

HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT
OF RURAL FREE DELIVERY
IN THE TOWN OF MACEDON

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INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the 19th century, America was primarily an agrarian nation, populated in the majority by independent, self-sufficient farmers. By the dawn of the 20th century, however, the country had passed through a period of economic upheaval. The farmer no longer held a dominant position, but figured as only one of many groups that were participating in a struggle for survival. His overall concepts had gradually changed from that of making a living, to that of making money.¹ Banding together with fellow farmers, he began to advocate certain reforms that would be beneficial to his way of life. One such reform was the "modernization", so to speak, of the postal system.

Throughout this tumultuous century, the unsatisfactory methods by which the farmers obtained their mail remained unchanged. Yet, the volume of mail that the farmer received had increased tremendously. The mails had come to be the life blood of information for the farmer.² The more farming became^y money-making proposition, the more the farmer had to be aware of the happenings not only in his immediate surroundings, but throughout the country. The mails

¹ American Heritage; The Magazine of History, Volume VII Number 3, (April, 1956), p.52.

² Arthur E. Summerfield as told to Charles Hurd, U.S. Mail--The Story of the United States Postal Service (New York: Holt; Rinehart and Winston, 1960) p. 84.

were the most reliable source of news. They were the "wires" along which market fluctuations were transmitted; along which new ideas and new machinery were brought to his attention.

Through the National Grange and other organizations the farmer's plea for improved postal service was heard. In 1891, Postmaster General John C. Wanamaker outlined the "Four Great Postal Departures",³ one of which was the establishment of a Rural Free Delivery System.⁴ If approved, this meant that the mail would be delivered practically to the farmer's door, and would remove from the farmer's shoulder the burden of having to contrive methods of getting his mail. Congress approved the plan for Rural Delivery in 1892, but it wasn't until the closing months of Grover Cleveland's administration that sufficient funds were appropriated for a true test of the proposed system.⁵ Thus, on October 1st, 1896, in Jefferson County at the Eastern most tip of West Virginia, five routes with a total length of 68 miles were put into operation.⁶ This attempt proved a resounding success. Rural areas all over the country began to petition for free delivery.

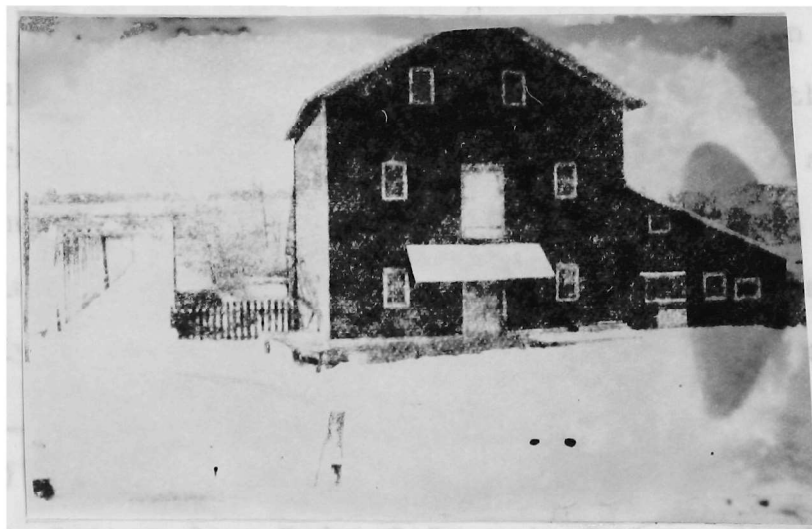
³ Marshall Cushing, The Story of Our Post Office (Boston: A. M. Thayer and Co., 1892) p. 1004.

⁴ Gwendolyn M. Aaberg. The R. F. D. Golden Jubilee 1896-1946 (1946) p. 2.

⁵ Aaberg, loc. cit.

⁶ Summerfield, op. cit., p. 83.

The area surrounding the town of Macedon, Wayne County, New York was typical of such sections. The farmers here were finding it increasingly difficult to get to the post office with sufficient frequency. Even though there were as many as three post offices serving the area at one time,⁷ it was not uncommon for patrons to ride or walk as much as five miles. to get their mail.⁸ Some sought to reduce the inefficiency of this system as in the case of those who lived in the neighborhood of the old red mill. The "mill... used to be a distributing point. Anyone that went to the post office (in this case, Betz's store in Farmington) would pick up the mail for a half-dozen or dozen people.... there was a rack in there where they would put the mail and



The old red mill location of
which is shown on map one

⁷ See Appendix, page 1.

