

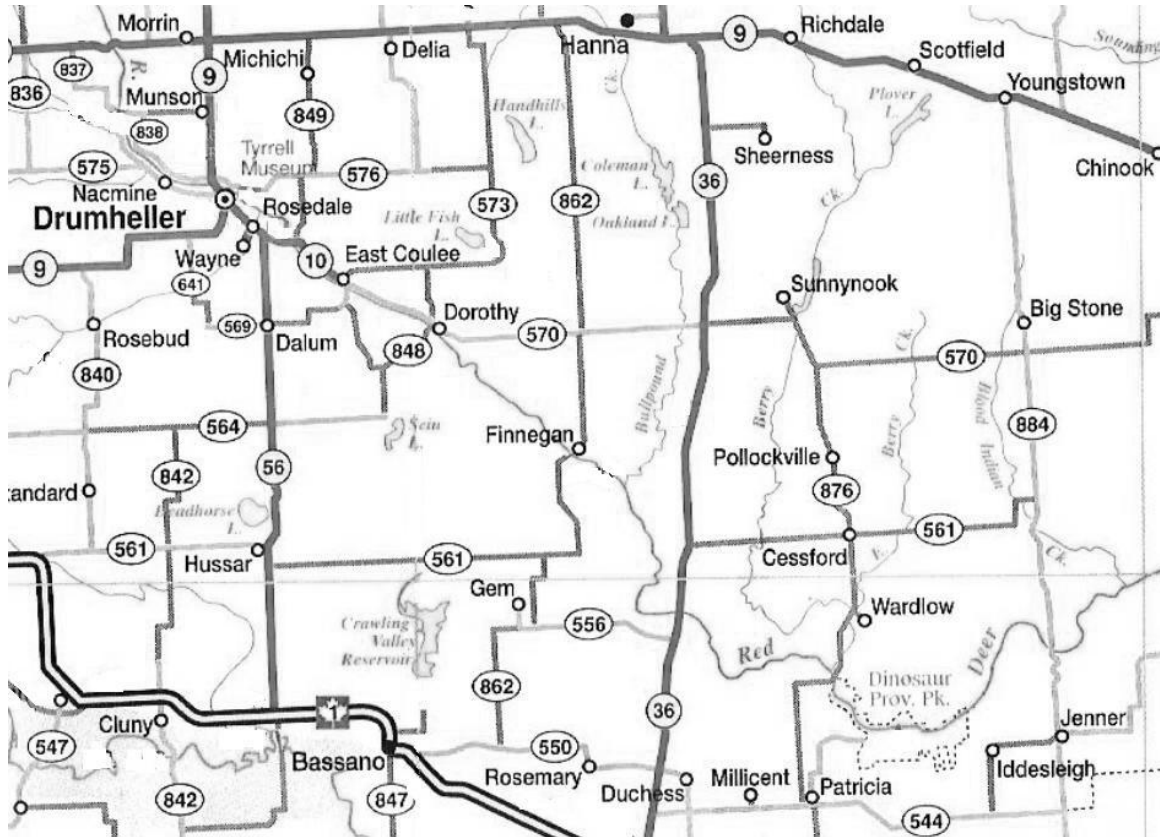
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POSTAL HISTORY OF RED DEER RIVER BADLANDS: PART 1

by Dale Speirs



This issue deals with the Red Deer River badlands of south-central Alberta from the Hoodoos south. The badlands portion of the river stretches for 200 kilometres, gouged out by glacial meltwaters. The badlands are the richest source of Late Cretaceous dinosaurs in the world.

Originally settled by homesteaders, the coal industry dominated from the 1920s to its death in the 1950s. Since then, the tourist industry has grown, with petroleum and agriculture strong.

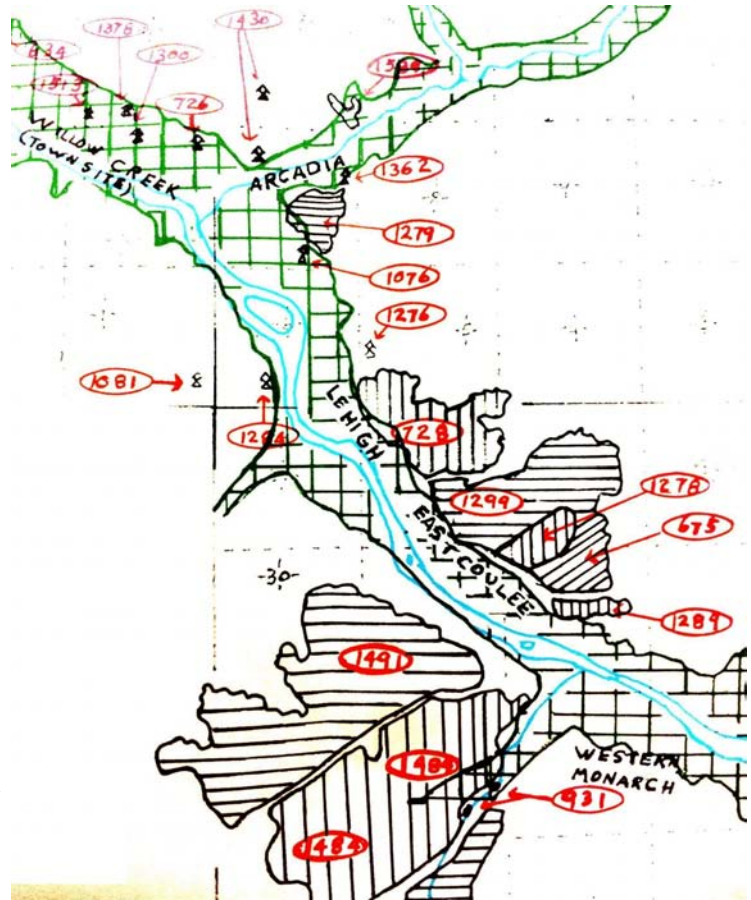
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THE HOODOOS DISTRICT

