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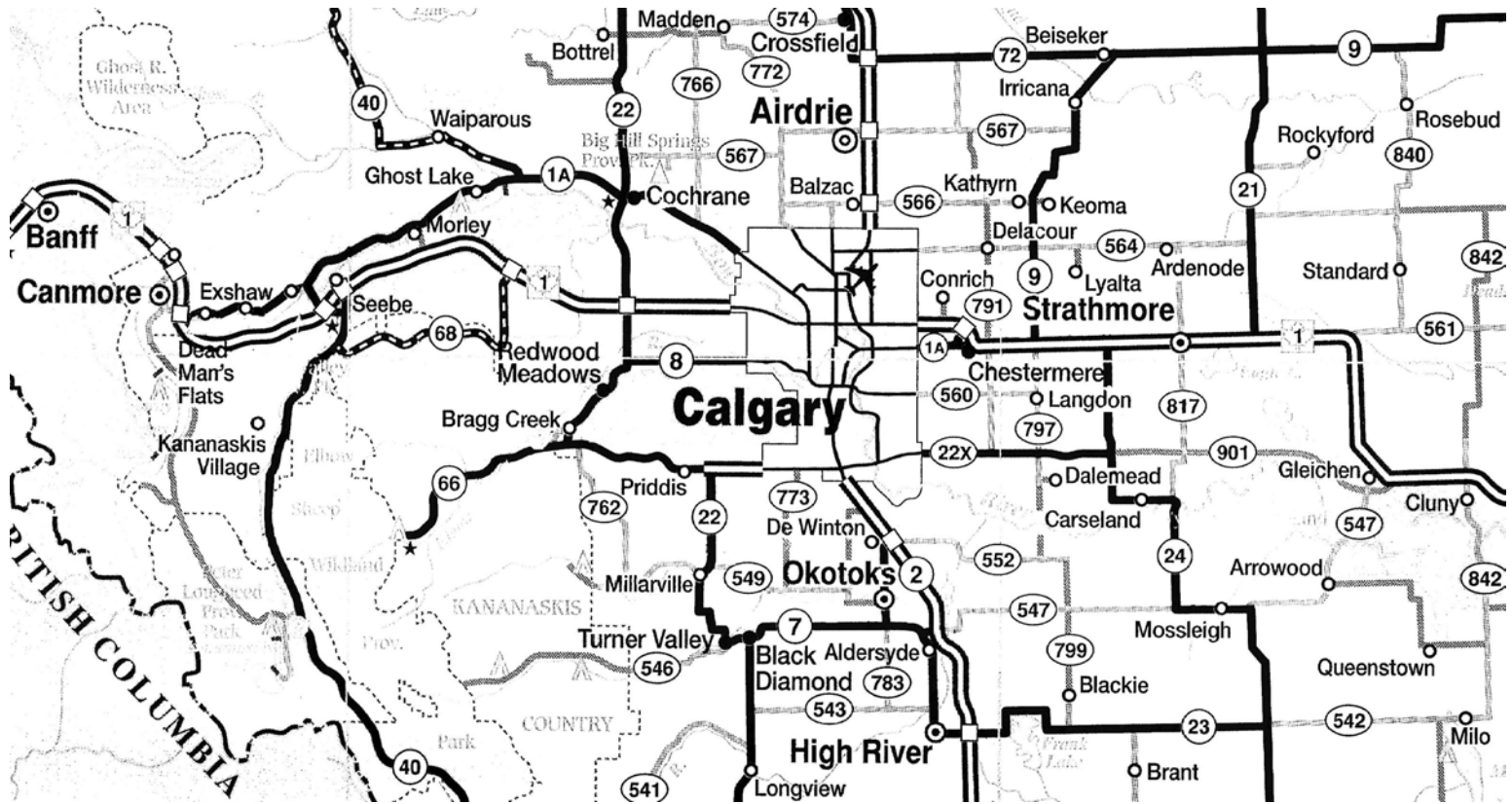
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POSTAL HISTORY OF ALBERTA: DISTRICTS SURROUNDING CALGARY TO THE NORTH AND EAST

