

# **JOURNAL OF ALBERTA POSTAL HISTORY**

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# **THE MORMON DIASPORA OF SOUTHWESTERN ALBERTA**

by Dale Speirs

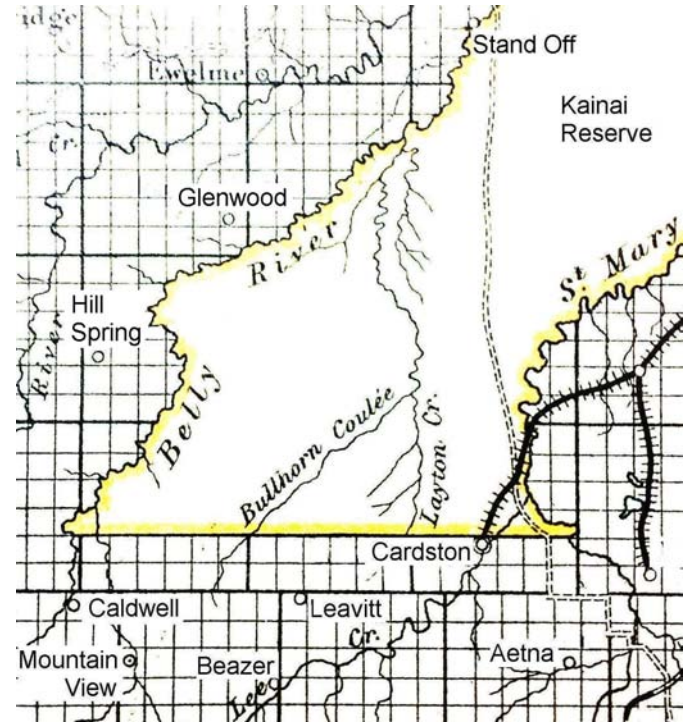
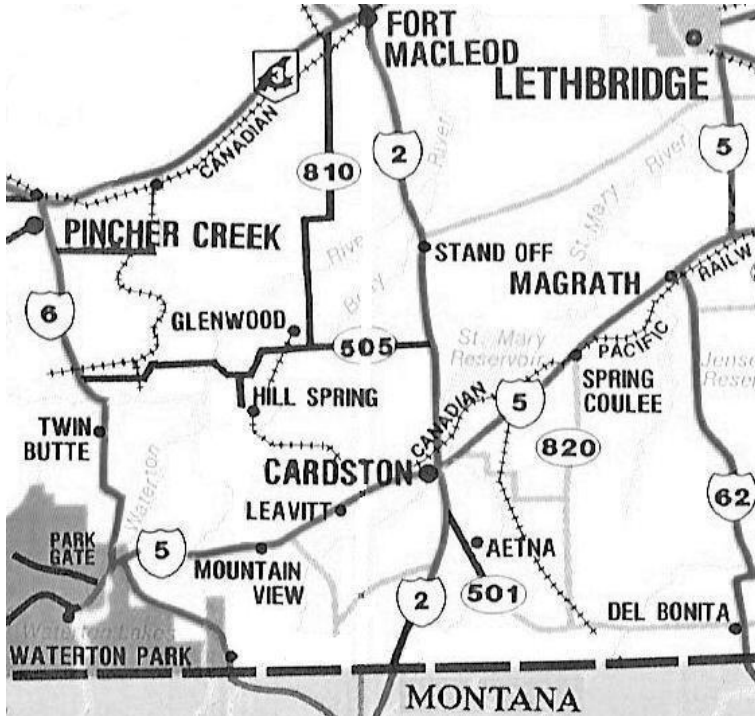
The American government's harassment of the Mormons in Utah prompted many of them to look north across the border during the late 1880s. Charles Ora Card, a son-in-law of Brigham Young, was asked by the Latter-Day Saints Church (LDS) leadership to see if land was available in western Canada. In 1886, he led a team to southern British Columbia but the land was unsuitable for irrigation farming. They met up with a mountain man who told them that east of the Rocky Mountains the prairies were wide and the bison still roamed free. The Mormons went to Calgary and from there traveled south, exploring the lands down to the Montana border. They decided that this was the place, and went back to Utah to gather colonists.

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## CARDSTON AND POINTS WEST

Below left is a modern map of the Cardston area. The map below right shows the post offices mentioned in the article, past and present. The small squares are a mile on each side. The double-dash line is the original oxen freighter trail.



## Cardston.

After the initial exploration trip, Card returned to southwestern Alberta in 1887 with ten families. Searching about, they finally settled around Lee Creek near where it emptied into the Saint Mary River, which was the southeastern boundary of the Kainai Reserve. The initial cluster of homesteaders was known as Mormon Village. Early mail delivery was intermittent, via Fort Macleod to the north, or Stand Off on the opposite side of the Reserve and which was halfway from Fort Macleod. Kainai tribesmen were hired as mail couriers to bring the mail from Fort Macleod to Stand Off, from whence Mormon homesteaders took turns bringing it to the village.

After several applications, the Canadian Post Office (CPO) finally granted a post office to the villagers. The settlement was re-named Cardston in honour of their leader, who became its first mayor. It became the capital of the LDS Church in Alberta, analogous to Salt Lake City in Utah. The post office opened on 1892-07-01 in a general store with Heber Simeon Allen as its first postmaster [2]. At right is the proof strike of the first postmark. Allen was born and raised in Utah and originally worked on southern Alberta railroad construction crews. He held a variety of jobs in a variety of places on both sides of the border, homesteaded near Lee Creek with his fellow Mormons, and eventually set up as a shopkeeper. He sold out to his son, who kept the store but not the post office [3].



John Anthony Woolf took over on 1901-04-30 as postmaster, locating the post office in his own store. The railroad arrived at Cardston in 1904, and thereafter the mails came from Lethbridge to the northeast. Woolf handed over the post office on 1909-11-18 to his son Simpson J. Woolf. The son ran afoul of partisan politics after the Conservatives won the federal election in late 1911. Postmasterships at that time were patronage positions, and hundreds of postmasters across Canada lost their jobs.

David S. Beach was a loyal Tory and took over as postmaster on 1912-03-04. He was a tailor by trade and the post office moved into his store. He had his eye on bigger things and a couple of years later moved to Vancouver. The Cardston Conservative Association got Charles Wilden Burt the position on 1914-03-04. The spoils system was eliminated a few years later, and subsequent elections did not affect Burt or other Tory postmasters.

Burt was variously a homesteader, a plasterer, an LDS Church bishop, and a storekeeper. He stayed until 1935-02-13 as postmaster. In 1921, the post office moved from his store into a standalone building that he rented out to the CPO. The federal government completed a purpose-built building of its own for the post office just as Burt retired in 1935. His nephew-in-law Edward Dahl Caldwell succeeded him and was another long-server, retiring on 1961-04-20. The post office was taken over by the CPO in 1948 and run directly by them. Caldwell and subsequent postmasters became civil servants. From the early 1960s onward, the postmastership changed occupants regularly.

The photo below shows the Cardston post office in 1989. The woman standing in front of it is the author's mother, the late Betty Speirs. The building looked much the same when I visited it in 2016, other than minor cosmetic changes such as new signs.



The Mormon temple is the main tourist attraction of Cardston, and is depicted on a pictorial postmark, as seen here next to a photo of the temple taken in June 2016.

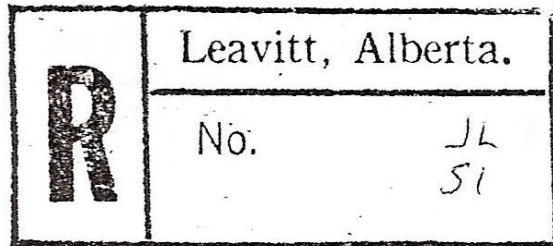


## Leavitt.

The Leavitt family came north from Wellsville, Utah, and settled in the Buffalo Flats area about 15 km west of Cardston. They were polygamists, and numbered in the dozens. Other polygamist families joined them and the increased population justified opening a post office on 1900-01-01, with Walter Glenn as the first postmaster. He didn't stay long, departing that same year on September 22. The post office moved from his ranch house into a general store operated by three Leavitt brothers, William being the one who took on the postmastership. They also had a dairy and a feedlot, and commonly accepted livestock as payment, which they then fattened and sold. The problem was that they eventually had too many animals and not enough cash flow. As a result, the store closed and on 1910-02-08 took the post office down with it [3].

Maroni Allen was the next postmaster. He was a relative of Heber Allen, Cardston's first postmaster. Maroni left the district on 1912-05-28, after which two placeholders came and went. The post office was often closed for short periods during this interregnum. William Leavitt then took back the post office on 1918-02-15 and served until 1921-03-09, when Ephraim Redford Haslam succeeded to the position [2].

Like all the other settlers in the area, Haslam was originally from Wellsville, Utah. He ran the post office until 1936-08-24, when John Amos Leavitt took over. Because of polygamy among the Leavitts and because they used common names for their children, I haven't been able to sort out who was son, nephew, or brother of whom among the second generation. Each adult male Leavitt in the first generation typically had fifteen to twenty children by two or three wives. Mrs Emily Leavitt, probably John's wife, was postmaster from 1944-10-31 until 1948-09-20. Another Wellsville immigrant, Mrs Martha Broadbent Wright, held the job until 1952-12-09, when she and her husband moved to Cardston.



Emily Leavitt then returned to the job until 1962-03-05, when she handed over to Mrs Georgina Petersen Olsen, the final postmaster. At left is a proof strike of the registration mark used during Emily's tenure.



Olsen was connected to a group of polygamist Swedish Mormons who first went west to Utah, then came north to the Cardston area. The Leavitt population began declining after the Glenwood-Hill Spring irrigation district came into operation and proved to be very successful. The project was only a short distance to the northwest and provided an outlet for all the children of the polygamists to find their own land. The problem at Leavitt was that only some of the land could be irrigated. The rest was foothills that were good for cattle grazing or dryland hayfields but not regular crop production. Rangeland cannot support as many families as the equivalent area under irrigation, so the children had to move away to find their futures. The Leavitt post office was permanently closed on 1968-04-30 and became a rural route out of Cardston.

