

Town of Ossian Historical Society Newsletter

18th edition

June, 2015

Airmail Beacon System

In the mid-19th century the western part of our country was largely unexplored with very little law and no coast-to-coast message delivery. When gold was discovered in 1848 thousands moved across country from the east, the trip taking from three to six weeks. In 1860 the Pony Express revolutionized cross country mail by offering delivery in about ten days, however while this was significant it was still inefficient compared to stagecoach lines. The Pony Express did not win its mail contract after its first year due to higher costs and poor economies. With the transcontinental telegraph line completed in 1861 and the threat of the Civil War the Pony Express became obsolete. In the late 19th century the reliability of mail delivery improved but not its speed. With the invention of the airplane intercontinental mail delivery obtained a breakthrough.

The east coast of the country had limited airmail service by 1918 and two years after a transcontinental airmail route was finally established. In the early days there were no aids to help pilots find their way. They flew by

looking out of their cockpit windows for landmarks or by using automobile road maps. In 1919 U.S. Army Air Service Lt. Donald Bruner began using bonfires and the first artificial beacons to help with night navigation. In February 1921 pilot Jack Knight tested this with an all-night flight to Chicago from North Platt, Nebraska. He found his way across the prairie with the help of bonfires lit by Post Office staff, farmers and the public. In July of 1923, using Bruner's ideas for lighted boundaries, spot-lit windsocks and rotating beacons on towers, the Army opened an experimental lighted airway between McCook Field in Dayton, Ohio and Norton Field in Columbus, Ohio, a distance of 72 miles.



Across the United States there is a network of concrete arrows, some will have a small shack and few a metal tower at their base. The reason for the arrows was that they were used to help pilots navigate flight at night. In 1924 the Postal Service developed a system of navigation beacons extending from New York to San Francisco that would help pilots fly across country at night. They used a system of about 1500 airmail beacons that were about 3 to 5 miles apart. They featured a 50 foot tower with rotating lights on a concrete foundation in the shape of a giant arrow measuring 50 to 70 feet long. On the top of the towers was a rotating beacon that would flash every 10 seconds. In clear weather the lights could be seen for 10 miles. Each tower had a site number painted on it for daytime identification. The program was a success and continued to grow. The Department of Commerce took over the beacon system in 1926 and it continued to expand until 1929. The beacon program operated full-scale until 1933 when advancements in technology and higher operating costs during the Depression rendered it obsolete. Various beacons would continue to operate in limited capacity into the 1940s. At that time most were disassembled for their steel which was desperately needed for the war effort. The last one was shut down in 1973 although the Montana

Department of Transportation reportedly continues to operate around 19 updated beacons in the mountains of western Montana.

Today most towers are gone and numerous concrete arrows were destroyed during WWII so as to not help enemy pilots visually navigate the country.



On August 1, 1928 the Post Office reduced airmail rates from 10 cents per half-ounce letter to 5 cents per one-ounce letter. A new five cent stamp was issued on July 25. This stamp was the first bicolor airmail stamp issued since the Jennies of 1918. The stamp depicted the airmail beacon light located on Sherman's Hill in the Rocky Mountains of Wyoming except that a picture of the top of the tower was from the tower outside of Omaha, Nebraska. Over 106 million of the stamp was printed.

An incomplete list of the beacons on the east coast of the United States listed two beacons in Livingston County, one in Ossian and one in Mt. Morris. The beacon in Ossian number was number 5 and there was no concrete arrow located

here. There were also beacons located in Elmira, Campbell, Towlesville (Steuben County), Arkport and Castile near us. Ossian's beacon was located on Ebert Road near Walworth Road. The NGS data sheet for the Ossian beacon states that it was located about four miles east of Dalton and it was the rotating beacon light No. 5 on the Buffalo-New York Route. The beacon was taken down but residents still talk about it and have memories of it such as picking berries near there, seeing pictures of family members on the tower and seeing it flashing on the way home and also staying away from there because of rattlesnakes.

Sources: Concrete Arrows and the U.S. Airmail Beacon System

U.S. Airmail 5cent Beacon Stamp of 1928: #C11

U.S. Centennial of Flight Commission
Airway Beacon List - Eastern U.S.
Rhea Walker, Historian

Days Gone By

Dansville Breeze Sat., Jan. 2, 1937

Program at Meeting of Ossian Grange

The following program was given at last night's meeting of Ossian Grange: Opening song; harmonica solo Marvin Wheaton; talk, "What Was Accomplished in Grange Last Year", Earnest Sample; talk "What We Hope to Do This Year", James Gibson; "What

Was Liked Best for Program", by various members, recreational number and closing song.