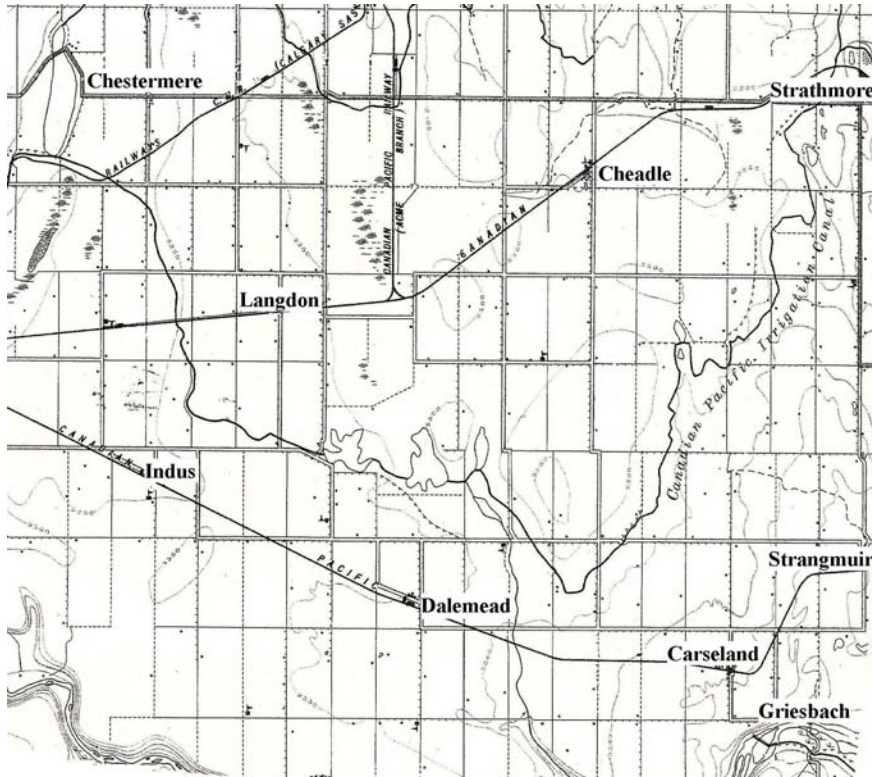
by Dale Speirs

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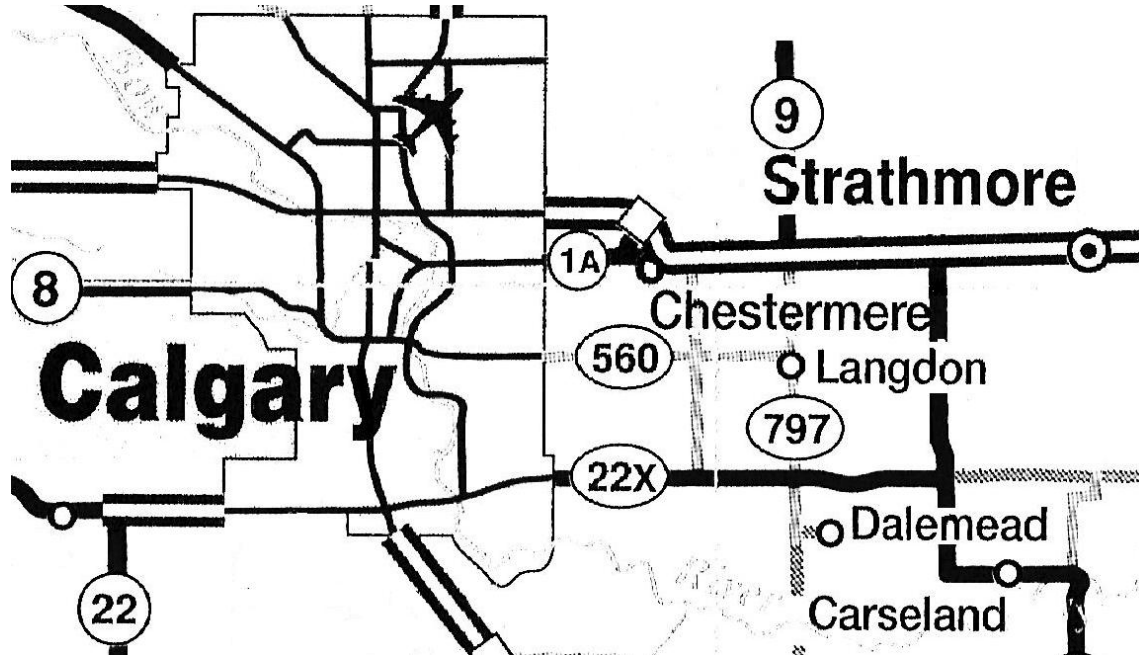
WESTERN IRRIGATION DISTRICT



The Western Irrigation District (WID) headwaters section, basically within 50 km east of Calgary, is shown at left. The base map is circa 1915, with additions to include subsequent post offices. For scale, the grid roads were laid out every two miles north-south and one mile east-west.

Initially the roads were simply tracks, first made as trails by horse riders and wagon teams, and then later scraped clean of vegetation as dirt roads. In wet weather, the roads became impassable quagmires. The railroads were a boon, allowing fast travel between towns and mostly unaffected by weather other than drifting snow. As the roads were converted to good gravel and residents shifted to the automobile, the villages survived or dwindled depending on their distance from bigger towns. In the last few decades, some have reversed their decline and started to grow again because they are now linked to Calgary by paved highways that reduce commuting time considerably.