The hamlet still exists and does get some business from the tourist trade heading to the Waterton mountains. Below is a photograph I took in June 2016, looking southwest across the hamlet to the Montana mountains. The American border is only a half-hour drive from Leavitt. The large mountain at left is Chief Mountain, just inside the Montana border.



## Caldwell.

A group of 47 polygamist Mormons settled this area in 1898, about 20 km east of Cardston. They were all Caldwelles by blood or in-laws by marriage. The population rose to 300, and on 1900-07-01 a post office was opened with David Henry Caldwell as the first postmaster. He became seriously ill and resigned his position on 1904-10-10, dying a few weeks later. The post office was closed and did not re-open until 1906-11-01, when Georges Vickery became postmaster [2].

Vickery handed the job over to James Sabey Jacobs on 1911-03-18, who, like his predecessors, kept the post office in his house. Jacobs had originally come from Utah and worked initially as a cowboy on the John F. Bradshaw ranch, which included the land that later became the village of Caldwell. Jacobs later homesteaded 200 km further north at another Mormon colony near the now-extinct village of Frankburg, where he met and married his wife [4]. The couple returned to what was now Caldwell, where Jacobs resumed working for Bradshaw. He served as postmaster until 1940-11-30, when he was granted military leave by the CPO. He lied about his age and told the Canadian Army he was thirteen years younger than he really was. His daughter-in-law Mrs Mary Peterson Jacobs took over the post office while he was away. After the war, he returned to the postmastership on 1945-05-02 until his death on 1956-04-11. Below is a proof strike of a circular date stamp dated just five days after his death. He must have ordered a new postmark device not long before his passing.



The village of Caldwell suffered two blows to its fortunes during Jacobs's tenure. Firstly, the Glenwood and Hill Spring irrigation district started up just north of the village, and almost all of the Caldwell villagers moved there. Matters were not helped when the village was bypassed by the railroad. Jacobs's widow Eva took over as postmaster on his death until 1960-01-01, when she passed the job to her daughter-in-law Mrs Truda Beazer Jacobs. The population of the area continued to dwindle and Truda was the last postmaster. The post office was permanently closed on 1968-04-30, and replaced by a mail route from Cardston [3]. In this case it can be fairly said that an irrigation project destroyed this post office, rather than the usual good roads explanation.

### **Mountain View.**

Occasional settlers were in an area known as Fish Creek, just outside today's Waterton National Park. The population increased enough that on 1894-09-01 a post office opened with Jacob Webb as the first postmaster. He died in 1897 and the post office was briefly closed before Samuel John Layton became the next postmaster on 1898-01-01.

The Laytons had previously homesteaded at Cardston. In 1897, Charles Ora Card asked the Layton and other families to plant a Mormon colony at Mountain View. Layton had a variety of businesses, including a blacksmith shop where the post office was located. He also carried freight between Cardston and Mountain View. The family later re-located to Taber, over at the other end of the Mormon diaspora to the east, and on 1903-06-01, the post office went to John F. Parrish.

The Parrishes were from Utah originally. They were the next generation of one of Joseph Smith's aides from the early years of the LDS Church in Missouri and Illinois. They came north in the 1890s and had numerous businesses, including a cheese factory. The post office was in the Parrish general store. It was passed on 1910-08-13 to James Slack Parker, who was Bishop of the Mountain View ward, and kept the post office in his house. He gave up the postmastership on 1917-06-28 when he returned to Utah.

Three postmasters came and went before Mrs Carrie Payne took the job on 1926-06-01 and became a long server. Samuel Henry Earl took over on 1942-09-08 until his death on 1955-10-03. During those decades, the post office was variously in a house or a general store. Canada Post records cut off after this due to privacy laws. The post office closed on 1989-02-01 and was immediately replaced by a retail postal outlet [5]. This was part of a great slaughter of Canadian rural post offices by Canada Post from 1989 to the early 1990s, when such offices were contracted out to retail operators. The photo below shows the outlet as it was in 1989, with Betty Speirs standing in front.





At left is a sample of the modern postmark. The postal outlet still operated as of 2016, so at least local residents couldn't complain about being reverted to a rural route.

The photo below was taken in June 2016 and shows the current retail postal outlet in a general store.



I took this photo in June 2016, looking west across Mountain View. The source of its name is obvious.



As an aside, the Wray family were among the Mormon homesteaders along the edge of the mountains. Their daughter Fay was born and raised on a ranch in the Mountain View area. When she was a teenager, the family moved back to Utah, then later to California. As a young woman, she became an actress and later starred in the movie KING KONG. Because she had lived briefly in Cardston before moving to Utah, that town claimed her as a favourite daughter and built a tiny water park, known as the Fay Wray Fountain, on its main street. It was built in 1962 and dedicated in her presence. When I visited Cardston in 2016, the fountain and pool were still there and well kept.



## Beazer.

Mark Ephraim Beazer came north in 1890 from Utah as part of a Mormon wagon train and originally settled at Cardston. Exploring to the southwest, he found a good homestead and moved his family there in 1895. Other Mormons followed in sufficient quantity as to justify opening a post office on 1903-12-01 with Beazer as the first postmaster. At right is the proof strike of its first postmark. The post office was located in Beazer's cabin until 1918-03-12. After that, his son-in-law George Alfred Duce was briefly postmaster. Another distant in-law named Richard Bradshaw took over on 1919-01-23 when the Duce family moved to Cardston.

Richard was officially the postmaster until 1926-08-09, but his wife Olive ran the post office most of the time. There was also a toll telephone; both were located in their ranch house. The Bradshaws moved to Caldwell where they had family, and Royal Mark (Roy) Beazer became the next postmaster. He was the eldest son of the first postmaster. The post office continued moving from house to house, next going on 1960-01-14 when Mrs Irene Lavonne Broadhead became postmaster. She was a distant in-law of the Beazers through Roy's wife Elva, and held the postmastership until 1966-08-29.

The hamlet of Beazer was failing, partly from good roads and partly from better irrigation projects elsewhere. Only some of the land could be economically irrigated, and the rest was hilly rangeland, so the children had to move elsewhere. Beazer is also on a side road off the tourist track. The final postmaster was Mrs Marilyn Kay Beazer (nee Broadhead). The post office was permanently closed on 1968-04-30 due to limited usefulness. Since mail distribution had always been from Cardston, there was no difficulty to convert it to a rural route.





## **Epilogue.**

The land in this area would have undoubtedly been settled if the Mormons had never come, but there is no doubt that it would have been entirely sparsely populated rangeland or dryland wheat. It was the Mormons who developed the irrigation farms, not the Gentiles. With the Mormons, the land was able to support a greater population than cattle ranching. Unfortunately much of the area west of Cardston was unsuited to irrigation, although the rest of the land made good pasture for rangeland cattle. A farm can only support one family and only one son can inherit, so the children of the homesteaders had to move away. The Mormon settlements were not immune to the effect of good roads, but Cardston without irrigation would today only be a hamlet instead of a town of about 4,000 as it is circa 2016. A comparable area in topography and climate, but without irrigation, is extreme southeastern Alberta, which today has one farm household plus the personnel at a Customs station [7]. The postal history of the Mormon diaspora in southwestern Alberta can therefore be directly related to irrigation.

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## **GLENWOOD AND HILL SPRING DISTRICT**

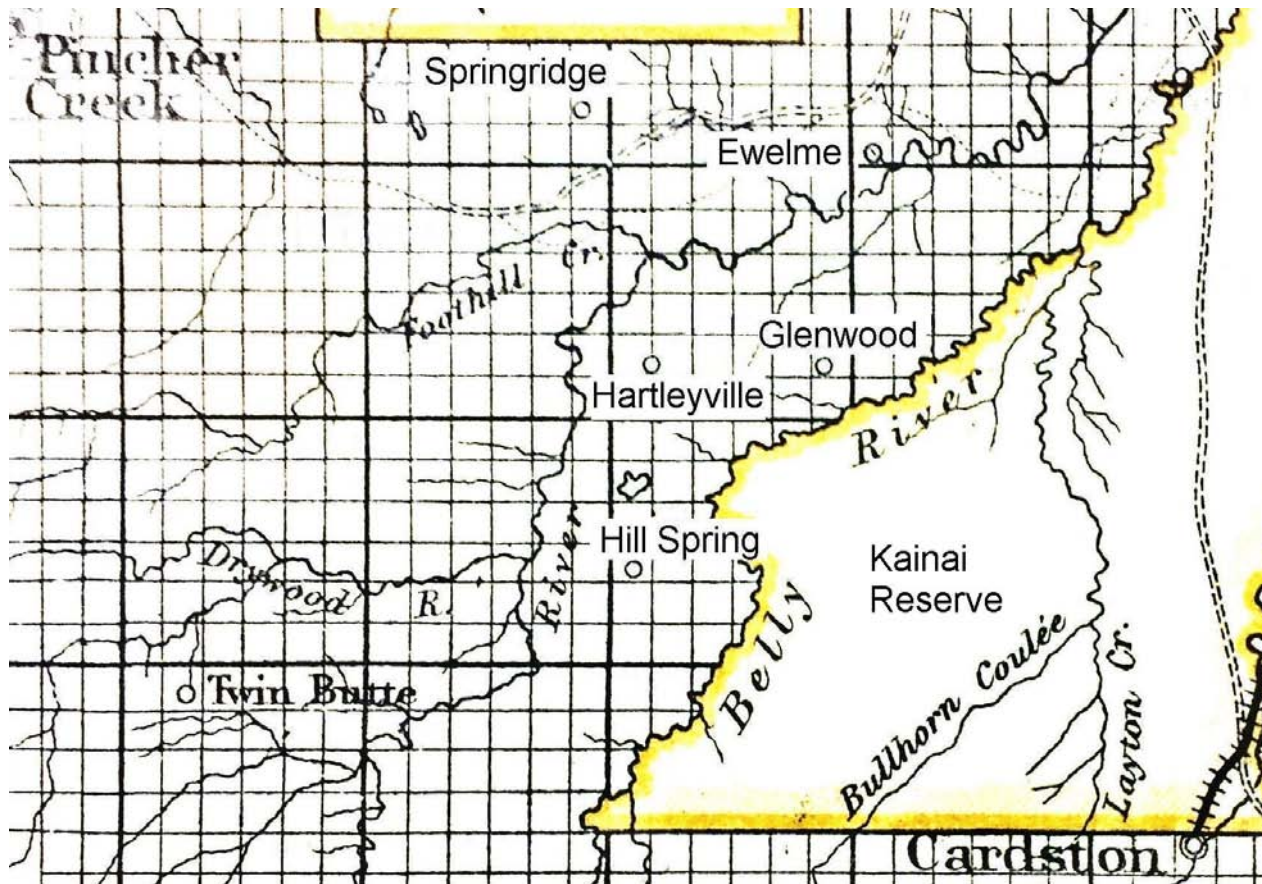
The Hill Spring and Glenwood area consists of low rolling hills that are a transition between the Rocky Mountain foothills to the west and the prairie flatlands to the east. European settlement began in earnest after the Mounties arrived in 1874. By the 1890s, cattle ranching was predominant, relying on huge leases of government land, measured in tens of thousands of hectares. The leases were gained by political influence in Ottawa, and then syndicated to European investors the way that junior mining stocks are sold today.

