



**EMPIRE STATE
POSTAL HISTORY
SOCIETY**

APS UNIT 28

www.esphs.org

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TALKING POSTAL HISTORY

By Frank Braithwaite

In the summer of 2005, I was at the library researching an article on the postal history of Smithtown. I knew enough about my subject from a philatelist's point of view, but I wanted to know more about the postmasters, post offices, and the cast of characters involved in the moving of the mail through my town.

After thumbing through hundreds of indexes, files, and all the other research material in the *Long Island Room*, I assumed I had exhausted all sources. Librarian Cathy Ball, who was interested in my project, offered to dig up as much as she could from a collection of Long Island books, maps, and other paper ephemera.

As I was preparing the final draft of my article, Cathy surprised me with a question: "How would you like to do a talk on postal history as a part of our library's lecture series?" I offered to do it in October 2006 to coincide with National Stamp Collecting Month.

My talk needed to appeal to the non-philatelic public. Details such as sizes of cancels or obscure postal regulations would cause my audience's eyes to glaze over. I wanted to talk about some of the rates, routes, markings, and transportation methods, but that would not keep their attention. Residents would want to hear about Hull Conklin, the mail stage driver, or Postmaster E. L. Arthur fishing the mailbags out of the Nissoquogue River when the Railway Post Office clerk missed dry land.

I realized a PowerPoint presentation was necessary. People love full-color presentations. In about two hours I set up 25 slides that I made from scanning covers, maps, and photos I had in my collection. Meanwhile, Cathy was busy promoting my talk by putting up posters and flyers around the library. People came out of the woodwork with stories of relatives who were postmasters or mail carriers, and countless other "I remember when" stories. I even got a chance to interview the last postmaster of the Head of the River Post Office, Rosalie Molin, who was 94 and sharp as a tack. The insights I got from her and the other people I spoke with added a great deal to the 20th century part of my talk.

When the fateful day arrived about 25 people showed up. I was nervous, but I knew I was well prepared. Other than a technology glitch, that prevented me from doing my PowerPoint presentation, the talk went well and I learned a lot. That's right, I learned a lot from my audience that day, an unexpected pleasure. They patiently listened to my lecture and added their own stories of days past.

I urge all collectors of local postal history to consider doing a talk at their local library or school, I promise you will not regret it, and you just might learn a thing or two in the process.