Calgary is a single-government city that has been expanding over the flatlands north, east, and south of the city, although it is constrained by the Rocky Mountain foothills to the west. The urban sprawl has swallowed up a dozen rural post offices which are now neighbourhoods inside the city, and continues to reach out to other hamlets and villages as commuters search for cheaper houses and suburban living to raise their children. Below is a generalized map of Calgary in proportion to the WID circa 2011. What is significant is that the revival of post offices and villages is not correlated to physical distance from the city but to how well the paved highways connect to Calgary's internal road system.



In the first decade of the 1900s, the Canadian Pacific Railway wanted to encourage settlers in the dry flatlands of southern Alberta, so as to generate business in the long run for its freight and passenger services. One method they used was to develop irrigation districts by building canals and reservoirs to help homesteaders switch from grazing rangeland cattle to growing higher value crops. This would support a higher population density, with a concurrent increase in railway shipping. The construction of the WID began in 1903 by digging an irrigation canal that started from the Bow River just downstream from what is now downtown Calgary, taking it in a long loop around the height of the land to a slough 20 km east of Calgary (straight line distance; the canal is much longer), and from there dispersing the water through secondary canals. The slough did not need excavation; it was a lake in wet years, pasture in dry years, and marsh in average years. The WID only had to build a dam at each end to create a permanent reservoir which was named Chestermere Lake [1].

Chestermere Lake.

When the CPR began its irrigation project, it dammed Kinniburgh Slough as a reservoir. Real estate speculators had it renamed Chestermere Lake as a more palatable name for customers who bought summer cottages on the shoreline. There is disagreement as to where the name came from but it was probably after Lord Chestermere of England. Chestermere Lake was developed originally as a tourist resort and summer homes district by the WID. The village was not incorporated until 1977, when it became the Summer Village of Chestermere Lake, and finally as a regular town in 1993 [3]. Today it is essentially a suburb of Calgary. While it is still independent and separated from the city by farmland, it will probably be annexed into the city a couple of decades from now.

The post office was quite late in opening and only lasted a few years because the population was so small and mostly seasonal. Orrin A. Webster was the first postmaster from 1924-12-01 until 1927-10-10, when he moved into Calgary [4]. At right is the proof strike of its first postmark. Genevieve Chandler Townsend succeeded him for the final season from 1928-02-15 to 1928-10-26, after which the post office closed for decades. Mail service thereafter was via a rural route from Calgary [2].





In the late 1980s, enough commuters had bought homes in Chestermere to justify a new post office. A postal outlet opened on 1991-02-27 in Porter's Gas and Food Mart, and lasted until 1998. Since then it has been in a Shoppers Drug Mart (postmark at left). The paved highway connecting Chestermere Lake with Calgary makes for an easy 15-minute commute to the city limits (inside the city is a different story!) and thus encouraged the resort to grow again. This revived what once was a dead post office.

Langdon.

Langdon is on the flatlands straight east of Calgary. It was named after James Langdon, one of the railroad contractors who worked for the CPR. Ironically he was later killed in an accident on the track.

The village was founded as a railroad siding in 1883, and grew rapidly during the real estate boom in Calgary just before World War One. It reached a peak population of 2,000 people in the 1920s, then declined to 100 by the 1950s. Its fortunes have reversed since the 1990s. It is now an easy and quick drive by paved highway to Calgary, and as a consequence it has steadily grown in recent decades to a small town, populated by commuters who want a small-town life but still keep their jobs in the big city [3].

The post office opened in a general store on 1890-12-01 with P.J. Hastings as postmaster [2]. It closed when he resigned on 1893-10-28. John Whitney re-opened the post office in his store on 1894-07-01 and stayed until 1896-08-13. His daughter Isabelle then became postmaster until her husband Roy Cowan took over on 1909-03-07. He served until 1912-04-26. Isabelle's brother-in-law (married to her sister Annie) Samuel W. Wilson then held the position until 1920-02-24, having bought the general store. His daughter Grace actually ran the post office; he held the postmastership in name only. James John Colwell, a returned veteran from World War One, bought the store in 1920 and became Langdon's longest serving postmaster, serving four decades until May 1962. Edward Leo Doyle was briefly postmaster until 1963-10-23. He sold out to the Smart family, with Alice, Robert, and Brian serving thereafter. Their store, with the sign in the window advertising the post office, is shown on the next page. Alice Smart was the daughter of Sam Wilson, Robert was her son, and Brian her grandson, thus continuing a remarkable chain of family postmasters [5].



The Langdon post office by 2011 was in the Prairie Pharmacy store as a retail outlet (below), then moved next door to a tanning salon in 2013 (next page). Despite nearly becoming extinct, the post office has made a comeback due to commuters.





Dalemead.

