Fairfield Historical Society : Early Township Police 1924

In 1798 New Jersey established 104 Townships. Caldwell was one of these original Townships that united the majority of the ‘Horseneck’ Area of Newark Township with a smaller western portion of Acquackanonk Township (Passaic). Essentially ‘West Essex’ as we know it today.

These original 104 Townships are made up today of 565 Municipalities throughout the State. Caldwell Township was no different as seven Municipalities were eventually set apart, generally following established educational districts. This made sense because one of the most important aspects of ‘home rule’ involves School funding and the associated tax burden. The other large part is Municipal Services especially road improvements and utility administration.

For example, if Township Committeemen are predominately elected from Fairfield and Clinton, the budget allocation seemed to always favor those sections of the Township. This actually happened, and the other Township elected officials felt that their districts were being treated disproportionately.

By 1908 today’s individual ‘West Essex’ Township borders were established. Caldwell Borough was the first section to self incorporate in 1892. About twenty years later the Borough established their first Police Department with the appointment of Chief John Markey. Initially he served alone, but by 1924 his one man Department was expanded into six full time Officers.

Fairfield (by default, the only remaining part of 1798 Caldwell Township) and West Caldwell (incorporated in 1904) were predominately farm country with much less need for law enforcement than the commercialized center of Caldwell.

Prior to organizing a Police Department these Towns employed part time Constables to protect their Communities. In West Caldwell Constable Roscoe Conklin was paid fifty cents an hour for his duties and could enlist other ‘deputies’ as necessary. Conklin was replaced when West Caldwell formally organized their first Police Department in 1924. William King was made Chief and served alone for six years. His salary was $1,700 per year for a job that required him to be on
call 24 / 7. He was not furnished any type of transportation or uniform and was only given a badge, a revolver, and a night stick. He also had many capable ‘deputies’ who he could call upon when needed. In addition, Chief King was responsible for School Attendance (Truant Officer) and Animal Control (strays of all kinds). Traffic Control was also a big part of his responsibility with Bloomfield Avenue requiring constant attention, especially on weekends.

In 1924 Fairfield was still utilizing part time Constables. Morris E. Collerd was Chief King’s counterpart with almost identical duties. Chief Constable Collerd also had several reliable ‘deputies’ who assisted when needed. The revolver he was issued was not capable of ‘hitting the side of a barn’ so he bought his own more accurate weapons. It’s likely those better revolvers were used most often for putting rabid animals out of their misery.

Every day Chief Collerd patrolled the Township for about four hours and was paid seventy-five cents per hour with a few pennies for his personal motorcycle mileage.
Both King and Collerd worked out of their homes, and when cases could not be scheduled for Municipal Court, the wrongdoers were brought to the Judges home for resolution.

According to Morris’ wife Adelia:

“Many nights when he was out on duty I was awakened in my sleep by people calling on the phone and knocking at my door and have even sat up with a revolver on my lap but couldn’t say that I ever would have tried to use it. Maybe to frighten someone that is all.”

* * * *

The New Jersey State Police graduated their first class of soldierly recruits in December of 1921. To give the reader some historical perspective:

“The first modes of (NJSP) transportation consisted of sixty-one horses, twenty motorcycles, one car, and one truck. The horse remained the principal means of transportation throughout the twenties.”

About 140 Troopers covered the entire 8,000 square miles of New Jersey 24 / 365 until about 1930 when the numbers of Trooper Cars and Motorcycles increased.

Early NJ State Police. For more see:

https://www.njsp.org/about/history/1920s.shtml
West Caldwell added two full time Patrolmen for Chief King in 1930 and 1931. Special Officers continued to be available when needed. Chief Collerd had several ‘Deputies’ that he frequently relied upon: Vincent Mullane (1st), Rudolph Geiger, John Filipow, Robert Henning, and Charles Voelker Sr (Father of eventual Fairfield Police Chief Charles Voelker and Grandfather of Chief Charles ‘Chuck’ Voelker).

Chief Collerd was becoming increasingly disenchanted with his position. The part time job had grown into many full time responsibilities. His other jobs were Fairfield Reformed Church Sexton and Farmer on the large fifty acre Horseneck Road Homestead with Father Abram, and Brothers Ray and James.

Ticket ‘squashing’ was the most frustrating aspect of the Chief’s job.

“When an honest ticket was given out and probably around a $3.00 fine sometimes there were 2 & 3 cops and many telephone calls to get these tickets squashed. This sickened me of the job........”

Fairfield’s first Police Car ( $ 600 ).
A 1932 Chevrolet owned by Constable Morris E. Collerd.

At the end of 1935, after 11 years, Chief Constable Collerd resigned and “never regretted his decision”. Less than two years later, Caldwell Township organized a
two man Police Department with former ‘deputy’ Robert Henning becoming the first official Police Chief. Officer William Vanderhoof Sr. served with Chief Henning and eventually became Police Chief as well.

