

Press Releases

02-16-11 This Week In Orange County By Edward A. Diana

Last week's column ended with a challenge to find out about the Vin Fiz Flyer. A quick visit to the Orange County historian's office in Goshen will give you loads of information about this early attempt to fly an airplane across the country. 2011 marks the 100th anniversary of the Vin Fiz Flyer's cross country adventure.

A classic example of early promotional marketing, the Vin Fiz Flyer was an airplane named for "the ideal grape drink" which was "sold everywhere" for just 5 cents. Pilot Calbraith P. Rodgers departed from Long Island on September 17, 1911. Following the tracks of the Erie Railroad, Rodgers successfully landed in Middletown. Unfortunately, he crashed upon take-off from Middletown the following day. With an Erie Railroad baggage car painted Vin Fiz purple as a support vehicle, the Flyer was soon repaired and Rodgers was back in the air. Sixteen crashes later, on December 12, 1911, Rodgers succeeded in completing the first trans-continental flight.

The Erie Railroad also played an important role in another, much more significant, piece of not only Orange County history, but American history. It served as one of the main routes for the Underground Railroad, a clandestine network to help southern slaves escape to the northern states and Canada prior to and during the Civil War. While many escaped slaves traveled on foot going from safe home to safe home, others actually rood the rails on the Erie line with the help of sympathetic conductors. Chester Presbyterian Church was one of the more widely known stations along the secret route. Other safe havens in Orange County were located in Harriman, Port Jervis, Goshen, Cornwall, and Newburgh. In honor of Black History Month, I invite you to stop by the Orange County Historian's office at the 1841 Courthouse at 101 Main Street, Goshen, for more information about our County's role in the Underground Railroad and other important contributions to the history of Orange County.

Today in Orange County we continue to work to keep our residents safe from harm and free from discrimination. In 1970, the Orange County Human Rights Commission was established to protect the rights of all people. The primary objectives of the Commission are: To foster mutual respect and understanding among all racial, religious, and nationality groups in the County; to inquire into incidents of tension and conflict among or between various racial, religious, and nationality groups and to act to relieve this tension; to conduct and recommend programs in education to increase good will among the diverse inhabitants of our County; and to receive complaints of alleged discrimination because of race, creed, color, national origin, age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, arrest and/or conviction record and to attempt to resolve such conflicts.

On April 14, the Human Rights Commission will host their annual awards dinner at Falkirk Estates in Central Valley, to recognize the contributions of those who have worked to protect and promote the rights of all people in Orange County. For more information about the Orange County Human Rights Commission and the annual dinner, visit them online at www.orangecountygov.com or call 615-3680.

Until next week, wishing you good health and happiness.

Edward A. Diana
County Executive