

editorials & commentary

In Praise Of The Fire Department

Generally, when this newspaper goes to press on Tuesday there is quite a bit of commotion around the office as we scurry around getting last-minute tasks done, making just one more phone call, and so on.

This week, we had a little bit more excitement than usual. Just as we put this week's Courier to bed, some of us smelled what we thought was smoke coming from the basement where our furnace resides, busily pumping away on overtime during the current cold spell.

When we opened the cellar door we were confronted by thick clouds of what we thought was smoke billowing up the stairway.

Without much more delay, we called the Potsdam Fire Department.

Well, we had hardly hung up the phone when the firemen started arriving. There were several on hand by the time the first fire truck arrived, which was only moments after we had called. Within a few minutes, there were 24 volunteers on hand.

Now to tell the truth, we couldn't find the fire, if there in fact had even been one. A careful inspection of the cellar showed that there appeared to be a blown valve in some of the plumbing and the popular thought was that perhaps what we had thought to be smoke was only steam.

We don't know about that, but we do know one thing. The quick response of the fire department was fantastic.

In the news business, we have covered many fires from a third person point of view and have seen how effective the volunteer firemen can be.

But as an interested party in this case, it was even more reassuring to see the number of volunteers who responded swiftly in the middle of a working day.

Perhaps if you have had a similar brush with a fire, you can understand the feeling of relief in seeing the firemen arrive on the scene.

Perhaps if you haven't, you still might like to know that Potsdam's Volunteer Fire Department is capable of mustering so many people so quickly.

The volunteer fire department is a definite asset to the village and to each resident and property owner. To have a quality fire department is of even greater value.

To be perfectly crass about it, the volunteer company saves village taxpayers a lot of money each year that would otherwise have to go toward paying professional firefighters.

And, to be doubly crass about it, perhaps that is something that each of us should remember the next time the firemen distribute their coin cards in Potsdam.

Save Some Clearings In The Woods

Climb almost any of the hundreds of large and small mountains in the Adirondacks and you will be amazed at how the great forest carpet has gradually enveloped or completely reclaimed many of the huge openings that once pockmarked much of the region. Especially in the interior sections, it seems that the only cleared spots remaining away from villages are those of lakes, ponds, bogs, beaver flows, rivers, summits of mountains and occasional rocky outcroppings at low elevations.

After hiking many miles over Forest Preserve trails you'll soon realize that sizeable clearings where one can find some relief from the shadows and chills of the dark forest are the rarest attractions you'll encounter. For this reason, I say let us look kindly upon those few clearings that remain. Let us make a genuine effort to preserve them by designating them as "clearings forever."

Some of the larger clearings or old burns have been in existence for over a hundred years, some for many centuries. While early logging operations created open sites the most enduring were those caused by repeated forest fires on cut-over lands. On the other hand, some of the open barrens were probably of natural origin, that is, not created by man-related action. However, no matter how these old barrens were formed I think it is time that we looked upon them as more than mere opening waiting to be consumed by the encroaching forest.

For example, what a refreshing feeling it is to come upon the shrinking, open flats of the Oswegatchie Plains located south of Cranberry Lake after walking many miles through uneventful woods. It is here at the clearings where the action usually takes place. It is here that you expect to see things and you are seldom disappointed, for wild animals also favor clearings as nice places to spend some time if no one is around to frighten them off into the nearby woods. Even then, they will not go far but merely wait for the removal of the disturbing factor before they return or they may soon be back if they sense there is no danger involved.

I do not know how long the Oswegatchie Plains have been in existence but the thin soil and charcoal particles indicate that fire had swept over the areas at one time. It must have been a periodic event to keep the Plains open. I am aware, however, that fires were set on the Plains by early settlers in order to produce better hay. Word is that the Plains were there long before the first settlers arrived. Although

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EDWIN REID

shrinking a little more each year as the forest edges closer, these Plains are still impressive and a welcoming sight, but with the absence of fire, lumbering and hay harvesters how long will they last? Although nature probably created the Plains, she will not be able to perpetuate them because of man's total protection. More protection means gradual extinction. Should they be allowed to disappear with the coming generations?