⁸ Interview--not taped--with Mr. Willard Briggs and Mr. Leland Cooper 6:40-7:00 March 12, 1961.

people would come in and get it".⁹ Yet such improvisations were unable to offset growing demands for a regular and efficient mail delivery. Rural delivery had proved successful in many surrounding towns: in Newark, the first system in Wayne County, established in 1899, and Walworth established in 1900. It was being considered by the neighboring town of Palmyra.¹⁰ "Why", people began to ask, "couldn't it be brought to Macedon?"

"Our aim is constantly toward such improvement as shall help our members and benefit mankind,"¹¹ wrote a member of the local grange, and it was with this purpose in mind that the Farmington Grange, No. 431, became one of the principal movers in bringing R.F.D. to Macedon. The ground work was laid on May 19th, 1900 when "Brother Allen spoke in regard to the advisability of grange taking up the subject of free mail delivery."¹² In opposition rose a number of the older and more conservative members. As one of the Farmington Grange, at that time recalls, "I remember distinctly a lot of arguments pro and con in the grange,

⁹ Interview---Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Allen--on tape-- 2:30-3:30 March 5, 1961.

¹⁰ Letter from Federal Records Center, St. Louis, Mo. to myself. August 8, 1960.

¹¹ Mary Louise Eldredge, *Pioneers of Macedon* (Fairport: Mail Printing House, 1912) p. 178.

¹² Farmington Grange minutes of May 19th, 1900-- Lizzie M. Ketkamier, Secretary.

about rural free delivery of the mail...I remember my father voicing the sentiment that it would be pretty expensive...some were bitterly opposed to it. Why? Well, I can tell you what I heard Ed Mott¹³ say, I can remember seeing him bang his hand down on the table (and) he says, 'By George, I want the privilege of going after my mail'. His mail was delivered there in the "Hook" at Betz's store, and if he had to of (sic) gone to Macedon after it, he might have felt differently about it."¹⁴ The majority of the members did feel differently about it and due to their efforts, during the summer of 1901 the plans were laid for three routes originating in Macedon.¹⁵

"This is the first day of our free rural mail", wrote one observer, "and we were much excited over it."¹⁶ Another writing home from California, later, reflected-"there was another big piece of news,...the rural delivery...Isn't that great!"¹⁷ Such were the favorable reactions, when, on a "mild and nice"¹⁸ Saturday, the 1st of February, 1902, R.F.D. came to Macedon.

¹³ See appendix, page 1.

¹⁴ Allen, Loc. cit.

¹⁵ Map, Rural Delivery System in Macedon, 1901.

¹⁶ Diary of A. Jennie Wilson. February 1st, 1902.

¹⁷ Letter from National City, California, by J. Oliver Wilson to Mrs. Sarah S. Wilson. February 9, 1902. (In my possession)

¹⁸ Diary of A. Jenny Wilson, loc. cit.

Two routes started that day, with Walter Wilcoxon going south on No. One and Austin Gage, taking the north, No. two. (Later that same year, on July 1st, Frank Warren began a third route, traveling north to Lincoln, in the town of Walworth.¹⁹



