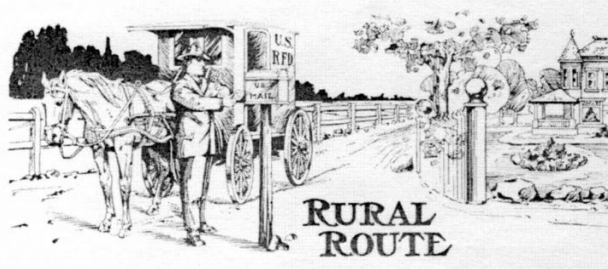


# BAINBRIDGE TOWNSHIP HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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## History of the U.S. Postal Service Including Bainbridge

In 1775, members of the Second Continental Congress established a Post Office Department and appointed Benjamin Franklin as its first postmaster general; and in 1788, Congress was given the power to establish post offices and to designate post roads. The department grew rapidly from 75 offices in 1790 to 28,498 in 1860. Two postmasters who later in their careers became U.S. Presidents were Harry Truman (who immediately turned the office over to an assistant) and Abraham Lincoln who actually served the office of the New Salem, Illinois from 1833 to 1836.

At first, postage was expensive. From 1799 to 1815 for instance, a letter would cost 25 cents per sheet to travel 500 miles. Although the first U.S. postage stamps were issued in 1847, mailers still had the option of sending letters without a stamp —postage to be paid by the recipients who often refused to accept this mail. By 1855, pre-paid postage became compulsory; and the cost of a letter weighing one-half ounce was brought down to 3 cents for most parts of the country with 10 cents to the west coast. During this early period, post offices were located every few miles in taverns, houses, stores and mills.



Bissell House and Tavern

Justus Bissell of Middlefield, Massachusetts came to Ohio in 1808 and ten years later moved to Bainbridge Township where he built a cabin on part of the land where the township hall is located. Bissell later built a large residence nearby facing Chillicothe Road. This building stands next to the present fire station and is now known as the Bissell/Tucek house. It was then at the hub of the township situated as it was on the main north/south coach route, and Bissell established a tavern there. Soon he was appointed the first postmaster of the township; and for many years until the death of his second wife in 1855, Bissell maintained the tavern and post office. After Bissell retired, William Harpham was the postmaster for 20 years followed by A.G. Kent, Edward Johnson and William Reed, all of whom were associated with either one of the two township center general stores.

In 1863, free city delivery was established in 49 of the largest American cities, but it was not until 1896 that the RFD system (Rural Free Delivery) was initiated and began to spread across the



Meech Store at Bainbridge Center

U.S.A. It reached Bainbridge Township in 1903 when L.J. Meech was postmaster. Prior to RFD, letters and newspapers came from a regional post office (in this case from Chagrin Falls established in 1839) by stagecoach once a week; and slowly as time went by, more days per week were added.

When railroads came to northeast Ohio, mail also was received at the Geauga Lake station by train, and transported to Bainbridge center by horse and



Gauga Lake Station

buggy or sleigh. Christopher Edick carried this mail for many years; and records indicate that members of the Edick family owned the Bissell house almost continuously from 1870 until 1947 when the Tucek family purchased and kept it until 2001. The Jaros family and later Sargent family were involved with the old general store at Bainbridge center which also served as the local post office for many years. (This store can be seen today at Geauga County Historical Society's Century Village in Burton where it was moved in the early 1970's)

One of the benefits of the Rural Free Delivery system was the improvement of the main highways

across the nation; and, of course, the method of moving mail also changed with the development of the railroad and later the interurban systems which transported mail for several years around the turn of the last century from large city centers to smaller outlying communities. As late as 1924, however, postal laws treated horse-drawn wagons as the norm for rural delivery; and allowed automobiles to be used if they were waterproof and of sufficient capacity. Bicycles and motorcycles also were allowed when weather and road conditions permitted.



Postal Slay with Smoke coming out of Chimney

Here in Bainbridge Township, local residents acted as mailmen; and Bill Green of Bainbridge Road tells of his father, William H. Green, keeping horses to deliver mail in the township—by buggy in summer and sleigh in winter; and later as roads improved, he was able to deliver mail by automobile.



Interurban Mail Car that came to Chagrin Falls

Another carrier was Austin Foster, and substitute postal carriers were Paul Pfouts, Sr. and Claude Hill of Chagrin Falls.

The Chagrin Falls Ohio Post Office was established on January 2, 1839 with Lorenzo D. Williams as postmaster. Mail was received once a week. Mode of transportation is not indicated.

The earliest record of compensation to the postmaster at Chagrin Falls shows that from the time the office was established to the end of the fiscal year, March 31, 1839, the postmaster received \$19.52. The total receipts for the fiscal year ended June 30, 1939, were \$301,076.70.