In 1937, they opened new Police Headquarters in the newly constructed Municipal Building on Fairfield Road. No more spouses ‘packing’ revolvers on their laps in case of possible danger at home.

**New Jersey License Plates 1920 to 1929**

Dedicated to Chief Constable Morris E. Collerd.........Paul Pollio  October 20, 2018
The Great Chicken Robbery

Not to trivialize the role of the Chief Constable, but this story made it into a Police report.

While on patrol one evening, Morris came upon a car parked on Big Piece Road in front of an abandoned home. The driver said he was having car trouble but it was quickly started and driven away. Morris jotted down a few details before returning to patrol.

The next day, a Farmer came to Morris’ home to report that all of his chickens were stolen. Morris went with the Farmer to his Chicken Coops to investigate. They noticed footprints in the light snow leading to the back of the same abandoned home Morris had stopped in front of the evening before. They entered the building and found all of the Farmer’s chickens in the basement unharmed.

Morris’ notes led to the arrest of the chicken thieves. Case closed.
FAIRFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY: FORMATION OF THE FAIRFIELD FIRE DEPARTMENT 1911

During the 1950’s, Walter Kulick* wrote a small article about the early days of the Caldwell Township (Fairfield) Fire Department that appeared in the *Caldwell Progress*. Much of the following is taken from his original story.

“Caldwell Township had no fire protection until 1911 when the original fire company was formed by, among others, Vince Mullan, Bob Hardy, Bill Whittle, Tom Pier, Ray Collerd, Reg Lee, Charles Pier, and John and Louis Schlapfer.”

A fire house was built in 1912 on land donated by J.W. DeBaun at 129 Fairfield Road (directly across from the Kulick Road intersection today). The Department had not even acquired fire equipment yet when the three year old building burned down with the Department “helpless to combat the flames”.

The Fire Company was inactive until 1925 when a new movement was started by Chief Andrew Shaw with a new group of Volunteers: Sam Klein, Lloyd Van Ness, Bill Wohkittel, Joe Schubert, Bill Stanek Sr., Lou LaRegina, Edgar Schmitt, Harold Jacobus, Al Sisco, Ralph Kent, Bert Garrabrant, and Bert Steinert. Ray Collerd and Lou Schlapfer carried over their service from the original 1911 company.

The Department received no backing from the Township Committee and raised funds by holding dinners and soliciting contributions. They took on a $1,500 mortgage for the new building and also went through similar financial struggles when they acquired their first fire truck in 1927.

The Company went through several difficult years in 1928-1930 with the mortgage and truck loan payments being difficult to meet. However, the Company was ‘bailed out’ in early 1930 when the town bought the existing fire truck for $6,700 and took responsibility for future equipment needs. Eighteen years later the 1927 Day-Elder fire truck was ready to be retired and the Township bought a new “pumper” (1948). Then in 1953 a second pumper was purchased with a large 1,000 gallon capacity.
The ‘Old Fire House’ was used as a Recreation Hall after the new municipal building was completed in 1937. As it is today with a fire hydrant - just in case.

( My Uncle ) Pasquale Pollio was the Fire Chief back then, and I rode with him several times to fires in those ‘old’ pumpers (Try that today with Insurance policies, etc.). You might think they’re fast trucks but all that water gallonage is a lot of weight and they take a long time getting up to speed. You needed a good running start to get over the Route 46 overpasses quickly. Today a turbocharged VW Beetle has about the same horsepower as those old water filled pumpers.

Before the Plectron era, the fire siren at the Municipal Building had a metal slug that created a series of long and short blasts unique to each street (really!). Theoretically, Volunteers would know the street where the fire was located by interpreting the signal. Later a placard with the street name was slid into an outside receptacle for late arriving Firemen who missed the outbound trucks.

*Indian Brand* Backpack Fire Pump
We teenagers even got to help put out small brush fires that were far from the street. This meant *Indian Brand* 5 gallon fire pumps on your backs. Try jumping a ditch with one of these on your back.

Now Fairfield has a Ladder Truck that is larger than the entire ‘Old Firehouse’.

There are many people who are more knowledgeable than I about the most recent decades, so I’ll end it here.

Dedicated to Walter Kulick and all the Volunteers and Auxiliary who helped - and continue to help - protect the Fairfield Community.