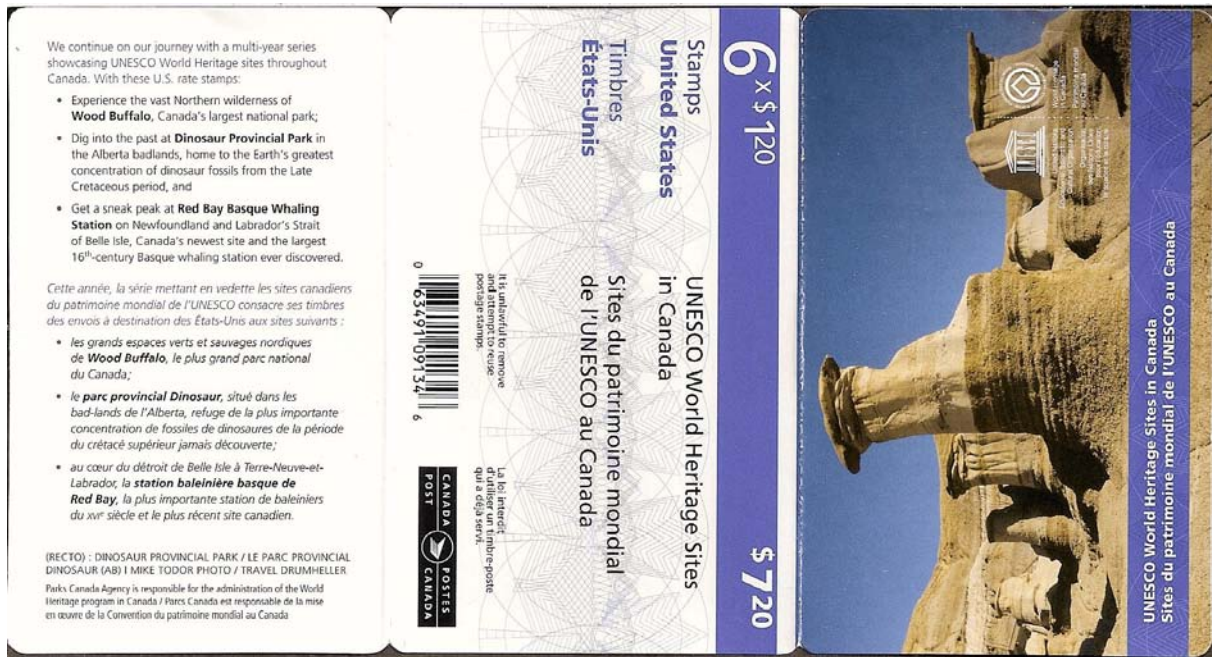
East Coulee is a village in south-central Alberta, on the banks of the Red Deer River in the stretch between Drumheller and Dinosaur Provincial Park. It made the national news when a stamp issued by Canada Post on 2015-07-03 to honour Dinosaur Provincial Park turned out to depict hoodoos near East Coulee, about 100 km upstream from the park. The stamp was subsequently recalled.

The map is a close-up of the East Coulee area, taken from reference 2. The numbered ovals are extinct coal mines; there were hundreds of them down the length of the river. The map also shows the hamlets of Arcadia and Lehigh, which never had post offices.



The Hoodoos Stamp.

As part of a set honouring five heritage sites, the hoodoos of the East Coulee badlands appeared on a stamp paying the American postage rate of \$1.20. The stamp was actually intended to honour Dinosaur Provincial Park as noted on its inscription, nowhere near the hoodoos, although both are part of the Red Deer River badlands. Below and on the next page are the cover and interior of the heritage booklet.





Below is a dry-gum souvenir sheet of all the heritage values. The stamps were issued on Friday, July 3, but instead of being on sale for the usual period, only had an exposure of four days before being recalled.

UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Canada / Sites du patrimoine mondial de l'UNESCO au Canada

DINOSAUR PROVINCIAL PARK | LE PARC PROVINCIAL DINOSAIRE (AB)
CANADA 120

WOOD BUFFALO NATIONAL PARK | LE PARC NATIONAL WOOD BUFFALO (AB / NT)
CANADA 120

RED BAY BASQUE WHALING STATION | LA STATION BALENIÈRE BASQUE DE RED BAY (NL)
CANADA 120

WATERTON-GLACIER INTERNATIONAL PEACE PARK | LE PARC INTERNATIONAL DE LA PAIX WATERTON-GLACIER (AB / MT)
CANADA 250

KLUANE / WRANGELL-ST. ELIAS / GLACIER BAY | TATSHENSHINI-ALASKA (BC / YK)
CANADA 250

LOWE-MARTIN | Design : Lara Minjo, Line Design Inc.
 Stamps / Timbres - Dinosaur Provincial Park / Le parc provincial Dinosaur (AB) | Mike Todor Photo / Travel Drumheller; Wood Buffalo National Park / Le parc national Wood Buffalo (AB / NT) | John McKinnon / Parks Canada / Parcs Canada; Red Bay Basque Whaling Station | La station baleinière basque de Red Bay (NL) | Courtesy / Avec la permission de destinationlaborator.com; Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park / Le parc international de la paix Waterton-Glacier (AB / MT) | Lowell George / National Geographic Creative; Kluane / Wrangell-St. Elias / Glacier Bay / Tatshenshini-Alsek (BC / YK) | Altrendo Nature / Getty Images.
 Background / Arrière-plan : John McKinnon / Parks Canada / Parcs Canada.
 Parks Canada Agency is responsible for the administration of the World Heritage program in Canada / Parcs Canada est responsable de la mise en œuvre de la Convention du patrimoine mondial au Canada

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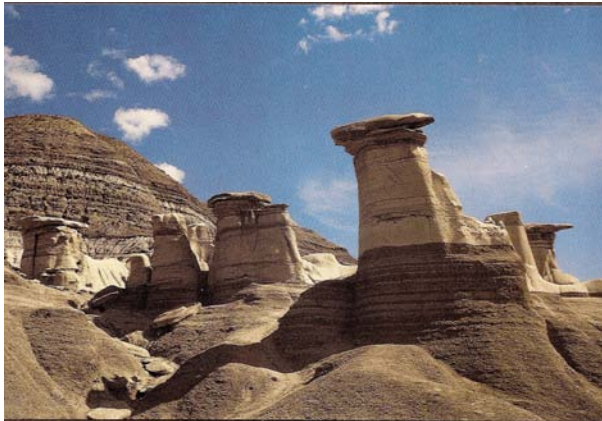
UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Canada / Sites du patrimoine mondial de l'UNESCO au Canada

UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Canada / Sites du patrimoine mondial de l'UNESCO au Canada

The hoodoos are a popular tourist attraction of East Coulee. They are located about 5 km north of the village on Highway 10 going north to Drumheller, so they were quickly recognized for what they really were. The adverse comments caused Canada Post to withdraw the stamps on Monday, July 6. A few retail postal outlet staff didn't read the memo, and as a result some lucky philatelists were able to buy the stamps a day or two after the official withdrawal. In late July 2015, some optimistic online sellers are asking high prices for the withdrawn stamps, but in my opinion over the long run they will not be as valuable as thought. They were, after all, on sale over the counter across Canada. Much of the buying was by philatelists who will ensure a higher-than-average survival rate of the material.

There was also to be a matching postal card with an enlargement of the hoodoos image, but normally they don't arrive in post offices until several weeks after the stamp issue. It is doubtful the hoodoos cards were ever sold across the counter, although it is possible that some lucky philatelists got them in their standing orders. Unfortunately I don't have one to illustrate. The other postal cards in the set were issued and I have seen them in Calgary post offices.

What is particularly funny is that in 1972 the Canadian Post Office (as Canada Post then was) issued a postal card of the exact same hoodoos, as shown below. The imprint text identifies the hoodoos as being near Drumheller, which is technically correct since they are only a ten-minute drive away but an insult to East Coulee. The photo was taken from a slightly different angle.



