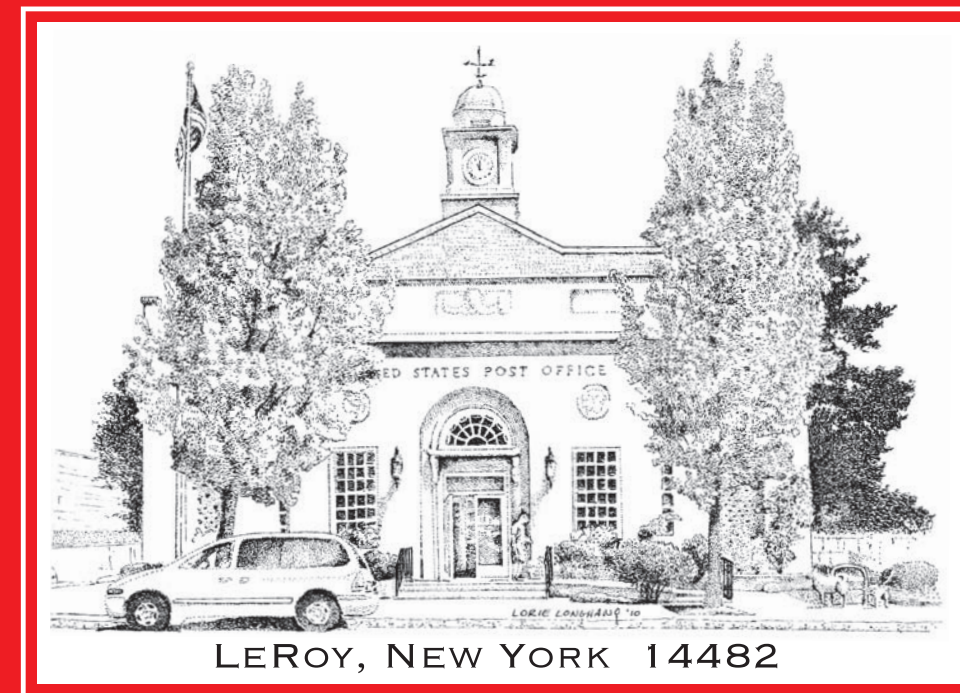
When we were trying to think of a design for this year's Oatka Festival t-shirt, I suggested using the LeRoy Zip code, 14482. Marny Cleere who did the design work took one of Lori Longhany's images of the post office and put in on a "stamp" and so we have a great t-shirt this year. We hope all of you like it too.

I did a little searching to find out about the ZIP code and learned quite a bit. On July 1, 1963, non-mandatory ZIP codes were announced for the whole country. ZIP stands for Zone Improvement Plan and is properly written in capital letters.

For a while, the term "ZIP code" was a registered service mark a type of trademark owned by the U.S. Postal Service, but they relinquished the registration. A postal worker, Robert Moon is credited as the father of the ZIP code, although the U.S. Postal Service will not give him the credit, saying that the decision to use a five number system was not his idea.

Moon only suggested a three number system. Born in 1917, Moon was a life-long postal employee. In 1944, he suggested the numbering system. Nothing was done and he submitted his idea at least twice more, before the "committee" took his idea and created what we know as the ZIP code.

I found it interesting that the ZIP code came into use partially because mail was being shipped by truck and plane, rather than railroads. In 1930, when the bulk of domestic mail was being shipped by rail, there were more than 10,000 mail-carrying trains crisscrossing the country, delivering mail into every city, village and hamlet in the United States. Men sorted the mail on the trains, in specially designed mail cars. But with the advent of truck and air delivery, the mail had to be sorted at mail centers, before being shipped out to the cities and



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villages. So the ZIP code became a necessity as the rail systems declined.

It was also at this time that phone numbers were being converted from the old exchanges to a seven digit number. (I still remember our old phone number: Greenfield 3-7945. Then it went to GR 3-7945 and I never could remember the number conversion. And then came area codes – but that's a different story.)

With all the conversions to numerical identities, newspaper editorials warned of Big Brother and "numerical neurosis." To remind everyone that they should use a ZIP code, the post office introduced Mr. ZIP, a cartoon fellow, dressed like a postman. Mr. ZIP was the invention of Harold Wilcox of the advertising agency of Cunningham and Walsh. Wilcox had designed Mr. ZIP for Chase Manhattan Bank for use in a bank-by-mail campaign.

ZIP code numbers are the lowest on the East Coast. The New England region begins with '0', as does New Jersey, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and military addresses for personnel stationed

in Europe, Africa and Southeast Asia. The lowest ZIP code, 00501, is assigned exclusively to the IRS in Holtsville, New York. The numbers increase southward along the East Coast and then across the country to the West Coast. San Francisco is 94111. The highest number 99950 is in Ketchikan, Alaska.

Every year, we ask our visitors at the Jell-O Gallery to vote for their favorite flavor and to give us their ZIP code. We sort and count the ZIP codes and it gives us an

indication of where people are coming from. Our demographics from the ZIP codes indicate that about 60% of our visitors come from Western New York, and the rest come from places further away.

So thanks to Robert Moon – and the "committee" the ZIP code is part of our numerical identity. And for those of you who use the expanded ZIP code system called "ZIP+4" that started in 1983 (and I still don't know my ZIP+4).

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