

Reporting the News and Needs of Port Henry and Vicinity

vol. 3, issue #14 February 2, 2013

This issue has been made possible by the generous support of the following:

Patricia Lovell, Penelope the Clown, Lake Music www.lakemusic.net and Salerno Brothers.com

Dear Fact Finder readers,

You may have noted that the Fact Finder was not in its usual places on Saturday, February 2nd, its scheduled bi-weekly delivery date. This was the first such occurrence in two-and-a-half years of publication. No, I was not ill, that would not have stopped the press. My computer became ill. It decided, on its own, to toss-up and spit out into the ether my almost completed paper. I could not find it anywhere, called Jack Sheldon and he finally found it among the incrypted jumble, but this meant a total re-configuring of it. Result: a short, late paper. I'm not saying "I'm sorry." I say that only when I step on someone's foot or spill coffee on them, but I do say "It was an unfortunate incident and I so hope it never, ever happens again". I know, I need a new computer, but my wallet says "WHAT?!".

A Boy's Life on Kennedy Row

Port Henry's Elizabeth Street runs east to west from Main to its two-block dead-end, approximately a quarter mile in length. There are houses lining its sides, nothing to make you stop to admire, nothing to make you hasten by in disgust. To an outsider, it is just another quiet street of modest homes. But Elizabeth Street was not always called Elizabeth, was not even called a street; it was called a Row, Kennedy Row and - it was anything but quiet.

There were close to 150 children on this one short street, according to Pat Salerno, Sr. who grew-up there over seventy years ago. These 150 children tumbled out of twenty houses many of which had been built by Republic Steel for its workers. Single family houses, duplex houses and one four family apartment house called the Chinese Jail which itself housed twenty-one children. This was where Pat Salerno's family lived. His father Ralph immigrated from Italy in 1916 when he was sixteen, fell in love, married and raised his family of seven children on Kennedy Row for twenty-two years. How did a boy of sixteen from Italy end up in Port Henry? He had an older married sister whose husband probably came here to work for Republic Steel. It was fortunate that the Port Henry of that era was a self-sufficient village, furnishing everything its residents needed and all within walking distances, because Ralph Salerno never owned a car. When young he had owned a motorcycle, had an accident and, for the rest of his life, was soured on travel by wheels.

Kennedy Row was a rough and tumble street, at least for the boys. Their play was simple, they played team games in the vacant field across the tracks in back of the Chinese Jail or - they had fights. These impromptu fights seem to be fondly remembered as one day's enemy could be next day's team mate. There were fist fights, tomato fights, stone fights, B-B gun fights, tire fights, rubber gun fights. Rubber guns were boy designed and made. It required a length of wood which was then outfitted with a clothespin secured at the back to hold a strip of old rubber tire, which was then pulled taut and slipped over the front end of the wood strip. Firing was simple, when the clothespin was opened, away flew the strip of tire on its stinging errand. A fight might begin as a game of hide-and-seek or some other innocuous game, but it seemed most often to be just a prelude to the real game - the fight of the day. Saint Patrick's priest of that time warned his parishioners (many of whom, I am sure, lived on Kennedy Row) to keep their children off Kennedy Row.

Of course in winter it was snowball fights, seemingly an appropriate and harmless pastime, but the boys on Kennedy Row revved-up the stakes by coating snowballs with water, which quickly turned to ice, turning snowballs into very effective weapons. Sledding could also be hazardous, particularly if you began at the top of Kennedy (two boys layered on one sled), closed your eyes, whizzed down and into a pole at the bottom. Bill Trow did just that. His older brother Tom, put him on a sled, put a blind-fold on him and sent him down the hill to see where he would end up, never thinking it might be into a pole. It took several hours for Bill to regain consciousness. If this happened today, the boy would be rushed to a hospital. In those days, they took you home, put you in bed, worried and waited to see what the next step might have to be.

I'm sure today's parents are wondering where were the parents, particularly the moms, when all these fights were happening. Well, when most families had eight or nine children, (a few more, a few less) parents had a full-time job just feeding, clothing and taking their children to church, let alone supervise their play.

Summer raised the number of game choices considerably, limited only by boys' imaginations and injuries sustained. Once Pat shot "Pop" Bullock in the eye which did send him to the hospital, probably in Ticonderoga. Fortunately, it didn't do permanent harm as he became a well know athlete in the Marines during the Korean War and, later, a star basketball player at Plattsburgh State, setting records, some of which might well still stand. However, in summer

swimming often took precedence over fighting and the boys headed to Cheever Hole (now the domain of the Fish and Game Club) for a refreshing skinny-dip. Cheever was, needless to say, for boy's only. A distance above Cheever Hole was Rosy Hole where the girls swam, in suits. Also needless to say, there seemed to be a fair amount of "sneaky-peeking", at least attempted, in both directions.

"Pop" Bullock was not the only Kennedy Row boy turned man to achieve recognition in sports outside our own immediate area. Pat Salerno, Sr., himself, was drafted by the Brooklyn Dodgers and played for them from 1952-1957. In 2011, both he and Witherbee's Johnny Podres were inducted into the Hall of Fame in the Capitol District of Albany and also unto the Hall of Fame of Glens Falls, New York. Joe Salerno became one of the top amateur golfers in Vermont. In the surrounding area golf clubs, the boys from Kennedy Row have more than held their own.

