

Chatham Times

Past and Present

Chatham Post Offices

By Jeanne Eastman

In the winter of 2021 Steve and I found in a trunk in our attic an envelope of old family documents, including a certificate appointing Steve's great-grandfather, Jonathan K. Eastman, as Postmaster of North Chatham, County of Strafford, New Hampshire in 1833. How did the mail get to Jonathan's house in North Chatham? Probably a mail carrier was hired to bring the mail by horse-back from Fryeburg, Maine, to the Eastman homestead. Neighbors would have stopped by the Eastman home if they were expecting a letter from a relative far away, or from a family member letting the folks know they'd reached Fryeburg. It was the only way to communicate with folks who were away.

In the book, History of Chatham, New Hampshire, published in 2017, postmasters for North Chatham, Chatham, South Chatham, and Green Hill are listed. One person would take the job for a few years, and then the office would move to another house.



The stage arrived at the North Chatham Post Office, at the home of Omer Charles



Omer and Lillian Charles waiting for the stage at the North Chatham Post Office

An 1888 advertisement for someone to carry mail between Fryeburg and Chatham was found in the Chatham Center house (1028 Main Road) where Ithiel Clay was postmaster at the time. The carrier was required to cover the route six times a week, allowing 3 ½ hours each way, with pay of \$274 per year. Carriers had to be at least sixteen years old. These routes, established by the federal Post Office Department, were awarded on the basis of the ability “to provide for the celerity, certainty, and security of such transportation.” Postal clerks shortened this phrase to three asterisks (***) , which became known as Star Routes.

After Rural Free Delivery was started in 1896, some folks put up mail boxes. Each family made two cloth bags with their name on them, with drawstrings at the top. The outgoing mail was left in one bag in the mail box for the mail carrier to pick up when he left the other bag with incoming mail. Steve Eastman remembers this system in the 1950s when he visited his aunt and uncle, Fannie and Norris Hill, at Chandler Farm.

Micajah Fife had the post office in his house at what is now 1930 Main Road (Wilshusen) from 1882 to 1913. The Wilshusen family has visited with Louise (Garland) Mann who grew up in the house with her grandparents, Will and Eldora Stone, from 1918 until 1935. Louise told how she found old calendars and old mail that had fallen down behind wall beams of the shed loft where the mail had been sorted for the neighbors.

Mildred (Hill) Heath remembered in an interview that her great-grandfather, Jonah Hill, Jr, and then her grandmother, Emily (Lang) Hill ran the

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Notes from the President

We have kept our museum open on Tuesday mornings this winter. “Thank you” to the volunteers who have helped with organizing, archiving, cleaning, and helping our visitors find information, and to all who have contributed to our functioning in big and small ways. If you have time to volunteer, even one morning per month, please let us know. I am sure there is something to fit your interest and talents! I would especially be glad for a volunteer qualified to help with some computer/technical questions.

Welcome to our new members: Margery Eastman, Gregory Thurston (Life), George Andrews (Life), and Holly Patch!

Our December potluck in conjunction with the Carols and Candles at the Church had to be canceled because of the first heavy winter snow and power outage. We rescheduled the potluck with a bonfire for February, and then postponed one day because of strong winds and frigid temperatures. A fun time was had by all who ventured out on this winter evening.

We have some sure-to-be interesting exhibits planned for this summer: cellar holes and historic houses; and tools used in farming and early trades such as logging, ice cutting, and stone cutting. If you have any photos of old houses, information, or tools to loan for the exhibits, please let us know. We also always love the stories that go with the artifacts!

Our schedule of events and programs for this year is still being finalized. We will be selling chili and baked goods at Nate and Kate's Maple on Maple Weekend in March. Our Annual Membership Meeting will be held at our schoolhouse on May 16th, 6:30 PM. Watch for an email notice of a history hike this spring, and perhaps a June event. We are always glad to hear your suggestions for programs.

May is the start of our new year, and the time to renew your membership. Please check on the address label to see if your membership is about to expire. We are glad for everyone who supports our work and is interested in Chatham's history!

We are looking forward to your entries in our “For Kids of All Ages” competition!

