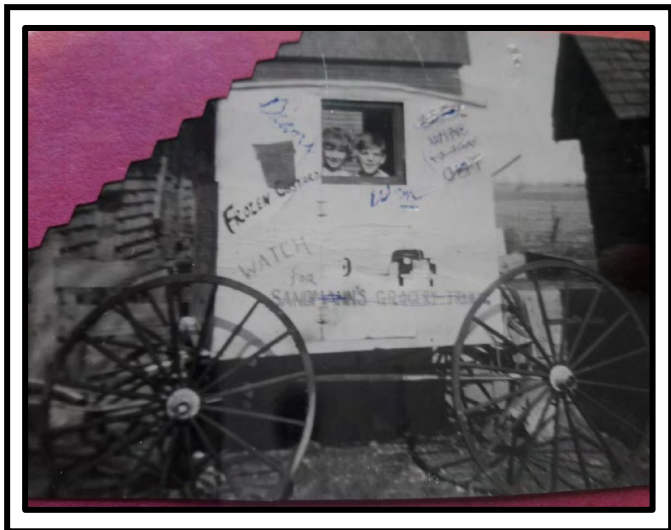


PORT HOPE RURAL DELIVERY HORSE DRAWN MAIL BUGGY

DELIVERED MAIL IN THE 30'S AND 40'S

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BUGGY, ITS RE-DISCOVERY IN 2019, THE RESTORATION PROCESS AND ITS RETURN TO PORT HOPE MI.



FINKEL'S PORT HOPE MAIL BUGGY

Story written by Alger Rutz 8-10-2021

"Neither Rain, Nor Sleet, Nor Dark of Night Shall Stay These Couriers From the Swift Completion of Their Appointed Rounds."

The old horse drawn Port Hope Mail Buggy is a perfect example of the above "Mail Carriers Oath", and has completed its rounds and has returned to its home in Port Hope Mi.

Built approximately ninety years ago by part time mail carrier, Harold W. Finkel, it was able to deliver mail thru the roughest of weather conditions. When the cars of the day could not traverse the heavy winter snow and muddy spring roads, the mail buggy "completed its rounds". Harold, a young man at the time built the buggy out of sheet metal panels, nailed to a wooden framework. The completed box sat on a chassis, no doubt purchased from the Melligan Farm Machinery and Hardware store in town.

The buggy apparently served the community well for several years but like many things in life, it eventually went on to greener pastures and became a long-forgotten memory. That is until seventy years later. Two years ago, in the fall of 2019 while doing genealogy research on my Finkel family, I came across a 1978 Port Huron newspaper article describing an old mail buggy having been built by a Harold Finkel (my uncle) and stored in a local farm museum barn. With much excitement, I contacted the museum, and a visit was planned. Sure enough, the old buggy was displayed in the corner of the barn with a Port Hope plaque. In a rather sad state of disrepair, there were broken parts and the original wagon wheels had been removed and replaced with car tires. I contacted two of Harold Finkel's daughters, Diane, and Marilyn Finkel, and with much surprise they both remembered the buggy well, but had long ago lost track of it. Diane in fact provided a photo of her and William, her brother, William taken in the late 40's.

Further research uncovered the fact that Art Wilkowski had also been a mail carrier and I was able to obtain an old photo of Art sitting in the wagon loaded with boxes carrying baby ducks ready for delivery along with the mail. While the remaining history is vague, it was kept on the Finkel farm for a period of time and was occasionally used in parades and such. Ownership at some point transferred to the Weatherhead family, the Melms family, and eventually around 1971 ended up in the St Clair County Farm Museum in Goodell's MI. There it has sat for the last 50 years, gathering dust in a corner of the barn. What a wonderful discovery!

FINKEL'S PORT HOPE MAIL BUGGY (cont'd)

Over the next few months, I pondered putting in a request to the museum that they should consider restoring it to its original condition. Instead, I contacted them, told them the history, and asked if I could somehow obtain the buggy and return it to its home in Port Hope. After a few phone calls and some internal museum board meetings, they agreed to loan it to us indefinitely.

Arrangements were made and the buggy was trailered back to my shop where refurbishment started almost immediately. The body was lifted off the chassis and the old car tires were replaced with original style wood spoked wheels. The chassis required some repair and replacement of broken parts. The body, showing the original hammer marks, bumps and dents and rather crude construction, was intentionally kept as original but painted the post office green with red trim. The original sliding door windows had long ago disappeared and were re-constructed.

Upon completion and with the body set back on the newly refurbished red chassis, the old buggy appeared to be smiling once again. Holding a lot of stories and history from the past.

On Aug 12, 1921, the "Finkel" mail buggy was returned to Port Hope and is now on display at the Port Hope Area Historical Society.