The Cochrane Cattle Company was the largest land owner and leasor by far, and had control over almost all of the area. It was owned by Senator Matthew Cochrane from Quebec. Large-scale ranching became uneconomical around the turn of the century when the companies ran out of gullible investors, since none of the ranches made a profit. In 1906, three years after the Senator's death, the Cochrane ranch was offered for sale to the Latter Day Saints Church (LDS) because the ranch owners knew the Mormons would settle the land rather than use it for speculation.

The Mormon diaspora had previously settled a large area further south, from Cardston (where they built a temple) to the American border. They had demonstrated their ability at irrigation farming and colonizing the land with respectable families, to the point where the Canadian federal government favoured them as homesteaders. Their ability to irrigate land meant that a higher population could be supported, compared to cattle ranching, which depopulated many areas.

The LDS Church accepted the offer from Cochrane Cattle, and subdivided the land for irrigation farming. Over the next decade, the area quickly increased its population and several villages were founded. Mail service came overland from Cardston. The settlers always looked south to Salt Lake City and east to Cardston for supplies and societal connections [1].

Adapted from a 1922 map and shows the Glenwood-Hill Spring district. The small squares on the map are a mile on each side.



## **Hill Spring.**

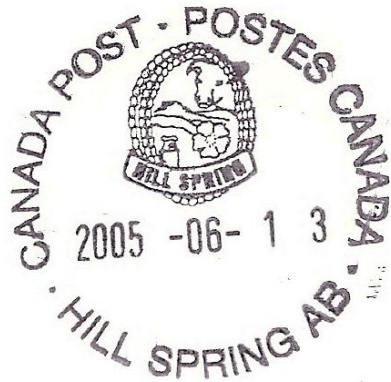
By 1909, a village had been platted at the foot of a hill with a good spring. It was originally called Spring Hill but when a post office was applied for, the name was already in use elsewhere, so the settlers reversed the words. Franklin Pierce Fisher was the first postmaster from 1911-02-01 but only ran the post office briefly in his house until December 20 of that same year. He had too many things going on, including being elevated to Bishop in the LDS Church, so he handed the postmastership to John Booth Merrill. The post office moved into the Merrill residence. He was a jack-of-all-trades, from carpentry to tree nurseryman to Justice of the Peace. He was the only one in the area who knew anything about dentistry or medicine, and was entrusted by the government to vaccinate residents [1].

Nathan Eldon Tanner took over the post office on 1924-10-01 and moved it into his general store. He later entered politics and became a provincial cabinet member, as well as being very active in the LDS Church. The post office then moved to the house of Leslie W. Coombs, who became postmaster on 1926-03-01 and held the position for a couple of years. His wife Agnes actually ran the post office. It was in the front of the house and the family lived in the back. They moved to the USA and Alexander Marian Brooks took over on 1928-07-10.

Brooks had grown up in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina and by a circuitous route eventually came to the Hill Spring area with his wife and children. Some of their children were grown by then. Originally he bought a farm from Tanner's brother, but with his older kids starting their own families, more space was needed. He bought the Coombs house in Hill Springs, becoming postmaster in the process. He and part of his family lived there while the grown and married children stayed out on the farm. Brooks was a long-service postmaster and finally retired on 1946-10-16. Fisher's son Franklin Paul briefly served as a placeholder postmaster until 1947-01-31 when Ivan Eugene Workman became the new postmaster.

Workman was born and raised in southwestern Alberta. He served the full duration of World War Two, including the first landing on D-Day. After the war he farmed north of Hill Spring but initially lived in the Coombs house with its post office. He and his wife bought a bigger house in the village and the post office moved with them. Another long-server, he retired from the post office on 1972-02-15. His daughter-in-law Mildred Nadene Leavitt Workman took over as postmaster. Canada Post records cut off after this date due to privacy laws [2].

Below are the pictorial postmark of Hill Spring and its regular cancel.



The post office in modern times is now in a one-room shack. In the summer of 2015 when I visited Hill Spring, I was startled to see the post office wrapped in pink taffeta and plastic pennants. The postmistress told me that this was part of a campaign in aid of breast cancer research, and the decorations would stay on until the dry season was over.



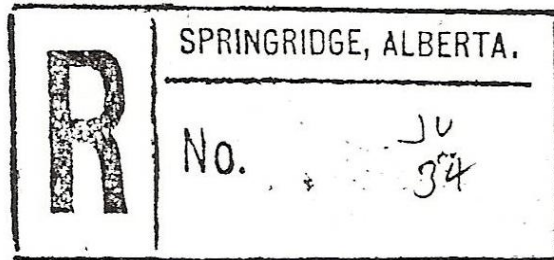
## Ewelme.

Thomas J. Turner was born in Ontario in 1825 and moved to the Ewelme district in 1901. He would have been 75 years old on arrival, an unusual age to be homesteading. The first post office opened in his home on 1905-05-01. Mail service was via Fort Macleod. The post office name came from the district, which in turn was named after a village in Oxfordshire, England. Turner served as postmaster until 1912-11-29, when he died at the age of 87. His brother H.J. Turner then took over the post office until 1919-05-03. The final postmaster was Thomas Edward Murphy until the post office closed on 1928-02-29, a victim of good roads. Thereafter mail service was a rural route out of Glenwood [2, 3, 4].

## Springridge.

Spelled as one word, this district was named after a chain of hills along its north side that spout numerous springs. The hills also shelter the district from north winds and often divert storms. The McNellis family arrived in 1901 from Minnesota to homestead. The population grew enough to justify a post office and on 1909-09-01, James C. McNellis became the first postmaster. The post office was in a front room in his house. He served until his death on 1921-09-05.

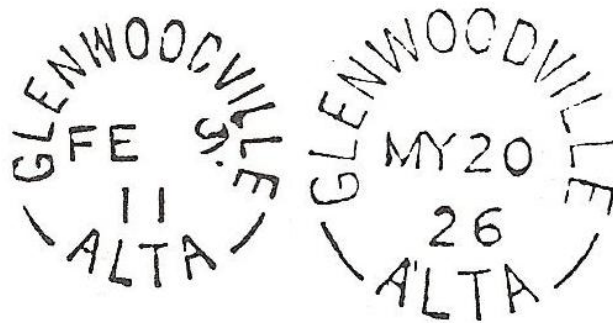
His widow Anna then briefly looked after the post office until 1922-05-04, when she handed the postmastership to Elmer D. McNellis, nephew of James. Below is a proof strike of the registration mark. McNellis moved the post office to his house on a nearby farm. It was discontinued on 1946-07-30 and replaced by a rural route [4].



## Glenwoodville / Glenwood.

This village was founded in 1908 in the heart of the Cochrane Ranch area, which was big enough after the transfer to have its own LDS Stake. The original proposal was to name it Edwoodville after Edward J. Wood, the president of the Stake. He declined the honour and asked that instead it be named after his first-born son Glen. The village was called Glenwoodville until 1979-07-27, when its name was shortened to Glenwood [3]. For consistency, I will refer to it only as Glenwood even though during the majority of its life it was known to residents by its -ville name.

James Albert Layton and his family arrived from Utah in 1888 and farmed in several areas of the Mormon diaspora before settling at Glenwood. He became first postmaster when the post office opened on 1911-02-01 in his farm house. Below are a couple of proof strikes of early postmarks.





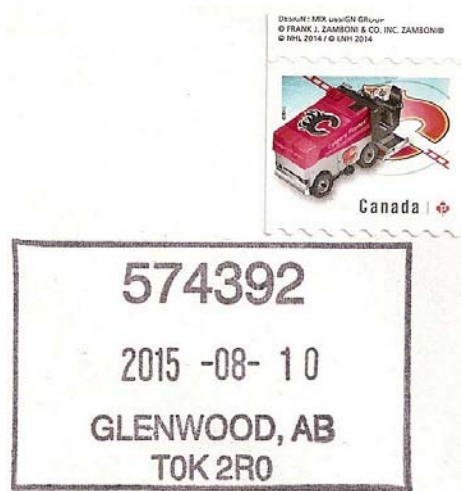
Robert Savage took over as postmaster on 1917-06-08 and was succeeded by Mrs Jannette (Nettie) Leavitt on 1920-08-11. The post office moved to a front room of the Leavitt house. A telephone exchange was added to it, for which Nettie and her daughter were the operators. The extra workload caused her to give up the postmastership [5].

