Postal Transformation

by Lynne Belluscio

I received a letter from Ronald Corcoran, manager of the United States Postal Business Mail Entry in the Buffalo office. "We are making some changes that will transform the way you are doing business with your Post Office."

To make a long story short and giving me a chance to vent my consternation over the new "transformation", the letter went on to say that the LeRoy Post Office can no longer accept bulk mailings and that it will be necessary to take all bulk mail to Batavia.

If you have ever wondered why postal rates are going up, read on. What Ronald Corcoran is telling me, is that the *LeRoy Historical Society Newsletter* will go from LeRoy, to Batavia, to Buffalo, to Rochester and back to LeRoy - - averaging 150 miles for a round trip back home. Does this make sense to you?

I compared all the figures, and we have decided not to take Mr. Corcoran's offer to join the transformation. We will be mailing our newsletters by first class mail. It will cost us $250 more each year, but I am doing our part to keep the Post Office green and from burning all that gas.

Now that I've got that off my chest, I thought it might be interesting to look at the history of the United States Post Office. Following the Revolution, the postal system was organized to meet federal regulations. Post roads were established by Congress. The best known post road in New York was between New York City and Albany. Postal service in Western New York hinged on the possession of Fort Niagara, which was held by the British.

Although efforts were made as early at 1792 to get a post road established to the Genesee region, it wasn't until 1797, after the terms of the Jay Treaty turned the fort over to the United States, that a post road between Canandaigua and Fort Niagara was established.

The mail was delivered every two weeks. In 1804, Congress declared that the post road to Niagara had to pass by Buffalo Creek (later named Buffalo). But since there were no road between Buffalo and Fort Niagara, the mail had to be carried into Canada. (I think I see a pattern with decisions about mail being sent to Buffalo.)

With the outbreak of the War of 1812, it was necessary to establish a special "Express Mail" from the military front at Buffalo to Washington (via Avon, Bath and Williamsport.) The trip took an incredible time of 4 ½ days with a relay of post riders. (Regular mail from Buffalo to Albany took 5 days.)

Letters were generally sent collect until 1855 when it became necessary to prepay for delivery. (Stamps weren't introduced until 1847.) Postal rates were high. From 1816 to 1845, the rate for a single folded sheet of paper (Commercial envelopes weren't available until 1876.) was 6 cents for a distance under 30 miles, 10 cents for 30 to 80 miles and 25 cents for over 400 miles. The mail was delivered to a post office and the recipient had to pick up his mail.

Many early post offices were in the homes of the postmaster or a place of business or tavern. The local newspaper often listed the names of people who had mail. A "penny post" was established in Buffalo, which provided pick up and delivery service from a private independent carrier. Postmasters were required to mark each letter with the name of the post office and state and the date of receipt as well as the rate of postage. Hand stamps were not used in the early years. Postmasters were often paid 30% of the receipts of the office. For many small post offices, the income was small and as an incentive for postmasters they received franking privileges. It was not uncommon for postmasters to be agents for various enterprises - - -including lotteries - - and they used their franking privileges to conduct business.

The first post office in LeRoy was established on April 1, 1804 in the home of Asher Bates on East Main Road (opposite the LeRoy Machine shop building.)

LeRoy mail carrier - Frank Curtis.

Richard Stoddard succeeded Bates in 1808, who served only one year, turning the post office over to James Ganson. Samuel DeVeaux operated the post office in 1815 at the corner of Lake Street and Main (at the site of the Wiss Hotel.)

Herman Redfield served from 1816 until 1836, when the Village of LeRoy was incorporated and the post office became a part of the Village. The first postmaster in the Village was Perrin Smith. At one time the post office was at the Eagle Hotel and for a while it was on the north side of Main Street in the Arcade of the Lampson Block (destroyed by fire). In 1856, Alvanson Drake, the LeRoy postmaster received $1,181.64 compensation.

While I was writing this article, Ruth Harvie came across an article in the August 18, 1847 *LeRoy Gazette*. Obviously snail mail was an issue 164 years ago.

"By the arrival of Uncle Sam's mails on Thursday morning we received the daily papers of Saturday preceding - - only four day from Rochester a distance of 25 miles! The facilities for letter carrying have been brought to such a state of perfection that a letter or paper can be transmitted on any of the cross routes at a rate of 5 or even 6 miles per day!" Sometimes it amazes me. History continues to repeat itself!

LeRoy mail carrier -Lawrence Sellinger.