Dalemead was originally named Strathmead, but there was too much confusion with nearby Strathmore, just 20 km north of it, so the name was soon changed. Dale and strath both mean valley, as the hamlet is located near the Bow River valley, although it is up on the flatlands itself. The second half of the name is in honour of Dr. Elwood Mead, one of the notable irrigation and water management specialists of his time. He worked on irrigation projects throughout western North America, including the WID, which has a diversion dam on the Bow River a few kilometres south of Dalemead. Lake Mead, Nevada, behind Hoover Dam, is also named after him. Dalemead today is a hamlet with a dozen houses and a church, and is serviced by supermailboxes. It is on narrow gravel roads off the paved highways, and is just too far to encourage Calgary commuters, but maintains itself as a viable hamlet. There is a large grain elevator complex providing some employment.



The post office opened on 1915-03-01 in a general store with Miss Emma Walker as postmaster [2, 3]. The proof strike of the first postmark is shown at left. Emma came to Dalemead from Langdon, having worked as a clerk in the post office there. She was a cat lady. Pioneer accounts of her store all comment on the numerous cats wandering about and napping on mailbags or the counter. Her sister Hattie and brother Tom later came to live with her and worked as clerks in the post office [6].

Emma suffered a stroke in July 1937 and died a few weeks later, having been in office for more than two decades of service. Her place was taken by Colin William Gibson who bought the store on 1937-08-31 and stayed until 1952-11-30. Until 1955, mail and store supplies were delivered on Fridays, so the local farmers would congregate at the post office on that day. Mrs. Leona A. Friesz and her husband bought out Gibson and stayed until 1963-03-31. The postmaster succession thereafter was through various people who bought the store. The post office dwindled away into a house location and finally closed on 1991-06-11. The photo on the next page shows the post office in its declining days; photo taken in 1989. The woman in the photo is the author's mother, Betty Speirs (1931-2002), who traveled about Alberta in the late 1980s photographing numerous rural post offices now extinct. In this case, Dalemead is on good gravel roads but far enough off the main highway as to be occasionally difficult for commuting in winter. The superiority of a paved highway over a gravel road is such that the small difference in distance compared to other villages is significant. It is unlikely that a post office will open again anytime soon.



Carseland.

Carseland is from a Scottish name for “fertile land”, as indeed it is. The settlement initially grew well when the railroad came through but peaked in the late 1920s and then began a long slow decline to hamlet status. Good roads and the end of passenger rail traffic stopped its growth, as shoppers went elsewhere. It has maintained its existence because of several large grain elevators, a natural gas extraction plant, and a nearby provincial park on the Bow River which provides a small amount of tourist trade. It is about 50 km east-southeast of Calgary, which is too much for a commute, but there are some new houses in the village. Its success as a village is ambivalent; being on a paved highway and next to a tourist attraction has protected it from terminal decay but it is just too far to encourage commuting.

When the CPR was trying to decide on a route through the area, three possibilities were mooted. A storekeeper named Emil Griesbach bet on the southern route possibility along the Bow River and established a store near where the WID was building a dam across the river for an irrigation canal. The CPR instead built the line on the second possibility several kilometres north, up on the flatlands. Because of the large work gangs at the dam site, Griesbach wasn't initially affected and had enough business to open a post office in his store on 1913-05-15, called Griesbach. A proof strike of its postmark is shown at right. However, once the irrigation project was completed, the contractors departed and business dried up (pardon the expression). He had no choice but to have his store hauled to the Carseland site where it and the post office re-opened on 1914-12-01 with a name change to Carseland.



Griesbach later moved further east to Gleichen and tried to run the Carseland store/post office from a distance. It didn't work and he resigned the postmastership of Carseland on 1915-01-19. His place was taken by W.J. MaComb, who came from Langdon and built another store. MaComb decided to go farming and resigned on 1918-04-04. After that, the post office went through a number of postmasters as the store was bought and sold repeatedly [2, 7]. Eventually it became a standalone building but still managed to survive.

When I visited Carseland on 2011-09-11, the old standalone post office on Railway Avenue was in its final days (shown below right). A local resident told me it was about to move into a nearby shopping plaza around the corner on Main Street. I revisited the post office on 2011-09-23, a Friday, and got a last-day handback cancel (below left). The staff were disassembling the interior stock and told me that it was their last day at that location, and the post office would re-open on Monday in its new premises. The survival of the post office and the village can be attributed to it being just far enough from Calgary as to make it easier for local residents to shop in Carseland, rather than make a drive to Calgary. The new post office location after the move is shown on the next page.





Strangmuir.