...............Paul Pollio   January 1, 2019

*Walter was the son of Joseph and Agnes Kulick whose farmhouse was on Horseneck Road where Barista Expresso is today ( # 27-29 ). It was both Joseph’s and Agnes’ second marriages and they had eight children from their first marriages. Then they had three more children together: Benjamin, Walter, and Elizabeth. Another beautiful Fairfield Family that contributed a great deal to the Community.*
Prior to World War I aircraft manufacturing was led by various inventors, ‘shade tree’ engineers, mechanics, and adventure seekers. Before airplanes, trench warfare was a virtual stalemate of death. The effectiveness of strafing and bomb dropping over enemy lines was obvious, and the combatants all needed warplanes no matter what the cost. At this time, only 5 U.S. Aircraft Manufacturers out of the top 20 ever produced more than 10 airplanes. This urgent demand seemed similar to the race to create automobiles early in the century. Thus, aircraft manufacturers naturally sought out assembly line experienced automobile manufacturing leadership. However, the complexities of aircraft manufacturing did not lend themselves to assembly line production. Add to this inexperienced military procurement personnel who changed specs, upgrades, and refinements ‘on-the-fly’ mid-contract. This will be important to remember when we later explore the success of Curtiss-Wright in the surge to build WWII aircraft.

The first aircraft in Fairfield (then Caldwell Township) were those few wood-wire-fabric biplanes used by the Armed Forces at the Navy Rifle Range 1918-1919. Apparently they utilized ‘cow pastures’ just as the Wright Brothers did in the ‘Huffman Prairie’ pasture near Dayton, Ohio. This was the beginning of the ‘Golden Age of Aviation’ that would end with WWII.

A couple of years later in 1920, a soon-to-be-famous pilot landed on the Fairfield Dairy property on old Dutch Lane. No—not Charles Lindbergh, Clarence Chamberlin who would also set transatlantic records only two weeks after ‘Slim’ became world famous. (There’s a great book about the race to be the first to cross the Atlantic non-stop: *Atlantic fever: Lindbergh, his competitors, and the race to cross the Atlantic* by Joe Jackson – Interlibrary 629.1309 JAC).

Clarence Duncan Chamberlin (1893–1976) was an American pioneer in aviation. Only two weeks after Lindbergh’s historic flight in 1927 and delayed by a legal suit, he was the second man to pilot a fixed wing aircraft (a Wright–powered Bellanca) over the Atlantic, while carrying the first transatlantic passenger (the airplane’s owner Charles Levine). By the time Chamberlin and Levine ran out of gas near Berlin, Germany, the Bellanca had flown a record 3,911 miles. About 300 miles further than Lindbergh. (Where else would Cham–Berlin land? :- ) :- )
In 1920 there was only one significant airport located in Northern New Jersey: Teterboro Airport. Newark Airport was still eight years away and then only occupying a relatively small 60 acre tract at that. A year later in 1929, a group of Montclair Aviation Enthusiasts led by Walter Marvin invested in a private airport venture on the former Fairfield Dairy property. These were the ‘Roaring Twenties’ when practically any investment or business venture was unlikely to fail. This same year, Curtiss Aeroplane and Motor Co., Wright Aeronautical, and Keystone Aircraft Corp. merged into a large holding company with about twenty other aviation related businesses under their wings :- ) :- ). The Wright Brothers and Glenn Curtiss disliked each other for various reasons, but strangely enough, this business arrangement did not involve them. (Another great book that highlights their early accomplishments and eventual bitter relationship is *Birdmen: the Wright Brothers, Glenn Curtiss, and the battle to control the skies* by Lawrence Goldstone – FPL 629.13 GO ).
The C-W merger was apparently an effort to become the nations leading Aircraft Manufacturing (Airframe, Aircraft Motor, Propeller), Sales, Flight Training, and Aircraft Support Network. Today we call this ‘vertical integration’ but possible thoughts of industry monopolization cannot be entirely ruled out. By issuing stock, the new C-W Corp. raised $31 million dollars. Some of which was used to add 12 Airports similar to Marvin Field in Fairfield to their network. Before it was even officially opened, our small grass ‘all direction’ Field was named Curtiss Marvin Airport.

There were many Aviation Clubs forming nationwide and some even called themselves ‘Aviation Country Clubs.’ They had Flight Instructors who were similar
to Golf Pros at a Golf Club, Pools, Tennis Courts, and sometimes even Lodging. It’s possible our well-to-do Montclair adventure seekers could fly around Manhattan and party in Hicksville, NY or a similar landing spot near another major city.

C-W was now the largest Aircraft Manufacturing Corporation in the Country. The merger was highly successful as Curtiss Airplane Manufacturing meshed nicely with the Aircraft Motor and Propeller businesses. C-W introduced many new models for commercial and military use yet they still had stiff competition from Boeing, Pratt & Whitney, United Aircraft, and others. ( The best book on C-W is *Curtiss-Wright: Greatness and Decline* by Louis R. Eltscher and Edward M. Young. Paterson Local History R 629.133 ELT ).