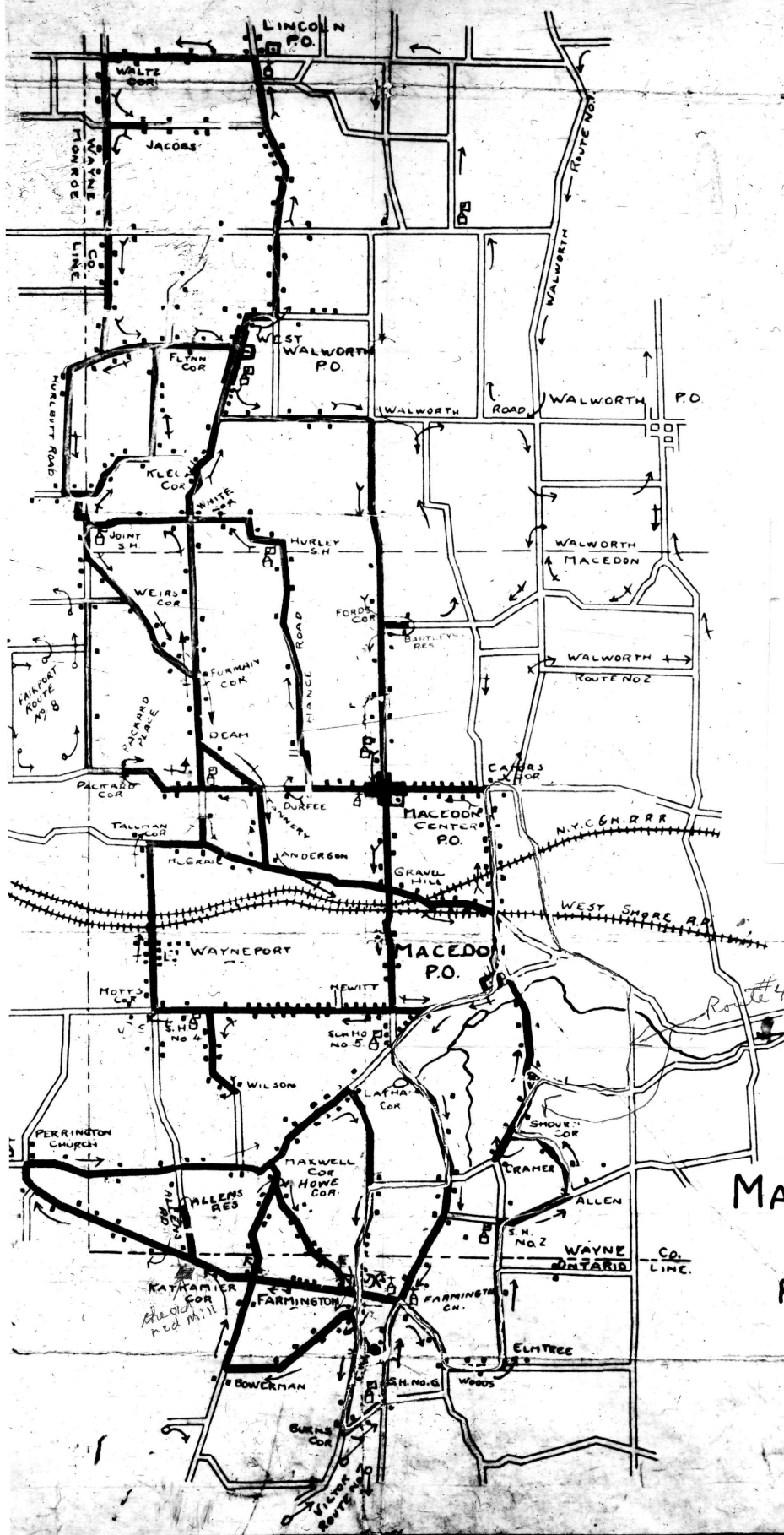
Left to right
Will Sitzer, (Austin Gage's replacement)
Frank Warren and Walter Wilcoxon

As time passed, the routes were to undergo three major changes. In 1909, a fourth route was added. In 1917 the routes were consolidated into three. This change was caused primarily by the introduction of the auto. The last change ^{no verb} in 1933 when the three routes were further consolidated into two.²⁰

¹⁹ Map, loc. cit.

²⁰ William Frank--taped interview--August 1960
3:00-5:00.

	Route #1	Route #2	Route #3	Route #4
1900				
	FEB 1, 1902	FEB 1, 1902 AUSTIN GAGE	JULY 1, 1902 FRANK WARREN	
		APRIL 1, 1904 JOHN STEWART MAY 21, 1904		
	WALTER WILCOXEN			
1910		WILLIT SITZER		JUNE 1, 1909
				WILL STEVENSON
	WILCOXEN - DIED 1917	SHOBB REPLACED - 1917		DISCONTINUED 1917
	GO WEHRLIN (SUBSTITUTE)			
1920	BILL FRANK (SUBSTITUTE)			
	1923			
	BILL FRANK (Regular)	WILL STEVENSON		
930				
			DISCONTINUED 1933	
940				
		1944 GEO. MONROE EARL MAXWELL		
		1946 DOEBEREINER (temp) JULY 1947		
950		HAROLD DOEBEREINER (Reg.)		
Q42				

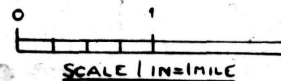


Map #1

The old red mill is shown in blue ink. It had been added to this map, but did not show up on the photostat.

Route #4 is the white line that covers part of #2 and #3. It was penciled in after 1908 and prior to 1909.