The post office then moved on 1923-01-02 into the general store of Ernest Albert Law. His son Harry Wallace Law took it over on 1931-02-28. From there it went to the house of Sidney John Stanley Read on 1934-05-26, who was a long-server until 1956-12-14. During his tenure, the post office moved into a standalone building. He was succeeded by his wife Annie, who stayed until 1963-05-10. Edwin (Ted) Kent Greene, a collateral descendant of Brigham Young, took over as postmaster until 1968-11-15, when he handed the post office to Mrs. Joyce L. Shipley, after which privacy laws kick in. The photo below was taken in 1989 and shows the author's mother, the late Betty Speirs, standing in front of the post office building at that time.



When the postal code system was introduced by the Canadian Post Office in 1972, Glenwood was initially assigned the code TOK 0Y0. Problems developed with mail intended for Glenwood being mis-sorted for Tokyo, Japan, so the code was changed to TOK 2R0.

Below are a pictorial postmark and the regular cancel from the modern era.



When I visited Glenwood in 2015, the post office had moved into a side apartment of a bank. The village is still prosperous and I was impressed at how clean and tidy everything was.



## Hartleyville.



This village, just east of the Waterton River, was named after James Hartley, who was a Social Credit MLA from 1935 to 1967 and later a cabinet minister in the Alberta provincial government [3]. Mail service was from the south via Cardston. This post office opened very late in Alberta's history, skipping the pioneer era completely. Jesse Lawrence Stanford became the first postmaster on 1939-01-02, serving until 1946-11-12. The proof strike of its first postmark is shown at left.

Four placeholder postmasters then came and went until Hans Christian Jensen accepted the position on 1950-04-01. As his name suggests, he was of Danish origin but was actually born in Utah. The post office moved into his grocery store and his wife Zina was his assistant. Hans previously had been postmaster further south at what is now the ghost town of Aetna [5].

For some reason there was a brief intermission in Jensen's postmastership, during which time Morris Blain Allred served as postmaster from 1954-12-01 until 1955-09-27, after which Jensen returned to the job. He retired on 1963-08-15 and was succeeded by Mrs Roumelia Hartley Smith. She was a relative of the man for whom the post office had been named.

By then the need for a post office was declining due to nearby Glenwood taking the majority of the trade. On 1968-04-29, the post office permanently closed and became a rural route via Cardston, with Glenwood providing post office services.

## References.

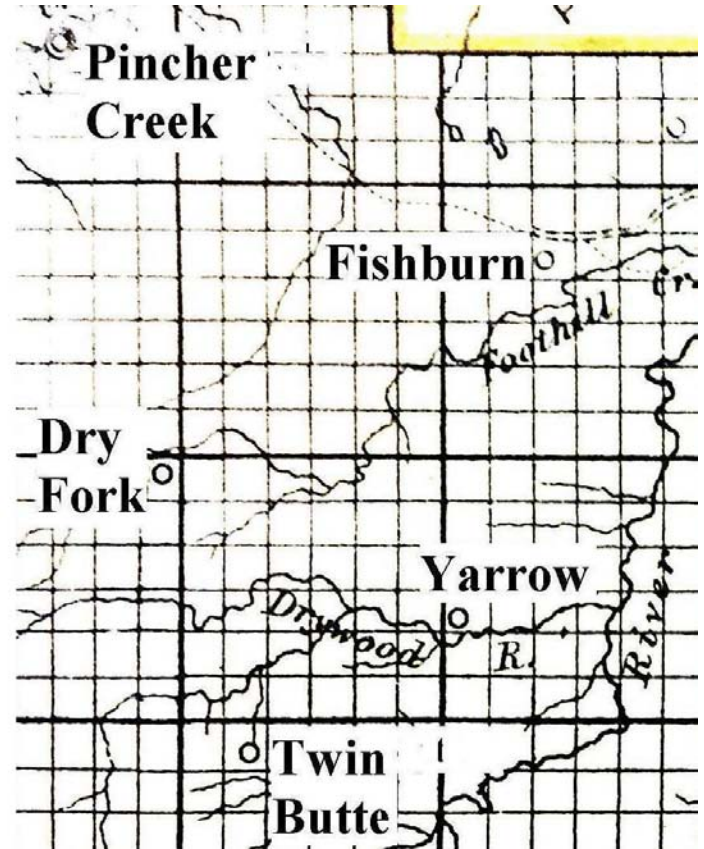
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## THE TWIN BUTTE DISTRICT

The Twin Butte district is in the southwestern corner of Alberta between Waterton National Park and Pincher Creek. Settlement began in the 1880s as open-range ranching, but by the late 1890s much of the land had been fenced off by homesteaders. The fenced land was not as productive as the open range, so as farmers consolidated, the population declined, and the area is thinly developed today.

There are country grid roads, but the only major route through the district is Highway 6, which runs from Pincher Creek down to Waterton National Park. The population was basically isolated in a cul-de-sac and still is today.

There is a highway running through the district into Waterton which provides some tourist traffic, and natural gas field servicing is important. The only surviving post office in the district is Twin Butte. At right is a map of the post offices that have existed in the area.



There were no railroads servicing Twin Butte. The nearest was a spur line about ten kilometres north of the hamlet, running along the south edge of the two hills that gave Twin Butte its name. Below is a photo I took in August 2015 of the twin buttes, looking north along Highway 6 to where the road goes underneath the railroad tracks and then makes a series of S-turns in a narrow gully between the two hills.



Prior to the opening of post offices, any mail was carried by favour or by the North West Mounted Police. The Mounties distributed a lot of mail in southern Alberta before the postal system developed, ostensibly as a courtesy but additionally as an excuse to visit people and keep an eye on them. NWMP Orderly Rooms at forts in southern Alberta accepted civilian mail and sold stamps [1]. Settlers also used the Pincher Creek post office on the northern boundary of the district, which opened in 1884.

## Yarrow/Uptonburgh



The first post office in the district was Yarrow, opened on 1895-04-01 with Robert J. Christie as postmaster [2]. The name comes from the adjacent Yarrow Creek, which in turn was named after the weed *Achillea millefolium*. It grows abundantly in the area and was used to make medicinal tea [3]. At left is the proof strike of its postmark. Christie was known as a sharp-practice man and was unpopular with local ranchers, many of whom preferred to bypass Yarrow and go the extra distance to Pincher Creek to mail a letter.

A petition was got up by residents to replace him with George T. Berry, who on 1895-09-01 became postmaster. Christie's actual tenure in office was only two months, although the official record shows a bigger gap before Berry took over [4]. The post office operated in a small general store. Berry sold out to the Upton family at the end of 1899, who were numerous in the district.

Frank L. Upton, one of the sons who homesteaded nearby, became postmaster on 1900-02-01 while his father ran the store. He operated the post office for a decade until it closed on 1911-11-04. The name was officially changed to Uptonburgh on 1911-05-01, only a few months before it closed. The postmark proof strike of the belated name change is shown in at right. However, it was referred to as Uptonburgh from the time Upton took over, despite it being a ranch house post office, not a village. The area today appears on maps as Drywood, after a creek of that name which connects with Yarrow Creek.





## **Dry Fork.**

This was a ranch house post office on a branch of Foothill Creek that only flowed during spring runoff and thunderstorms. The first and repeating postmaster was rancher Levitt Cyr, who opened the post office on 1903-09-01 in his ranch house and held it until 1906-10-19. George Stewart then took over until 1907-10-11, although his wife Penelope actually ran the post office. Stewart was a Scot who initially immigrated to the Dakotas but was plagued there by droughts no matter where he settled. He came out to Pincher Creek and when he saw the wildflowers and tall grass, perfect for grazing, he made the Twin Butte hills his final home.

The Stewarts had problems with the Pincher Creek postmaster, who liked his liquor, and often sent Yarrow mail to Dry Fork and vice versa. There were lots of French and German homesteaders in the district, who received mail from the Old Country written in the elaborate scripts of the era. Penelope had trouble reading the addressee names, so she would show the letters to customers asking for mail and have them pick out applicable items [5]. The Stewarts gave up the post office when they took up a new homestead nearby and couldn't carry the combined workload.

Levitt Cyr then stepped back in again as postmaster until 1914-01-02. William Kinman then took the post office until 1916-04-17 in his house, but handed it back to Cyr. Third time was not lucky and the post office permanently closed on 1918-04-05 [2]. Even for the district, Dry Fork wasn't that well populated. On the next page is a photo I took of the Dry Fork area in August 2015, with hazy mountains in the distance as a result of forest fire smoke drifting in from Washington State.



## **Twin Butte.**

Edward Mitchell homesteaded in the district in 1903 and later opened a general store. The post office opened in the store on 1905-06-01, and all subsequent postmasters except one were store owners. The stores were usually in ranch houses, and were a room rather than a standalone operation. The name Twin Butte was suggested by R.E. Wyckoff at a community meeting held in 1904 at Wesley Shannon's house [3]. In addition to serving the surrounding district, the Twin Butte post office was at times the distributing point for mails to Waterton National Park further south, until that task was taken over by Pincher Creek when good roads developed and made mail transport easier [6].

Shannon was briefly the next postmaster from 1908-07-01 until he sold his homestead to William Terrill, who took over on 1909-11-02 as postmaster. The Terrills were notorious for their dogs. The critters hung about the post office and were friendly to humans but absolutely intolerant of any other dogs brought along by customers. Many dog fights took place. The Terrill cat liked to sun itself on a ledge on the outside of the post office window where the glass reflected the heat. The cat occasionally joined in the fights by leaping down from the window onto the back of an unsuspecting dog which had its attention on the main fight [4]. Twin Butte in that era must have had one of the noisiest post offices in the country.

The Terrills also had problems with a local homesteader who was from tobacco country in southern Ontario and regularly received bundles of whole-leaf tobacco from the folks back east. The leaves were not cured, as it appears that the homesteader preferred to make his own blend from scratch. The scent contaminated all the other mail in the bag as well as the post office room.