Only four months after the merger the Stock Market plummeted and the commercial and recreational aircraft businesses *crashed* too :-) :- ). The military aircraft business survived for two more years because of a five year procurement cycle, but that business also vanished when government funded projects and purchases ended. Of course no one anticipated a long lasting depression at that time, so there was no reason for Walter Marvin, his Montclair Associates, and C-W VIP’s *not* to plan a colossal air show and official opening celebration. 35,000-40,000 people showed up for the biggest event Fairfield would ever see ( Sunday October 26, 1930 ).

‘Speed King’ Frank Hawks flew over the Field at 250+ mph, and USN ‘Stunt Marvel’ Lt. Alford J. Williams performed aerial maneuvers seldom seen before.

At the 1930 Fairfield Airshow, a Curtiss Condor ( L ) took hundreds of passengers up for short flights, while the Pitcairn Autogiro ( R ) demonstrated vertical take offs and spot landings. ( Note: These aircraft photos are not from the actual Fairfield Airshow ).
Parachuting, spot landing, and ‘bomb dropping’ competition for $100 prizes wowed the crowds. Hawks and Lt. Williams showed off their skills with a ‘follow the leader’ race full of vertical banks, dives, barrel rolls, and ‘figure eights’. The highlight of the show was a near crash when Lt. Williams’ motor quit in the middle of a low inverted pass. Luckily the Navy Pilot glided the aircraft to a safe landing. It was a long day of exciting events, but I know one person that was glad when it was all over: Chief Constable Morris Collerd! This must have been one helluva “Woodstock” type of day for him and his Deputies. I’ll bet they uncorked the old dusty cider jug when that day was finally over.

* * * *

Some good did come out of this downturn in the economy for C-W. The Corporation completely reorganized, restructured and shed all businesses not essential to aircraft manufacturing. New subsidiaries were formed and consolidations implemented with Engineering realigned accordingly. One small example was their Buffalo Facility sending all of their propeller production to Clifton N.J. This times ten, created a strong foundation for eventual future growth. Our small Fairfield Airport stayed in the C-W Family and even expanded later to support the new Corporation that was no longer just a holding company.

Aircraft propeller ‘final inspection’ at the Clifton N.J. Plant
After The Greenbrook Mill Stream and old Dutch Lane were rerouted, the Airport was greatly expanded with two large hangers and three paved runways.

Another subsidiary C-W Export Corporation was gaining strength during the Depression years. Asian, Latin American, and other smaller countries bought aircraft with our governments approval. Of course the most technically advanced and most heavily armed aircraft could not be exported. But these export sales and a few development contracts took C-W through this grim period. Things picked up sharply in 1935 when Great Britain boasted about the strength of their Royal Air Force. Hitler and Goering responded immediately by announcing the formation of their Luftwaffe Aerial Warfare Branch that had already been ramping up significantly in secret. As you can imagine, the panic for advanced military aircraft took off :-) :- )
C-W was in prime position for adding new business. Even if competitors had better designed prototypes, C-W could deliver their models more than a year sooner. The propeller plant in Clifton was greatly expanded (1938) in tandem with Wright Aeronautical Motor production in Paterson, and airframe plant expansions in Buffalo and St. Louis. This was only the first phase of C-W’s pre-war growth. After acquiring the propeller blade business of Pittsburgh Screw and Bolt Corp. (1939), the second phase included new propeller plants in Fairfield (1940), Indianapolis (1940), and Beaver Pennsylvania (1941). Motor and airframe facilities were similarly added when the war broke out in Europe.

C-W was generally reluctant to license production or sub contract components compared to it’s competition. In the propeller business the Hamilton Standard subsidiary of United Aircraft was the top producer during WWII. Of the total 708,000 WWII propellers produced, C-W made 144,863 (20%); H-S made 233,021 (33%); and H-S licensees made 297,114 (42%). (A local writer once
stated that C-W made “85% of all the aircraft propellers during WWII”. But such a claim must have been made in Neko’s Tavern just a few minutes before closing time :-) 

Although C-W did not manufacture the highest number of propellers during WWII, per this illustrated example, size and complexity should be considered as well.
There’s obviously a lot more to the C-W story, but that’s almost enough for now.

During my ‘research’ I found a copy of Clarence Chamberlin’s 1917 draft card. It’s significance to me was that it highlighted a dark chapter in our Nation’s history regarding African Americans in the ‘Jim Crow’ era. The bottom left corner of the card states: "If person is of African descent, tear off this corner". Enough said.

I can’t close out any story without a dedication. This one is dedicated to my Aunts Felicia and Agnes Pollio who both worked decades at C-W’s Fairfield Plant. They worked in the ‘Key Punching’ and ‘Tabulation’ Department. God Bless them Both.

For an excellent read on Working Women during WWII see: Our mothers' war: American women at home and at the Front during World War II by Emily Yellin (interlibrary 940.53 YEL).

...............Paul Pollio  December 30, 2018