Alger K. Rutz

Huron Happenings

By Paul Solal

Mail buggy dates to '35

When Frances and I were at St. Clair County Farm Museum at Goodells recently, we noticed with great interest a green mail buggy with the words, "Port Hope, Route 3," just inside one of the two barns, in which exhibits are on display.

Our curiosities aroused, I did some research. By a happy chance a few days later, I met Walter Meske, a retired letter carrier of Port Hope Post Office, who said the vehicle was built by Harold Finkel, a substitute carrier.

Harold told me he built it about 1935 for use to deliver mail in side roads during winter months when the snow was deep and in spring months when the roads often were quagmires.

He said George Johnson, for whom he was a substitute, drove an automobile on part of Route 3 while the mail buggy was hauled by a team of horses on other roads.

The present owner of the mail buggy is George Melms, of 5345 Atkins Road, Port Huron. He obtained it from the Weatherhead family of Port Hope.

I was mildly surprised to learn that rural lettercarriers in the Thumb used horses to draw buggies and sleds until after World War I.

Indeed, there are metal rings on the railing behind the Bad Axe post office for carriers to tie their horses. That structure was built between 1917 and 1919.

Rural free delivery (RFD) for farmers was started in 1895. Prior to that year, farmers went to post offices, some at crossroads, to get their mail.

This service caused closing of many post offices in Huron County. At one time, there were post offices at Bach, Berne, Canboro, Glencoe, Helena, Huron City, Ivanhoe, Parisville, Pinnebog, Popple, Port Crescent, Rapson, Kedman, Rescue and Verona.