There are other plains in the Adirondacks such as the Moose River Plains where the same thing is happening in a greater or lesser degree. Where trees are not commercial products, as on Forest Preserve lands, it seems logical to give the remaining clearings, plains, barrens or burns, which have a definite aesthetic value, a genuine exemption from extinction.

For example, Scott's Clearing in the High Peaks near Indian Pass is now, for the most part, merely a name in a hiking guide to designate a place and not the actual condition of the location. Except for a few little openings the clearing in the wilderness has become

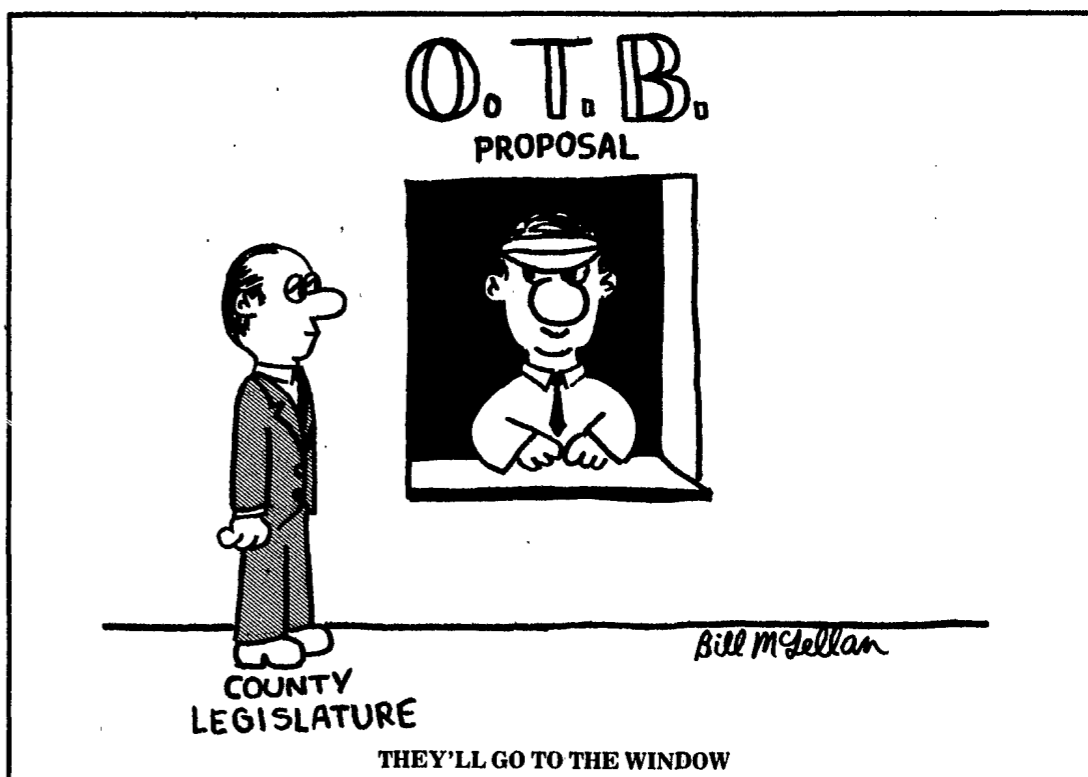
part of the forest. Most first-time hikers to the area are disappointed at not finding a more spacious clearing while others seem glad that the evidence of man's former preserve here is being slowly erased. To most woods walkers, however, a clearing serves as a relief value, a breath of air, an invigorating breeze, a gulp of the sky and a napping or eating place before plunging back into the gloom of the forest and onto the next clearing which may be the summit of a mountain or the shore of a lake or pond. Even in the wilderness we cling to the clearings.

Now that the ranger station at Shattuck Clearing has been demolished should we not give some consideration about leaving this area a clearing and not just a meaningless name on a hiker's map. Should it stay a clearing in the wilderness? And what of the other clearings where ranger stations have been removed, such as the Duck Hole and Cedar Lake; should they be permitted to revert back to the wilds or be designated clearing forever?