Donations

Elwyn Wheaton – A “Welcome” sign for our building; **Rick Charles** – permission to copy family photos. **Monetary Donations** over the past year from: Diane & Monte Powell, Cindy Priest, Scott Lusky, Denise Stanford, Rebecca Clements, Cynthia McAllister, Janine Cook, Mona Ames, Joan Lombardo, Lonni Lewis, Steve Murphy, Sue Crowley, June Kelley, Dick Anderson & Joan Bowen, Gene Chandler, K. Kiesman, Paul Daley, Willie Bain & Cheryl Collins, Kate Kane, Betsy Fowler, and Anonymous. Thank you so much for your generous support!

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www.chathamhistoricalnh.org
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Business meetings April – October, 3rd Tuesday,
6:30 PM
Open Hours: Tuesdays 9-Noon
We look forward to seeing you!

Old Bill Says

by Bill Sanborn, published in *The Norway Advertiser-Democrat*, May 3, 1918

I got up spunk enough the other night to go smelting. Charles Forest invited me to go and hold the lantern and lug the fish for him, - said it wouldn't cost me a cent. Of course that was cheap in these times, so he borrowed an old leaky pair of rubber boots, size eleven – I wear anything from a six to a ten – elevens are a bit loose.

Charles told me it was only one mile out to the brook, but it took us two hours to make it. There was one place across an old creek where the water looked deep and black and fifty feet across, but there was a white maple pole six inches through at the butt laid in the crotches of two trees up about six feet from the ground. We got over that by straddling the pole and hitching along.

Well, there were lots of smelts, and after we had got about three bushels to lug out I began to think about that pole crossing. “Oh,” Charles says, “we can get over that easy.” “Well,” I said, “I am perfectly willing for you to go ahead and show me.” We had a bushel and a half of smelts in each bag. Some load. Anyone who ever sacked blueberries off Baldface can guess pretty near how we felt when we had gone a mile. When we came to that pole, I was behind with the lantern. Charles struck out pretty brave and I was afraid he would get across all right, but I swung the lantern around behind me, then I heard a groan and a splash and saw the water fly.

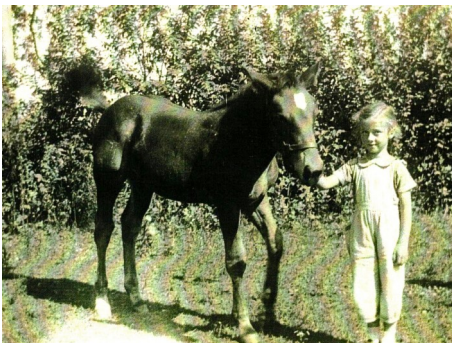
I kept quiet, then I heard a puffing and blowing and a “Bub-Bub-Bill, help me out!” I looked out to where he was. He was flat on his back. Once in a while his head would go under. When I asked him how deep it was, he was mad then.

He rolled over, got on his feet and the water wasn't up to his knees, so he waded ashore and I waded in and went across all right, except those old boots leaked some. I was awful sorry for Charles and I told him so, but he was mad and wouldn't listen to me and went right off and left me.

After he had gone, I had the best laugh I have had for a long while. I promised I wouldn't tell of his getting soused, and I have not said a word. Well, I got the worst of it after all. You see, Charles went home the next morning and everyone wanted some smelts, so he gave each one a mess that asked for them until he got up to Harry Hutchins' store. Hutchins wanted a mess. Charles had about a pint left and Hutchins took them, then Charles came up to my house visiting and stayed till he ate up all of mine. Next time I go smelting I am going alone, and I don't intend to let anyone know when I come home.



“Old Bill” Sanborn wrote a column for the *Norway Advertiser-Democrat* for fifty years

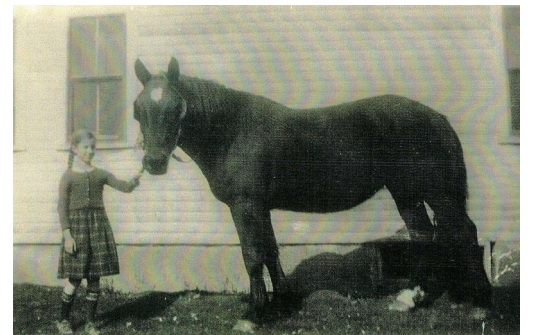


Spring Things

Helen Bryant with Fanny.