Refreshments were served. Dancing followed the meeting. There was a good attendance.

There will be a dance next Friday Night.

Dansville Breeze Thurs., Jan. 14, 1937

Ladies Aid Society of Ossian Presbyterian Church yesterday started making a quilt to be disposed of at a sale in the near future.

Dansville Breeze, Sat., Jan. 16, 1937

Men were winners in an attendance contest conducted by Ossian Grange through the past six months, and were feted at a supper by the losing women last night at 7 o'clock preceding the meeting. The women, anxious for revenge, expect to win another attendance contest to run until mid-July.

A dance will be held in Ossian Grange Hall next Friday night with music by Ollie Stockings' orchestra. There was good attendance last night.

The program: Opening song; reading by James Covert, "My Favorite Dessert, and How It Is Made", by the men; "What to do to Interest Members, Who Do Not Attend Meetings", answered by various members; reading by Ray Weidman and closing song "America the Beautiful".

Dansville Breeze Mon., Jan. 18, 1937,
Today

Meeting of Association of School Teachers of Sparta, West Sparta, Ossian and Dansville in Public Library in the evening.

Genesee Country Express, July 1, 1932
Dansville Contractor Low on Ossian Hall Project

Dansville – Clarence MacNaughton of this village was the low bidder on a contract calling for construction of a new town hall in the town of Ossian, bids for which were received by Town Clerk Frank McTarnaghan on Tuesday. Mr. MacNaughton, with a bid of about \$1300 was one of seven building contractors who submitted proposals for the building.

The town board will meet in a few days to award the contract.

The new building will take the place of the old Ossian Town Hall, destroyed by fire the latter part of May.

Genesee Country Express, Thursday,
Sept. 1, 1960

3 Murphys, 4 Others Due to See the World

Seven Dansville youths enlisted in the US Navy Tuesday and have been sent to the Great Lakes Naval Station, Ill., for boot camp training.

The group includes John Reinholtz, Robert Hillsdorf, Paul and Jack Murphy, Charles Wallace, Larry Murphy and Kenneth Guy.

Birth, Death and Marriage Records on file in Ossian Town Hall

The Earliest recorded dates for the above records in Ossian are: birth – 1882, death – 1885 and marriage – 1882. There were births, deaths and marriages before these dates in Ossian but records of them were not required by law to be kept until 1880. Some of our residents also were in towns around Ossian when these events happened so they would be recorded in those towns.

Upcoming Events

August 30, 2015 – Author of Birding in Central and Western New York, Norm Wolfe, will present a program, Bird Identification and More, at the Ossian Town Hall at 2pm. Refreshments will be available.

October 17, 2015 – Cider and Cookie Sale Purchase cider by the gallon and cookies by the dozen at the Ossian Town Hall parking lot, 9am until 1pm or gone.

December 12, 2015 – Chili luncheon, cookie sale and local vendors at the Ossian Community Center.

Due to certain circumstances we are not able to hold our annual haunted house and hayride this year.

LOWREY'S AUTO REPAIR

We have quite a few businesses in Ossian, while they may seem small to many, they have a large impact on our town. Lowrey's Auto Repair on Linzy Road is one of them.

The Lowrey family, Charles, Beverly, Douglas, Daniel and Darla moved to Ossian from West Sparta in 1962. At that time Chuck worked for Molyneux Motors in Dansville. In 1965 he started a part time business in his garage doing auto repairs. In 1966 this became a fulltime business. Bev worked at Rapid Grow and Star Market while was Chuck repairing cars, trucks, tractors, bicycles, lawn mowers and whatever pulled into the driveway.

His son Dan started working for him in the late seventies and with the extra pair of hands came the tow truck. Later on a third generation, Dan's son, Adam, started working in the family business. Dan and Adam also became missionaries at different times over the years but eventually they both returned to the family business.

Bev passed away in 2012 and between then and 2014 Chuck has retired, remarried and moved to Dansville. He does return quite often to act as a consultant to his son and grandson.

Dan is now the owner of Lowrey's Auto Repair and he and his wife,

Isabella, live in Dansville. He employs Dan Wilson in the shop. They still do all the same types of repairs that Chuck did – cars, trucks, lawn mowers and more. His son, Adam, is in charge of the towing part of the business which involves not only cars but sheds, trailers and whatever else he can move with the tow truck. Adam and his wife and six children, all girls, also live in Dansville. Two of the girls are already showing interest in the business. Maybe, someday, in Ossian, there will be a fourth generation operating Lowrey's Auto Repair and the uniforms will be pink.

Cathy Saunders



Left to Right: Charles, Dan, and Adam Lowrey