I do not wish to imply that such openings should be maintained as a misfit lawns in the wilds. Rather, such areas should not be given any attention except on a widely spaced schedule which may call for treatment by cutting or controlled burning every 10, 25, 50, 75 or 100 years depending upon the need of the individual clearing to keep it sufficiently open. This would be determined by a close study of each clearing designed for preservation.

Should not Rondeau's hermitage be kept open? A maturing forest we have with us aplenty, its recovery from those years of abuse in the late 19th and early 20th century has been amazing. To fully realize this one should study some of the photographs taken during this destructive era. The almost total lack of cover is shocking. In those days, villages stood boldly against naked hills, while present-day communities at the same locations are snugly, half-submerged in a sea of trees.

Yes, we have saved the Adirondack forest from man's devastations, now let us rescue the remote and wild clearings from the encompassing forest. Let us give them a passport into the future.



letters

Coffee Drinkers Raised \$193

To the Editor: Sincere thanks to the coffee drinkers of Potsdam, to the Courier and Freeman and station WPDJ for their help in publicizing our first Heart Fund Coffee Day, and especially to the cooperating restaurants: McDonald's Family Restaurant, Jackie's Lunch and Coffee Shop, the Town House Restaurant, Deli Cafe, the Wheel, the Quonset Steak House, Morgan's Soup and Sandwich, Tardelli's Restaurant, Pizza Hut, Fiacco's Restaurant, Mister Donut, and Sunset Lodge.

This first Coffee Day added \$193.68 to this year's Heart Fund, and we have been given some good suggestions for next year.

Again, many thanks. Ted Schulze, 1979 Chairman, Heart Fund Coffee Day Margaret Claffey, Publicity Chairman, Potsdam Heart Fund

Have Hospital: Are Fortunate

To the Editor: I wonder if the people of the Potsdam area know how fortunate they are with the Potsdam Hospital and their fine doctors. My wife had a need for blood. A call was made on Christmas eve and Christmas Day on the hospital and rescue squad scanners. On a very stormy night and day, we had more donors than we needed. This was really nice on a holiday for such response. Then Drs. S. Chugnat, A. Jacobs, and Dr. Mazzotta spent three days and nights fighting for her life. I believe they should be recognized for the wonderful men that they are.

Gratefully, Nelson Currier, Waddington

Writer Praises Youths

To the Editor: Would you please publish this letter in your paper. On Feb. 2, my wife and I boarded the bus to go to Syracuse. When we got on I noticed that we were the only older people on the bus. The rest were college students. At Canton more students got on and some had to stand up. My observations of these young people were that they were polite, considerate and very well-mannered. In fact, they were a credit to the young people of today. I hope that some of the students read this letter and pass it on to the rest. No one ever takes time to write about the good young ones. Only write about the bad ones. Again I say thank you young adults and good luck.

A grateful older person W.A. Sirester Fort Jackson

PAT Sums Up Their Tax Investigation

To the Editor: To Residents of St. Lawrence County, This is the concluding part in this series on local taxes, researched by Rosemary and Richard Sanford, and put out by the Potsdam Area Taxpayers Inc. as a public service. PAT believes that the more citizens (including legislators and supervisors) know about the laws and intricacies of local government and taxation, the less likely we are to suffer from the errors and abuse of incompetent or uncaring government dominated by special-interest groups. We ask you to inform us (PAT, Box 722, Potsdam, 13676) of any errors or confusions in these articles, and some of you will save them for possible future use in questioning doubtful government or taxation practices.

Town budgets usually include items in four general categories. -General budget applies to entire town inside and outside incorporated villages, and thus (except for items 2 and 3 below) is paid for equally by all town residents.

-Towns outside for special services such as board of health and planning boards which, while a part of the town budget, apply only to areas outside incorporated villages since they are duplicated in corresponding village services. Only residents outside incorporated villages pay for this.

-Special districts: also included in the general budget, but applicable to and charged to only those residents of the special districts involved, such as fire protection, sewer, and lighting districts.

-Highway budget: This is a separate budget prepared by the highway superintendent, but is included within the general budget in the Town Tax Warrant (tax levy). It is subdivided further into five items: ITEM 1 Repairs and Improvements. ITEM 2 Bridges, charged by law equally to all town residents.