MAP OF
MACEDON, WAYNE CO., N.Y.
AND VICINITY
SHOWING
RURAL FREE DELIVERY ROUTES
Nos. 1, 2, and 3.
1901.



ROUTE ONE

When it came time to provide a carrier for route one, the choice was a man who for a number of years had given faithful and dependable service as he transported the mail between Macedon and the Farmington post office. Thus, Walter Wilcoxon was given a route that was, in part, not unfamiliar to him. His appointment though was accompanied by an interesting circumstance. On the very day that Mr. Wilcoxon began his duties, the President of the United States ordered that all future carriers would come under Civil Service. This made him one of the last carriers to be exempt from taking the Civil Service examination.²¹



ring cap
Walter Wilcoxon
1908

Mr. Wilcoxon planned carefully for the new route. He had built into his cutter a pigeon hole affair, into which he sorted his mail.²² There was one thing, though, that he could not control, nor completely provide for, and that was the weather. By the following Monday, February 3rd, 1902, as one of the patrons put it, "We are snowbound,

²¹ Aaberg, op. cit., p. 10.

²² Mrs. Edna Plumb--daughter of Walter Wilcoxon, a taped interview--February 20, 1961, 7:00-8:00.

neither the mail carrier nor the milkman could reach us today."²³ The following description of his route, (that between Wilson Road and the South Perinton Methodist Church) was typical of the situation that confronted him that day and often thereafter.

"The mails are away (sic) behind time...We have had some of the worst weather of the winter. The snow has kept coming till (sic) the roads are seemingly in the air. Whether you believe it or nor, we more than once, on the way to church (South Perinton Methodist) could look down at the fence posts. If one ever got far out of the road in some places, I'm afraid they would stay there awhile...We thought the roads were bad enough, till (sic) we got to the fields in Reed's. There we thought they were too bad. They go differently than they did last winter, and so, instead of going down that steep hill, they go on the side of it. Near the fence it gets still steeper and very little would make the sleigh roll 'til one reached California or something else. At Silas Pannel's the road had been shoveled some and then we were on the level, I mean the runners were, with the fence, along the electric road."²⁴ (the old Rochester, Syracuse and Eastern Trolley)

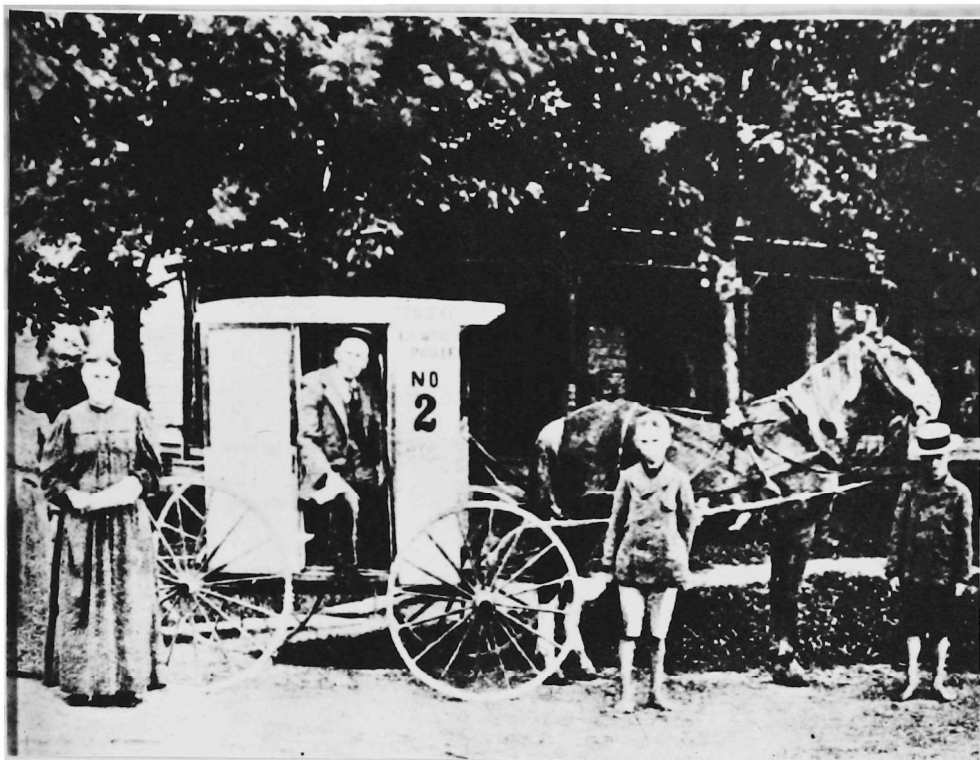
As spring came, the twenty-seven miles²⁵ of road he covered were slowly cleared and he took to wheels. When summer came, he purchased, from the Studebaker Company, a white standard, rural delivery wagon, resembling the one below:²⁶