Today no trace remains of this ranch house post office. There was never any settlement by this name. The area was leased by Major-General Thomas Strange, an English expatriate who had seen military service in a variety of places. He took up grazing leases in 1881 at a time when huge syndicated ranches were popular across the prairies, and which milked a considerable amount of money from British investors but seldom paid any dividends. The MCC ranch established by Strange never worked properly, in part because of his continued lengthy absences for military duty and business matters back east, including a tour of duty with the Canadian army during the 1885 Riel Rebellion. When he built his ranch house, he called it Strangmuir and ran it in the British manor house tradition. He and his wife had come out west with their youngest children, and were later followed by their grown sons Harry and Alex who homesteaded nearby in shacks. The shacks were built as a condition of qualifying for the homesteads but were one-room hovels since the boys spent much of their time at the big house. Harry and Alex relied on Mom's home cooking and her maid to do the laundry [6]. "Failure to launch" is no new thing!

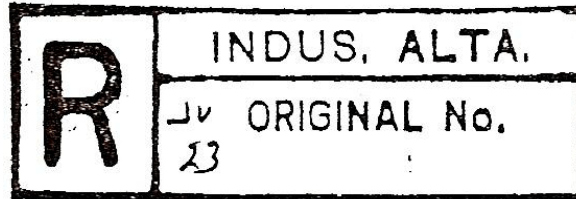
Alex became the first postmaster of Strangmuir when it opened in his shack on 1889-11-01. Shown below is its proof strike postmark. It lasted until 1898-07-31, when the post office closed after the ranch failed and the Strange family returned to England. The mail was originally carried through the area by the North West Mounted Police as a courtesy. After a branch line was built by the CPR, Strangmuir re-opened, sans any Stranges, under the postmastership of W.J. Phipps, and operated from 1913-01-01 until 1915-04-30, when it closed again and this time permanently [2, 7]. Large-lease ranching failed for good throughout the district and the area today is irrigation farming and pasture, with a natural gas processing plant nearby. None of the original buildings remain.



Indus.

This was a railroad siding hamlet which never really succeeded from the beginning, although it did manage to keep its post office as late as 1965. The name was suggested in 1914 to the CPR by Dr. J.M. Fulton as a contraction of the word “industry”, although why it had to be shortened three letters is puzzling. There is also a false etymology that it is from the Sanskrit word for a constellation of stars, which has been repeated in some uncritical local histories. Indus struggled as a hamlet for decades, with the post office in a small general store. Today it still survives as a dormitory community for commuters (the skyscrapers of downtown Calgary are clearly visible from it) plus a county school and sports centre.

The post office opened on 1923-08-01 with Fred S. Day as the first postmaster. Below is a proof strike of its registered letter postmark. Alfred Hugh Evans bought the store on 1929-08-19, just in time for the start of the Great Depression, but he managed to hold on through most of it until 1937-06-22. Mrs. Maye Templeton Keir then held the position through the war until 1945-08-02. There followed a couple of short-term placeholders until George Brassard settled in from 1949-03-31 until 1961-08-01. His widow Eva worked the store and post office until 1965-03-16. When she resigned, the post office closed for good [2].



Indus is just off a good paved highway and within a close distance to Calgary for commuting. However, although the map might suggest it is close enough to grow like Langdon did, which is actually further away, the reality is in the details. Langdon commuters enter Calgary from the east and the internal road system of the city in that area, while clogged during rush hour, is relatively passable. For Indus, the access to Calgary is from the southeast of the city, with only one freeway, called Deerfoot Trail, to get commuters into the city. Calgarians often jest that Deerfoot Trail is the longest parking lot in the country, and this well-known proclivity for traffic in the south end of the city to come to a standstill with every vehicle accident would be off-putting to potential commuters from Indus. Thus, although Indus is closer than other commuter villages in the WID, it will probably not grow much in the future.

Cheadle.

Cheadle is named after the pioneer explorer Dr. Walter Cheadle, who was a member of an 1862 expedition that crossed the prairies into the Rocky Mountains. Joseph and Florence Belwer were the first settlers in the area. When the railroad came through and Cheadle was established, Joseph went to work for the railway but was killed in an accident. His widow, with a young daughter to raise, opened a general store and boarding house in Cheadle. The post office opened in the store on 1902-05-01. Florence died on 1910-10-26 and her daughter had to be sent to an orphanage. The post office then transferred to a farm implement store run by William Kirton, who was postmaster until his death on 1936-07-21. His widow Ruth then took over until she resigned on 1939-09-25. J. MacDonald came from the town of Blackie and bought the store. His daughter Mary was the next postmaster, first under her maiden name, then her married name of Kildea. She retired on 1969-04-21 and her husband Tom briefly took over until 1970-10-26 when the post office closed permanently [2, 7].

Cheadle is still a hamlet today but new houses are being built for Calgary commuters. It is just off the Trans-Canada Highway, and while it is a longer drive to work, cheaper house prices make it attractive to some people. The mail is delivered to a very long row of green cluster boxes next to the community hall, shown on the next page. Cheadle is only a few minutes driving time from Strathmore, so postal services can be obtained there without the need for a local outlet.



Strathmore.

