

Figure 1. A cover dated 1916 mailed from the Mizzen Top Hotel on Quaker Hill in Pawling, New York, to Mrs. P.A. Brennan in Edgemere, Long Island. John B. McManus and W.J. Roberton are the proprietors.

## Enjoying 'Adagio Tempo' at the Mizzen Top

Italian Composer Pietro A. Yon  
Visits Quaker Hill in Pawling

By Charles J. DiComo, PhD

Let's take a trip to the Mizzen Top Hotel on Quaker Hill in Pawling, New York via the envelope shown (**Figure 1**), which I recently acquired for my Pawling and Dutchess County studies.

This envelope, imprinted with the hotel's corner card in blue, was written by the famous Italian-born organist and composer, Pietro A. Yon (**Figure 2**).

The letter entered the mail stream on the morning of August 12, 1916 from the Quaker Hill Post Office, where a 2-cent Washington stamp was affixed to pay the domestic first class letter rate.

The envelope is addressed to Mrs. P.A. Brennan, 7 Beach 42nd St. in Edgemere, L.I. (Long Island), and contains a two-page letter dated August 11, 1916 on hotel stationery. The letter (**Figure 3, Page 4**) was written by Pietro. He writes:

My Dear Mrs. Brennan,  
I am having a good adagio tempo  
[translated as "slow time"] here in Pawling and  
the only sports I like are: mangiare, bere  
[translated as "eating, drinking"] and golf (ten  
minutes of flirt in the evening). I do feel very

well but I play the piano and the organ like a  
real street-Italian player. I would be very  
glad to take few lessons back before begin-  
ning the season!! Five minute octaves?! I am  
dead after one minute!

Many thanks for your sympathy for my  
little troubles and I shall promise not to  
work myself to death – Signor (!) Castantino  
(?) sends you and Dr. Brennan his very best  
regards and I send twice as many.

As ever very sincerely yours,  
Pietro A. Yon



Figure 2. Musician Pietro A. Yon at the console of a Casavant Frères organ, New York City in 1919.

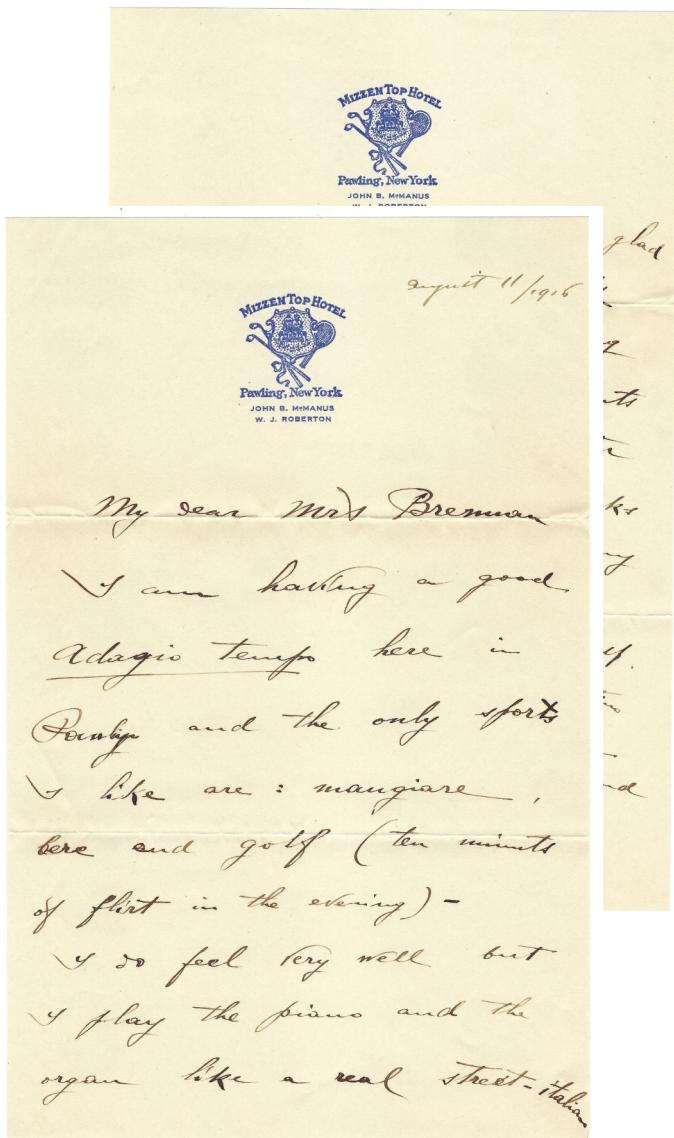


Figure 3. A two-page letter, on Mizzen Top Hotel stationery, written by Pietro A. Yon to Mrs. Brennan discussing his adagio tempo (or “slow time”) at the Hotel while mangiare, bere (eating, drinking), golf and 10 minutes of flirt in the evening.