The recalled stamp debacle prompted me to drive out from Calgary to the hoodoos in July 2015, about a two-hour drive eastwards across the flatlands. Rather than photograph them as shown on the stamps, I climbed above them to show a wider view. The stamp image gives the impression that the hoodoos tower high in the wild remote hills. In actual fact, they are a roadside attraction closely fenced in by metal stairs and catwalks, as per my photo below. They occupy an area about the size of an average house lot. Because they are directly on Highway 10, a major tourist route through the badlands, the hoodoos are a popular stop. My photo was taken on an ordinary weekday morning and even in such a slow period, the site was crowded.



This photo shows the hoodoos from below. You can easily imagine how the photographer of the stamp image was able to crouch down at the base of the hoodoos and angle the camera up so as to make it appear they were in untouched wilderness.



East Coulee.

This village is relatively young and only dates back to the glory days of coal mining in the 1920s. Drumheller had developed as a coal mining town upstream. Railroads were built hither and yon to service the mines along the Red Deer River badlands, which also enabled new mines to develop. Several mines opened up in the vicinity of what is now East Coulee after the railroad extended south from Drumheller, and in 1928 a townsite was platted where the railway line came down along the river. It began dying after World War Two as the coal industry faded away. In the early 2000s the railroad tracks were removed, by which time the remaining villagers were surviving on the petroleum servicing industry and tourism. East Coulee has the advantage that it is on a paved highway a short drive south of Drumheller and in effect has become an outlying suburb.



The post office opened on 1929-06-01 with Nicholas Chebry as the first postmaster [1]. He was a Ukrainian immigrant who arrived in Canada in 1912, drifted about the country doing odd jobs, and arrived at the newborn East Coulee in 1928. The population was mainly Slavic, mostly Ukrainian and Polish, and the men had experience as coal miners in the Old Country.

Chebry opened a large general store and post office, with a dance hall on the second floor. It was known to locals as the Big Store and is shown in at left. Notice the badlands behind the store and the sagebrush growing in the dirt street [2]. Mail service was via the railway, with some cross routes to nearby hamlets up on the flatlands.

Chebery ran into difficulties because he was squatting on land owned by a coal mining company and couldn't get clear title. He eventually gave up the struggle, sold out the store contents, and moved on. Mrs. Florence Arinda Brown took over as postmaster from 1929-12-18 until November 1931, with the post office still in the illegal store.



A distant relative named Andrew Brown Raisbeck took over the postmastership and moved the post office into its own building on a street of East Coulee, properly platted as a legal lot. He and his family lived at the back of the post office. Raisbeck worked a full-time day job as a coal miner, so his wife Evelyn actually ran the post office. Andrew resigned on 1942-05-05 in order to join the Veterans Guard, being too old for active service. He spent the war as a prison guard at the internment camps in the Kananaskis mountains of Alberta [3]. Evelyn became the official postmaster for a short time. The Raisbecks are shown at left.

Thomas Levison was postmaster from 1943-07-15 until his death in 1951. He was succeeded on 1951-12-31 by Miss Sharon Dawn Berridge, who had been a clerk in the post office. She only stayed as postmaster until 1952-10-08. By that time, the East Coulee coal mines were declining as trains and household furnaces shifted to petroleum, so she got a better opportunity with the Calgary post office, where she rose through the ranks and had a long career.



Robert Wilkinson served as postmaster thereafter until 1955-05-24. A brief placeholder came and went, then James Peers took over the job on 1955-10-26, three days after the Canadian Post Office made it a Semi-Staff position. He served until 1969-07-15. At left is a proof strike of a new CDS postmark ordered during his tenure.

Three more civil service postmasters followed until 1989-09-20, when Canada Post closed the post office [4]. It was converted into a retail postal outlet (RePO), located in a museum and cultural centre. Below left is its regular postmark in 1990. Below right is the pictorial postmark used during Alberta's centennial.



Canadian
Institute of Mining,
Metallurgy
and Petroleum

The photo below of the RePO shows it in 1990. The woman is the author's mother, the late Betty Speirs.



The RePO closed sometime after 2005, although the museum was still operating as of 2015 when I visited it. I spoke with the museum staff but no one could remember when the RePO closed. The photo below shows the supermailboxes that replaced it, located directly across the street from the museum. When I travel, I always carry a supply of stamped self-addressed envelopes, so I dropped one into the supermailbox. It returned to me with a Drumheller machine cancel, which is what I had suspected.



Western Monarch.

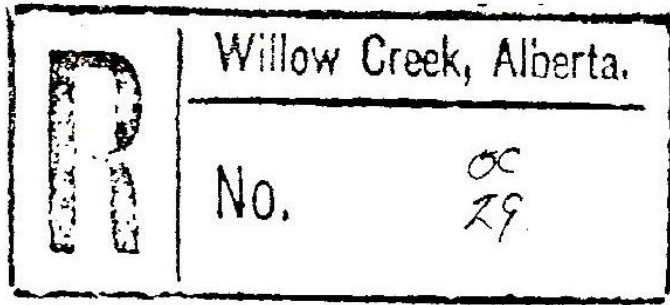
This post office was only a couple of kilometres south of East Coulee, within easy walking distance and a couple minutes' driving. One wonders why it was established but it may have been a company post office for the Monarch coal mine. The only postmaster was Mrs Doryce Myrtle McFarlane Repas, who operated a general store in East Coulee with her husband [1]. The post office was probably in the mine company office, since the hamlet only consisted of six houses and a few mine buildings. The post office opened on 1952-01-02 and closed on 1963-03-20 as the coal industry went into its death throes. By 1970, no traces of Western Monarch were left. Below is the proof strike of the postmark.



Willow Creek.

The aforementioned hoodoos are just north of Willow Creek where it flows into the Red Deer River. There developed a coal-mining hamlet due west of the hoodoos. A post office opened in 1929, which took its name from the creek and closed in 1947, living entirely on the coal industry and dying with it as well. In the photo below, the hamlet was on the far side of the highway where the cottonwood trees are (the river is behind the trees and invisible from this vantage point), and the creek is a few hundred metres out of the photo to the left.





David Oliver (Olie) Clark was the first postmaster when the Willow Creek post office opened on 1929-11-01 in his general store [1]. At left is the proof strike of the registration postmark. The Great Depression was too much for him, and he sold the store. Mrs Laurie Isabel Sprela took over as postmaster on 1932-09-20 and lasted until 1936-02-27.

Alexander Rough Ingram was the next postmaster. He was Scottish by origin, initially emigrating to New York City, then going to work for a bank in Toronto. The bank transferred him to Calgary and then Drumheller.