Located directly on the Trans-Canada Highway, 40 km east of Calgary, this is a popular bedroom community for Calgary commuters despite having the longest commute, albeit on a four-lane divided highway. The population was just over 12,000 as of 2011, so it is a small city now. It has some industry of its own, mostly agricultural or petroleum. It was named for the 13th Earl of Strathmore of Scotland, Queen Elizabeth's maternal great-grandfather. The original location was on the south shore of Eagle Lake a few kilometres southeast of its present-day location but the terrain proved unsuitable for settlement and the townsite was relocated in 1905.

George H. Lloyd was the first postmaster when the post office opened on 1906-11-01 and stayed until 1911-12-29, when he left town. Lloyd was the founder of Strathmore in 1905. He owned the hotel, general store, livery stable, blacksmith shop, opera house, and bought 47 of the townsite lots when the CPR first subdivided the land. The post office was in his store, but Miss Clara Smith was postmaster de facto while Lloyd was postmaster in name only. His successor had a name which philatelists will instantly recognize, Rowland Hill. (Different one, of course!) Unfortunately Hill does not show up in any local histories and I could find nothing about him.

James Martin became postmaster on 1920-02-17 until his death on 1939-07-05. He was a cowpuncher who came to Alberta in 1906 and initially worked on the Burns ranch south of Calgary. He later joined Lloyd as a bookkeeper before taking over from Hill as postmaster. James was succeeded by his widow Edith, who was postmaster until 1954-10-14, followed by her son Rowe until 1976-07-29 when he retired [2, 8]. Rowe had worked for his mother as an assistant prior to her retirement. After 56 years in the Martin family, there were a variety of postmasters and somewhere along the way it became a standalone operation run directly by Canada Post (photo on next page).

Strathmore got its first retail postal outlet (RePO) in a Neighbours store from 1990-01-16 until 1992-11-03. An IGA supermarket took it over until 1997-04-22. Value Drug Mart then replaced it and still runs the RePO [9]. As of 2011, Strathmore had a Canada Post-operated main post office and two RePOs. A strange thing is that the main post office and the Value Drug Mart RePO are across the intersection from each other. Standing on the sidewalk you can see one from the other and walk between them in less than twenty seconds. The drugstore is open longer hours than the main post office, but that hardly justifies two postal outlets almost side-by-side.



Strathmore is big enough both in geographic size and population that one would expect them to be on opposite sides of town for better customer service. The second RePO is indeed on the far side of town, in the north end, and is in a convenience store called Yukukou (photo below). Note the spelling error in its postmark; the street address is missing a “t”.