The records show that domestic money order business was established at Chagrin Falls on Feb 1, 1866, and that international money order business was established on April 2, 1894.

Contract was made with W. L. Arque of Washington D. C., dated March 10, 1880 at \$164.00 per annum to haul mail from Chagrin Falls to Bissell Post Office in Bainbridge. This was 4 miles and back, six times a week except Sunday to leave Chagrin Falls at 11 a.m. and arrive at Bissell by 12 noon. Leave Bissell's daily, except Sunday, at 9 a.m. and arrive at Chagrin Falls by 10 a.m.. Bond required with bid. \$200.00.

The Annual Report of the Postmaster General for the year 1901 shows that rural delivery service was established at Chagrin Falls on September 1899, with three carriers at \$400.00 per annum. Rural delivery started in Bainbridge in 1903. City delivery service in Chagrin Falls was established on October 1, 1925.

List below shows postmasters who served at Chagrin Falls in the late 1800's and date they were appointed..

Jeremiah Evans	March 25, 1861
Sheldon L. Wilkinson	May 9, 1865
Joseph C. Claverdon	August 29, 1881
Tyron Bailey	February 3, 1887
Charles H. Hubbell	January 31, 1891
Frank Bradley	January 28, 1895
Homer S. Kent	February 15, 1899
John C. Steel, Jr	March 15, 1915
Howard E. Foster	March 5, 1924
Charles W. Huggett (Acting)	February 28, 1933
Joseph Davidson (Acting)	May 1, 1934
Joseph Davidson	May 16, 1934

### Digging A Well By Hand

Water- -we can't live without it. It's been a main focal point throughout history. Today, most of us take water for granted. Convenience to water was one of the main considerations in the selection of a home. Our early settlers to Bainbridge settled near streams, lakes, springs and often they were frequently subject to droughts, contamination, and ownership struggles. Basic survival requires a safe water supply, food, shelter and clothing.



During the early years, slow land sales forced the company to offer settlers moderate rates, free bonus land for running grist and sawmills, and other incentives. Because of company management, not many of the original proprietors made profits. Many of these proprietors had not moved to the Reserve and the company never opened a sales office in Cleveland or anywhere else.

A hundred years ago and before, several methods were used to get water. The ideal solution was to build your house beside a stream. People also caught the rain water running off the roof or sometimes they hauled it in barrels from a nearby stream. Occasionally, they dammed creeks and dug canals to bring water to their homes and farms, and when time permitted, they dug a well.

Even if there was a creek or lake in the immediate vicinity of their homes, the old timers often dug a well anyway. But even in those early days they had to be concerned with water contamination and having safe water to drink. The old timers used the earth between their well and the water source as a filter of sorts. First, only a shallow well was necessary as the water from the stream or lake would seep through the rocks and earth to fill the well.

A hundred and fifty years ago when a homesteader wanted a well, he had to dig it by hand. The space required for digging it required that the diameter of the well be quite large so the well digger would have room to maneuver with his pick, a short handled shovel and a heavy steel bar.

For homesteaders that weren't lucky enough to have a piece of land bordering a stream, a well became much more important. Without a well they were required to haul the water, sometimes over long distances in a horse drawn wagon. Usually, when the homestead was first moved onto, they'd haul their water. This process could take weeks; and if there were layers of rock, months in their downward search to find the water table. Always, it was a joyous occasion when their well became active and they could discontinue the long treks to the nearest creek or river to fill their barrels.

Yes, a well was truly a luxury, something to be sought after. But there was still a lot of work involved getting the water out of the well. Many families had the traditional windlass under a small roof over the well's opening. But there were also many other systems rigged up by early pioneers to get the water to the surface. Some simply had a bucket on the end of a rope that had to be pulled up. Often, between uses, the top of the well was covered with boards to prevent children, pets and foreign debris from falling in the well.

Digging a well was amazingly difficult work fraught with danger if not done correctly. More than one well digger lost his life from the side walls of the well caving in on him. Most of us today, when we think of an old, hand dug well, think of a neat, round well shaft lined with brick. Interestingly enough, in the early days this rather expensive method wasn't the standard way well walls were reinforced. The typical well shaft of 150 years ago was square, rather than being round. And instead of bricks, the walls of the well were reinforced with rough boards commonly referred to as curbing.