Wyckoff took over on 1912-10-04 and was the exception to the store owners, keeping the post office in his ranch house without a store. Charles Mullen was the next postmaster beginning 1914-04-14. He and his wife operated the store but the post office was actually in their house adjacent on land leased from Terrill. The house burned down in 1922 and nothing was saved. The Mullens lost all their possessions, and moved to Iowa where they had family. Terrill took back the post office on 1922-07-18 and operated it until 1927-05-27, running it on his ranch. The photo on the next page shows the Terrill ranch; the post office was in the white house at left. He had mortgaged his original homestead (not the land the store was on) to buy the other land and various investments, and needed a cash income to help pay off his debts. His health failed in 1927 and he handed over the post office to Fred Campbell, who stayed postmaster until the end of 1934.



George Shenton then became the longest-serving postmaster, his first tenure ending on 1951-07-27. He handed over to Mrs. Edith Constance Aebli, who stayed until 1955-04-09. John Dawson MacLennan then took over until 1960 when ill health forced him out of the job. Mrs. Beatrice Lorraine Shenton, sister-in-law of George, was briefly postmaster until George returned to the post until 1963-03-19, by which time he was of advanced age. The musical chairs continued when MacLennan returned for a brief second try as postmaster after George gave up the position for good. As the area declined in population, there was a steady turnover every few years of postmasters and storekeepers until 1971, when Mrs. Helen M. Bator took over. The post office temporarily closed for five months in 1976 before Bator resumed.

Canada Post records cut off after that date due to privacy regulations. The post office was relocated into a house. Below is the CDS postmark from that era. On the next page is a 1989 photo of the post office; the woman is the author's mother, the late Betty Speirs.





During Alberta's centennial in 2005, Twin Butte used the pictorial cancel shown below left. The regular postmark is below right.



It wasn't so much good roads that killed the village like so many other places on the prairie. Twin Butte suffers from being in the middle of nowhere, with only a few ranchers to provide business and the occasional tourist who stops en route to Waterton National Park. It is halfway to the park but since the drive is only an hour or so, there is usually no reason for tourists to stop on the way. When I stopped by in August 2015, Twin Butte in its entirety was a general store and one house. The house had a For Sale sign. The photo below shows the store. After taking that photo, I then turned around 180 degrees and photographed the view directly across the highway from the post office, seen on the next page. I daresay that the clump of Angus cattle watching me with the greatest curiosity outnumbered all the humans within a 1-km radius at the time.







## Fishburn.



Fishburn had the earliest post office in the district, at the fringe of the Mormon diaspora, and was named after a pioneer homesteader Arthur Fish [3]. It opened on 1894-11-01 in the ranchhouse of Harris B. Garlough, the first postmaster [2]. At left is the proof strike of the first postmark. In 1901, Garlough moved to the Cypress Hills on the far side of Alberta, taking up a new homestead there and starting a family.

Garlough sold his ranch to Col. James Ward, who became the new postmaster on 1901-07-15. He was an Englishman born in 1844 who had emigrated to Ontario in 1868, so by the time he came out west he was 56 years old, fairly old for someone settling the new lands. Ward had served with the army during the Second Riel Rebellion in 1885, as did his son. The prairies impressed him, and he returned in 1900 where he and his three sons took up homesteads adjacent to each other. When Garlough left, Ward took the opportunity to expand his ranch. His house and the post office burned on 1903-11-05, a total loss, but he rebuilt and continued on [7].

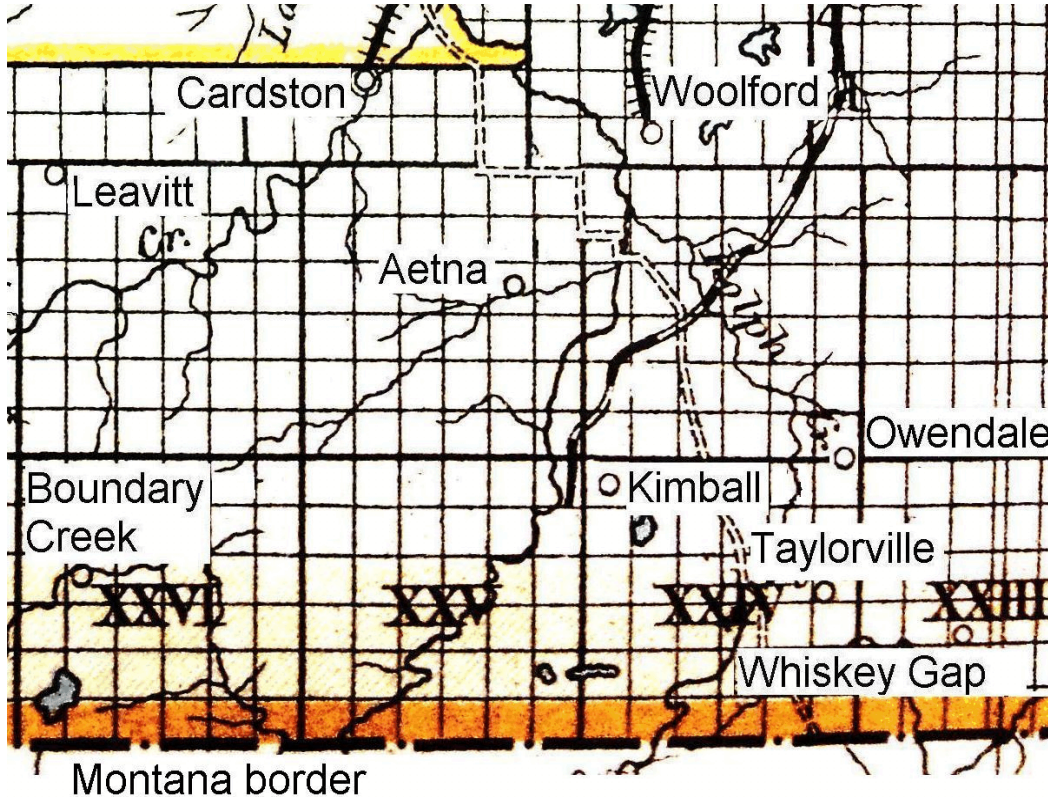
In 1908, Ward and his wife sold out and retired to Burnaby, British Columbia. His place as postmaster was taken on 1908-07-01 by James Russell, about whom nothing is known. Local histories are silent about him. In any event, he was a short-term postmaster, and was succeeded on 1909-10-16 by Arthur L. Saunders, who moved the post office into his general store. He was a son-in-law of Ward, and had followed the family out west, arriving in 1903. He sold the store in 1914 and moved to Vancouver, probably so his wife could be closer to her parents [7].

The final postmaster of Fishburn was Richard August Herman Wittkopf, who served from 1914-08-08 until 1942-08-31, when the post office was closed due to limited usefulness [2]. Thereafter postal service was a rural route, first via Twin Butte, and now today from Pincher Creek. Wittkopf was born in Germany in 1864 and emigrated as a boy with his family to Quebec in 1879. When a young man, he came out west in 1886 and established a blacksmith shop in the Fishburn hamlet. He bought the Saunders store and took over as postmaster. Fishburn, like so many other places, was the victim of good roads that made it easier to shop in Pincher Creek and of a general decline in population as farms mechanized and children migrated to the cities. The hamlet dwindled away and vanished.

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## SOUTH OF CARDSTON



Not all the Mormon settlements were successful. In particular, a string of hamlets between Cardston and the Montana border failed to survive the advent of good roads, with or without irrigation.

Trails led south from the Cardston area to the border through an opening in some hills known as Whiskey Gap, and several settlements were established along the way. The map shows past and present post offices. The small squares are a mile on each side. The double-dash line is the original oxen freighter trail.

(Whiskey Gap's postal history was discussed in JAPH #12.)

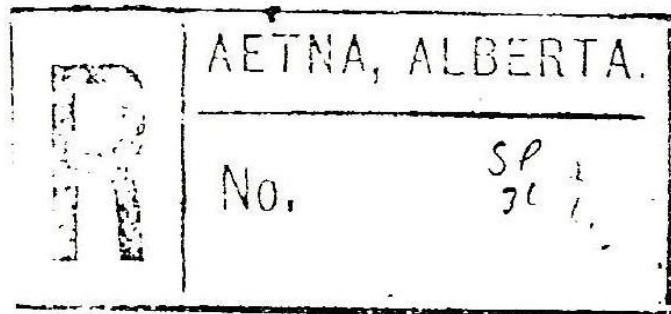
## Aetna.

This hamlet was named by Mormon leader John W. Taylor after Mount Etna, Italy, because the hills reminded him of the volcano [1]. He used the archaic spelling of that period. The hamlet was ill-starred for most of its life, notwithstanding how hard the Mormon farmers worked. The post office opened on 1900-11-01 in the house of Neil Hanson (also known as Niels Hansen in the records). The proof strike of the registration mark is shown at right.

After his death on 1902-12-20, the postmastership was briefly held by a placeholder before N.W. Tanner took over on 1904-01-01 and moved the post office to his farm house. Oswald A. Steele was the next postmaster from 1909-02-01 to 1916-09-12. After Steele, the post office began rotating every two or three years between the Richards, Tanner, and Jensen families, moving from one house to another as Aetna faded away. There were seven postmasters between 1916 and 1944, mostly various Jensen family members [2]. Figure 3 is a proof strike of Aetna's registration mark from this era.

The merry-go-round stopped with Richard Demont Smith. His wife Alice was a Hansen, and both were originally from Mormon settlements in Idaho. Smith lost his left leg in a horse team accident, leaving the couple in poverty. They took on numerous odd jobs to survive, the post office being one such position that provided some steady cash. Alice was the postal clerk behind the counter. The post office became vacant as a result of tragedy. On 1953-01-01, the Smiths were returning from a New Year's Eve party when they were both killed in a car accident [3].

