



Mile 146

Winter - 2016



Volume 9

Topeka Area Historical Society

Number 1

It's In The Mail

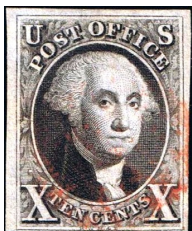
Reliable postal services are a critical component in the development of unsettled territory. That was certainly true when it came to the early days of Topeka. Commonly referred to as Slabtown, mail was being delivered to the Hawpatch post office as early as 1837. In the years that followed Topeka's mail would be dispensed from four different locations in the community. The current post office which stands at the corner of East Lake and Harrison opened on September 10, 1967, with a program of dedication and an open house.

In May of 1775, a mere three weeks after the Battles of Lexington and Concord, the Continental Congress created a committee chaired by Benjamin Franklin and comprised of Samuel Adams, Richard Lee, Philip Livingston, Thomas Lynch and Thomas Willing to consider the creation of a postal system. Franklin was the logical choice to chair the committee having previously been appointed Postmaster of Philadelphia by the British Crown in 1737. The committee agreed that "The conveyance of letters and intelligence was essential to the cause of liberty" (United States Postal Service *An American History 1775-2002*, page 8).

The committee presented their findings on July 25, 1775. The following day, members of the Second Continental Congress, meeting in Philadelphia, agreed:

That a postmaster General be appointed for the United Colonies, who shall hold his office at Philad, and shall be allowed a salary of 1000 dollars per an: for a secretary and Comptroller, with power to appoint such, and so many deputies as to him may seem proper and necessary. That a line of posts be appointed under the direction of the Postmaster general, from Falmouth in New England to Savannah in Georgia, with as many cross posts as he shall think fit.

This simple declaration marked the birth of the second oldest federal agency in the United States of America. To no one's surprise, Benjamin Franklin was named the nation's first Postmaster General. By 1777, Congress authorized the appointment of an inspector of dead letters. In 1829, the Postmaster General became a member of the President's Cabinet.



William McConnell is believed to have been the first postmaster in Topeka, being appointed to that position on May 27th, of 1837. That would have been five years after Robert Latta and McConnell, who were some of the earliest settlers in Eden Township, moved to the area. McConnell's store building on the east side of Main Street was the location. Postal records list Hawpatch as the official name of the post office. For the next 56 years that name continued until August 11, 1893, when it was officially renamed Topeka to coincide with the name given the town when it was platted that same year.

The US Post Office didn't begin issuing postage stamps until July 1, 1847. Prior to that, letters were taken to the post office where the postmaster would write the postage amount on the upper right corner. Rates were based on the number of sheets in the letter and the distance it would travel. According to the United States Postal Service website, postage could be paid by the writer, collected from the addressee upon delivery, or paid partially in advance and partially upon delivery.

The first stamp issue of the U.S. was offered for sale on July 1, 1847, in New York City, with Boston receiving stamps the following day and other cities thereafter. They consisted of an engraved 5¢ red brown stamp depicting Benjamin Franklin, and a 10¢ value in black with George Washington. All U.S. stamps before 1857 were not perforated so clerks had to use a scissors to cut them apart. The 5¢ stamp paid for a letter weighing less than 1 oz. and travelling less than 300 miles, the 10¢ stamp for deliveries to locations greater than 300 miles, or, twice the weight deliverable for the 5¢ stamp.

Continued on page 2

In this Issue

- It's in the Mail
- Track Notes
- The Mile 146 Quiz
- The Hawpatch History Detective: "Coach Clason in the Hall of Fame"



Apparently Topeka had three routes at the time of this picture because there are three men with mail bags and three cars.

On January 1, 1856, the use of government issued stamps became mandatory. That same year the 5¢ Thomas Jefferson stamp was issued. The 2¢ Andrew Jackson stamp was released in 1863.

In the early days the mail arrived by stage coach from Ft. Wayne. With the coming of the Wabash railroad, mail arrived twice a day by train. Town residents became accustomed to checking their mail twice a day. People with a rural route only had mail service once a day. Mail continued to arrive in Topeka by train until Norfolk & Western discontinued rail service in 1979.

The late Arleen Oesch, who worked for the post office for 37 years, beginning in 1942, recalled that after rail service stopped, "We had what was called a Star Route." That route ran from Goshen, to Middlebury, to Shipshewana, and Topeka; then reversed. The Shoup Bus Company (now Cardinal) of Middlebury operated the service making runs twice a day. Wilbur Hostetler, who married Donna Bough, THS Class of '45, drove the mail bus for Shoup's for a number of years.

