

Lavallee Begins 40th Year As Lake Postmaster

NH's Unique 'Floating PO' Nears 80th Anniversary

By EARL O. ANDERSON

WEIRS BEACH — Lake Winnepesaukee mail service, which first began to serve many of the islands 79 years ago, is still functioning.

Six different craft have been used for the purpose, and this marks the fourth year since the service was taken over by the Sophie C.

By far the most famous of all the boats was the Uncle Sam, which plied the waters of the "big lake" for 46 years, until "retired" nine years ago.

OLDEST IN U. S.

Capt. Edward J. Lavallee has just begun his 40th year as postmaster of the only "floating postoffice" in the

world. He is reputedly the oldest active postmaster in the U.S.

Lavallee takes pride in the fact that he is slightly older than the mail service itself, which started in 1892. He was born on Dec. 14, 1891.

He served as skipper and postmaster both for about 30 years, when the mail was carried by the original Uncle Sam.

This craft was built especially for this service about 1906 by a Mr. Seabury (first name not available) from Nyack, N.Y.

Lavallee, reminiscing this past week, noted that Seabury spent some time studying the

lake and the cross winds which prevail on its waters. His object, it was pointed out, was to construct a boat, especially designed for its particular elements.

The craft had a "round, flat stern," and its type had never before been built on Winnepesaukee, Lavallee recalled.

"You see, the mail had to be delivered daily," he pointed out, "and a boat was needed that could ply the tricky waters of the 'big lake.'"

Mail service was officially begun on Lake Winnepesaukee by Dr. George Saltmarsh in 1892. It was carried on for three summers by his private,

36-foot "steamer," the "Robert and Arthur," named for his two sons.

"Dr. Saltmarsh loved Lake Winnepesaukee and its surroundings," Lavallee told Hector Bolduc, Gilford historian, in recollecting early history of the mail service.

FIRST DAY COVERS

It was Bolduc who earlier this year originated the idea of first day covers for the maiden 1971 mail boat trip.

Two covers were issued, one commemorating the old Uncle Sam, and the other, the present mailboat, the Sophie

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Record Round-Up...

By
JAMES
PARKS

Ever since Bill Graham's announcement closing Filmore East in New York City and the Filmore West in San Francisco, pandemonium has gripped the rock industry. The Filmore were theatre-type auditoriums where many of the top rock groups were showcased. By comparison, a rock act playing at the Filmore was like a classical act playing Carnegie Hall.

Now it seems that the last strongholds to showcase rock acts will be shuttered permanently. The reason that Graham gave was rising costs. The days of doing business directly with a booking agent are gone. Now, according to Graham, successful acts have overreached themselves right out of the area. He feels that the days of doing business with musicians are gone.

Now is the age of stockholders, corporations, lawyers and fast-buck promoters who have invaded the industry in an effort to cash in on talent. What Graham has come to realize as fact, we predicted would happen as early as 1967 via this column — if it was not checked. The time is now ripe for a complete change in the college concert picture. If the college acts of talent sharpen their skills and become real hard-core traders, they may survive themselves. Now is the time for driving extra hard gains on all high priced

refusing to book high talent unless it is purchased at a sensible price — no price over \$5000 per act is sensible — only then, the colleges be able to toe the line and remain a part of concert circuit 10 years

will be interesting to see the outcome will be for the concerts at the beginning of the school year in

that will be seeking generous prices will of course be listed on the best



HAND CANCELLING DEVICE, over 75 years old, used in stamping all mail processed on the Sophie C mailboat with the "Winnepesaukee" postmark, is examined here by Hector Bolduc, left, and

Edward J. Lavallee. Bolduc originated the idea of a "first day" cover for mailboat use this year of the only "floating postoffice" in the world.

(Five Star Photo)

'FLOATING PO'

(Continued from Page 27)

C. Well over 2,000 covers were cancelled.

In 1895, Lavallee observed, Dr. Saltmarsh changed to the "Dolphin," which continued the island mail service through 1906.

"It was known as the 'RFD 7,'" the veteran boatman noted, "and had a flag flying to that effect. This was a 45-foot steamer, with overhanging stern, which caused the 'Dolphin' to become 'rocky

ple," still another song written by Canadian Paul Anka.

The Ocean on Kama Sutra Records is a Canadian group that scored big with their first release in this country, "Put Your Hand in the Hand." Now with their follow-up release titled "Deep Enough For Me," the Ocean is making a strong bid for the American concert market via the college circuit come September. This group will definitely be among the winners.

and tippy' in rough weather. As a result, it was hard for her to take the storms that came across The Broads."

While Saltmarsh was a physician, it was recollected, he loved the water and loved to work with wood. Lavallee remembers watching him for hours busy in his shop.

It was Dr. Saltmarsh, the veteran postmaster said, who made the finely executed wheel for the "Gov. Endicott." This piece of "magnificent" craftsmanship, described as truly a work of art, now rests in the ceiling of Lavallee's living room at Lakeport.

The Uncle Sam took over the tradition from "The Dolphin."

Burt Bickford was the first "contractor" for the mail "run" on the lake, with award of a contract to him in 1916.

The special boat designed by Seabury, which became the Uncle Sam, was built at Lakeport, near the present Irwin Marine.

"No other boat on the lake could match it for perform-

prior to the first mail trip of 1971.