Kennedy Row produced not only excellent sportsmen, it produced excellent soldiers for World War II. This little street sent thirty-seven of its boys into the war and all but three, Alan Gambrell, Junior (Lawrence) Gebo and Joe Montagnola, were able to return. It would seem that the fight games of childhood had well prepared Kennedy Row boys for the realities of a serious fighting. Statistically, that only three (precious as those three statistics were) out of thirty-seven did not return was an amazing testimony to the kind of soldiers, the kind of men Kennedy Row sent into the world, strong, self-reliant, honest, racially open men - good citizens, fast friends and proud to have grown up on Kennedy Row.

MID-MONTH NOTES FROM MAYOR GUERIN

Important re-reminder: Residents, with cars and who park over night on the streets, be warned. **Tickets will now be issued** enforcing the 1970's law stating that no parking is allowed on any street within the village limits from November 15th- April 1st, from 12 am - 6 am. The first offense will receive a warning ticket, a second offense warrants a \$10 fine, however - remember any ticket (this is state-wide), whether speeding or parking illegally incurs an additional state mandated fine of \$85.00. So, you leave your car parked a second time on the street during the designated months and times, you are looking at a \$95.00 pay-out. OK, it's late, it's cold and you just can't find a place to park, so you decide to chance having to pay another \$95.00. Don't make that decision! It won't be just another ticket, the Village has the right to have your car towed away and - at your expense! Third time is anything but a charm. The reason for this law is: in winter, when you have snow, streets can not be plowed properly if cars are parked in them. Oh, where does one park? Go to your landlord and find out where he has provided parking for you. This, he is supposed to do.

A safety reminder that is also a law: An Essex County Law states that each building, business or residential, legally, must display its address in a visible location and with re-able numbers. This is a safety requirement, in that if emergency vehicles are called to an address, they need to find it easily and quickly. Seconds can mean the difference between life and death or saving or not saving a building. Old signs should be replaced or repainted. The use of reflective paint is the best solution.

Next week there will be a joint meeting of the Village, Town and Chamber representatives to discuss local economics and the possible use of joint services to reduce Village and Town expenses.

The Beach has been plowed for walkers only; it is closed to all other winter traffic.

The Board is still waiting to hear about the grant for manhole 13.

The Elizabeth Street project is moving ahead on schedule.

National Grid will, in the near future, use its magic so the Village can have Christmas lights next year and other needed new year-round light sources.

The Board has received it last Zoning Commission application, so this project will be going forward. Zoning does not have to be a "Big Brother" thing, it is truly needed and it can be designed for our specific village demographics.

WHISTLE SIGNALS

If you live in Port Henry and have even just fair hearing, trains and their whistles are part of your everyday life; so much so that often you do not hear them consciously, they have become part of the background sounds of daily life. I live on a hill above the tracks and over the years have become aware of the seemingly infinite ways to "whistle" the approach of a train. I wondered if what I heard had specific universal meanings or were they just random choices of the engineers, expressing their feelings or considerations of the moment. So, I asked. Here is what I discovered.

Whistle Signals

Deciphering the code

Published: May 1, 2006

Before radio communication came into wide use in the 1960's, a locomotive's whistle was an important tool in conveying information to other employees, both on and off the train, and many signals were on the books. The General Code Of Operating Rules, used by many railroads, contains the following list of whistle signals and their meanings: Note: "o" denotes a short sound; while a "-" is for a longer sound.

- When stopped, air brakes applied, pressure equalized.
- - Release brakes, proceed.
- oo Acknowledgement of any signal not otherwise provided for.
- ooo When stopped, backup; acknowledgement of hand signal to back up.
- oooo Request for signal to be given or repeated if not understood.
- ooo Flagman protect rear of train.
- ooo - Flagman protect front of train.
- - - - Flagman may return from west or south.
- - - - - Flagman may return from east or north.
- - o - Approaching public grade-crossing.
- o - Inspect brake system for leaks or sticking brakes.

A series of short blasts is sounded in an emergency.

Today, the only signals you're likely to hear regularly are the grade-crossing warning (which is also often used to warn employees or others on the tracks); two (or three) shorts to indicate the engineer has received a signal to start the train forward (or backward); and one long blast when a train is approaching a station on a track next to a platform.

Since discovering this code, I have tried to un-learn my acceptance of the whistles and re-sensitize my hearing to their sounds. Today I heard and understood the grade-crossing signal! We in Port Henry are lucky in having a scheduled stop on Amtrak's New York to Montreal line. We can practice the "when stopped, air brakes applied....", the "release brakes, proceed" added to the "grade-crossing" warning. I'm not sure about the signal as they pull into our station, as there is no platform. True, this is not an earth shaking piece of knowledge, but like knowing the names of the animals and the trees that surround you, the names of the continents, the constellations in the sky, all knowledge adds to the joy of living so - enjoy our whistles.

Look for the next issue of the Fact Finder on Saturday, February 16th at Adirondack Hair Associates, Macs and Moriah Pharmacy; also, find copies to read at the Sherman Free Library. Also at John Eisenberg's Service Center, Ken and Paula LaDeau's Champlain Best Wash and Don Foote's (Miss Port Henry) Diner.