Digging the first few feet were always the easiest with the dirt and rocks thrown out of the well by the person digging it. But just as soon as the well got a little depth to it, well digging became at least a two man job with an additional person on top. His job was to raise the bucket filled with dirt, empty it, and lower it back down into the well. Then he'd fill the bucket, give a shout, and the bucket would ascend yet again. The person on top not only hauled the earth up but he also lowered the boards, nails and hammer into the well. Using the boards lowered down to him, he'd box the walls in preventing a cave-in. Dynamite was inserted in the holes and the rock was blasted away. Yes, digging a well could end up being quite the project!!! But finally, if they kept digging long enough, the long

awaited payoff came. Water! And if they were extremely lucky they might even find an artesian well whose water would flow to the surface and run out the top. But this didn't happen very often. If they were unlucky, they might find the new-found water was unfit for drinking. It was always possible for it to be red with rust from iron rich earth, have so much sulfur that it smelled like rotten eggs or some other mineral that made it unfit for anything but maybe watering the garden.

It seemed the work was never done on the well, even after it was put into operation. At least once a year someone had to go down into the well and clean it out. The wind blew leaves, insects and everything imaginable down into the well which often contaminated it. Unless the water was too far down, mice, frogs and snakes could smell the water and fall in resulting in coliform bacteria getting into the water. Usually, one of the children got saddled with the annual clean-up job. This was really a dirty job. By now, the boards near the water were covered with moss and algae, slick and slimy. He'd clean this off the best he could and send up buckets of mud. Every five years or so, someone else had to go down and replace the rotting boards. The rotting wood formed tannic acid that made the water unpleasant to drink. If they waited too long to do this, the side boards could break and permit a cave-in meaning the well had to be dug back out. This created a lot of unnecessary work that could be avoided with a little vigilance and prevent the temporary loss of their water supply.

Those old wells often doubled as refrigerators in the old days. Milk, cream, butter, and anything they wanted to keep cool were often lowered down into the coolness of the well shaft.

The hand-dug wells of yesteryear are mostly gone now. Gone also are many of the really difficult times that came with taming a new land. Modern wells can now be drilled with rigs that can progress at a rate of hundreds of feet on a good day. An electric pump is then lowered down the steel casing into the water and the top of the well is capped and sealed to prevent anything from ever getting into the well and contaminating it. Like most things in our times, digging a well has changed dramatically.

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**Meetings of the Bainbridge Township Historical Society are held the second Wednesday of the month (September through June) at 7:30 p.m. in the Burns-Lindow Building at the corner of Route 306 and Bainbridge-Solon Road.**



Town Hall—Circa 1914  
Now—Burns Lindow Bldg

**Correction on last issues Howard family article**

**From Dick & Jean Ziethaml**

*When I read the article about the Howard Family Farm in the Fall issue of the Historical Society Newsletter, I questioned that it was the Lina Howard Hurd generation that ran the chicken dinner/hayride party business because I knew that it was my Uncle Howard and Aunt Rose (Dietz) Hurd that ran that business and my mother, Florence Dietz Zeithaml, helped with the chicken dinners. I distinctly remember Howard's mother, Lina Howard Hurd, but couldn't remember her husband's name. So, I sent the article in our Christmas card to cousin Dorothy Hurd Hamilton who now lives in Colorado. Here is her reply...*

Lina Howard married Walter Hurd they had one son my father Howard Hurd. Howard Hurd married Rose Dietz they had four daughters, Pauline, Lucille, Dorothy and Lois.

Howard and Rose had a dairy farm, about 1935 they had a husking bee for a friend from Cleveland and Mom made hot chocolate and chilli and Dad took them for a hayride. This was the beginning of the parties that played such an important part in our lives. Dick your Mother helped with those parties for many years. I have an article from the old Cleveland News dated January 17, 1940 with many pictures of a group. They never advertised; however, word of mouth was a powerful force and they often had a group reserved every day of the week--except Monday.

**Below is part of the original article-**

Artemus Howard number two married Josephine Mary Haskins daughter of Commodore Perry Haskins and Cynthis Maria Warrella. Their children were Lina Howard, 1874-1956, Frank Leo Howard, 1876-1896, Reno Howard, 1879-1939, and Carl Perry Howard, 1889-1960. All of the Howard children grew up on the farm and as time went on, as in most families, they took different paths in life. Lina Howard married Howard Hurd. Reno Howard married Mary Corrine (Mattie) Andrews and had a son they named Wayne. Carl married Eva Wilema Reed and they had 3 children, Claude and twins, Vernon and Verda.

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**One of the best ways to increase your knowledge of your local community is to become active in a local historical society. The Bainbridge Township Historical Society supports a variety of programs designed to expand and amplify your abilities to enlarge your family history information. We cordially invite you to attend our meetings as a visitor and share in our hospitable atmosphere. As a further enticement, we serve GREAT refreshments!!! Plan to attend our next meeting.**