He quit the job and opened a store in Rosedale, about halfway between East Coulee and Drumheller. Later he opened a second store in Willow Creek. Running two stores and a post office proved too much work, so he gave up the postmastership on 1941-01-27, although he kept the stores. Ingram finally sold both stores in 1945 and moved to Vancouver [2].

Thomas Sharp was the next postmaster, working in the store until 1943-04-09. Another shop clerk, Berl Alden (Buster) Jameson became the postmaster and later bought the store from Ingram. Jameson was postmaster only until 1944-10-01, followed by his father-in-law Robert Graham. The final postmaster was Mrs. Mary McCallum Stevenson to the permanent closure of the store and post office on 1946-10-16. By that time the coal mines in the Willow Creek area were terminal, and it would be decades before the tourist industry became important.

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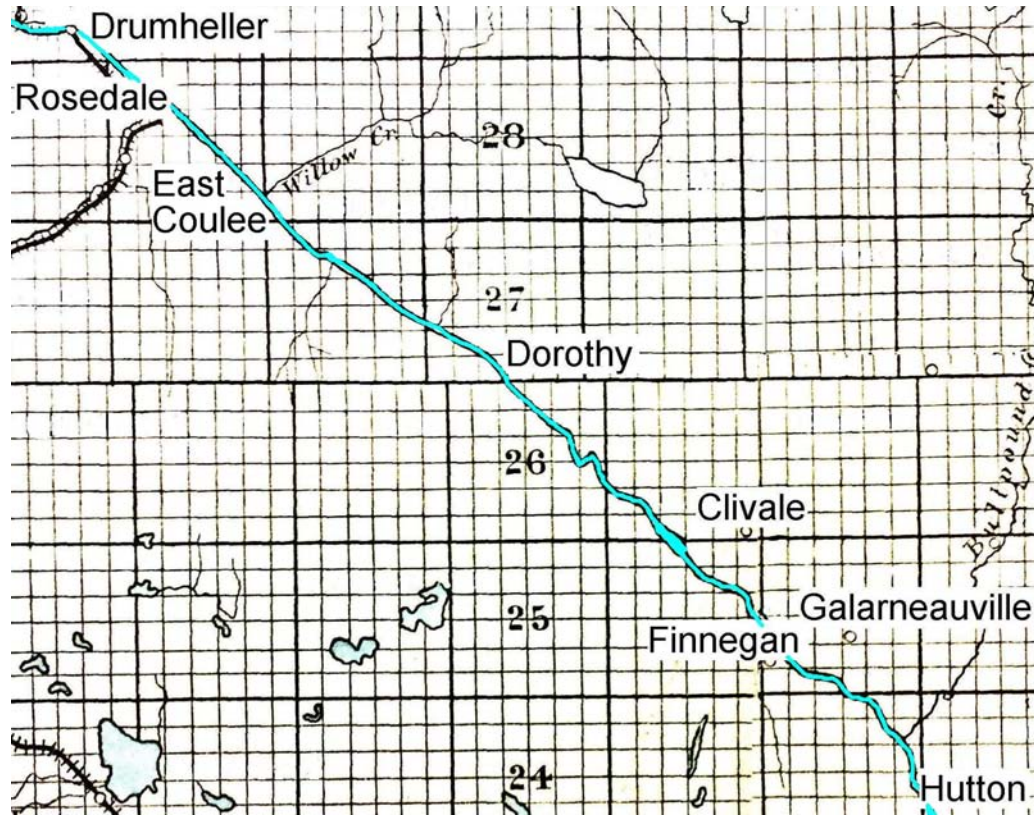
THE MIDDLE SECTION OF THE BADLANDS



The middle section of the Red Deer River badlands between East Coulee and Dinosaur Provincial Park is one of the emptiest sections of the Canadian prairies. It is semi-desert and was originally settled by cattle ranchers.

The severe winter of 1906-07 killed half the cattle in all of southern Alberta, ending large-scale ranching forever. The land was opened up to homesteaders in ignorance of the dry climate, as a result of which it was initially over-populated and then abandoned. At left is a modern map of the area.

Today the flatlands west of the river are mostly dryland crops and grazing, with occasional irrigation farming. East of the river is desert rangeland with a bit of dryland farming. Natural gas processing plants are common through the area and provide some off-farm employment. The hamlets that arose never made it to village status in size, and the few that remain are stagnant. Below is a map adapted from a 1912 map and shows the post offices discussed in this article. The small squares are a mile on each side.



Dorothy.

This hamlet was founded on the east bank of the Red Deer River where the badlands formed a wide semi-circle known as Circus Coulee. The photo below shows part of the coulee when I visited the area in August 2015. A ferry was established in 1906 called “North of Gleichen Ferry”. While technically correct, it is about 60 km northeast of Gleichen, a village on the CPR transcontinental railroad.



John Percy McBeath, who went by his middle name, homesteaded near the ferry and set up a small store at the crossing. The post office opened in the store on 1908-02-01 with him as the first postmaster. He wanted to call it Percyville, but was on the outs with the local postal inspector. The two had been feuding with each other and did not get along. Instead, the inspector named it Dorothy, after the baby daughter of Jack and Eliza Wilson. She was the first white child born in the district.



McBeath owned a stagecoach and freight team and earned additional money hauling mail from Gleichen. The photo at left shows McBeath on his mail route. He is the man on the right, with a mailbag slung over his shoulder. In later years the terminus shifted to Bassano, also on the railroad and which was closer. As the McBeath children reached school age, he wanted better school opportunities for them. The family moved elsewhere and McBeath relinquished the postmastership on 1917-11-13.

Mrs Mary Campbell took over as an unofficial postmaster but she was never listed as such on the books of the Canadian Post Office. She moved the post office into her house on the bottomlands of Circus Coulee [1].

Mrs E. Adelia Pugh became the next postmaster, the second official one, on 1918-07-15 and was a long-server until 1939-09-02. The proof strike postmark at right is from her time as postmaster. The post office moved east up onto the flatlands above the river, into the Pugh farm house several kilometres away. This led to the peculiar situation that the post office was nowhere near the settlement it purported to serve. The constant droughts were too much for the Pughs and they abandoned their farm in 1931. They bought the general store in Dorothy and relocated the post office back to its original location.



Mail service to the district was the subject of a 1933 complaint to the CALGARY HERALD newspaper. A letter to the editor in the August 1st issue is short enough to be quoted in its entirety: *“We got a better mail service at this point 35 years ago when a railway was 50 miles away and also when mail was carried by a wagon. Just because a railway is built does not appear to be sufficient reason for shutting us off from intercourse with the outside world. People living in more favored districts now have a rural delivery. This is a great annoyance to people who write and receive letters, not to mention others. It is time that mail delivery to this point was renewed. [signed] Pro Bono Publico, Dorothy, Alberta.”*

If I read this correctly, it appears Pro Bono Publico was complaining about lack of rural delivery to his particular farm area or perhaps reduced frequencies of mail delivery via train. Since he blames the railway for the apparent decline, I am guessing that his farm was somewhere along the old wagon route and the mail had been dropped off at the farm gate as the wagon went by, only as a courtesy. Once the mail went directly to Dorothy by train, the farmer would have had to get his mail from the hamlet.

