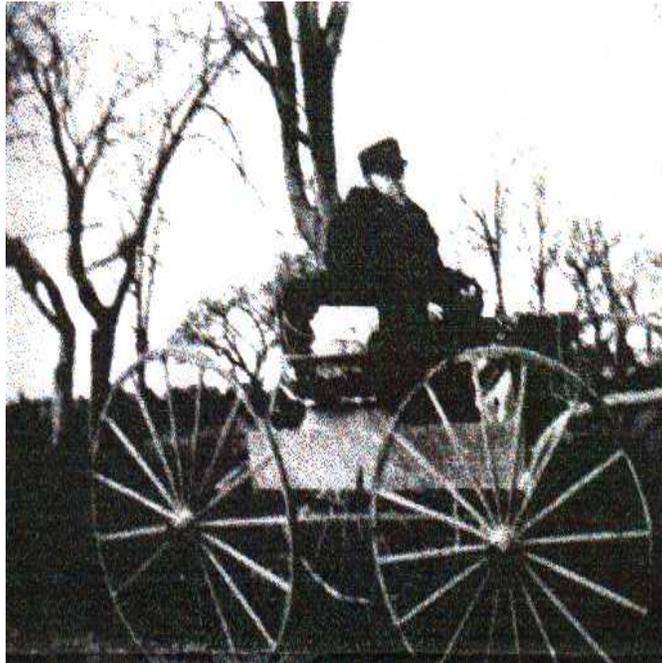


Scarborough's First Mail Carrier

Noah Pillsbury



Things That Aren't There Anymore

By Frank Hodgdon

Scarborough, Maine

While this is yet another story in the Things That Aren't There Anymore series, the thing that isn't there in this case refers to Noah's faithful horse and trusty wagon. Rural mail delivery is still alive and well in our community 95 years after it was first instituted. Nowadays the population and mail volume require some sixteen carriers who fan out over Scarborough's 58 square miles each Monday through Saturday and yes, each carrier acts as a post office on wheels accepting outgoing mail, selling stamps, accepting items to be insured, registered, or certified, as well as applications for money orders and the like. Despite continuing criticism on slow news days, the postal service is still one of the best bargains around and its employees among the world's most dedicated public servants.

Long before the urban postal service became the bane of the public, Rural Free Delivery Service (RFD) had a reputation for being an efficient operation that delivered and collected mail in rural

communities without post offices nearby. RFD, later known just as rural delivery service, has a long history in Scarborough, as does general mail delivery.

A post office was established in West Scarborough in 1798, a mere 10 years after the creation of the United States Constitution. The first postmaster was Eliphalet Smith who was appointed by Federalist John Adams and served for one year. He was succeeded by John Wood, who was appointed by Republican Thomas Jefferson and served seven years until July 1, 1806.

Eleven more postmasters served the West Scarborough post office up to William McKinley's appointment of George Knight in 1897. Mr. Knight held the office for 23 years through the administrations of Presidents Teddy Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson. His tenure, which ended in 1921, was longer than any of the other 17 persons to hold the office, including Mr. Irving R. Moulton, the last postmaster, who served from July 1949 until the Scarborough and West Scarborough post offices were merged in June 1962.

In 1899, under the administration of Teddy Roosevelt, the RFD service was conceived and formally instituted. And it was during the postmastership of George Knight that Scarborough's first Rural Mail Carrier, Noah Pillsbury, was appointed in 1903. Pillsbury, born on Dunstan Landing Road, delivered the mail by horse and buggy in West Scarborough for the next 16 years, until 1919.

Interestingly, Pillsbury had also served as the last toll collector on the Scarborough Turnpike, the road across the great marsh between Dunstan and Oak Hill. Built in 1801 by Judge Southgate and other investors, tolls were charged at the rate of eight cents for a one-horse wagon, twelve cents for a wagon with top, and twenty-five cents for public stages. The tollhouse, which collected tolls for 100 years, was located just north of the Southgate residence (across present day Route One from the Marshview Restaurant). Cumberland County accepted the turnpike and removed the toll charges from it and the old Vaughan's Bridge across the Fore River between South Portland and Portland simultaneously.

When considering Pillsbury's service, one must remember that none of the town's roads were paved, nor plowed in the winter. Those niceties came with the automobile traffic in the twenties.. Roads were rolled in winter to provide a hard smooth surface for scoots and sleighs, which replaced wagons and buggies in the snow season. One can only imagine what travel was like in March when the frost came out!

Yet records show that Pillsbury and his co-workers maintained great pride in the reliability of their service and few, if any, trips were missed.. Parcel Post was added to the mailstream in 1913, so it is likely that Mr. Pillsbury's burden increased substantially during the final years of his tenure.

Postmaster General Arthur Summerfield, in his 1960 book U.S.Mail mentions that "despite strict regulations to the contrary, many RFD Route men would begin their daily rounds as laden with chores for their customers as with stamped mail--a spool of thread urgently needed by a housewife who had run out the previous day, a box of jar rubbers for preserves in progress or a pair of boots to replace those Johnny had lost while playing in the mud."

This tradition still holds today. Many people in remote parts of town and without transportation look to the mailman to deliver some of the little necessities of life.