

Ballston Spa Post Office delivers best of the way we were - and are!

**This holiday feature was prepared by
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If Ken Burns ever produces a PBS documentary about the history of the United States Postal Service, I hope he'll consider sending a crew to One Front Street, Ballston Spa, NY 12020.

Inside the red brick landmark whose past patrons included Andy Rooney's ancestors and upon whose front steps masses huddled on a chilly long ago evening in hopes of catching glimpses of Barbra Streisand and Robert Redford during the filming of *The Way We Were*, Burns and company would discover a setting where the hometown hospitality of yesteryear seamlessly merges with the corporate efficiency of The Digital Age.

While I've not yet had an opportunity to thoroughly research the property's postal past, its services have been a cornerstone of my life since my parents uprooted their 10 children and transplanted our clan here 50 years ago as 1968 Christmas cards were being mailed out.

In those days US Mail collection bins dotted nearly every neighborhood and a day rarely passed when the one across the street from our new address didn't receive an offering from a member of The Hauprich Homestead.

I sometimes wonder what the not yet Sweet Sixteen me of early December 1968 would have thought had she been whisked to 2018 via a Time Machine to purchase stamps or post a package at the front counter where tech-savvy clerks now sport security ID badges on pristine USPS uniforms. The impressive array of computers and digital devices would have seemed like props from the set of Star Trek while greeting cards and decorative seasonal mailing supplies would surely have been impossible to resist purchasing!

Being dispatched half a century ago to walk the short distance from our family's Victorian-era abode on Church Avenue to the Post Office at the intersection of Front Street and Milton Avenue had in itself been an adventure a high school sophomore whose formative years had been spent in a post-World War Two suburb on the outskirts of Albany.

Inevitably the waiting line inside would include folks holding an astonishingly haphazard assortment of cardboard boxes and brown paper packages that were quite literally tied up with strings. Quite a contrast to today's customized Priority Mail envelopes and boxes which are available as a customer service to patrons wishing to invest in that USPS delivery option!

Among the friendly customer faces I often spotted inside the Post Office the month after Richard M. Nixon was elected to his first term as President of the United States were two of my mother's most beloved teaching colleagues at the Malta Avenue Elementary School: Albert and Helen Eisenhower. Imagine what our conversation might have been like then had I known that while I was convalescing from a debilitating condition five decades later, the daughter of this now late pair of prolific letter writers would utilize Priority Mail to send me an irreplaceable hand-crafted get well gift from The Villages in Florida.

Nestled within the sturdy USPS container that had travelled over a thousand miles to reach my home was an exquisite quilt made with “love, hope and prayers” by members of Dagne’s church. That this treasure — in which each knot represents a prayer for comfort and healing — arrived in mint condition is a testimonial to the professionalism of all who handled it along its postal journey from 32162 to 12020.

Dagne had earlier entrusted the USPS to deliver a similar Priority Mail box she had filled cherished photographs and souvenirs from Ballston Spa’s 1957 Sesquicentennial from there to here. Related stories and images will be woven into chapters of a forthcoming local history book, but in the meantime, [CLICK HERE](#) to view photo essays about how the Front Street Post Office contributed both to celebrations marking the 150th anniversary of the village’s charter and the subsequent Bicentennial of 2007.

If my now 65-year-old memory serves me right, posters featuring some of America’s Most Wanted were among the notices that filled a bulletin board in the postal lobby of my youth – perhaps because a grisly murder had taken place on the property in 1833 when the Eagle Hotel stood on the site. The brick and mortar Post Office was constructed on the lot after the century-old wooden lodging was destroyed by fire in the early 1930s.

It’s hard to say how the adolescent me who was standing in a line awaiting my turn for service at the postal counter would have reacted to the news that some have long believed the building to be haunted. But I do know with certainty that she found it fascinating to prepare a related story for a book she was writing earlier this year. ([CLICK HERE](#) to read “*Eagle Hotel once stood on Post Office site. Jury is still out on whether or not historic property is haunted. YOU be the judge!*”)

At the time I began writing Mornings with Morley (a tribute to the life and legacy of Village History Consultant Maurice “Christopher” Morley, who was 89 when he passed away in 2011), I’d not yet fully grasped the significance of the fact that his father Edward had presided over Ballston Spa’s first Air Mail delivery in 1938. Nor had I fully grasped the importance of the fact that Hollywood had chosen Front Street as the backdrop for select scenes that were filmed here in 1973 for *The Way We Were* because it still looked much as it had shortly before America entered the Second World War. ([CLICK HERE](#) to view related stories.) What I do know is that the local Post Office became even more important when I lived in Scandinavia and Canada during the better part of 1971 – 1989. In those pre-email (and other forms of social media) days, I depended upon Air Mail deliveries to keep me posted about the lives of friends and relations in the USA. (Those who invested in stock for light-weight Air Mail stationary now know who to thank for the extra profits they reaped during those two decades!)

FOOTNOTE TO THE YOUNGER GENERATION: If you’re wondering why I didn’t simply text or SnapChat, it’s because the Internet wasn’t the only thing that was absent from my universe. Cell phones were also not yet in common use during the era in question. Penning letters that could travel thousands of miles for pennies on the dollar was the way to go when long distance “land line” telephone charges were prohibitive.