Adelia retired in 1939 and was succeeded by her daughter-in-law Mrs Vera May Pugh, who held the office until 1966-08-25. Vera and her husband Fred bought the general store and post office but only kept the store a few years. The post office then moved into their house. Prior to his wife becoming postmaster, Fred had couriered the mail from Rosedale further up the river, until a railroad was extended down to Dorothy in 1928. From 1945 onward, he was the ferryman, and the post house moved into the ferry house where he and Vera lived [1]. The Dorothy ferry was replaced in 1975 by a bridge.

In the fullness of time, Vera passed the postmastership to her daughter-in-law Mrs Edna Pearl Pugh. Canada Post privacy rules kick in at this point and no further data is listed. However, the Hughes reference book lists the final postmaster as Mrs Maryanne Pugh, daughter-in-law of Edna, until 1991-05-10 when the post office permanently closed [3]. The Pugh family had provided 73 years of postal service to the district through a remarkable chain of daughters-in-law.

Postal service is now provided by supermailboxes. I took the photo below in late August 2015 at what is left of the hamlet. In the distance, at upper right of the photo, is an abandoned blue-and-white building which was the general store where the Dorothy post office was located. I dropped a self-addressed stamped envelope into the supermailbox to see where it would be canceled, but, alas, it came back with only a Calgary spray-on cancel. Almost certainly though, it would have gone via the Drumheller post office.



Finnegan.

John Finnegan was a Scotsman who came to Gleichen in the 1880s to work for the CPR. After the railroad boom faded, he took up a homestead near the Red Deer River and began a ferry and stopping house in 1913. It was busy enough, and there were enough homesteaders, such that it is surprising a post office didn't open until 1930-08-01, with John James Young as the first postmaster [4]. At right is the proof strike of its first postmark.



Miss Pauline Verweire, later Mrs Pauline Muri, took over as postmaster on 1933-02-28 for a couple of years. She was succeeded on 1935-03-27 by Arthur Hugh Peake. He was an English drifter who had a varied life across the prairies from the 1880s until World War One. He was a cowboy for others, and then ranched on his own account in various places before finally settling at Finnegan. He retired as postmaster on 1945-08-28 by which time he was 78, and died a couple of years later [1]. Lawrence Edward Stewart was the next postmaster until 1952-07-14.



Iris Lila Fladhamer took over as postmaster, operating the post office in her general store at the ferry until 1957-08-12. She and her husband John then bought a nearby farm from Fred and Mary Lois Linn, who in exchange bought the store and post office at Finnegan. Fred was a grain buyer and school bus driver, while Lois kept the store and post office [5]. Privacy laws cut off the Canada Post records, but Hughes [3] records the final postmaster as Laurie Gillespie before the post office permanently closed on 1995-09-30.

Below is a photo of the Finnegan post office as it was in 1989, with Betty Speirs standing in front of it.



Finnegan Ferry still runs in summer. It is one of two flatdeck scow ferries left on the Red Deer River. The other is at Bleriot, north of Drumheller. They could easily be replaced by bridges as happened to all the other ferries on the river, but are specifically run as tourist attractions by the provincial government. I drove to it in late August 2015. The photo below shows the approach to the ferry on Highway 862, which despite its name is a one-lane gravel road through open rangeland. The reason I stopped to take a photo was because the Angus bull at left was slowly ambling across the road and I didn't want him to dent my car disputing the right-of-way.



On board the ferry. I arrived about noon and the ferryman told me I was the first customer of the day.



This photo was taken from the opposite bank of the river, looking back at the ferryman's house. The smaller white building was where the post office last was. There are no supermailboxes at the ferry, and the few inhabitants get their mail tens of kilometres away.



Clivale.



This post office, up on the flatlands just east of the Red Deer River, was named after a town in England, or possibly Ireland [6]. It was only ever a place name. William Van Horn was the first postmaster from 1916-10-01 when the post office opened in a small store he had on his homestead. At left is the proof strike of its first postmark. He was a widower from the USA who came up with his three young sons. He gave up the post office on 1920-02-12 and moved to British Columbia for a better life [1].

A placeholder postmaster came and went before Percy Albert Campbell took over on 1921-01-14 and moved the post office into his farm house. He retired on 1929-03-30 and with his wife moved to Hanna, a town about 50 km northeast. John James Young, of the Finnegan post office, briefly served, followed by his wife Maud but the Clivale post office permanently closed on 1932-01-31. The land was rapidly depopulating because of too many droughts and is today only inhabited by a few farm families. The surrounding area is now semi-desert rangeland. Postal service moved to nearby Finnegan.

Galarneauville.

Gaspard P. Galarneau, despite his name, was an Idaho man born and raised. He brought his family north in 1911 to homestead east of the Red Deer River. The post office opened in his farm house on 1914-11-01 and he was postmaster until his death on 1921-08-21. At right is the proof strike of the first postmark. His sister-in-law Gladys V. Billows married Gaspard's son Fred, thereby also becoming his daughter-in-law. After Gaspard's death, she took over the post office for a few months as a placeholder [7].



Howard E. Farr was the next postmaster from 1923-06-08, moving the post office into his house. Robert Walter Marsh became postmaster on 1925-08-15 until 1927-07-04. Gladys Galarneau returned as postmaster until the post office was permanently closed on 1932-01-31, the same day the Clivale post office closed. Postal service moved down the hill to Finnegan.

Fieldholme / Hutton.

George S. Field and his brother homesteaded along the east side of the Red Deer River. The Fieldholme post office opened on 1906-05-01, with George as the first postmaster and mail contractor. The mail came from Bassano twice a month. In 1908, the Field brothers began operating a ferry downstream of their farms. Prior to the ferry, the mail bags had to be loaded into a rowboat to get to the post office on the other side. The ferry was discontinued in 1960 when Highway 36 bridged the river further downstream.

On 1911-04-15, the post office changed its name to Hutton to honour a real estate speculator and banker named Baldwin P. Hutton. He and others platted a village up on the eastern flatlands, and advertised it with the slogan "Gold Grain Town of Sunny Alberta". Hutton was the manager of the Northern Crown Bank, which was bought out in 1918 by the Royal Bank of Canada. The townsite failed miserably, being in the middle of nowhere in drought-stricken lands with poor soil. By 1920, the project was abandoned and all that is left is a farmstead. With the disappearance of the ferry, the site is now on a dead-end side road no one but a few ranchers would have any reason to drive.