#### MIZZEN TOP, FROM PAGE 3

To my delight, this cover also contained a receipt for organ lessons, given by none other than Maestro Yon to Mrs. Brennan. It is dated July 1, 1916, and addressed at 853 Carnegie Hall in New York (City) and is on Pietro’s personalized receipt. Mrs. Brennan must have enjoyed learning from the maestro, as she partook in eight piano and organ lessons from May 25 to June 20, 1916, for which Pietro was paid \$24 (Figure 4).

Let us travel back to the Mizzen Top Hotel via early 1900 picture postcards and what would have drawn Pietro, and many other visitors, to this bucolic southern Berkshires location on Quaker Hill (Figures 5 and 6).

The following excerpt from a 2019 newspaper article in the Poughkeepsie Journal details the hotel’s history, eventual closure and unfortunate demolition.

In 1880, construction began on the Mizzen-Top Hotel atop Quaker Hill in Pawling, NY. It was conceived & financed by one of Pawling’s most successful businessmen, Albert J. Akin, who in 1849 founded the Pawling Bank & is credited with bringing the Harlem Railroad to the community. He invested most of the structure’s \$100,000 cost.

Architect J.A. Wood oversaw the hotel’s design & construction on land that boasted spectacular views of the Harlem Valley. The hotel had porches on three sides & stood 1,300 feet above sea level — on clear days guests could see as far as Lake Mahopac. The three-story hotel was built of wood & was 260 ft. in length.

It had 145 rooms, 128 of which were used as guest accommodations, and offered a variety of activities, such as a billiard room, bowling alley and horseback riding. Telegraph service was available on-site, with which guests could communicate with NYC.

While some guest rooms featured hardwood floors, most were covered with fine Brussels carpeting and complemented with black walnut furniture. The hotel staged a grand opening in June 1881 and quickly became a desired destination for getaways.

Hotel servants used a separate building consisting of 16 rooms. When guest reservations escalated at the hotel, a series of cottages were erected in close proximity to the main building to accommodate overflow. There was also a livery stable built on the hotel grounds, which along with a separate carriage house provided quarters for 40 horses and carriages, as well as rooms to house grooms and livery attendants.

#### MIZZEN TOP, PAGE 6

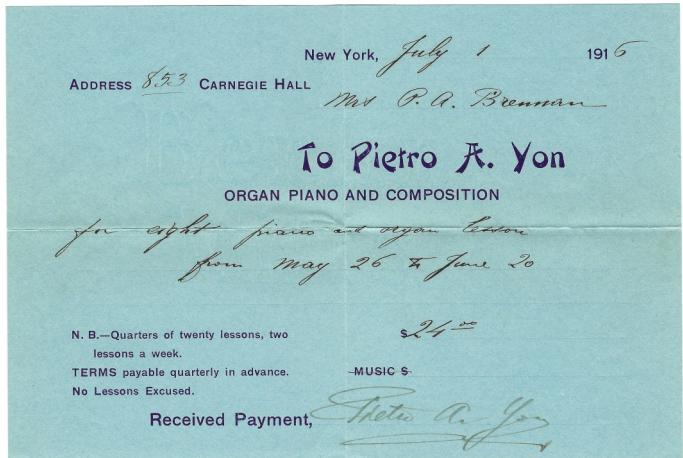


Figure 4. A receipt for payment dated July 1, 1916 in the amount of \$24, signed by Pietro A. Yon to Mrs. Brennan for eight piano and organ lessons.



**Figure 5.** Postcards from the early 1900s depict the 145-room Mizzen Top Hotel and some of the grounds, including tennis courts. Hotel construction began in 1880 and it drew clients until early in the Great Depression, when it closed. The main building was demolished in 1932.



**Figure 6. Postcards from the early 1900s emanating from the Mizzen Top Hotel, note the Pawling Mountains, surrounding countryside and the hotel's golf course.**



#### MIZZEN TOP, FROM PAGE 4

Among the officers appointed to oversee the hotel operation was its President, John B. Dutcher, who owned his own lodging establishment – Dutcher House – in the village, about 3 miles away. Guests traveling north on the railroad would be greeted at the Pawling train station and transported to the top of Quaker Hill and the hotel by horse & carriage.