In hindsight, I’m glad we had no high-tech alternatives because the Air Mail letters I received not only from my father and mother (born in 1924 and 1925, respectively) and my nine siblings (who debuted between 1948 and 1963) but also from a host of other ancestors who’d been born in the late 1800s and early 1900s, can still be held in my hands — and close to my heart. Some of those sealed with a kiss by my Nana continue to hold the scent of her perfume. Had the accounts of everyday life as it was during the 1970s and 1980s arrived via text or email, they would most assuredly have been deleted or otherwise vanished into Cyber Space by now. How grateful I am to have these tangible, precious – no, priceless – links to my heritage!

But the greatest postal-related gift of all was of an expected Return to Sender variety that transpired around my 65th birthday when my parents handed me a hefty folder containing letters I had written to them. The communications had been penned during my years as a Rotary International exchange student in Denmark, and later as a college student, a budding journalist and, best of all, a young mother in Canada. While I’d lovingly filled Baby Books north of the border with entries of infant and toddler milestones, I’d been far too busy to keep a journal in which everyday life was recorded. Recently reading long ago passages (some punctuated with tiny sticky fingerprints) about the more spontaneous antics of my daughters as proudly shared in letters to their maternal grandparents brought many a smile to my face as well as an occasional nostalgic tear to my eye.

When I penned the preceding passages in December 2018 with a box of Christmas cards on my desk waiting to be signed, sealed and delivered, I was at a loss to adequately express my deep appreciation for those affiliated with the Ballston Spa Post Office who helped make Christmases Past so joyful. As for Christmas Present, despite being as busy as elves at this time of year, staff members make certain that every letter a child sends to Jolly Old St. Nick from the 12020 ZIP Code is promptly forwarded to the North Pole. Assisting with the success of this holiday tradition are honorary postal elves disguised as Eagle Matt Lee Fire Department volunteers who regularly empty the festive mailbox with Santa's name on it.

But that's just the tip of the iceberg. All who serve under Village Postmaster Joseph Amash and Supervisor Greg Morley are positive reflections of their leadership and a credit to the USPS. Now – as it was when I first set foot inside the Post Office lobby half a century ago -- the ambiance is welcoming, with window clerks greeting “regulars” by name as co-workers toil diligently behind-the-scenes to ensure PO boxes are filled and mail is sorted so carriers can get out on schedule. (I sometimes think rural route drivers who must often navigate remote roadways in all kinds of weather must be cut from the same courageous cloth as early Air Mail pilots!)

If I were to contribute names to Jolly Old St. Nick's “Nice List”, the compilation would need to begin with my longtime carrier Tony Sgambelluri and those whose faces are most familiar to me because they have been at the front window the longest: Tammy Biasini, Brian Cota and Matthew Hall. (Photos and captions about the Postmaster, Tony and Tammy accompany this web presentation while future features will shed additional light on ways they, Brian and Matthew have “delivered” exceptional window counter service over the years.)

Other Distribution/Window Clerks I'm hoping to be able to tell Santa more about in the New Year include Scott Adams, Kevin Adamkiewicz, Erick DeJesus, Katie Langford, Kristen Mancini and Yoey Peet. The balance of the “Nice List” would read along the lines of: Distribution Clerks Dick Brown and Tom Rielly; City Carriers Amber Bazan, Josh Burke, James Calkins, Mike Denisio, Betsy Gadoua, Carol Salerno; and rural carriers Steve Lake, Chris LaShomb, Tim Schutte and Tom Soltran. May Santa drop a lump of coal in mystocking if any names are missing!

In closing, I like to think that if he were still alive today, legendary “60 Minutes” commentator Andy Rooney ([CLICK HERE to read about his boyhood ties to Ballston Spa](#)) would do a segment urging any Scrooges and Grinches out there to think twice before grouching about the price of postage. Thanks to the USPS, presents that failed to make it into Santa's sleigh on time continue to be safely and expediently transported from sea to shining sea . . . and beyond. Try doing that via email!

POST SCRIPT: Should Ken Burns ever decide to make that USPS documentary, may I wish upon a star that he gives his stamp of approval to Disney's “*The Mail Must Go Through*” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=df0N0AepSO8>) as the soundtrack! For those who care to sing along, here are the lyrics by Larry Croce that remain as true today as when they were first recorded on vinyl records in the 1960s:

When you mail a letter, you take it anywhere.
On foot, by truck, by airplane. The postman gets it there.
So write a letter to a friend, Maybe she'll write you.
No matter what, you always know.
The mail must go through.

CHORUS

Well The mail must go through. The mail must go through.
No matter if it rains or snows. The mail must go through. I
say

The mail must go through. The mail must go through. No
matter if it rains or snows. The mail must go through. Some
folks live in a city, some live in a little town.

Even if you live out on a farm.
There's a postman making his rounds.

So mail someone a letter, even just a card will do.
You know it's nice when the postman
has a letter in his sack for you.
The mail must go through. The mail must go through. No
matter if it rains or snows. The mail must go through. I
say

The mail must go through. The mail must go through. No
matter it rains or snows. The mail must go through. Oh
Yeah

The mail must go through. The mail must go through. No
matter if it rains or snows. The mail must go through.
You Know That

The mail must go through. The mail must go through. No
matter if it rains or snows. The mail must go through.