

Mill House Monthly

August, 2015

Occoquan Postal Service

In 1807 there were two bridges that crossed the Occoquan River below the fall line. The first was Nathaniel Ellicott's bridge located just west of his Merchant's Grist Mill at the site of the current Town of Occoquan's footbridge, and the Mason bridge located closer to the mouth of the Occoquan River, approximately where Route 1 crosses.

Ellicott and Mason both applied to the Virginia General Assembly in 1795 to erect toll bridges on the Occoquan. Both men constructed their bridges and they stood until a storm in August of 1807 destroyed both of the spans.

Ellicott rebuilt his bridge after the storm and it reopened in May of 1808. The Mason bridge, had been more than double the length of Ellicott's 300' bridge. The Mason family chose to run a ferry across the Occoquan rather than rebuild.

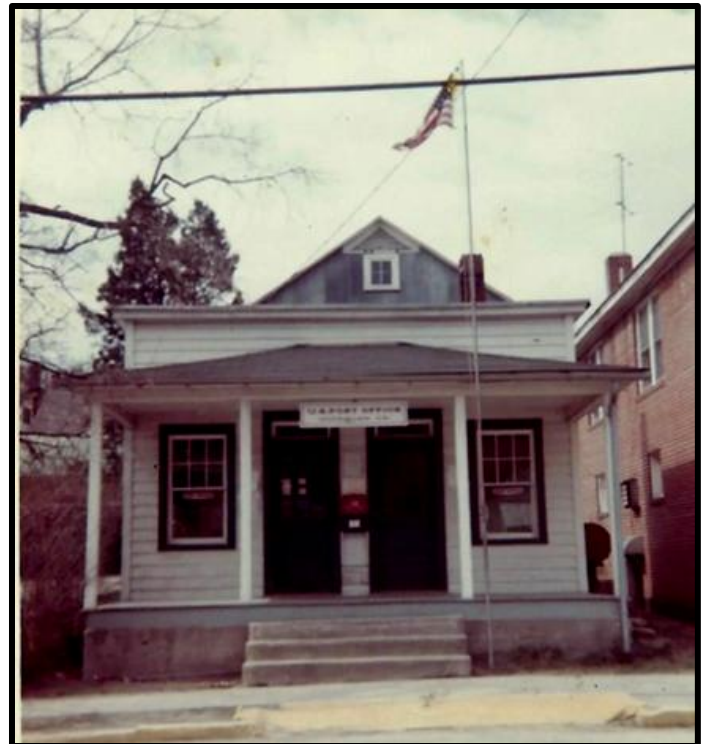
Having the only bridge conveniently crossing the Occoquan River between Alexandria and Fredericksburg, two major cities in Virginia, Ellicott obtained the U.S. postal route.

OHS member Sophie Donlin served the Town of Occoquan as postmistress from December 28, 1973 through March 28, 1996. Sophie had obtained records which include copies of several of the postmaster appointments from the General Services Administration. These records are in our Mill House files.

The first appointed postmaster was Bernard Gilpin on October 1, 1808 followed by Nathaniel Ellicott on September 1, 1810.

The current U.S. Post Office in Occoquan opened on June 23, 1969. The building was built on property owned by Bernard and Bine Cross. Construction of the building was by Leonard Cross, brother of Bernard. This new building had heat, air-conditioning and keyed post office boxes.

The first Occoquan post office building at 304 Mill Street was built by John Leary. In 1920 Leary bought the 304 Mill Street property from William Smoot. The post office building shown below was between Leary's hardware store at 302 Mill Street and Wayland Grocery at 306 Mill Street. This post office building closed on June 21, 1969, two days before the first day opening of the U.S. Post Office at 202 Mill Street.





Pictured above is a partial view of the post office window with 48 mail slots that is on display at the Mill House Museum. It was made by the Sadler Company which had sites in Baltimore MD., Indianapolis IN. and Kansas City, KS. Positioned above the window is the Occoquan Post Office sign that hung outside the 304 Mill Street office.