The unusual name of the hotel was credited to Admiral John Lorimer Worden, commander of the Civil War ship Monitor & later superintendent of the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, MD. Having spent summers on Quaker Hill & eventually marrying Olivia Toffey, daughter of a prominent Pawling resident, Worden was said to have taken in the breathtaking views from the hotel property & aptly named it Mizzen-Top, after one of the highest points on a ship, the mizzen mast.

Despite its quality and first-class attributes, the hotel struggled to sustain a profit. When the cost to maintain the hotel became an issue, its trustees closed it permanently and demolished the building in 1932.

I am always on the search for Pawling-related material and this postal history survivor and enclosures captures the essence of what drew visitors in the early 1900s to the comfort and amenities in Pawling, the same area where my Sicilian family and I enjoyed mangiare, bere and adagio tempo for more than a decade.

#### Resources

The 1919 photo of Pietro A. Yon at the console of Casavant Frères organ, Op. 184 (1903) is credited to Underwood & Underwood Studios, New York, New York. It is in the public domain at the following link: [www.commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=2077808](http://www.commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=2077808).

“Pawling's Mizzen-Top Hotel Once Stood 1,300 Feet Above Sea Level,” by Anthony P. Musso, special to Poughkeepsie Journal, January 19, 2019.



# Excelsior!

The Journal of the Empire State Postal History Society

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**Dr. George DeKornfeld:** New discoveries finds our author finds he is still drawn to his former home in Columbia County. **Cover, Page 8.**

**Charles J. DiComo, PhD:** Mountaintop resort offered a respite worthy of a pastorale sonata. **Page 3.**

**Douglas Penwell:** So, you have a nice cover except for one part is a bit rough. Should you clean it up? **Page 7.**

**Jeff Stage:** An entertaining and somewhat squirrelly cover touches on crime and official police business. **Page 12.**

**Jeff Stage:** Covers bring together hotels, promotions and Chicago's (?) Sultan of Swat. **Pages 13.**

**Douglas Penwell:** A stamp dealer who serviced a major U.S. stamp release in 1932 may have been responsible for many of the issue's special cancellations. **Page 16.**

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## SHOWS

### Pennsylvania: October 12; Dec. 20-21

K2 Lancaster Stamp Show, K2 Stamps, Farm and Home Center, 1383 Arcadia Road, Lancaster. **Contact:** Kevin Kellman. **Email:** [k2stamps@gmail.com](mailto:k2stamps@gmail.com). **Website:** <https://k2stamps.wixsite.com/k2collectiblestamps/schedule>

### New Jersey: Oct. 18; Dec. 20

Burlington Masons Lodge Stamp Show, Merchantville Stamp Club, Burlington Lodge 32 F&AM, 2308 Burlington-Mt. Holly Road, Burlington. **Contact:** Ryan Terlecky. **Email:** [rterlecky@hotmail.com](mailto:rterlecky@hotmail.com). **Web:** [www.merchantvillestampclub.org](http://www.merchantvillestampclub.org)

### New York: October 19

Albany Fall Stamp & Postcard Show, Fort Orange Stamp Club, American Legion Hall, Joseph E. Zaloga Post 1520, 4 Everett Road Ext., Albany. **Contact:** Mike Krug. **Email:** [majkstamps@gmail.com](mailto:majkstamps@gmail.com). **Website:** <https://www.fortorangestampclub.org/>.

### Connecticut Oct. 26; Nov. 23

Fourth Sunday Stamp Show, New Haven Philatelic Society, Annex Y.M.C.A Club, 554 Woodward Ave., New Haven. **Contact:** Jesse Williams. **Email:** [redgypphon@gmail.com](mailto:redgypphon@gmail.com). **Website:** <http://www.nhps1914.com>

### New Jersey: November 22

Burlington Masons Lodge Stamp Show, Merchantville Stamp Club, Burlington Lodge 32 F&AM, 2308 Burlington-Mt. Holly Road, Burlington. **Contact:** Ryan Terlecky. **Email:** [rterlecky@hotmail.com](mailto:rterlecky@hotmail.com). **Website:** <http://www.merchantvillestampclub.org/>.