Star Routes were the result of an Congressional Act on March 3, 1845. In an effort to reduce transportation costs Congress authorized the awarding of contracts to the lowest bidder for what "*may be necessary to provide for the due celerity (quickness), certainty and security of such transportation.*" These became known as "celerity, certainty, and security" bids. Postal clerks began to abbreviate the phrase by using three (3) asterisks or stars. Thus the bids came to be referred to as "star bids" and the routes as "star routes".

During the Star Route days, Arleen Oesch stated for the Topeka Area Historical Society's book *Celebrating a Century 1893-1993* that,

"We made (mail) pouches to Shipshewana and Middlebury direct; the rest went to Goshen for further distribution. Today the mail from Topeka is transported by truck directly to the distribution center in South Bend."

Topeka has the distinction of having the first free delivery in LaGrange County according to Gerald Fisher's research. That service began on October 2, 1899. Ephraim Hartzler was identified as the first rural mail carrier in northern Indiana. Hartzler delivered mail for 33 years before retiring in July of 1932.

Robert W. "Bob" Sutton started carrying the mail on Route 2 in June of 1949. In those days Route 2 (Clearspring Township) was about 35 miles long with 170-175 mailboxes. Over the course of Sutton's 32 years of service his route miles changed very little, but as the number of small farms grew the number of boxes soared to 337 by the time he retired on December 24, 1983.

Bob was always proud to be a mail carrier. "I felt I was continuing a family tradition since my grandfather, David Sutton, was a carrier when they used horses to deliver the mail in the winter." During his tenure, Bob worked out of three different Topeka Post Office locations and under seven postmasters.

He enjoyed the changing seasons, especially Fall with its colored leaves. But what he dreaded most was the mud; three-fourths of his route was gravel and dirt. In an article for *Celebrating a Century 1893-1993*, Sutton wrote, "Until the last nine years, I usually drove tan-colored Ford cars, 18 in all. I figured tan didn't show dust and mud as much as other colors would. It made sense to me to drive the same color so patrons who wanted to buy stamps and money orders could easily see me coming." The last nine years he drove an International Scout with 4-wheel drive.

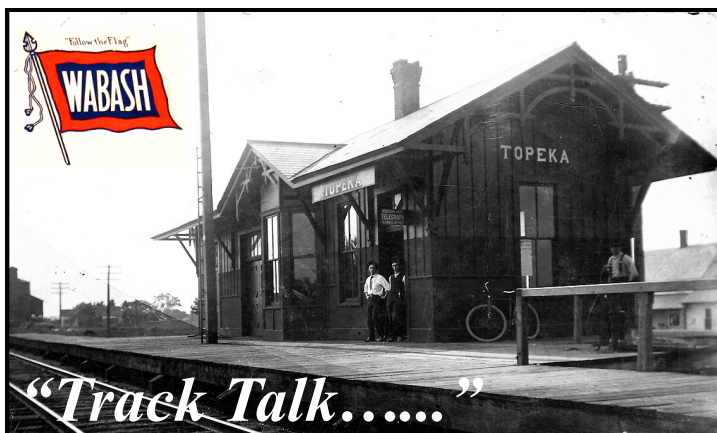
When David Sutton was a mail carrier, the post office was on the east side of Main Street just south of the Ace Hardware Store. From there it moved across the street to the Bowsher building just north of the bank. When Farmers State Bank purchased the property to expand the bank, the Post Office Department purchased the house on the northeast corner of Lake and Harrison and began the construction on the current post office.

Today the Topeka Post Office continues to serve the growing community. Currently there are 435 post office boxes in use and three rural routes with over 1,300 stops. **HG**



Larry Stout, Postmaster Verlo Christner, Arleen Oesch, and Robert Sutton outside of the Post Office located on the west side of Main Street.

- Answers:
- (1) William McConnell
 - (2) Benjamin Franklin
 - (3) 37 years
 - (4) Goshen High School
 - (5) 15 and 7



Welcome to the Board:

We are please to announce that Erin Schwartz and Bryan McCoy were elected to the Topeka Area Historical Society's Board of Directors in our January meeting. Erin serves as the society's Secretary. Bryan will serve a three year term as a Director.