C.1936 on the left

C 1942 on the right





Guy Crouse used this Model T "snowmobile" for the Stage, carrying mail, passengers, and purchases from the stores.

South Chatham post office out of their home (2438 Green Hill Road). In the summer people would come through the front door, down the hall to where the boxes were. In the winter, folks had to come in the back door to the kitchen. And they always stood around and talked.

George Andrews remembers the North Chatham post office at the Charles place (run by Lillian B. Charles 1916-1947, and by her daughter-in-law, Mary E. Charles 1947-1958). There was a glass case counter, and pigeon holes for mail boxes. Candy was sold there too.

Ken Small wrote in his booklet, "From Then Till Now" that when he was six years old (1916) his first eye glasses came in the mail to the PO at Dana Hill's house. The post office moved to Ken's house in 1918 when his mother, Eva Small, took over as post mistress. Post cards, candy, tobacco, crafts, and other items were sold at the PO. It was a very busy place with the summer camps and portable sawmills in the area.

Guy Crouse drove the Stage in Stow, carrying passengers, mail, and goods from the store. Before the winter roads were plowed he drove a "snow mobile." His son, Rodney was the postmaster in Stow 1942-1945, while he operated a store and gas station at Stow Corner.

Frank Eastman, who grew up on Butter Hill Road, said, "We used to have our mail box out at the end of Butter Hill Road. Father hired Ernest Winslow to build a larger box that could hold packages. The box was about three-feet wide, shaped like a little house, sitting on a sturdy post, probably red oak. I used to walk out to the end of the road to catch the bus to Eastman School. The bus was a '37 Buick four-door, driven by Cora Thurston. On the windy winter days, when the wait was so cold, I'd climb inside the box to wait for the bus.

"I remember hearing that in the spring, the mud in the roads was so deep that the Stage drove through the fields along the river between Bradley Brook and Chandler Brook in North Chatham. In a dry summer, one could eventually drive through on the road. In the winter, the roads were rolled, packing the snow down, or frozen when they were plowed, setting the stage for 'mud season.'

"Millard Chandler wrote on his garage wall, 'Jan. 15, 1930, First snow plow on truck run over Chatham roads by Everett Eastman.' But they weren't the big plow trucks we have now. The snowbanks couldn't be pushed back like they are now. So after several snow storms, the banks were creeping out into the roadway, and the roadway was narrower and narrower. The mail carrier couldn't reach the mail boxes! So people would stick a broom in the snowbank and hang their mail bag on the broom. Or if they didn't have a broom to spare, a crocheted stick.

"Mail boxes were on both sides of the road, so the mail carrier would be weaving back and forth across the road to deliver mail."

Jim Wilfong remembers, "When we first moved here (1957), we lived in Stow. My father was away, with our only car, for two weeks at a time, working building roads in Massachusetts. If my mother needed something from Harriman's Store in North Fryeburg, she'd call to the store, and the items would be brought up on the Stage with the mail. Mother would be watching for it to come. The next day she'd have the Stage take the money to Harriman's. And the next day, the change would come back in the mail."

Denise Stanford, who spent summers (starting in the early 1950s) on Little Chatham Road with her parents remembers: "The 'walk to the P.O.' was a family outing. We NEVER drove, even in the latest days of its being the P.O. I remember standing in front of the rough-hewn counter with Ina (Ken Small's sister) on the other side holding court amid her many cats.

"She read every post card, and she didn't seem at all embarrassed to let you know she had! The summer Jim & I got engaged (1959) he came out from California for 10 days to meet my parents. The first day we set out for the P.O., my parents and I all warned him NOT to say, "How are you?" as a greeting. But of course, being a polite young man he promptly forgot, and we were held hostage for a matter-of-fact list of ailments.

"Apparently I had recently received a postcard from Bill, a former Ann Arbor boy friend, who luckily always signed his



At the Chester Eastman home, circa 1908, the family eagerly awaits a visitor arriving on the Stage. Note the mailbox.

correspondence 'As always.' When I introduced Jim to Ina she said, 'Good to meet you, Bill.' I cringed. He didn't follow up!

