

# Forward, into the Past

## “Neither Snow, Nor Sleet”

by Marion M. Dumond

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As plans for the celebration of the Bicentennial of the Town of Wawarsing develop, it is difficult to remember that many of life's daily activities were unknown two hundred years ago. Going to the post office to mail a letter, or buy stamps, or pick up one's mail, or check a zip code... even the concepts did not exist.

Two hundred years ago, the hamlet of Wawarsing (then called Wawarsink) was a postal stop on the old stage road between the Hudson River and Pennsylvania. The community now known as Ellenville was called “Fairchild City” or “the City.” Contrary to a long-standing bit of folklore, there was a community here before 1805. On February 3, 1794, John A. DeWitt, a blacksmith and grandson of Egbert DeWitt of Napanoch, became the sole owner of much of what is today's Ellenville. He owned from the Beerkill to near the village line to the south, and from the Shawangunk Mountain to the village line on the west.

DeWitt sold most of the tract to Alpheus Fairchild, of Newton, Connecticut. In 1803, a baby was born in the settlement and named Lamira Fairchild Miller, her middle name in honor of Mr. and Mrs. Fairchild. The Fairchilds



lived here until 1817 when Alpheus sold his land to Nathan Hoornbeek and Jacob E. Bogardus. Mrs. Fairchild (Lois) had died May 16, 1815, and is buried in the old **Ellenville Cemetery**.

Nathan Hoornbeek acquired a dwelling Mr. Fairchild had erected on part of the site where the **Hunt Memorial Building** stands today. He enlarged the structure and turned it into an inn. Jacob E. Bogardus built several buildings, one of which may have been his own home, located where the present post office stands, next to the street later named in his honor. Alpheus Fairchild has also been credited with building the Bogardus home, one of many contradictions in historical records.

In 1823, young Charles Hartshorn arrived in The City to try a case in the Hoornbeek tavern. (No, he was not a lawyer, except as he had studied it himself.) He liked the people he met, and decided to settle here. He borrowed some money and acquired a partner, Samuel Rockwell, to establish a store. *Hartshorn & Rockwell* opened in October 1823 in what was reputed to have been the first log cabin erected here.

Charles Hartshorn was a born leader. Shortly after opening the store, Hartshorn decided that The City needed a post office and a new name. No record exists of the discussions the men of the community held to determine the name, but tradition tells us that the men finally decided to let “the ladies” decide. At the time, Mrs. Hoornbeek's sister, Ellen Snyder, was visiting at the inn. Legend has it that she offered her name and the men agreed.

The name “Ellenville” was sent to the Federal Government on the application for a post office, although United States Postal Service records note that it was spelled ELLENSVILLE from approximately 1825 to 1845. On December 27, 1823, Ellenville had its official name and a post office.

Charles Hartshorn was named the first postmaster and used a corner of his store as the post office.

The **Ellenville Post Office** had no home of its own for more than 110 years, first being moved to the premises of each postmaster, and later from rented quarters to rented quarters, as the growth of business or other factors dictated. The April 4, 1873, *South Ulster Press* announced that E. W. Guernsey would occupy rooms in the Terwilliger Block for post office and his boot and shoe business. These were rooms formerly occupied by *Cox and Cudney*, and by *J. A. Whittaker*.

The July 13, 1888, *Journal* carried an article headed “New Post Office” and says “The post office has been removed to the Keeler building, corner Main and Canal streets, the room long occupied by McKinlay, the con- ➔