Harold Kelven Jensen was the fifth of his family to be Aetna's postmaster, and the final postmaster as it turned out. Aetna was in its death throes because of good roads. On 1958-10-30, the post office permanently closed. It was replaced by a mail route from Cardston. The hamlet is still there but today is only a fifteen-minute drive from Cardston. I took the photo on the next page in 2016.





## Boundary Creek.



This stream rises in Montana, flows north a few kilometres into Alberta, then curves about 180-degrees and goes back into Montana. The hamlet was in sight of the border. Although there were Mormons about, the majority of settlers in this area were Gentiles, mostly from Scotland. The foothills were not conducive to irrigation farming.

There were no roads, and the mail couriers traveled on horseback across trackless rangeland. The mail came via Beazer originally and then later Cardston. The post office opened on 1907-07-15 in the ranch house of William Fidler. At left is the proof strike of the first postmark. Fidler kept the postmastership for a decade until Victor W. Hillmer took over on 1918-01-26, moving the post office to his house [2].

From there, the post office moved to the farm of Stuart Selby on 1923-03-22 when he became postmaster. He was a mail courier hauling up and down the line, so his wife Minnie actually ran the post office. The Selbys moved about to be closer to schools for their children, and eventually gave up the post office on 1925-04-12. One of the Hansens briefly looked after the post office until 1927-01-31 when John Herbert Vair became postmaster. When the post office moved to the Vair ranch, their son Ernest became the mail courier to Beazer. John died on 1934-08-25 and his widow Edith took over as postmaster for a couple of years [3].

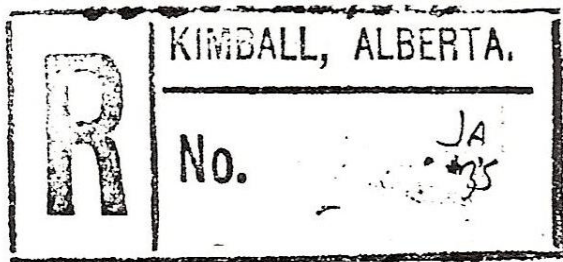
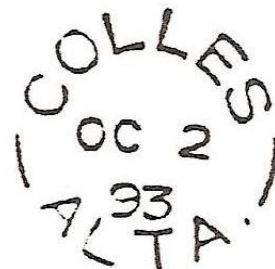
The post office returned to the Selbys on 1936-04-09 and this time Minnie was the official postmaster. The Selbys had moved yet again, so the new location was on the Enders ranch they were renting. Minnie retired on 1946-10-31, and her husband Stuart briefly took over as a placeholder. Depopulation had rendered the post office unneeded and it closed permanently on 1947-02-28, replaced by a mail route from Cardston.

## Colles / Kimball.

The first Mormon settlers arrived here in the late 1890s in what was originally called the East Aetna district. The Kimball family were the most numerous among this group of settlers. Prior to the arrival of the Mormons, there was a detachment of the North West Mounted Police and a small trading post operated by Henry J. Cope Colles.

He was an English remittance man, one of thousands on the Canadian prairies [3]. Remittance men were the younger sons of English gentry who were usually sent to the colonies for good and sufficient reason. Often dissolute, they “left our country for our country’s sake”, as a song went, and were paid to stay away by regular remittances, hence their nickname. Not all of them were fallen young men, and many were simply surplus to English society, unsuited for the army or the church, the traditional dumping grounds for unneeded sons.

Colles seems to have been more responsible than most of his ilk, for he became the first postmaster on 1893-09-01, with the post office named after himself [2]. Had there been any question about him, a Mormon would have been chosen, and certainly the local Mounties would have been asked about his character. At right is the proof strike of the first Colles postmark.



Colles stayed in the job until 1899-03-07, when it passed to Thomas O. King, one of the Mormon settlers. He had the position a short time and then Orsen H. Kimball took over on 1900-11-01 but only stayed until September 1901. Yet another placeholder came and went before Mark Spencer became postmaster on 1903-02-01 and remained thirteen years on the job. It was on the day that he took over that the post office name was changed to Kimball in honour of Herber C. Kimball, grandfather to most of the adult Kimballs in the district [4]. At left is a proof strike of the Kimball registration mark.



Born in Salt Lake City, Spencer originally migrated to Cardston and operated a variety of businesses there. He moved south to Kimball and opened a general store, in which the post office was located, but kept his Cardston businesses going as well. They eventually drew him back to Cardston and on 1916-04-17 he gave up the Kimball postmastership.

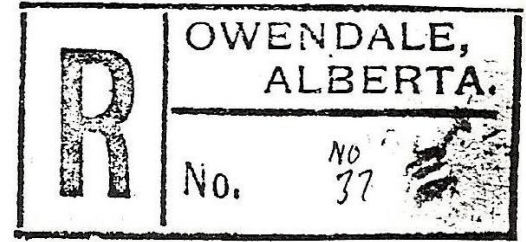
The Kimball hamlet began declining as good roads penetrated the district. There were ten postmasters over the next two decades, and for a few months in late 1929, the post office was closed. When it re-opened, the new postmaster died three days later, and the revolving door of postmasters resumed. It finally stopped with the last postmaster, Ray Nish, who was born in the Kimball district and was related to the Spencers. He served from 1937-04-01 until 1956-06-29 when the post office permanently closed, a victim of good roads. Today Kimball is a mail route from Cardston.

## Owendale.

This area was settled in the 1890s by the original Mormon diaspora. The post office, however, was surprisingly late in opening, not until 1937-12-01 in the general store of Emil C. Fredericks. The settlement was originally named Jefferson, but when the post office opened it was renamed after the adjacent Owendale Farm, a major sugar beet processor. The farm belonged to two brothers, Roger and Owen Owens, with an "s" in the family surname [1]. At left is the proof strike of the Owendale registration mark.

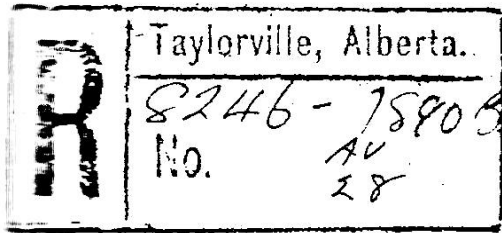
Fredericks sold his store, and the new owner John Paul Bietz became postmaster on 1940-07-16. He in his turn sold out, and after a brief placeholder, the postmastership went to Elmo Wolsey on 1951-02-16. The Wolseys were all over the countryside. They dated back to the original Mormons of Illinois before the troubles there. Elmo was born at nearby Taylorville where his parents homesteaded. Large families could not sustain all those grown children on the farm, so Elmo became a storekeeper. Lynes Lavel Woodward took over the postmastership on 1957-10-06 and held it until 1965-08-09.

By then, good roads were having their effect on Owendale the same as other villages. The last two postmasters were placeholders who each stayed only a few months on the job. On 1966-10-18, the post office permanently closed, although the final official date was 1972-01-14. It was replaced by a mail route from Cardston [4].



## Taylorville.

As the first group of Mormons entering Alberta in 1898 traveled north, the Vaughn family noticed a large meadow along a creek, about 3 km north of the Montana border. They and several other families decided to homestead on the spot. The general area was called Vaughn Meadows. The Mormon families decided to consolidate their church, school, business, and houses in one location for convenience. Residences were built there and the settlers commuted to their homesteads, which was unusual for the Canadian prairies. The Taylor brothers opened a general store, and James H. Taylor became the first postmaster on 1900-06-09, serving until 1901-01-11.



This batch of Mormons soon found out why prairie farmers live on their land instead of commuting. The village almost immediately began to lose population as its citizens moved onto their homesteads. There were three postmasters in the next three years before Mrs Jane Piper took over on 1904-09-01 and stayed until 1917-01-02. After her, there was a revolving door on the post office, with five postmasters, including a second brief spell by Piper, before Edward P. Wolsey became postmaster on 1928-03-27. At right is a proof strike of a new registration mark he ordered shortly after taking on the job.

Edward was the father of Elmo, later to be the postmaster of Owendale. Edward and his wife Esther had numerous businesses and jobs to support their large family. As a result, he gave up the post office on 1936-05-04. After a short-term replacement, the final postmaster was Mrs Fawn Campbell, whose family lived on what was left of Taylorville. The site had reverted back to farmland. The post office, once in a store, was now in a farm house, all that remained of the settlement. It permanently closed on 1963-02-20, not so much a victim of good roads but rather because the inhabitants had voluntarily abandoned Taylorville and spread out onto their land.

## **Epilogue.**

The hamlets south of Cardston are still there, usually just a cluster of a few houses. They are connected by a paved highway, each only a ten-minute drive from the other, a trip that would have taken a half-day in pioneer times. In June 2016, I drove the full length of the highway from Cardston to the Montana border in about thirty minutes, an easy trip that explains why the bright lights of Cardston vacuumed up the commercial trade of the district and killed off the post offices.

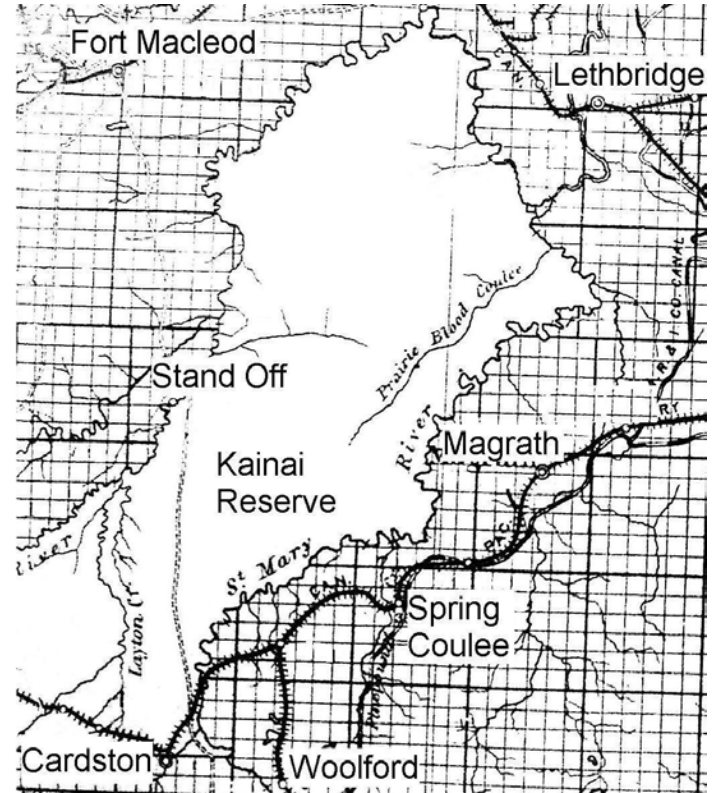
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## EAST OF CARDSTON

The Mormon diaspora east of Cardston was successful because it was closer to the natural north-south corridors of travel, which were oxen trails in the early days, the railroad in the first half of the 1900s, and paved highways since then. The Kainai Reserve, the largest tribal homeland in Canada, blocks natural lines of travel. Traffic must detour to the east and go around the Reserve via Lethbridge.