Field gave up the postmastership on 1912-07-02 and handed it to Melvin S. Smith. It then rotated through two more postmasters, moving from farm house to farm house, until Reinhart Larson took on the job on 1922-09-25, staying for more than two decades until 1947-11-16. At right is a proof strike of the Hutton postmark. Mrs. Edith Allison Suitor was the next postmaster. She and her husband had a ranch just upstream of Hutton Ferry, which also included a stopping place, a small store, and the post office [7].



Suitor gave up the post office on 1950-10-03 and James William Fregard became the final postmaster until his death on 1952-06-16. At that point, the post office died because there were so few people left. Postal services transferred to Finnegan.

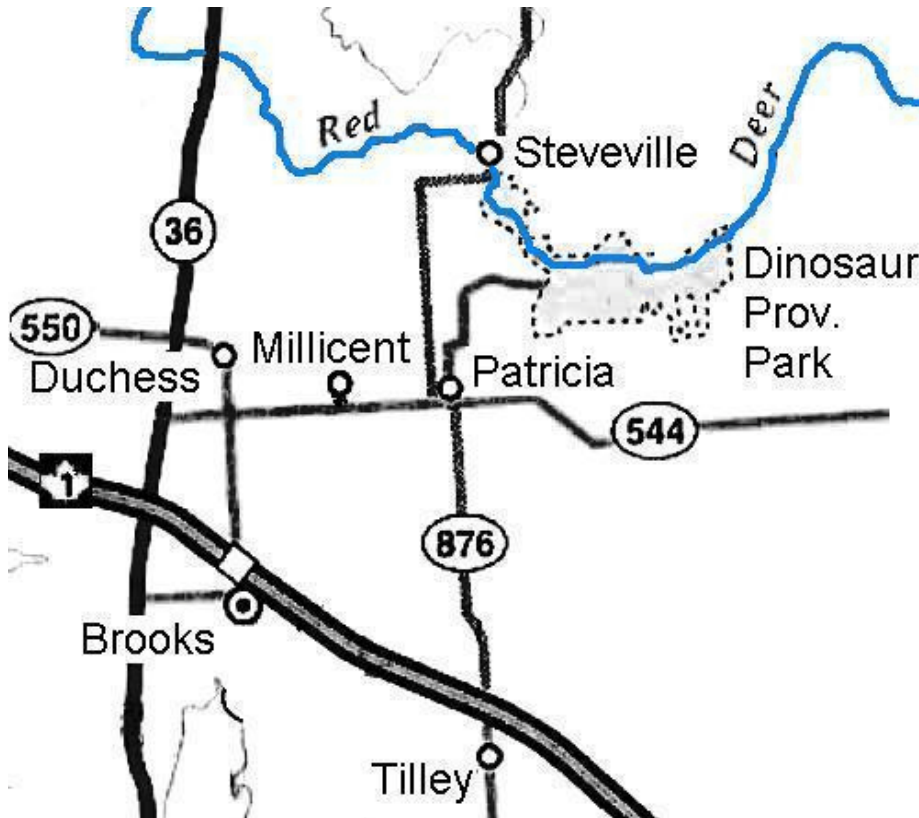
Epilogue.

This area was originally settled during an anomalous moist period. After World War One, the climate reverted to its normal desert climate. So many homesteaders abandoned their land during the Great Depression that the provincial government consolidated the area into grazing leases. I saw a few crops being grown here and there when driving around in August 2015, but the majority was rangeland. There was no cellphone service within 100 km, and I often drove for an hour at a time without meeting another vehicle. The land is as empty as the Arctic tundra.

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DINOSAUR PROVINCIAL PARK



Dinosaur Provincial Park (DPP) was created in 1955 on the south bank of the Red Deer River in the badlands of south-central Alberta, in an area known as Dead Lodge Canyon. The treeless flatlands up on the plateau are semi-desert, with some irrigation farming, cattle ranching, and dryland wheat. The park never had its own post office.

Southwest of the park are the hamlets of Patricia, Millicent, and Duchess, all on the same railway line known as the Royal Line, because the sidings and villages were named after royalty. Further south a half hour's drive from the park, is the Trans-Canada Highway and the town of Brooks.

Communications in the area are instinctively to the south because of the closeness of the Trans-Canada Highway and the CPR transcontinental railroad. Crossing the river and going north means a long drive across empty flatlands to any town of useful size. At left is a modern map of the area.

The park is considered the world's richest source of Late Cretaceous fossils, from the terminal era of dinosaurs just before their extinction. Below is a 1966 cover from the park showing a return address of Princess, the hamlet nearest the park, but postmarked in Brooks.



Canada Post has issued several stamps over the years depicting fossils of the Red Deer River badlands, most recently on 2015-04-13. As this is postal history and not topical philately, I will not discuss the dinosaur stamps per se, but will note that the 2015 booklet issue shows the scenery of Dinosaur Provincial Park on its cover.

DINOSAURS ONCE ROAMED THE LAND THAT IS NOW CANADA

From the badlands of Alberta to the east coast Bay of Fundy, Canada is a hotbed of discoveries about Earth's ancient dinosaurs and their prehistoric kin. Fossils yield fascinating clues to the mysterious lives of these long-extinct, gentle and not-so-gentle beasts.

LES DINOSAURES FOULAIENT LA TERRE DE CE QUI EST DEvenu LE CANADA

Depuis les bad-lands de l'Alberta au littoral est de la baie de Fundy, le Canada est une bibliothèque à ciel ouvert sur les dinosaures et autres animaux préhistoriques. Les fossiles nous fournissent de fascinants indices sur ces titans aujourd'hui disparus, inoffensifs ou terrifiants.

Special thanks to the Canadian Museum of Nature for their expertise and cooperation.
Remerciements tout particuliers au Musée canadien de la nature pour son expertise et sa collaboration.

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CANADA

DINOS OF CANADA | DINOS DU CANADA

This is a photo I took in July 2015 from the escarpment of the valley, looking down into the badlands at the park entrance.



Stevenville.



Stevenville began as a ferry crossing over the Red Deer River, just upstream of DPP's northwestern boundary. The ferry began operating in the spring of 1911 with Stephen Hall as the first ferryman. He was also the first postmaster, located in his general store [1]. The post office took his name when it opened on 1910-08-15, and the proof strike of its first postmark is shown at left. Hall was an entrepreneur and had so many different business interests that on 1911-08-04, he gave up both the ferry and the post office.

The hamlet initially grew because it was on the only river crossing in the district. It was a short distance from Brooks and the CPR transcontinental railway, and all the homesteaders heading north into the Hanna district on the far side of the river took the ferry to get there. Fossil hunters also began to appear as the area became known as a source of Late Cretaceous dinosaurs. It was not unusual for the ferry to handle 100 crossings per day at its peak. The ferry would ultimately be replaced by a bridge in 1971.