"There was a party-line most of the time I lived there, but in any case my parents didn't have a telephone. One time I climbed Mt. Washington with a couple of North Conway male friends in 1958. We all knew to take the weather seriously, even in summer. We did in fact run into a terrible storm coming down and I was sure my folks would be worried, especially since it took us forever to reach North Conway. The only way to reach my parents was through Ina. I phoned her and asked if she could let my parents know I was safe and would spend the night at one of the boys' homes. Being a teenager it didn't occur to me to worry about how Ina would reach my parents. But it probably made for some good gossip!"

Paul Reiss started coming to South Chatham with his parents in the 1960s and vividly remembers the Post Office. Paul wrote, "The post office formed a part of every weekday that we spent at Camp. We went there almost every day as my parents had all of their mail forwarded to our summer address as that was the only way to stay in touch. We often walked down from the camp if the day was particularly lazy. It was the time of shared party-line phones and expensive long-distance calling (sometimes done with an operator). The mail was the way to communicate. Some days there was little, and other days there was a lot of mail. Since everything was forwarded from our home address, it was always a bit out of date by the time we got it.

"We were always told to refer to the post mistress as Miss Ina. She held court on her porch where much of the mail seemed to be stacked. We got a report of how much we'd received before we went inside and retrieved the mail. It was never a short visit. If another resident came, the conversation grew and took significantly longer. There were discussions about the weather, fishing, new people around, a Harold Briggs auction, and anything that was in the newspaper -- the Bridgton or North Conway papers. A lot of business got transacted as well, arranging repairs or finding the right person to help with something. Sometimes we kids would wait in the car -- there was no air conditioning - with the windows down, hot and complaining about how long it took. It was a major event in the course of the day.

"Miss Ina also had a way of giving you the mail a piece at a time with some commentary about whom it was from and frequently some questions about the contents. My father received a lot of mail from other universities, think tanks, and friends all over the world. There were a lot of post cards which were summarized as they were passed from her hands to ours. My siblings and I occasionally went in to speed up the process, as we did not like to talk much.



Louise (Ballard) Weeks delivered mail in South Chatham from 1924-1928



A postcard of the South Chatham Post Office

"At one time, my father was invited to the Soviet Union as part of an educational exchange program between groups of social scientists. There was a thawing in the hardline relations between the West and the USSR, and my father was chosen to help lead the group. He struck up a friendship with several of the social scientists and corresponded with one from Bulgaria.

"One summer, the Bulgarian social scientist sent a post card of his vacation early in the summer, and it arrived in South Chatham in August. The postmark, Soviet stamp, and location did not escape Miss Ina's review. She seemed to puzzle over why my father was receiving mail from a Communist country

and having it delivered to South Chatham. When she handed the postcard over to my father, she had a series of questions about the origin and meaning of the postcard -- and what was it doing in the US? My father deftly explained how he got to know the Bulgarian but seemed to dig himself deeper into trouble by saying that he had actually been to Moscow. I am pretty sure that Miss Ina did not look at my parents in the same way after that postcard.”

Frank Eastman recalled that since 1959, when he and Barbara settled at their current location in Chatham Center, their mailing address has changed from Stow, Me. to North Fryeburg, Me. to Fryeburg, ME to Center Conway, N.H. to Chatham, NH with the Ctr. Conway zip code.



The mailbox at the Parsonage in Chatham Center is shoveled out for the mail delivery. The Parsonage was built in 1906, near the current Veterans' Memorial, and burned in 1939

Paul Reiss summed up the Chatham Post Office era perfectly, “After the post office left South Chatham, it was never the same driving to Fryeburg or Center Conway for our mail. It left a hole in the conversational barking chain that kept everyone up to speed on the community.

“I was away for several years at college, and when I started to return for longer periods and more frequently in the mid 80's, a lot seemed to have changed in a very short period of time. Some of it was because I felt out of the loop because there was no longer a post office that gave you more information than you ever got in the mail.”

“For Kids of All Ages” Competition!