Complete with a bared service window the box was used at the Beach family home at 206 Commerce Street and lastly at the post office at 304 Mill Street. Isabel Beach was named postmistress in 1904. The 1910 census indicates she is still employed with the postal service. In 1914 her son Lee was named postmaster.

On April 22, 1920 Charles Pierce was the new Occoquan Postmaster and served until the end of November in 1933. Our records indicate Pierce conducted the Post Office at 307 Mill Street and later at 301 Union Street next to Slack's Funeral Home. When Leary built the Post Office at 304 Mill Street, Pierce took the post office window with him to that address.

It's interesting to look at some of the postmaster names through the years. Our first postmaster, Bernard Gilpin may have been a relative of George Gilpin. George was a trustee of Occoquan when it was laid out in 1804 and he served as postmaster in Alexandria. If Bernard had a connection to George, his appointment may have been a choice to assure that the new postal service and route ran smoothly. Merchant Mill owner, Nathaniel Ellicott, our second postmaster, built the bridge that allowed the mail to travel between the north and south routes. John Underwood was arrested by CSA General Wade Hampton during the Civil War on the charges of treason for his abolitionist stance. Mill owner Joseph Janney is the gg-grandfather of several of our current OHS members. William R. Selecman operated a general store and shipped large quantities of lumber from Occoquan. William and several other postmasters were descended from Henry Selecman, the master forger at the 1755 Occoquan Iron Works. Lola Beach Woodyard followed in the footsteps of her mother Isabel. Bine Cross owned the property where the current post office is located.



Above: a 48" H x 37" W x 10" D Occoquan Postal Window (Provenance unknown)
Left: Commemorative Covers

List of Occoquan Postmasters through March 26, 1996

Occoquan Postmasters	Appointment Date
Bernard Gilpin	October 1, 1808
Nathaniel Ellicott	September 1, 1810
James Russell	October 1, 1815
Joseph Janney Jr.	July 20, 1826
Leland A. Lynn	December 29, 1856
John Underwood	June 3, 1862
John Wright	July 30, 1862
Thomas A Selecman	July 26, 1865
Peter Hughes	March 29, 1866
John Manning	January 29, 1867
William R. Selecman	February 14, 1867
Julia Hammill	August 5, 1867
Jennie Davis	April 14, 1879
Henrietta C. Selecman	December 9, 1897
Ida E Selecman	August 11, 1898
Isabel Beach	October 26, 1904
Lee E Beach	March 13, 1914
Charles S Pierce	April 22, 1920
Ashley B Rogers	December 18, 1933
Francis B Morgan	January 26, 1941
Lola B. Woodyard	March 4, 1943
Bine S Cross	July 31, 1964
Sophie Donlin	December 28, 1973-March 28, 1996

Post Office Department,
TOPOGRAPHER'S OFFICE,
Washington, D. C. *Nov 15, 1898,*

TOPOGRAPHER
DEC 8 1898
P. O. DEPT.

To enable the Topographer of this Department to determine, with as much accuracy as possible, the relative positions of Post Offices, so that they may be correctly delineated on its maps, the Postmaster General requests you carefully to answer the questions below, and furnish the distances on the other side, returning the same as soon as possible, verified by your signature and dated, under cover to the Topographer's Office, Post Office Department.

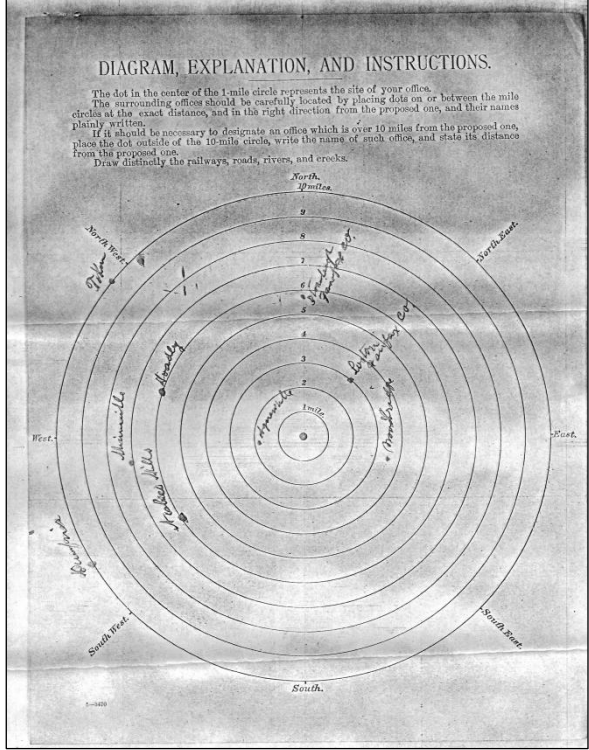
Respectfully, etc.,
A. von Frank
Topographer P. O. Dept.