Hall sold his store to E.D. Coulter who took over as postmaster. He was a busy man too, with both a homestead up on the flatlands as well as a lumber yard. The lumber was rafted down the river from Red Deer, 250 km northwest in the parkland belt. Coulter sold the lumber yard to Hugh McLeod, who became postmaster at the same time on 1916-07-31. He stayed in the job until 1922-09-05, when he sold the yard and post office to none other than Stephen Hall. This time around it was Hall's wife Edith Mary who became postmaster, staying until 1925-08-03. The lumber yard changed hands once again, to Charles H.S. Parker, who only kept the postmastership briefly until 1927-04-11 before handing it back to Edith Hall [2, 3].

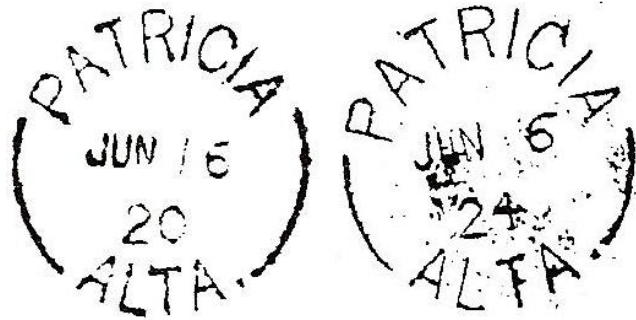
By this time the area was beginning to decline. Too many droughts, too far away from markets, and too many homesteaders giving up in despair and abandoning their land. Stephen died in 1932 but Edith held on to the post office until 1942-08-24, when she sold out and retired to Vancouver.

The final postmaster was Jacob Nicholas Schaeffer, who was a place-keeper until 1943-12-31 when the post office permanently closed. The photo below shows the Steveville bridge in 2015. The hamlet is long gone. The red car is mine; no other vehicle came down the road during the hour I was there.



Patricia.

This village began life in 1914 as a railroad siding named after a British princess (who also had a Canadian Army regiment named after her) but World War One interrupted settlement. In 1919, homesteaders arrived when the CPR initiated an irrigation district. The post office opened on 1920-08-15 in the Havens & Kay general store, with John Truman Kay as the first postmaster. Below are some proof strikes of Patricia split-circle postmarks. The building burned to the ground and on 1921-07-25 the post office moved to another general store with J.A. Munro as the new postmaster. He served until his death on 1938-08-27 from a heart attack. His widow Winnifred then took over the job until her death from cancer on 1940-02-12. Her son Gordon briefly held the position until 1940-06-23 before going overseas with the RCAF [2].



The post office then went to Eugene Myers Rumohr, who operated a garage and blacksmith shop. He served as postmaster until his death on 1953-01-29. His widow Elsie Mary succeeded him and was postmaster until her retirement on 1966-04-09. Mrs. Anne Bailey, descended from homesteaders in the area, took over. Canada Post records cut off after this due to privacy laws, but Gwen Fyfe was the final postmaster until 1989-03-01.

The post office was then replaced by a retail postal outlet (RePO) in the Dinosaur Country Store [4]. This was a crossroads store on the northeast corner of Highway 876 and Highway 544, about a kilometre south of the village. The cover below shows the RePO postmark.



This is a 1989 photo of the outlet, taken by Betty Speirs. The RePO closed on 1996-05-05.



Supermailboxes were installed at the store site, seen in July 2015 on the left of the photo below. The abandoned store was boarded up, with its dinosaur statue rusting but still remaining to attract passing tourists en route to Dinosaur Provincial Park. Since Patricia is on the highway to the only entrance to the park, it is puzzling why it has not done better with the tourist trade. I dropped a self-addressed stamped envelope (SASE) into the supermailbox and it came back to me with a Brooks machine cancel.



Millicent.

On the same railroad line as Patricia, this siding was named after the Duchess of Sutherland, whose husband had invested in a large farm near Brooks. The post office opened in the general store of Edmond Francis Purcell, who became postmaster on 1916-03-15. Purcell later accepted a position as a grain elevator manager and the post office passed on 1921-08-19 to Mrs Ada Beresford. It was relocated into her home. She was a British immigrant and had previously been a postmistress in England. She served until 1946-07-03, resigning shortly after her husband's death and moving to Medicine Hat [2].

Miss Winnifred Charlton took over and the post office moved to her family's general store. After her marriage, her brother George served as postmaster from 1948-08-01 until 1960-09-14, when his wife Margaret became postmaster. The store was failing, as was the hamlet of Millicent, and the post office moved into the Charlton house in May 1961. It was originally in the basement, then later in an addition built onto the main floor.

The Canadian Post Office tried to close the Millicent post office in 1969 but the villagers protested enough to keep it open. On the next page is a 1969 commercial cover from the Charlton family cancelled with the original split-circle postmark. The post office managed to survive until 1988-07-23, with Eleanor Chipping as the final postmaster.

M. W. Charlton & Son,
Millicent, Alberta

MILICENT
ALBERTA
SEP 5
1961
77001A

TO BURNS & CO. LIMITED
COUNTRY ORDER DESK,
CALGARY, ALBERTA



Rush
Attention office of,
Mr Mc Kenzie

SPECIAL DELIVERY
SD-8
23-10-61 **EXPRES**

Below is a 1989 photo of Betty Speirs at the Charlton general store. Notice the protest sign on the door. The cover my mother left there, she being unaware that the post office was already dead, is seen on the next page, returned to her without a postmark. My parents had passed through at night, and in those pre-Internet days one could not simply look up post offices on www.canadapost.ca as we do now, so they did not know the post office was gone.



Millicent, Ab.
T0J 2A0

UNCLE TOM'S CABIN STORE

TOM AND LAURA CHARLTON

MILLICENT, ALBERTA

CR. PO BORN TOJ 2A0 DIED July 22 1987

ON THE WAY TO DINOSAUR PARK



MRS. C. J. (BETTY) SPEIRS
4535 MOORE CRES.
RED DEER, ALTA., CAN
T4N 2M1



Millicent was too close to Patricia, Duchess, and Brooks to justify a RePO anymore. The locality is now a loose collection of acreages. In the days of rail, it was on the main track, which meant something when passengers and freight went quickly and smoothly on rails, instead of struggling along mud roads. Now Millicent is off on a side road used only by local traffic. Tourists going to the park stay out on the highway several kilometres away. If one knows that it was a once a hamlet, one can tell which side road was the main street by the slightly higher density of acreages and the supermailboxes across from them, as seen below. I dropped in a SASE, which returned to me a few days later with a Brooks machine cancel.



Duchess.



The village was also named after the Duchess of Sutherland, whose first name was used for Millicent. After the CPR created the Eastern Irrigation District to encourage settlers and water began flowing in 1914, homesteaders soon began arriving in the district. The village was platted in 1915, and the post office opened that year on December 15, with William C. Galloway as the first postmaster. At left is the proof strike of its first postmark. The post office was located in a general store for which Galloway was the manager but not the owner. He didn't stay long and resigned on 1916-08-08, moving to Millicent [5].