ITEM 3 Machinery. ITEM 4 Snow and Maintenance. These last two items are normally charged equally to all town residents, but by law incorporated village boards can petition town boards for exemption from some of these charges. However, this abatement has never been agreed to in St. Lawrence County, since all residents of a town, including those in villages, benefit from snow removal and open roads. (Even those village residents who rarely travel town roads shop in stores for items that travel them).

Residents inside incorporated village thus pay two separately-stated items in their "land tax": The county tax at about \$5 per 1,000 true value, and the town tax which includes the cost of the general town budget and items 2, 3, and 4 of the highway budget.

Residents outside incorporated villages pay a much lower county tax (since they elect to have their share of the sales tax applied as credit against their county tax, as explained last week); the same town tax as village residents; a small "outside town" tax (which would not apply to residents of towns without incorporated villages); a highway tax consisting of items 1 and 1a of the Highway budget (they also pay for all other items of the highway tax in their share of the town tax); and special district tax if they live in a special fire protection, sewer district, water district, or lighting district.

Village Taxes Residents of incorporated villages also pay a village tax for the extra services they receive in the village. Since this tax is usually fairly well understood, it will not be discussed further.

Sales Tax Versus Property Tax It is interesting to see what the property tax might be without the sales tax. St. Lawrence County has \$5 million budgeted as its share of the 1979 sales tax, and also an "excess sales tax" of \$681,000 from 1978 to apply to 1979 revenues. As part of the appropriated cash surplus. The county also has the \$5,388,000 real property tax levy for 1979.

Without the sales tax, the real property tax levy would be more than twice what it is now, or about \$11 million. This county taxes in nine incorporated villages and in towns outside villages (or with no villages) would be about \$11 per 1,000 true value. For example, the equality tax in Potsdam with a 1979 equalization rate of .1837 would be about \$60 per 1,000 assessed value, or twice what it is now in the village (\$29.25).

The last year with no sales tax was 1968 and we had a budget of \$18 million and a tax levy of \$2,600,000. Eleven years later with no increase in

population, we have a budget 2 1/2 times as big as \$43 million (NOT counting CETA), and about four times the tax levy, or \$11 million, including the equivalent value of the county sales tax. Without the sales tax, property taxes would be even more impossible than they are now; but a much better solution is to reduce expenses. After all, is a fourfold increase in county taxes in 11 years the kind of "Progress" and "Economic growth" we need?

Tax Bill Errors Taxes must be paid in full even if in error. But any time after they are paid, you can file with your local assessor for a refund of errors, and this request must be acted on by the legislators. This year there are numerous errors: the \$150,000 over the adopted tax levy appears illegal; people outside incorporated villages have been overcharged several dollars for two years; a row and application of excess sales tax to the general budget in towns with incorporated villages (as in Potsdam) also appears illegal.

Chester Blinett Information Officer Potsdam Area Taxpayers By order Board of Directors

Not 'Rubber Stamp' Administration: Thayer

To the Editor: First, a quotation from Mr. Schwenke's letter to the Courier last week: "...when all members of the administration are of one party. Then it invariably soon becomes a rubber stamp administration doing whatever the mayor wishes. To me this is not only wrong-it's dangerous." Mr. Schwenke, are you saying that a "dangerous" situation existed during the many years in Potsdam's history when all the trustees were Republicans? After the last village board meeting-the first one ever attended by Mr. Schwenke, to my knowledge-he came to the board table to compliment the Mayor on how she ran the meeting. He indicated that it was very obvious that the board does not always agree on all issues. So much for that campaign issue.

Welcome to the "public office" campaign, Mr. Schwenke, because I agree with you that "voters deserve the opportunity to have their party represented on the ticket." However, we Democrats will work to re-elect to the village board the Democratic incumbents. A vote for Garner, Chapelle, Claffey on March 20 will assure Potsdam of continued progress under an open-not a "rubber stamp," "wrong," or "dangerous"-administration.