Erin and her husband Tobey have three children. She is a descendant of the Thompson family that has played a significant role in the history of Topeka.

Bryan McCoy is president of the LaGrange County Historical Society. In 2015, Bryan was appointed the LaGrange County Historian for the State of Indiana.

Indiana's 200th Anniversary

As settlers made their way into the Indiana territory and the population increased, the territorial government was able to petition the federal government for statehood. Congress passed the Enabling Act of 1816 to provide a process by which Indiana could become a state.

This act called for a constitutional convention to meet in Corydon beginning in June of 1816. Delegates included Jonathon Jennings, who had been Indiana's territorial delegate to Congress and who would be elected Indiana's first governor. The convention drafted Indiana's first constitution, which provided for a state-supported system of education and forbade slavery (though this provision was not enforced).



Indiana entered the Union as the 19th state on December 11, 1816.

The Mile 146 Quiz:

1. Who was the first postmaster in Topeka?
2. Who was the first U.S. Postmaster?
3. How many years did Arleen Oesch work for the Post Office?
4. Where did Hank Clason attend high school?
5. What was the 1948-49 Topeka Bears' record?

Coming Events:

March 15, 2016

*The Daughters of Dr. Lehman
"Taking Time to Remember"*

May 17, 2016

TBA

June 21-24, 2016

42nd Annual Topeka Quilt Show & Sale

Topeka Area Historical Society Meetings are held
at the Topeka Branch Library - 6:30 PM
Everyone is welcome

Visit us online at: www.topekahistoricalsociety.com



Cal Miller presented a 1901 Wabash Railroad timetable to the Topeka Area Historical Society president, Harold Gingerich, in the 2016 January meeting.

Topeka Area Historical Society
P.O. Box 33
Topeka, Indiana 46571

www.topekahistoricalsociety.com

2016 Board of Directors

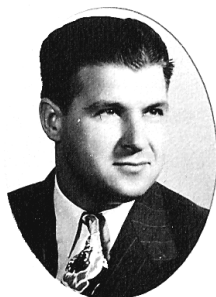
Harold D. Gingerich, President
Doris Haggard, Vice President
Erin Schwartz, Secretary
Janice Gingerich, Treasurer
Keith Bobeck, Director
Michael Zehr, Director
Bryan McCoy, Director



The Hawpatch History Detective

THS Coach Enters Hall of Fame

Former Topeka High School basketball coach, Henry “Hank” Clason, is set to be inducted into the Indiana High School Basketball Hall of Fame on March 23, 2016, in ceremonies at the Hall of Fame in New Castle, Indiana.



HENRY CLASON
FACULTY

A 1938 graduate of Goshen High School, Clason was an outstanding athlete both in high school and at Northwestern University. Clason was Goshen’s leading scorer for three years running earning him three years all-conference honors to go along with three years all-county. Helping Goshen to a sectional championship as a sophomore, he led the NIHSC conference scoring as a junior, and was named the captain of the all-county team his senior year.

As a three year letterman at Northwestern, Hank led the team in scoring and was named all-Big Ten as a junior. He served as captain of the 1941-42 Wildcats. Clason graduated in 1942 and later earned a masters at Indiana University.

Clason was outstanding beyond the hardwoods. He set numerous track and field records at Goshen. At Northwestern Hank was a notable

member of the 1940 Big Ten baseball championship team.

Following his tour of duty with the U.S. Marine Corps during World War II, Clason became a teacher and coach at Topeka from 1947 to 1953. Returning to Goshen in 1953, he taught and coached basketball, cross country, and track for his alma mater before retiring in 1985.

Hank Clason died on Sunday, July 14, 2013, at the age of 93 and was buried in the Violet Cemetery in Goshen.

HG



The 1948-49 Topeka Bears posted one of the best records in school history at 15-7. Notice the LaGrange County Horseshoe trophy. Front row (L to R) Mylin Yoder, Jake Gloor, Robert Plank, Don Hayden, Bill Snyder and Quin Jones. Back row (L to R): Coach Hank Clason, Quentin Hartzler, Orland Sprunger, Virgil Eash, Lyle Schrock, Eddie Neuffer, manager James Sprunger, and Principle Floyd Glass.

www.topekahistoricalociety.com

Topeka Area Historical Society, Inc.
P.O. Box 33
Topeka, Indiana 46571