From there the post office relocated to a boarding house run by a Norwegian immigrant Juell Swenson. He had homesteaded north of the village but moved into town as his health began to fail. He gave up the postmastership on 1917-04-05 and moved to Calgary where he could get better medical care. The post office then went into the general store of D.P. Davies, who was postmaster until 1921-09-13 when he sold the store. J.A. Turner, a clerk in the store, was then briefly postmaster until 1923-02-28.

Havelock Henry Spicer, a Nova Scotian by birth, became postmaster until his death on 1933-09-01. The photo shows him in 1923, standing proudly in front of the post office just after he had taken over. The post office was in a purpose-built building with family quarters in the back. He had a very large garden behind the building, stemming from previous experience as a market gardener. He also sold insurance part-time to make ends meet.



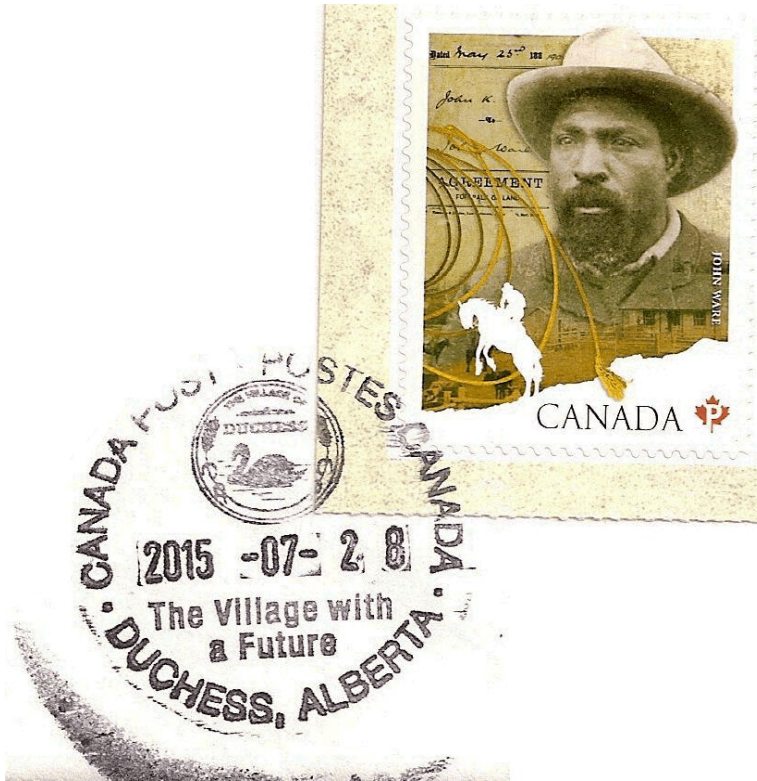
Storekeeper Matthias Purcell then took over the post office and moved it into his place, which was originally the Davies store. Matthias was the brother of Edmond, the first postmaster of Millicent, and the two men ran the stores as a single company. Matthias sold his interest in the store, resigned as postmaster on 1946-04-06, and then retired to Calgary. William A. Bell bought the store from the Purcell brothers and was briefly postmaster as a placeholder.

C. Laverne Kadey became postmaster on 1947-02-01 and the post office moved back into its old standalone building. Kadey was a returned veteran and thus was given preference for the job. He served until 1958-05-26, when he became a school teacher. His successor was Mrs. Nora Jane Godfrey, who served until 1972-09-13 when she moved to Calgary. During her tenure, in 1966, the post office became a civil service position. After Godfrey's departure, her clerk Mrs. Betty Jean Lee took over as postmaster and was still there as of 1982, after which postal records break off due to privacy laws. It is still a standalone Canada Post operation as of 2015, not in a store. The building, however, is a newer one which I photographed in July 2015, seen on the next page.

Duchess is the only post office left in the Dinosaur Provincial Park area. It seems to have survived because it is on a main highway and is surrounded by numerous irrigation farms, which can support a higher population. There is a little irrigation at Millicent and Patricia, but most of that area is semi-desert rangeland almost completely uninhabited. Duchess gets a fair amount of tourist traffic en route to Dinosaur Provincial Park because it is on Highway 550, a short cut to the park for visitors coming from Calgary.



John Ware.



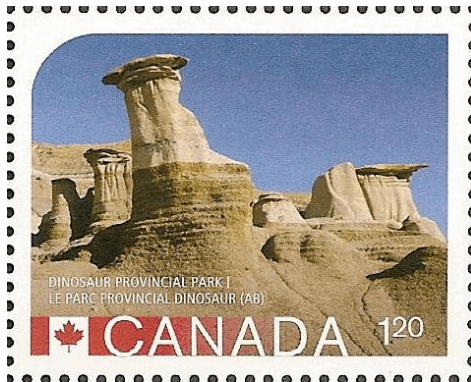
A prominent homesteader in the DPP area was cowboy John Ware, who was honoured on a 2012 stamp as part of Black History Month. Ware was famous as a pioneer rodeo competitor and horse-breaker, hence the bucking bronco image on the stamp. He had first homesteaded near Millarville, in the Rocky Mountain foothills southwest of Calgary, before moving to the badlands area [6]. Ware died in 1905 just southwest of the park when his horse tripped and fell on him. His cabin has been preserved and was relocated into the park as an exhibit.

When I stopped at the Duchess post office in July 2015, I was surprised to see that it had booklets of the John Ware stamp still on the racks, three years after it went off sale everywhere else in Canada. I asked the postmistress about them. She had made a special large order from Canada Post in Toronto, asking to have surplus stock sent to Duchess. She and her fellow citizens are very conscious of the fame of John Ware. The pictorial cancel on the stamp was the regular working cancel, not just something kept in a drawer for special requests.

2015 UNESCO Stamps.

In 2015, Canada Post issued a set of stamps, in booklet and souvenir sheet form, depicting five UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Canada, one of which was Dinosaur Provincial Park. The stamps were issued on Friday, July 3. It was immediately pointed out by numerous Albertans that the image on the DPP stamp was actually that of The Hoodoos, located 100 km upstream on the Red Deer River, just north of East Coulee. (Not Drumheller, as many erroneous reports had it.) Canada Post withdrew the stamps the following Monday, July 6, creating an instant rarity.

On August 28, Canada Post quietly re-issued the booklets and souvenir sheet, this time with a corrected image. I found out about the stamps by accident on August 31 at the Hussar, Alberta, post office, whose postmistress told me she had been sent the stamps with no advance notice. She said her stamps had been received Friday, August 28. By coincidence, I was en route to the badlands area between DPP and East Coulee as part of my continuing research into the postal history of that area. Hussar was on the way and I had stopped in to get a current postmark when I noticed the stamps on display at the counter. I checked the Canada Post Website when I got back home to Calgary, but there was nothing on it about the revised stamps until September 10, when they were mentioned in the September issue of DETAILS.



*Error stamp
with Hoodoos*



*Corrected
stamp*

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