Submit a short account, poem, photo, drawing, or puzzle relating to Chatham's past. Put on your thinking-cap and let your creative energy flow! It is fair to gather information from the Chatham Historical Society's collection as you work on your piece. Winners in the Under 18, New-Comers (associated with Chatham since 2000), and Long-Timers (associated with Chatham since before 2000) categories will receive a gift-certificate to our Chatham Historical Society sales room. Submissions will become property of CHS and might be used in a newsletter, a *Pages for Kids of All Ages* publication, or for any other purpose.

Check the *Pages for Kids of All Ages* on our website, to see some examples of stories, drawings, and puzzles that have already been gathered.

The deadline for submissions is September 30, 2023. Each person or team may submit more than one piece.

In Memory

Our deep sympathy to the families of these loved ones:

Jaques Dupris, 20; passed away November 2022. Stow. Jack loved to go fishing with his brothers. He loved to run cross country and ski for Fryeburg Academy. He was a proud Marine.

Charles Eastman, 83, passed away December 18, 2022. Charles was born in Chatham and raised by foster parents, Helena and Hilton McAllister. Charles served in the Army. He was a sawyer and grader at a lumber mill in Madison, NH. He loved spending time with his family, playing cribbage, and wood-working.

The Peddler's Pack

A bundle of news from the neighbors over the years

Millard Chandler's 1932 Diary: March 8, Squally. Cool. All hands went to town meeting. Victory for Guy and Willis. (Guy Crouse, road commissioner; Willis Bryant, selectman) Roads were rough....

Norris Hill's 1946 diary: Apr. 9, Tues.....Arthur Hill found canvas to put over pool table which he went after down to Hiram. Don, Clyde, & I went down to Town Hall about 5 p.m. and helped set it up. Then we played a while.....

Lonni Lewis: I have good memories of sitting in Winnie and Harold Andrews' kitchen savoring the aroma of just-baked oatmeal "Winnie" bread. So good!

Jim Wilfong: The Forest Service was going to burn down the old Cyrus Binford house up past Langdon Brook. They said Gary and I could take any of the old furniture that we wanted. I was 14 or 15. Gary and I lugged a pine cupboard home and gave it to our mother. I lugged a cobbler's bench, complete with the places to store pegs and nails. I had to lug it because I didn't have a truck. It was probably made in the 1830s. Then I needed 40 bucks so I sold it to Harold Briggs for his auction barn.

From a 2002 interview: **Clyde Garland** (1919-2003): 'Course there was old Rosenbloom used to come down from Conway. I remember when he come around selling clothes, dishes, tin ware. **Shirley (Emerson) Garland** (1921-2005): My mother used to keep a big grain sack out there in the shed full of scraps that were worn so they weren't any good anymore. When the rag man come he'd pay so much a pound, a penny a pound, something like that. Not very much. That's what they used instead of wood to make paper.

Al Stearns: In the early 1900's my grandfather, Orlando Allard, worked in the winter hauling blocks of

Winnie's Secret Bread Recipe

1/2 c. rolled oats	
1/2 c. white flour	1 pkg. yeast
1 T. lard	
1/2 c. brown sugar	

Boil 2 c. water, add to above, stir, cool to lukewarm. 1/4 c. lukewarm, put on top, add yeast. Let sit for 5 min, stir. Add 5 1/2 c. flour sifted w/ 1 tsp salt. Mix well + knead. Drape w/ towel soaked in hot water. Rise until double. Punch down. Put ^{cut in half twice} in greased bread pans. Towel in hot water again. Bake at 400° for 30 min. Cool on rack. Cover with cold wet dish towel.

granite down the steep slopes of Baldface Mountain. He drove a team of six horses pulling a scoot, also known as a sled or stone boat. It was dangerous work because the heavy load picked up speed quickly and the horses had to be urged to stay ahead of it. Chains were wrapped around the runners to slow it down. The scoot was also equipped with brakes. When the handles were pulled back, steel spikes came out of the runners to grip the snow. At the base of the mountain where the land flattened out, the chains were removed and the horses had to strain in order to move the heavy load to the road. There it was turned over to buyers who sold it to be used in building foundations and steps. Many old homes in this area are built on foundations made of Baldface granite.

Chatham Historical Society
1061 Main Road
Chatham, NH 03813

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