Irrigation was, of course, the original economic engine for the area. Had the Mormons not colonized the district, it would today be rangeland with a much smaller population. At right is a map of the area during pioneer days and the railway.



## Magrath.

This is the head of the district, and is named after Charles Alexander Magrath, who was a prominent businessman, landowner, and politician [1]. In this area, the Mormons did not homestead because Magrath was in there ahead of them and sold them the huge parcels of land he had accumulated by various means. Magrath was a Gentile but was a great friend of the Mormons and helped them establish their irrigation systems. They therefore honoured him by naming the new settlement after him.

Magrath the village was in the Pothole Creek Valley, an area that had only occasional ranchers prior to the arrival of the Mormons. The North West Mounted Police (today the Royal Canadian Mounted Police) established a post called Pothole in 1888 to intercept whiskey traders and rustlers. In the early 1890s, the Mormons began arriving via Cardston and by 1901 the Pothole post was closed as superfluous [3].



The post office opened on 1900-03-01 with Ammon Mercer as the first postmaster [2]. He had arrived from Utah in 1897 and set up a stagecoach and freight line that also carried the mail between Cardston and Lethbridge prior to the arrival of the railroad. At left is a proof strike of a duplex postmark used during his tenure.

Mercer was dismissed from office on 1912-04-04 for political partisanship. In the September 1911 federal election, the Liberal party fell from power and were replaced by the Conservatives. In those days postmasterships were patronage positions, so the Tories evicted hundreds of postmasters across Canada and replaced them with their supporters. Later the system was abolished and postmasters were given tenure on condition of good behaviour.

The Tory replacement for Magrath was J.A. Rasmussen but he didn't last long after discovering that the post office was not a sinecure and he actually had to work at it. On 1913-08-27, John Thomas Steele took the post office into his house. He joined the Canadian Army in 1917. He was still officially postmaster until 1918-03-09, and his wife Amelia ran the post office. A returned veteran, Lt. R.G. Swift, then took over and stayed until 1925-10-15.

The next postmaster was Hyde Siddeway Taylor, one of the original Mormon colonists. He was a long serving postmaster. During his tenure the post office moved into a standalone building. The job became a civil service position in 1948. Taylor retired on 1956-11-12 and thereafter various civil servants followed in the job. The photos below show the Magrath post office as it was in 1989 (left) when Betty Speirs visited it and in 2016 (right) when I came by. It is interesting to see how well the birch tree and junipers have done!



The pictorial postmark at left refers to the horticultural crops grown in the area.

## Spring Coulee.

A whiskey trader set up a trading post at this location in 1872 and was later driven out by the North West Mounted Police. The Mounties then built their own post to control smuggling across the Montana border and to keep watch on the Kainai tribe. Both posts were located near a large spring at the mouth of a coulee, which supplies water to the hamlet even today. The settlement that subsequently grew was forced to move up the hill in 1900 when the railroad came through. Its population peaked at about 100 people, and today is about 50.

The first wave of Mormons settling at nearby Cardston spread out to the coulee by 1889 and the population grew rapidly because of all the polygamists, each with three wives and up to twenty children. On 1902-05-01, the post office was opened in a general store [1]. W.H. Brown was the first postmaster but only served a short while until 1903-05-22.

After a short-term placeholder came and went, Herbert Eugene Kelley became postmaster on 1908-05-09 when he bought the store. The photo shows the store just before Kelley bought it.





Daniel Martin Eby was the next store owner and thus postmaster, from 1913-06-23 until 1919-04-01, followed by Fred Greenwood, a returned veteran. Greenwood had been gassed by the Germans while serving during World War One and never recovered fully. He came out west hoping the dry air would help, but died on 1922-02-13 because of his ruined lungs.

Alexander Munroe bought the store from the Greenwood estate and became the next postmaster. The store burned down in 1926, taking the post office with it. There was evidence that prowlers had been in the building and may have started the blaze to cover their tracks. The store was rebuilt where it was and the post office resumed. Munroe had been a station agent at Magrath for the railway but decided to get into a different line of business. He died on 1932-08-13, leaving his widow Brunetta with seven children and numerous debts. She took over as store owner and postmaster, and stuck it out through the Great Depression. On 1937-01-19, the store burned down, again taking the post office with it [4]. She gave up.

Harvey Thomas Anderson, who had his own store nearby, became the next postmaster until 1940-07-18, followed by a placekeeper. The store was sold to the Van Horn family, with Edith Van Horn as postmaster from 1941-12-31 until 1951-09-07. The next store owner and postmaster was Norman Playfair Brown, no relation to the first postmaster. He lasted a decade but had to sell out due to poor health, giving up the postmastership on 1961-06-01. The next postmaster was Warren S. Harris, who kept it for over a decade, then his wife Desmonia for a year until 1976-07-31. They both retired to Magrath.

The post office has since continued to change hands at regular intervals as the store was bought and sold over the years, but remains open as of 2016. A couple of postmarks are shown below. On the next page is the post office in 1989 when Betty Speirs visited it.





## Woolford.

Mormon colonists began settling this area in 1889, and the railroad arrived in 1909. A hamlet grew up at the siding, taking its name from a nearby ford across the Saint Mary River named Woolford Ford, after Thomas Henry Woolford, one of the pioneer Mormons [1]. The railroad was built no further for two decades, so the hamlet became the trailhead for points south and therefore prospered as the trading centre of the district. In 1929, the railroad was extended down to the Montana border, which caused the decline of the settlement as more of the business was distributed down the line.



Mail was originally via a mail route from Cardston, but the population grew enough to justify opening a post office on 1912-01-01, with F.B. McTighe as the first postmaster [2]. McTighe simplified the post office name to just Woolford because the original name seemed awkward. The post office was located in his general store.

McTighe sold out to Q.H. Thomee, who took on the postmastership on 1919-01-11. He moved the store and post office into a bigger building which had apartments on the second floor, a creamery, harness shop, and several other businesses squeezed into it. The proof strike of a postmark used by Thomee is shown at left. Thomee retired on 1926-05-13 as postmaster.

Joseph Edwin Knight, a Gentile, became the next postmaster when he bought shares in the general store along with others, and was assigned the post office and store counters as his duty. He and his wife Agnes farmed nearby, and he had the mail courier contract until 1926 when he became postmaster instead. He resigned on 1938-03-18 in order to open a farm machinery dealership and lumber yard in the village.

Miss Clara Pitcher, daughter of Mormon homesteaders, was a clerk in the store and became the next postmaster. She was given preference because her parents had died and she was the sole support of her younger siblings. She died of pneumonia on 1943-05-05 while still in office. Clara and her sister Mrs Hannah Elizabeth Wood ran the store by themselves during the war years.

After Clara's death, Hannah became postmaster until 1945-12-28 when her husband George Edgar Wood was demobilized from the Canadian Army. He took over as postmaster while she concentrated on raising their newborn son [5].

In 1949, George accepted a position with the Alberta Wheat Pool elsewhere in the province. A series of temporary postmasters followed, five of them in the next three years. Mrs Lois Stapleton became postmaster on 1952-05-01 when she and her husband Mick bought the store. They were Gentiles. They worked a variety of other jobs as well because Woolford was in its terminal stage. The store and post office, while still profitable, could not support the family. Lois resigned the postmastership on 1956-10-01 in order to get her teaching certificate at the University of Calgary, and later returned to teach in the Woolford district.

The final postmaster was Raymond V. Christie, a Vermont orphan who was brought to Cardston to be raised by his uncle, a veterinarian. The post office moved into his house but by then Woolford was a shadow of itself. It closed on 1958-05-15, and was replaced by a mail route from Cardston. As it was in the beginning, so it was in the end.