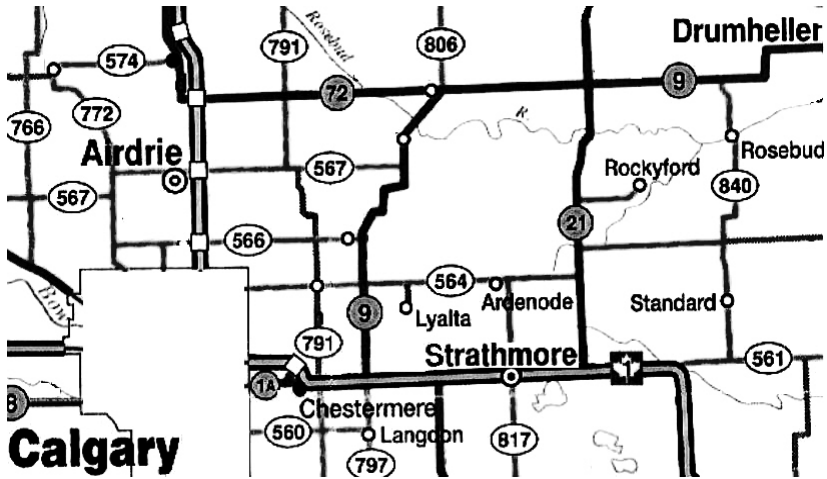


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SERVICEBERRY CREEK

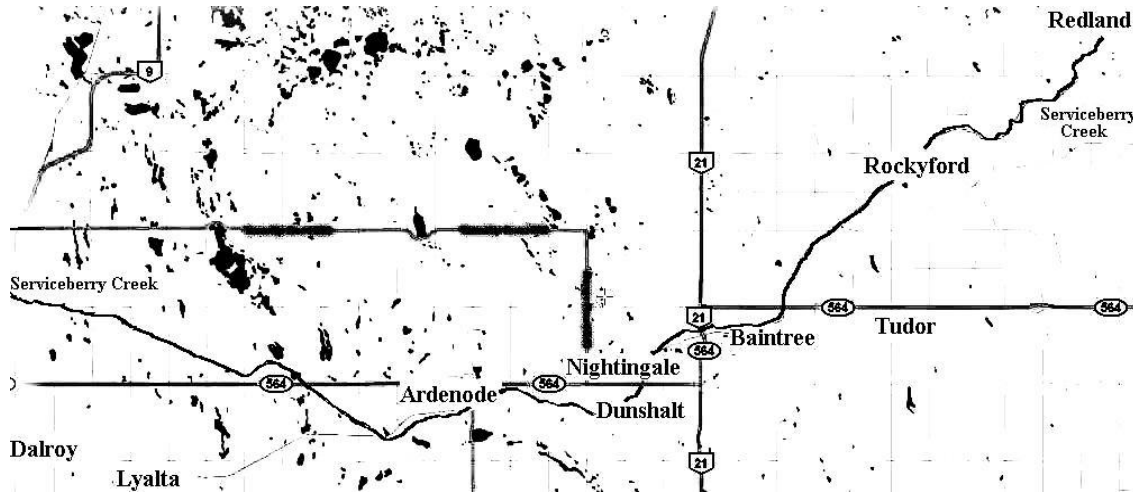
Most settlements in the western Canadian provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan followed a standard plan of surveyors going ahead to mark out the land into squares, and homesteaders treading on their heels. The initial influx of settlers was more or less random, save that they followed the railroads for easier access to the land. Post offices were originally established by the Canadian Post Office every five or ten miles in farm houses because the roads were so bad, and settlers came in to the postmaster's house to get their mail. Good roads and rural mail delivery eventually killed off most of these post offices. Hamlets and villages sprang up more or less by chance. However not all areas of the prairies were colonized by random homesteading. The Serviceberry Creek district of southern Alberta was heavily influenced by railway company planned-colonization schemes. This also had an effect on the post offices, which were not random farm house offices as was common elsewhere but associated with premeditated settlements.



Serviceberry Creek rises in the rolling hills about 15 kilometres northeast of Calgary, where there are countless sloughs and intermittent lakes. It then flows east across flatlands until it empties into the Rosebud River. It meanders through a glacial meltwater valley sometimes kilometres wide, but today the creek itself is only about five metres wide at most, and often narrow enough to jump over. It has, however, incised itself deeply into the floodplain sediments and the banks are occasionally vertical cuts one or two metres high. This made the creek difficult to ford by horse and wagon, although bridges were easily constructed across it, often just by building a long platform and dragging it overtop the creek. The muddy bottom of

the creek would bog down any horse and wagon trying to cross it despite the shallow depth. The map on the previous page shows a modern view of the area in relation to the big city of Calgary (population 1.1 million).

There were some traditional homesteaders, but settlement of the Serviceberry Creek district was heavily influenced by two types of projects used by the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) to speed up colonization and increase the density of the area. Greater population meant greater demand for freight and passenger transport by trains. The Western Irrigation District, established by the CPR, is at its northern limits here. The CPR also built ready-to-go farms, hiring contractors to break the sod en masse and throw together cheap houses and barns on a standardized plan. Settlers were encouraged to band together in Europe and join colonization companies set up by the CPR in areas such as Serviceberry Creek. Both the CPR and the Canadian Northern Railway built lines along Serviceberry Creek, and established villages at sidings. Below is a map of the Serviceberry Creek drainage with the past and present post offices. The two easternmost settlements, Dalroy and Lyalta, were not part of the colonization schemes per se but were on the fringes of them and benefitted from the controlled flow of settlers.



Dalroy.

Dalroy today is a rural hamlet just northeast of Calgary, with some new houses, acreages, and other minor real estate development. It is five kilometres south of the origin of Serviceberry Creek but not actually on it. The name's origin is uncertain; it may have been after a town in Scotland or it may have been a derivative from the name of an early pioneer homesteader G.M. McElroy [5]. The first postmaster was George Rehder. He moved a store from neighbouring Lyalta to Dalroy. When the railway came through a year later, they established a siding at his store instead of the standard ten-mile distance. Rehder had calculated the probable location of irrigation schemes and the influx of homesteaders and chose the store location ahead of the settlers, instead of following them as did so many other shopkeepers. This area is the northwestern corner of the Western Irrigation District established by the CPR.



The Dalroy post office opened on 1910-01-15, and mail was delivered by train on Fridays. Homesteaders from around the area congregated at the store on Fridays and it was a day for socializing [6]. At left is the proof strike of the first postmark. Rehder sold the store and resigned as postmaster on 1915-07-14. The store and postmastership changed hands three times more during the next decade. Herbert Desson became the longest-serving postmaster on 1926-07-31 and stayed until 1955-05-20. Three more postmasters came and went as the store slowly failed against the bright lights of the big city nearby, with good gravel roads making it easier to shop in Calgary. Mrs. Florence Starosta became the final postmaster on 1963-05-30, moving the post office into the front of her house. It was there that it finally closed on 1968-04-30.

Lyalta.

