

Everyone Knew Joe Bieler

Every town has a few folks who seem to be known by everyone. If you lived in Perinton one hundred years ago, you probably would have known Joe Bieler. His formal name was Charles Joseph Bieler, but to the people in town, he was simply Joe. Born in Erie County in 1848, as a youth, Joe worked on the family farm alongside his thirteen brothers and sisters. After completing his schooling through the eighth grade, he briefly worked in a Buffalo boot factory. But Joe didn't like life in the city, and from then on, he worked outdoors. He eventually made his way to Perinton with his bride, Cora Artlip Bieler, and spent the next 70 years in our community, most of it in a home they owned at 67 Filkins Street.

Although he did many things to make a living, one of Joe Bieler's primary sources of income was trapping muskrats, along with the occasional mink and skunk. His trap lines were extensive, and were located along the canal and the creeks from Fairport to Shortsville. He walked his lines daily, and in 1925 was widely acclaimed for his record catch of 1047 muskrats. At the time he was 77 years old. Joe did some canal fishing as well. On one particularly successful day in 1915, he took home 250 pounds of fish.

Never one to stand still, when he wasn't trapping muskrats or fishing, Joe pursued a variety of other business ventures. He operated a bakery, and for many years was known at "the cherry king of Fairport." Farmers brought their cherries by the ton to a rented storefront on Main Street or to Joe's house. He sold them to canners across western New York for many years. Joe placed advertisements in the newspaper, to let friends and neighbors know he was available for hire: *"NOTICE – I am on the job this year the same as in former years, and am prepared to draw your ashes, clean out your cellar, clean up your yard, plow the garden or any such jobs – Joe Bieler.*



1944 painting by well known Fairport artist Carmen Peck, depicting Joe Bieler at 96 years old, walking down a village street.

Along with walking twenty miles per day tending his traps, Joe did a little gardening. In fact, an acquaintance, Sam Jacobson, said of his friend, then 93 years old: "Joe is rugged and industrious; one garden plot is not enough, he has plots of onions on the Ayrault Road and another on the old Hulburt farm, both well cultivated. Joe is on the job at 4 a.m., works alone, is never tired, and takes no time off."

Joe Bieler also held several part time positions within local government, including almost thirty years as constable, keeping the peace and resolving minor squabbles. A lifelong Republican, he never forfeited his opportunity to vote, a fact that indirectly caused him great pain when he was accidentally run down by an automobile on Election Day, 1944, at the age of 96. He recovered from his injuries quickly enough to get back to his gardens the next spring.

Arch Merrill, Rochester's iconic historian and author, included a profile of Joe Bieler in his book, *The Tow Path*, written in 1945. Just three years later and not far from his 101st birthday, the town's oldest resident passed away at his home on Filkins Street. He had recently purchased his annual trapping license. His grave can be found at Greenvale Cemetery, a short distance from his old home. I imagine the muskrats all over town breathed a sigh of relief when Joe died.

Written by Bill Poray, Perinton Town Historian Published in the Fairport-ER Post, 08/29/2013