²³ Letter dated February 3, 1902, Macedon, N.Y. from Sarah S. Wilson to Lewis M. Wilson. (in my possession)

²⁴ Letter dated February 19, 1905, Macedon, N.Y. written by Sara E. Wilson to Mr. M. N. Wilson.

²⁵ Mrs. Edna Plumb, loc. cit.

²⁶ Loc. cit.



also by carriage 12

in air 11

some 11

Affectionately called the "white post office",²⁷ by some patrons, "It looked somewhat like a milk wagon, with sliding doors."²⁸ Time and use, though, proved it impractical as it was top heavy and unmanageable. Thus, as one of his

²⁷ Taped interview with Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert Padgham, March 12, 1961, 7:00-8:00.

²⁸ Mrs. Edna Plumb, loc. cit.

patrons relates, he came to carry in an ordinary wagon or cutter, "a bag a great deal like the carriers had in the cities, and the mail was all dumped in--they didn't have any way of sorting down there in Macedon...he came up to the "Hook" here (Farmington) and was fairly frantic. He came down to the house and sat there and sorted the mail the way it went around the route...He was sort of a nervous person and he wanted his job done and done right, and in good season."²⁹ In time, the bag was also replaced, and the "mail was put up, folded and strapped, so that it came off in order of the route, and if you had more than one strap could hold, you would have as many straps as you needed."³⁰ This method proved the most practical of all and is still used by carriers today.

Mr. Wilcoxon and his patrons were mutually friendly. "He was faithful, sometimes not getting back until five o'clock at night."³¹ It was in thanks for his service, that "one winter, one Christmas time, they (his patrons), bought him a long black fur coat and a dandy pair of gloves."³² At times when the weather was quite severe, the people would help him out, as Mr. Lewis Allen did: "Once when the roads were all drifted full and he was anxious to get

²⁹ Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert Padgham, loc. cit.

³⁰ Loc. cit.

³¹ Mrs. Edna Plumb, loc. cit.

³² Loc. cit.

the mail around, we put his horse, it was all tired out, in our barn. I hitched the team to the sleigh, bobsleigh, and I took him all around this side of his route."³³

Through a span of fifteen odd years, Mr. Wilcoxon faithfully served his patrons. At first he was paid six hundred dollars a year³⁴ but gradually worked up to twelve hundred dollars per annum.³⁵ During this time he saw the transition from horse to auto and purchased his first car in 1916.³⁶ Reflecting on the passing of the years, he remarked, "the picture changes quite rapidly. I go by a place one day and the doctor's rig is standing in the yard and seems as though the very next week, the kid comes out and gets the mail."³⁷ With the help of his son Milo, who was sworn in as deputy, he carried mail practically to the time of his death.³⁸

Ed Wehrlin and Bill Frank served the interim until the latter, a veteran of W.W.I, was appointed regular carrier on June 1, 1923.³⁹ Bill Frank was immediately

³³ Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Allen, loc. cit.

³⁴ Letter from Federal Records Center, loc. cit.

³⁵ Memorandum No. 160--August 18, 1917, written by W. J. Satterfield, Inspector Division of Rural Service.

³⁶ Mrs. Edna Plumb, loc. cit.

³⁷ Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert Padgham, loc. cit.

³⁸ Loc. cit.

³⁹ William Frank, loc. cit.

confronted with numerous problems. When R.F.D. was established in Macedon, not everyone was served; and a few of those who were had to walk to a nearby corner or intersection. As a result of this, the Post Office Department fell under constant pressure to further extend the system and in 1909, a fourth route was added.⁴⁰ A few years later, however, the government's policy was changed.⁴¹ In memorandum No. 160, to the fourth assistant postmaster, it was recommended that a "revision of the following routes and the discontinuance of.....

.....1.....
route number four in Macedon⁴² ... "take place. "After I got on (carrier Bill Frank speaking), people kicked about it and they made application"⁴³ for the routes to be extended and delivery given back. Gradually the government changed its position and a difficult period passed.