One was from Gov. Walter Peterson, and presented by Alton H. Stone, director, Division of Safety Services.

Governor Peterson commended Lavallee for his long record, noted that at 79 he is the oldest active postmaster in entire nation, and lauded him for his "prompt, efficient service" to the many islanders in Winnepesaukee.

The City of Laconia also honored Lavallee with a citation, presented by Mayor Rodney N. Dyer.

TEN ISLANDS

At least 10 islands are visited by the mail boat, Loon, Pine, Bear, Beaver, Three Mile, East Bear, Birch, Sandy, Guernesey, Jolly and Mark.

Between 35 and 70 pounds of first class mail are handled on each trip, which Lavallee estimates as ranging from 5,000 to 8,000 letters.

All of this mail must be processed during the trip, taking about two and one-half hours. Each letter is

HEAD DOOR

HAND

Captain Lavallee, adding that she was converted from steam to diesel power in 1944.

It was a great blow to its skipper when a state inspector condemned the Uncle Sam as being "unsafe," on the basis that her hull was "rotten," and therefore a danger to human life, according to Lavallee.

"Captain Ed" said that he "knew differently," but complied with the decision of the inspector. He later proved the "seaworthiness" of the venerable craft, Lavallee stated, by taking it apart "plank by plank," and sawing through every four feet of the hull.

"There was no rot or defects whatsoever found in her framework," the skipper emphasized. "Ed Gallagher of the Laconia Citizen and Dr. John Perley were present when I dismantled the Uncle," Lavallee related to Bolduc, "and can attest to its soundness."

Two interim craft served briefly on the lake, after the "Uncle" was withdrawn from service.

They were the private cruiser of "Captain Ed," a 30-foot safety craft, during the summers of 1962 and 1963, and the Uncle Sam II, a vessel converted to mail and passenger use, from 1963-1967.

The tradition continues today, with the Sophie C, a steel-hulled craft, owned by the Winnepesaukee Steamship Co., headed by Byron C. Hedblom.

The Sophie C is just 26 years old, and was also built for use on Winnepesaukee, primarily for passenger service at first. It is diesel-operated, 76 feet in length, with a 16-foot beam, and has a draft of five feet, three inches.

It can carry 150 passengers.

"SHUTTLE" SERVICE

For the first three years, the Sophie C provided "shuttle" service from Weirs Beach to Wolfeboro, and later took over as an excursion vessel, according to Robert B. Murphy, general manager for the Winnepesaukee Steamship Co.

Besides its mail trips, it operates three times on Sunday, and also provides a twilight cruise every evening, weather permitting. The skipper is Wilbur H. Bigelow, and crew members, Bruce Campbell and Buca Smith.

Captain Lavallee was presented two citations just

year-old, bearing the distinctive "Winnepesaukee" postmark.

Both incoming and outgoing mail (from the islands) is handled through the Laconia postoffice. The Laconia postmaster always makes the first trip each season, this time Reginald N. Clement.

A special act of Congress was required to enable the mail boat to use the "Winnepesaukee" postmark. This was done over 50 years ago.

Historian Bolduc secured a copy of the actual Act of Congress, providing this privilege, through the cooperation of the General Services Administration.

It is part of an act approved on March 3, 1917, relative to Post Office Department.

"Provided, that the maximum yearly salary of \$1,800," reads the act in part, "shall hereafter be paid to the rural carrier on Lake Winnepesaukee, who furnishes his own equipment."

Copies of the Act of the 64th Congress were made by Bolduc from the document sent him, and provided the Laconia postoffice and the Laconia public library.

Queried as to how payment that first year compares with that now received, Captain Lavallee replied that despite the greatly increased operations during the intervening 64 years, it has not yet doubled the original figure.

It is done on a contract basis, and yet, Lavallee noted, "during the nearly 40 years that I have carried the mail, the volume has jumped over 150 per cent."

But far more than the money involved, is the service which Lavallee can give, that and the satisfaction of being able to visit the islands, and chat with the residents, all of whom he regards as friends.

And they are always glad to see him every year. Captain Lavallee has become an "institution" on the lake, and he hopes to carry on the work, just as long as he is physically able to do so.

A particularly unique thing about the mailboat service is that it is probably the only postoffice in the world which provides regular deliveries on both the Fourth of July and Labor Day. This is because of its peculiar status, as an independent carrier.

But on Sundays there is no service. "No sir-ee," says Captain Lavallee, "on that day we rest up for the week ahead, and I wouldn't have it any other way."

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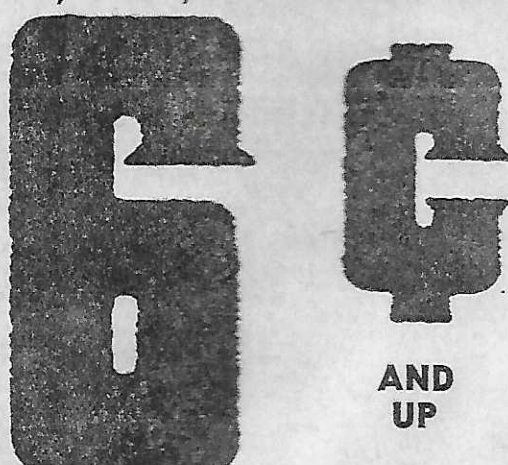
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