RANDI WEINER

A tale of 2 Ardsleys

Among life's questions that occasionally crop up: Is the Saw Mill River big enough to need a marine patrol?

Ardsley's village manager and fire chief get the chance to work on that one, especially when the state of New York sends letters to the village asking why it hasn't joined the state's coastal management program or when the fire department gets yet another flyer announcing good buys on fire boats.

What a difference a mile and a half makes. It isn't Ardsley that is being paged — it's the other Ardsley — Ardsley-on-Hudson, in Irvington. THAT Ardsley is on a major waterway — the Hudson.

Residents of both areas are aware of each other, but few other people seem to be. The Village of Ardsley is a politically independent entity. Ardsley-on-Hudson is a railroad station.

The Village of Ardsley is a one-square-mile village in the Town of Greenburgh. It has its own government — Mayor John Morehouse and four trustees, a village manager, clerk and treasurer — police and fire departments, and school district. It has 4,272 people, its own post office and its own ZIP code, 10502.

Ardsley-on-Hudson, on the other hand, is exactly what it says it is — on the Hudson River. It is a train station beside a little hamlet — called Ardsley Park —of about 10 streets, also within the Town of Greenburgh, but enclosed within the Village of Irvington. Estimated population: 350 people, many of them living in Hudson House, a housing complex. The government, police department, fire department and school districts of Irvington handle hamlet business. Ardsley-on-Hudson has its own ZIP code — 10503 —but it is only used for postal boxes. The post office is in the train station.

Why are there two Ardsleys in Westchester County? Here's how history explains the problem:

In the early 1860s, the hamlet around Ashford Avenue and Saw Mill River Road was named for Ashford, Kent, England, the birthplace of Captain King, an early settler whose pickle factory gave employment to many in the hamlet.

In the early 1880s, the residents of Ashford petitioned for a post office, but, since there already was an Ashford in New York State (in Cattaraugus County) they were told to choose another name.

Cyrus W. Field, famous for having organized the company which laid the telegraph cable across the Atlantic Ocean, lived in Ashford on an estate called Ardsley, named for his ancestral home in Yorkshire, England. The residents chose that name in honor of their famous citizen and the post office was approved in 1883. The village incorporated 13 years later.

The same year the village incorporated — 1896 — the Ardsley Country Club opened the Ardsley Casino on the shore of the Hudson — a most exclusive club with an impressive Board of Directors. Irvington resident Jerome Mertha, whose family has been in the area for generations, said the country club was closer to the Hudson than the current site, which accounts for the Hudson River casino connection.

The Village of Ardsley had a railroad station on the Putnam Line of the New York Central Railroad, which was a regular stop until the 1950s, when it was abandoned.

The New York Central Railroad built and still has a station at Ardsley "on-Hudson," which was given the hyphenation to differentiate it from the Ardsley on the Putnam Division.

Art McCartney, whose family has lived for generations in Ardsley, said he remembers a family story claiming the wealthy people living near the Ardsley-on-Hudson station "wanted to use that name. We were already Ardsley over here, and they tried to get us to rename our village and to make Ardsley over there." He said he did not know how much truth there was in the tale.

The real estate development around Ardsley Avenue and Hudson Road in Irvington took the name of Ardsley-on-Hudson to conform with the train station, despite its un-hyphenated cousin up the road, and Ardsley-on-Hudson it remains to this day.

Randi Weiner's column runs Thursdays. Call her at 694-3519.