Norma Thayer, Village Trustee

Save Depot; Build 'Less Ambitious' Road

To the Editor: I was moved by your editorial on the state of the Depot several weeks ago to take some action. I went and talked to Mayor Garner.

One thing I understood is, as far as the knows, most of the people want the Relief Route and the bridge. It is evident that traffic does congest sometimes. Apparently college students going from Clarkson Hill Campus to the other side of the river are partially responsible. It appears that their right to drive is more important than saving a building that could be a landmark, the Depot.

I am sure that there is much more to be said and done if indeed there are other citizens who don't want to see the Depot or other buildings that lend continuity with our past and visual charm to the "urban landscape" of Potsdam turn into parking lots, highways or less visually pleasing buildings.

One thing that bothers me is that DOT says the bridge and access highway will relieve traffic downtown. An interesting assumption. I have read that more roads generate more cars. Maybe there is a fear because I lived in the greater metropolitan New York area for 17 years. Or maybe it was a trip across the country by bus through so many partially deserted downtown areas-business diverted to outlying shopping centers-or just going to Ogdensburg. I would like to see one of Potsdam's remaining viable older buildings stay and a less ambitious, more harmonious and equitable bridge with access road materialize. I keep hearing about "unchangeable" federal guidelines in regard to the (highway) access road and bridge. Who will challenge that what may be right for many situations may not be okay in a town like Potsdam?

Sincerely, Diana Douglas Potsdam

From Our Files

1890- Our veterinary surgeon, Dr. Grime, has committed matrimony. Last week he married Mrs. Shirland of Madrid and they have been in Montreal several days.

1940- For sale, two Jersey heifers, both milking, \$85 buys the pair, or will trade for last year's calves. Elwood Taylor, Parishville.

1940- Dr. Alice Williams of the Potsdam Normal faculty has written a book, "Children's Choices in Science Books."

1940-May 1-Fresh-made sausage, two pounds for 25 cents at Sullivan's Market,

Beal Street.

1940- High Flats-On Wednesday evening April 24, Larry Gunner entertained the following boys at home, Ralph Christy, Gordon Randall and Donald Randall. It was Larry's 10th birthday.

1965- Edward Mundy's 43 year association with the New York Central Railroad came to an end on Sept. 7, when the road accepted his request for retirement.

1965-Nov. 4-Voters return Healey to fourth term as supervisor. Jones defeats Fountain for highway superintendent.

1965- Sandstone harrisers are Section 10 champions. Four Potsdam men lead field, Steve Wray, Dac Forbush, Gerry Hobson and Jim Serabian. Dave Dwyer, Bob Reutershan and Tracy Lewis finish well. Coach Bill Lewis had high praise for his men, who worked and trained diligently.

1944- Jackie Phelps, former Clarkson athlete, is now playing for the Navy at Sampson, N.Y. In a game Sunday he played center field and hit a home run.

1861- It takes five and one half hours to go from Potsdam to Watertown on the Watertown-Rome Railroad.

1939- Bill Pelotte, Potsdam, won first place in the high jump in the Van Deusen with a jump of 5 ft. 8 in.

1899- Lee Ellis won a Ford for 25 cents. He bought the ticket on a raffle to finance the Grand Lodge Meeting of the Odd Fellows at Saranac Lake.

1940- March 6- George Theobald making record as sheep breeder. He graduated from the state school at Canton a few years ago and now has his hands full with a retail milk route, a large flock of hens and one of the largest flocks of Shropshire ewes in the county.

1940- March-Elliott's mill, which burned last December, is ready for business.

1940-Pure wheat germ, one half package 10 cents at Potsdam Feed and Coal.

1940- April 10- John LaClair, well-known fiddler, buried Tuesday. He had taken part in numerous contests and had won several medals. There survive two sons, Ogden and D. LaClair and Ernest LaClair of Oneonta and Miss Mildred LaClair of Schenectady.

1940-April 10-Fire destroyed Woodstock barn. Built about 100 years ago by the Clarkson family. Used as a rifle range by Clarkson ROTC.

1890- F.A. Weed and J.R. Weston have formed a co-partnership in the book and stationery business.

Compiled by Earl Pattison

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