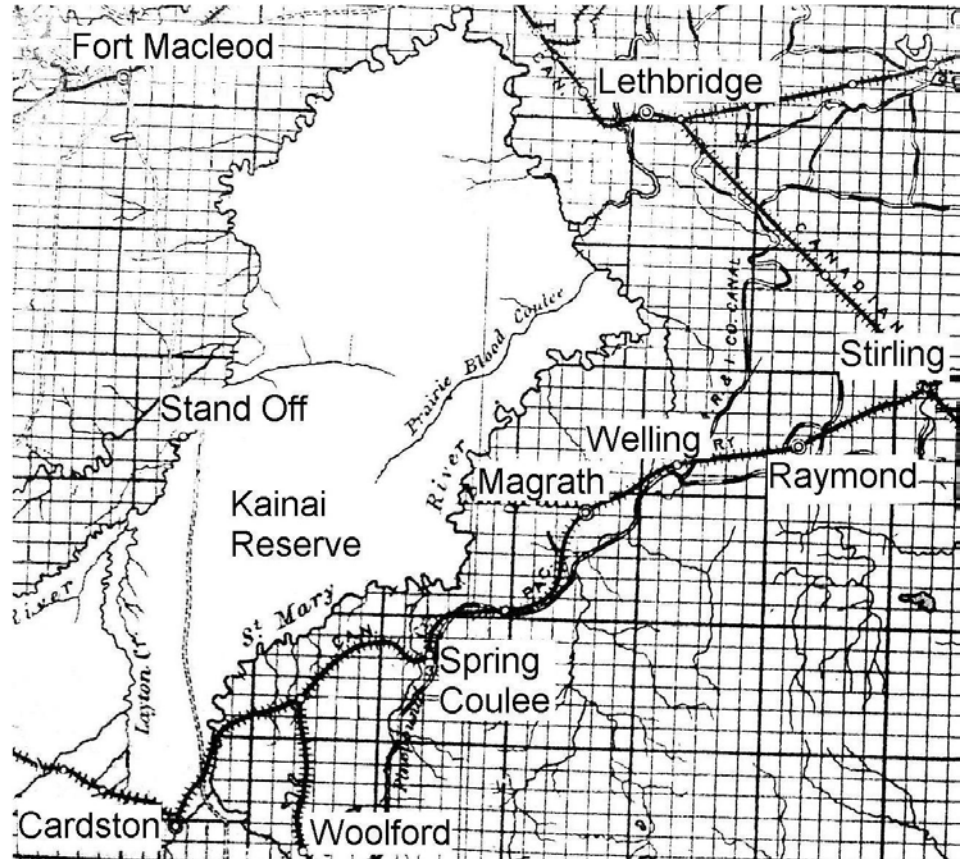
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## RAYMOND DISTRICT

As the Mormon diaspora stretched eastward from Cardston, it eventually approached Gentile settlements such as the city of Lethbridge and along the north-south railway that ran through it. Lethbridge and district owed their fortunes to coal and cattle, but the Mormons were like a flow of water, not just figuratively, as they surrounded it with irrigation farming.

There was some prejudice against Mormons but most Gentiles appreciated them for their industriousness and clean living. The map shows the post offices in pioneer days. The small squares are a mile on each side.



## Raymond.

Ranchers were in this area in the late 1800s but surprisingly the Mormon diaspora initially bypassed the place. Jesse Knight, of Utah, was approached by Gentiles concerning the possibility of establishing an irrigation system and sugar beet industry. He was skeptical, and sent his sons William and Raymond to inspect the land. Charles Magrath convinced them to invest. A settlement built around a sugar refinery arose, named after Raymond Knight [1]. Mormon settlers began arriving in 1902, not as part of an official LDS Church migration as did the previous immigrants, but on their own initiative. They bought land from Magrath rather than homesteading it.

Charles McCarty became the first postmaster on 1902-08-01 when he opened a post office in his general store [2]. He was born and raised in Ohio, worked out west as a cowboy, and converted to a Mormon while living in Utah. He heard many good things about the diaspora in Alberta, and decided to go north with a private group. After ranching a while, he settled in Raymond and opened a store and hotel. He was subsequently elected as the village's first mayor. With all his many activities, he thinned out some of his workload by giving up the postmastership on 1904-01-29 and selling the store. The buyer was Heber S. Allen, who had been Cardston's first postmaster, but declined the job on moving to Raymond [3].

The post office turned over twice until Louis Debenham King took over as postmaster on 1912-05-21 and served until 1948-01-01. He and his family came from Salt Lake City as townies, and opened up a store in which they located the post office. They also had a service station and an auto dealership.

In 1948, just after King retired, the Canadian Post Office re-organized hundreds of rural post offices such as Raymond, and converted them to direct control with the staff as civil servants. The proof strike shown here is an example of one of the postmarks used during King's tenure.



Leslie Larson Palmer was the next postmaster and the first civil servant. He had previously been Assistant Postmaster under King since 1929, and so had no difficulty stepping into the job. Such a re-organization would not have been a surprise, so it seems probable that King knew it was coming and decided it was an opportune moment to step down. Palmer was from the original Mormon migration as a very young man. He retired as postmaster on 1962-01-02, and Mrs Mildred Amelia Attwood took over. She was the first Gentile postmaster and served until 1969-03-18 when she retired. F.F. Glass then served briefly as postmaster until 1972-01-31, when he was given a lateral transfer to nearby Coaldale as their postmaster. After him, Canada Post records cut off due to privacy laws.



Raymond was closest to the north-south mainline railway and served as a distribution point for the Mormon diaspora. When mail transport shifted to trucks as the train system dwindled away, the post office lost some of that work.

Balancing that was the acquisition of rural mail routes, so the post office managed to hang on. I took this photo of the post office in June 2016.

## Welling.



When the Mormons colonized this vicinity and raised a church, a community meeting decided to honour their earliest settler Horace Welling, who had arrived in 1902 from Utah [1]. The post office opened on 1909-03-01 with John T. Henninger Jr as postmaster [2]. The split-circle postmark shown at left is the proof strike. Henninger was a large-scale farmer with thousands of head of livestock. His grain fields were so extensive that he used three steam threshing outfits at harvest. He gave up the post office on 1917-08-09 when he relocated to a new farm at Lucky Strike, close to the Montana border [4].

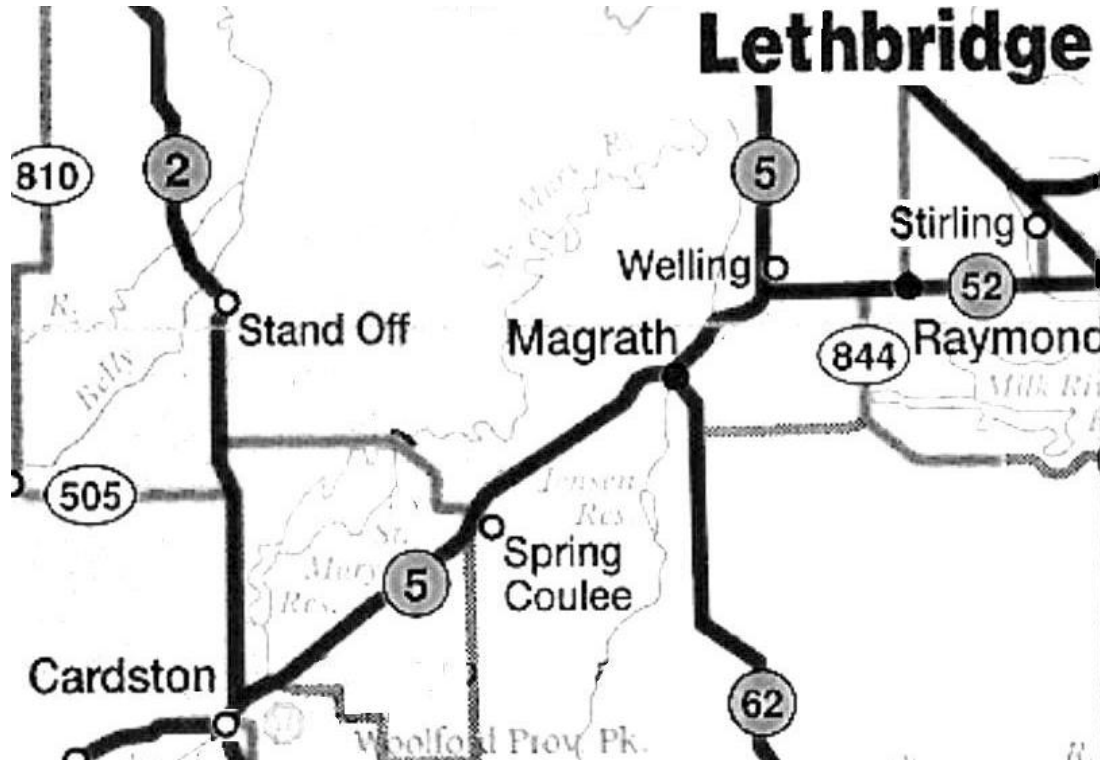
The post office turned over twice with two short-term postmasters, then settled on the farm of William Wilford Wilde from 1924-05-30 to 1927-12-30. He was from the original migration of Mormons as a child. Upon reaching adulthood and marriage, he took up land near Welling. He and his wife Ann had eight children plus several foster children, so they eventually moved east closer to Raymond, onto a bigger irrigation farm that could support such a large family. When they left Welling, there were no volunteers to run the post office, so it closed [3].

After a long gap, the post office re-opened on 1935-07-01 in a general store, with Milton John Wolsey as postmaster. In its previous incarnations, the post office had been a farm house operation but now going forward it was in a store. Wolsey joined the Canadian Army and served overseas in the war. His wife Carrel became postmaster from 1941-11-30 until her retirement on 1950-08-16. The store changed hands and Mrs Jennie Bracha became the next postmaster, serving until 1969-05-16, when the store was sold to the Zobell family. Mrs Melva Zobell was postmaster but resigned on 1976-01-31 when she and her husband bought a nearby farm.

The store changed hands three more times until the post office was closed on 1990-03-13 as part of Canada Post's massive reorganization of rural and sub post offices across the country. The post office was replaced by a retail postal outlet (RePO), which had the advantage of contracting out work that Canada Post didn't want. There were two more store owners under the RePO system before even they couldn't fight good roads anymore. The last day of postal services in Welling was 1996-12-31, after which mail distribution came from Lethbridge [5].



The earliest mail service was via railroad through Raymond, as seen in the map on page 61. Note on the modern map shown below that a paved highway now runs directly to Lethbridge and thus cuts off Raymond as a natural distribution centre. On paved highways when I drove them in June 2016, it was a ten-minute drive to Raymond and only twenty minutes to Lethbridge.



The hamlet is still there but mail is now received in cluster boxes, shown below when I visited the place in June 2016. When I travel, I always carry a supply of stamped self-addressed envelopes. I dropped one in the Welling mailbox and it was returned to me with a cancel from the nearby town of Magrath, indicating where the postal route now goes.



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[www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/postal-heritage-philately/post-offices-postmasters/Pages/search.aspx](http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/postal-heritage-philately/post-offices-postmasters/Pages/search.aspx)
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