ARTICLE THAT STARTED IT ALL

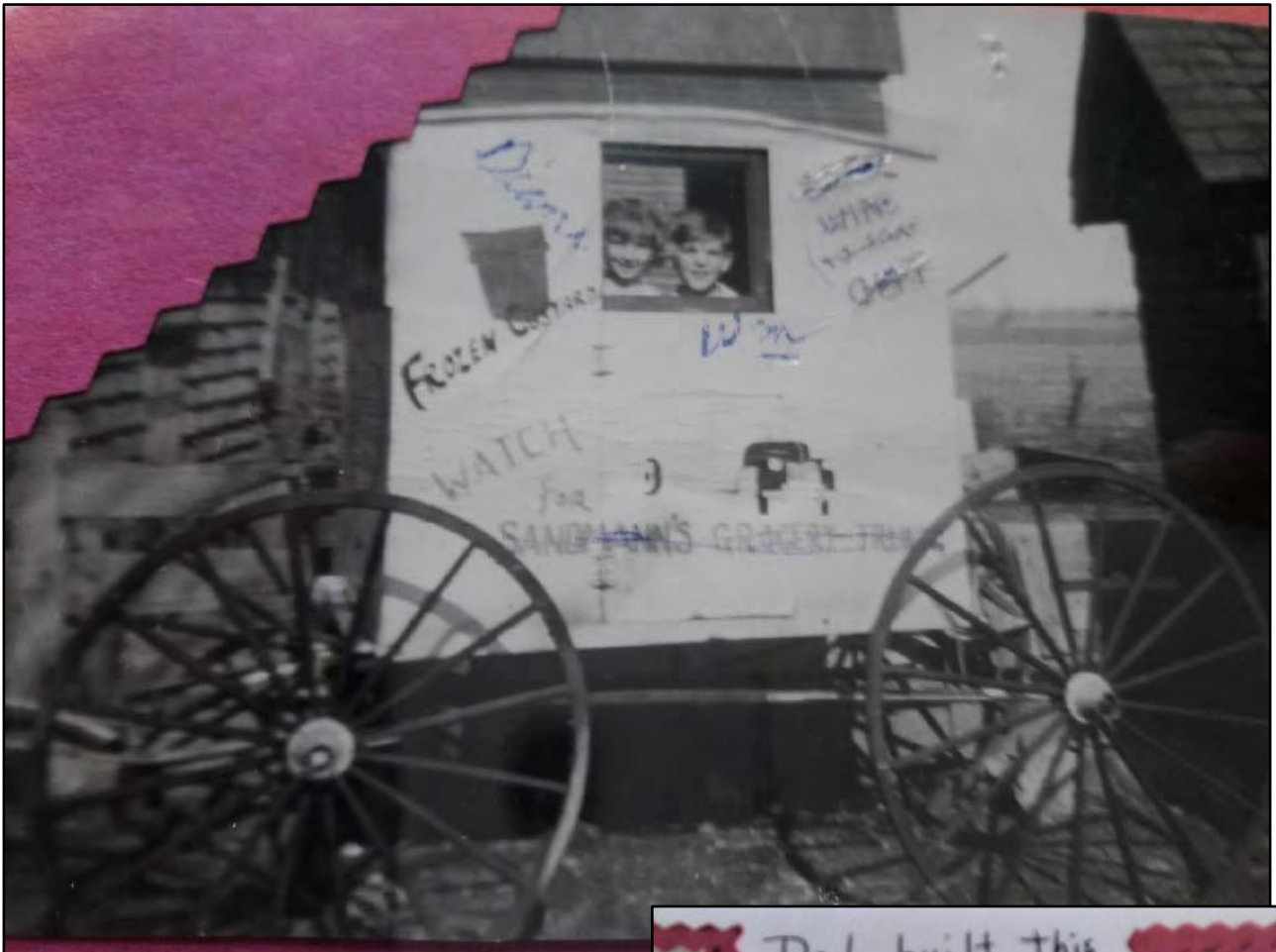
OLD 1978 ARTICLE UNCOVERED DURING FINKLE FAMILY RESEARCH DEC 30, 2018

Port Huron Times Herald article
published on Aug 6, 1978

While doing Finkel Family research and on-line browsing thru old newspaper archives, this article was found.

Until this article was discovered, the buggy had long been forgotten and no one in Port Hope was aware of it even existing.

OLD PHOTO & MESSAGE PROVIDED BY DIANE FINKEL



After learning of the buggy's existence, Harold Finkel's daughters, Diane and Marilyn Finkel were contacted. Both remembered it as a child and sitting in the barnyard, but neither had any idea as to when or where it went. Diane did have an old photo of her and her brother William playing in the buggy and posing for a picture.

Dad built this mail buggy around 1935. He was a substitute mail carrier in Port Hope on Route 3. He used it to deliver mail on side roads during winter months when the snow was deep and in the spring months when the roads were quagmires. The mail buggy was hauled by a team of horses.

OLD PHOTO & MESSAGES PROVIDED BY CONNIE WILKOWSKI



Connie Wilkowski, was also able to provide some information on the mail buggy. Her father-in-law, Art Wilkowski, also served as a Port Hope mail carrier and had used the mail buggy. She sent the old photo shown and the following notes.

“This was Art Wilkowski about 1952. He fixed it up. Painted it gray and rode Harold Finkel’s horse in Port Hope parade. The horse was pulling the mail wagon”.

“Connie’s husband Denny Wilkowski, said George Johnson owned it in 1947. someone posted that the Weatherhead family was related some way to George Johnson”. (more research required).

“1947 was when George retired from post office”.

“The horse was boarded at Harold Finkel’s but belonged to Tony Duda”.

“People ordered baby ducks, chickens, and geese, and they were sent in those boxes. Art Wilkowski, the mailman, would deliver them on his mail route”.

NOV 16, 2019
BUGGY AS RE-DISCOVERED IN MUSEUM



Stored in the museum barn for almost 50 years (1971) It had over time, been repainted, re-lettered and had its wheels removed and replaced with car tires.

NOV 16, 2019
ORIGINAL BUGGY WHEELS AS STORED IN MUSEUM



The original wooden spoked wheels, no longer road-worthy were removed and were setting behind the mail buggy.

AUG 18, 2021
BUGGY BEING TRAIERED TO AL'S SHOP



The old mail buggy and all of its parts, loaded on the trailer at the St. Clair County Farm Museum, and ready for the trip to my Shelby Township shop for restoration.

BUGGY BOX AS IT WAS REMOVED FROM CHASSIS



The old metal box removed from the chassis and ready to be refurbished

ORIGINAL BUGGY CHASSIS BEING DISASSEMBLED FOR REPAIR AND RESTORATION (NOTE THE CAR TIRES)



The chassis currently being disassembled.

All metal parts had to be sand blasted and repainted.

Notice the old car tires that had been fitted to the axles replacing the old wooden wheels. Used wooden spoked wheels had to be purchased,

BUGGY CHASSIS COMPLETE AND READY FOR THE BOX



The completed chassis, painted with "Rustoleum Colonial Red", and ready for the box and the front shafts to be mounted.

BUGGY BOX PAINTED AND READY FOR CHASSIS



The buggy box now refurbished and ready to be mounted on the chassis. The various bumps, dents and holes were kept intact to preserve the buggy's originality. (the original door handles, "bent nails", were kept as is) The original sliding windows were rebuilt, and the interior painted a combination of green and red. The lettering was hand painted on the sides to replicate the original

COMPLETED BUGGY



The completed buggy at my workshop, ready for delivery to Port Hope

SLIDING DOOR GLASS AND ATTACHED STORY PLAQUE



Rural Delivery Route No 3 Mail Buggy ready for the road.
Notice the sliding door glass and frame and the drop down front window.
A plaque with the description and story of the buggy is magnetically mounted
on the side.

AUG 10, 2021
THE BUGGY IS RETURNED TO ITS HOME IN
PORT HOPE, MI



The completed buggy on the day of delivery to Port Hope
Standing on either side of my wife Sharon and I, our two sons, Ken and David.