### New York: November 22

Autumn Stamp Festival, Buffalo Stamp Club, The Knights Event Center, 2735 Union Road, Cheektowaga. **Contact:** Alan Davis. **Email:** [ddavis504@roadrunner.com](mailto:ddavis504@roadrunner.com). **Website:** <http://buffalostampclub.org/>.

# Excelsior!

October 2025

Whole No. 42 New Series

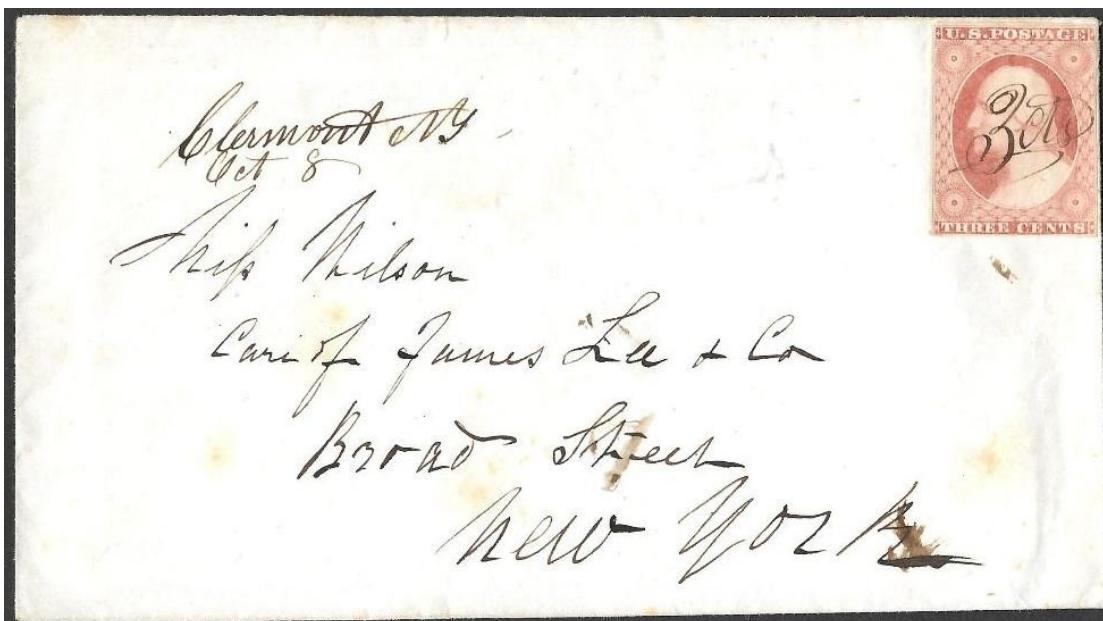


Figure 2. A cover mailed in the mid-19th century from Clermont to a New York City firm involved involved with printing and book publishing.

## You Can't Go Home Again

By George DeKornfeld

These words of wisdom were coined by American author Thomas Clayton Wolfe (**Figure 1**), from the National Archives) and served as the title of his final novel, published posthumously in 1940 by his editor, Edward Aswell, of the publishing house Harper & Brothers.

Wolfe's novel is based upon the idea that the past is the past, it cannot be fully recaptured, nor can there be a return to previous circumstances, especially once significant changes have occurred. I would guess that most of us would lean toward agreeing with the adage from Wolfe (1900-1938). That said, I would also suspect that most of us would agree with another truism, to wit, that there's an exception to every rule.

When I lived in Ancramdale, I ate, drank, and breathed all things Columbia County. I collected as



Figure 1. Thomas Wolfe (Courtesy the National Archives).

much postal history as I could get my hands on, wrote articles about them, and even managed to put together an exhibit on the marcophily of the county seat, the city of Hudson.

And then I moved. I found myself in Hobart, another equally small, rural village, this one located in Delaware County and nestled comfortably within the Catskill Mountains. Suddenly, there was new, fertile philatelic ground to explore, and I found myself now vacuuming up all things Delaware, my penchant for collecting Columbia County having been pretty much shelved by virtue of my new location. I simply stopped looking.

So, returning to our original premise, can one really go home again? Well, as it pertains to postal history, we're about to find out!

Within the matter of a single month, three philatelic troublemakers, err, philatelic friends, pointed me in the direction of covers that they had each come across, supplying me with the information required should I determine that I couldn't go on living without purchasing them. So, of course, I had to check them all out as it seemed the only polite and proper thing to do (ahem).