In 1924 the horse was the mainstay for winter delivery, as the auto, used quite extensively by the carriers for passable roads was as yet not match for winter roads, and it was with his horse, a high spirited Morgan,

⁴⁰ Letter from Federal Records Center, loc. cit.

⁴¹ William Frank, loc. cit.

⁴² Memorandum, loc. cit.

⁴³ William Frank, loc. cit.

that carrier Bill Frank had a number of interesting experiences.⁴⁴

Back in 1924, the snow was about that deep. We couldn't get out for three days, we didn't get any mail for two...Finally I ventured out--they all told me I was crazy---I had this horse, a big long-legged animal--He was kind of a wild one--I used to take him out on a long rope (and)...halter, and chased him around the lot, to get him unwound a bit---(then) I would take the automobile out and go down to the post office and get the mail,...bring that up, and pack it all in the cutter in the barn,...hook him on...(keeping) the doors closed...(as) he wouldn't wait. (then), giving the door one reef...I (got) in while he was going out....This one morning he started right out down the road...by the hardware, and up that hill---He mog(ged) just as fast as he could go. I let him up Paddy's Lane and back...he seemed to slow right down...his ears drooped down sideways, and he tried to cough, his tail came out straight,...finally he did cough and blood went from both nostrils, from one fence to the other,--he had a hemorrhage. Well, it took the life right out of him. I went up as far as where John Maney lived, where Cahills live now,...I drove in the yard, and asked...if he would give me some warm water so I could wash out his (the horse's) mouth and nostrils. "By God! he says, 'you'd better go right back home, you have no business being out on the road on a day like today.'...he then brought...water and washed out his nostrils.

I remember one time when I was coming down the main road, (rt. 31) (in a cutter) and Oliver Knight was walking--I picked him up and gave him a ride---Who ever had had this horse before me had, when they broke him, (he was a little balky) flailed him with a chain---there were a few cars on the road, mostly model T's, those days,--with chains on (for) the roads were covered with snow,---(as soon as he heard them)...He would start right out----and I remember Oliver Knight sitting there

⁴⁴ William Frank, loc. cit.

grabbing hold of the seat, sitting up straight, and I (kept) right ahead of that model T--Well, he was a Morgan, a great big long legged animal, and when the going was good, he would knock off 10 miles an hour.

I got up there one time, by Frank X Frank's, just before you get to the Bastian place⁴⁵---Down that grade, there was always a lot of snow,---and I had this cutter,...with a box in the back, that carried all the extra stuff I couldn't get in the front----They had shoveled it (this grade), by hand...but didn't shovel it wide enough...and of course (with) your cutter, (the) horse is over half and travels in the track. That puts your cutter to one side---(so), the one runner went way up on the bank and tipped me out...(luckily)⁴⁶ I had the lines buckled and made it all right."⁴⁶

Bill was good to the people on his route, and they in turn to him, Once, however, a lady had misgivings about his handling of the mail.

One woman came out one time, and wanted to know what I did with her letter.---I said 'I don't know what I did with it, why?' 'Well' she said 'I had a letter sent to me and I never got it.'---I said 'I was sorry,---'Where was it mailed?'---'Fairport'---So I trotted out my little pad and pencil and I said---'We'll see what we can do about it...will you tell me just exactly what time it was mailed, by whom, and in what mail box.'... 'Well,' she said, her husband mailed it---she finally said she wrote it herself--she never got it, because,---She thought---the mail had been going astray---and that's what she did to find out.---I went ahead and took every thing down---'I'll see what I can find out about this' The next day come along, and there was a letter in the box saying, 'never mind, I gave it⁴⁷ to my husband to mail, and he never mailed it!"

Bill Frank was always willing to help out. It didn't matter whether it was saving stamps for young collectors, putting

⁴⁵ See map one.

⁴⁶ William Frank, loc. cit.

⁴⁷ Loc.-cit.

out fires, or helping with the chores.

(during the summer, some of the) "farmers would go to the Palmyra Fair...and they'd have pigs---fixing the pails and meal and everything---and they would ask me when I'd come by, if I would dump the pails for them.