To POSTMASTER AT Occoquan,
Prince William Co. Va.

The (P. O. Dept.) name of my Office is Occoquan
If the town, village, or site of the Post Office be known by another name than that of the Post Office, state that other name here: None
My Office is situated in Occoquan part of Accoquin Township, or in _____ quarter of Tract No. _____ Township, County of Prince William State of Virginia
The name of the most prominent river near it is Potomac
The name of the nearest creek is None
My Office is _____ miles from said river, on the West side of it, and is _____ miles from said nearest creek, on the West side of it.
My Office is on Mail Route No. 1431
My Office is a Special Office supplied from _____ miles distant.
The name of the nearest Office on my route is Woodbridge, and its distance is 7 miles, by the traveled road, in a SE direction from this, my Office.
The name of the nearest Office, on the same route, on the other side, is Woodbridge and its distance is 7 miles in a _____ direction from this, my Office.
The name of the nearest Office of the route is Woodbridge, and its distance by the most direct road is 7 miles in a _____ direction from this, my Office.
My Office is at a distance of 2 1/2 from the track of the _____ Railroad, on the _____ side of the railroad.
My Office is _____ miles, air-line distance, from nearest point of my County boundary.

(Signature of Postmaster) *I. E. Selecman*
(Date) Dec. 7, 1898

Ida Selecman 1898
documents pertaining
to the location of the
post office.



Save The Date!



Join OHS for our fall fundraiser at the **Bottle Stop** located at 311 Mill Street in Occoquan at **6:30 p.m. on Tuesday, September 29, 2015.** Great wine and a fund raiser too, can't wait!



Get online and vote starting August 1!

Go to www.vatop10artifacts.org and vote for our group of Mill House Museum artifacts which include Henry Selecman's blacksmith vise, the iron ingot and a section of the iron conduit that brought water to the mill sluice. These three items are all connected to our 1755 Occoquan Iron Works.

The Virginia Association of Museums (VAM) is sponsoring this program and it will put us in touch with conservators and possibly grant money. We need your support!

www.vatop10artifacts.org has a wealth of information about the program.

There are 26 nominees so we are very appreciative of being one of those selected. Tell your friends and family, post it on Facebook or anywhere you think will help. Voting runs through August 23 so vote today!

Annual Dues

Thank you to everyone who has mailed in their dues, dropped them off at the museum, or paid online. All the support has been wonderful!

If you haven't had the opportunity to pay your dues you can mail them to the address at the bottom of the page with a check payable to the **Occoquan Historical Society for \$20** or pay online through our web site; www.occoquanhistoricalsociety.org

Thank you everyone!

Forgive Me

Last month I made a terrible mistake and omitted our OHS President, Shara Kundu, from the list of Board members. Shara has worked so hard for OHS and is responsible for arranging our upcoming fund raiser. I know he forgives me but how could I have done that!

Our Board is as follows; President; Shara Kundu, Vice President; Alice Gardiner, Treasurer; Earnie Porta, Secretary; open, Curator; Dolores Elder. Also sitting on the Board are Boyd Alexander, Stewart Christiano, Kim Deal, Rose Destefano, Bobbie Frank, June Randolph, Annette Riley and Martha Roberts.

Thank you everyone for your continued support through donations of artifacts, financial support, and kind words. You are all such a great group of people!

Thank you,
Dolores Elder



Mill House Museum
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