.....
I stoped in one place one time, oh it was a bitter cold day...I had a register or something for (this) lady)...She stuck her head out the door and she said to me 'While you're here, would you get me a pail of water? It's so cold, I hate to go out'-- so I took the pail and got...her...water."⁴⁸

During World War II, if on his return to the post office at the end of the day he found letters from the boys overseas, he would call and tell the ever-anxious relatives.⁴⁹

Because of his kindness and personal interest, among other outstanding qualities, his patrons will long remember him, and it was with deep regret, that they saw him retire on December 1st, 1956, after thirty-three and one-half years of service.⁵⁰

The interim between the present appointment held by Mr. Morris DePaape and his retirement, was filled by Mr. Dennis Church and Mr. Gene Maney.⁵¹

⁴⁸ William Frank, loc. cit.

⁴⁹ Interview with Miss Sara Wilson, April 16, 1961, 3:00, not taped.

⁵⁰ William Frank, loc. cit.

⁵¹ Present postal records, via Macedon's Postmaster, John Mosher.

ROUTE TWO

The opening day of route two was recorded by a patron as follows: "Austin Gage is the carrier, he got along at 9:30 a.m. (sic) (to Wilson Road, the M.N. Wilson place) had a cutter and two horses...we each had a letter in the mail box for the new carrier, four in all." Other than this entry in a diary,⁵² there is not much to be found concerning Austin Gage. He was a regular carrier for only two years—from 1902 until March 31st, 1904,⁵³ and his death is recorded in the minutes of the Farmington Grange on May 2, 1904:⁵⁴ John Stewart acted as temporary replacement from April 1st, 1904 until May 31st, 1904,⁵⁵ Succeeding Mr. Stewart on the first of June came Will Sitzer.⁵⁶

Willit Sitzer lived in Wayneport where the Lewis Frey family lives today.⁵⁷ Here, for a while, he served in a dual capacity; as a farmer as well as a carrier.⁵⁸ He had little taste for farming, caring only for watermelons and

⁵² Entry in the Diary of G.J. Wilson, loc. cit.

⁵³ Letter from Federal Records Center, loc. cit.

⁵⁴ Loc. cit.

⁵⁵ Loc..cit.

⁵⁶ Loc..cit.

⁵⁷ Taped interview with Mr. and Mrs. Harvey MacLeod, February 22, 1961, 7:30-8:00.

⁵⁸ Loc.: cit.

potatoes out of all he produced.⁵⁹ As a result of his disinterest he eventually sold ~~the~~ farm and moved to a house in Macedon, near the site of the present Lincoln-Rochester Bank.⁶⁰

Mr. Sitzler had a regular mail wagon with pigeon holes in it.⁶¹ Interestingly enough it was useable in any weather, having runners that could be clamped on for winter and wheels for good roads.⁶² As time passed, he too, bought an auto.

It was a one cylinder International Harvester car with high wheels, big solid rubber tires and an exposed chain drive.⁶³

Will was a little unsure of this car. "He used to take it out in the morning early (this was after he moved to Macedon) to make sure it was going to run and run it around the square."⁶⁴ Soon he switched to a more reliable Model "T".

"He used to brag about one tire he had on there that he claimed had run ten thousand miles...At that time if we were to get twenty-five hundred miles to a tire we thought it was pretty good."⁶⁵

⁵⁹ Interview, not taped, with Charles Bulis on March 5, 1961, from 4:00-4:15.

⁶⁰ Mrs. Edne Plumb, loc. cit.

⁶¹ Allyn, Byron, interview not taped on March 12, 1961 from 3:00-3:30.

⁶² Mr. Briggs and Mrs Cooper, loc. cit.

⁶³ Interview with Robert W. Briggs on February 21, 1961 from 9:30-9:45. (not taped)

⁶⁴ Mrs. Edna Plumb, loc. cit.

⁶⁵ Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert Padgham, loc. cit.

As a carrier he was thoughtful of his patrons, going ~~out of the way to deliver mail to~~ out of the way to deliver mail to Wayneport even when there was a legal holiday.⁶⁶

He, too, had difficulties with the weather. One of his patron's remarked in her diary that she "sent picture postcards (today) and someone found the cards in the wagon tracks where the carrier had lost them in the wind."⁶⁷

When on November 1st, 1917 the fourth route was discontinued, Willit Sitzer was relieved of his job and William Stevenson was moved from route four to route two.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Mr. and Mrs. Harvey MacLeod, loc. cit.

⁶⁷ Entry from the Diary of Hester Day, January 16, 1913.

⁶⁸ Interview with Bill Frank on February 22, 1961 from 5:00-5:30, Not taped.