Proceeding eastward, Lyalta is the next post office, and is still extant. It is about five kilometres south of Serviceberry Creek but is within its drainage area. The village was originally known as Lyall but when it came time to open the post office, it was discovered that there already was another village by that name in Alberta, which, however, never had a post office. The new name was adopted as a combination of Lyall and Alberta.



The railway built the siding as a convenient place for trans-shipment of grain from colonists of the northern side of the Western Irrigation District. Despite being older than Dalroy, Lyalta didn't get a post office until considerably later, after the railroad came through. The first post office opened in the train station on 1923-07-02, with Mrs. Margaret Peterson in charge. Her husband was the railroad section foreman. The Petersons didn't stay long due to a transfer by the railway company. The post office moved to the grain elevator a few months later on 1923-10-08 with the grain buyer Orlando Meyer as the new postmaster. The agricultural depression temporarily shut down the elevator and the post office closed on 1924-06-04. At left is a proof strike of the first postmark.

On 1926-04-01, the post office re-opened in a general store operated by Walter Shaw. He was gone before the end of the year, and on 1926-12-28, the store was purchased by Angus Urquhart, who also became postmaster that date. He retired on 1933-11-27, and sold out to Cyriel Joseph De Neve, a Belgian immigrant. De Neve had been farming in the district but developed leg problems that forced him to look for a more sedentary job. Having learned that Urquhart wanted to retire, De Neve made an offer for the store and became postmaster. He stayed until 1943-07-19 when he sold out to the Novak family. They lasted only a couple of years, during which time two of them were postmasters. More stability came when Mrs. Edith Payne became postmaster on 1945-01-01 and stayed until 1962-09-07.

At this point the post office moved to a different store, run by Stanley Finders, who was postmaster until 1970-04-11. In 1966 it was moved into the ugliest bungalow I have ever seen, built out of exposed cinder blocks, where it still was in 2014. After Finders, the post office has been through five more postmasters. The post office as it was in 2011 is shown on the next page. I drove past it the first time because the sign was half-hidden by junk. I nominate it as the ugliest post office in Canada. The front half of the building was the store, with the post office in a tiny wicket, and the back half had the living quarters [7]. The interior was incredibly cluttered. The kitchen opened into the post office and when I went in to get a sample postmark, the elderly postmistress was still at the table in her dressing gown. Standing at the postal counter, I could see she was having scrambled eggs for breakfast.



Shown below are the pictorial postmark and the regular business cancel. Lyalta had about a dozen new houses in 2012 so it seems to be surviving as a commuter hamlet. Its only visible major industry is a grain elevator on the railroad tracks.



Nightingale.

Nightingale is about the halfway mark along Serviceberry Creek. The first settlers were part of a non-irrigation colonization company called the English Colony, even though most were Scottish, Irish, or Welsh. The Colony never worked well due to bad weather that killed the crops the first two years in a row, which resulted in the poverty of the settlers, many of whom subsequently abandoned the land. The CPR had invested heavily in setting up ready-made farms and platting the hamlet, and while they could repossess the land, it seems unlikely they made their money back in this neighbourhood.

The first post office was opened on 1911-01-01 with H. Meredith Jones as postmaster [1]. A few months previous, the famous nurse Florence Nightingale had died, and Jones named the post office in her honour. At right is the first postmark as a proof strike. Jones was a retired soldier who had bought into the English Colony. He carried the mail from Strathmore twice weekly, which was further south on the CPR transcontinental railway. The Jones family became homesick for England and left in late 1911. The next postmaster was Mrs. W.E. Henry, who took up the position on 1912-05-28 when her husband Clayton built a general store, and stayed until 1915-02-15.



Clayton's niece, a young widow with children, came out west from Nova Scotia to live with the Henrys. She married his clerk Gilbert Southwell, and they later bought the store. Gilbert took over the post office from his aunt-in-law but only stayed until 1918. From then until 1938, the store and postmastership changed hands fifteen times, with some postmasters only staying for a month or so. First there was the post-WWI recession, then depressed agricultural markets, and then the Great Depression. It was not a good time to be in any sort of business in such a remote area.

Arthur Farr bought the store on 1937-12-01 and finally broke the cycle. He stayed as postmaster until 1948-04-15 when he had to retire due to ill health. His son Arthur Jr took over the store and his wife Wilda became postmaster until 1956-11-26. At that point the Farris gave up and closed the store, taking down the post office with it, and made it into a dwelling house [2].

Nightingale still exists as a hamlet. The photo on the next page shows the Nightingale community centre on 2011-09-20 with a row of green cluster boxes beside it. The woman getting into her vehicle is the mail contractor who had just finished delivering mail to the boxes as I drove up.



Dunshalt.

Just a few kilometres south of Nightingale was the hamlet of Dunshalt, which had originally been named Florence after the famous nurse. It was later re-named after a Scottish town. Florence/Dunshalt began as a crossing point between the CPR and Canadian Northern lines. The two railways feuded over the rights-of-way, mostly in the courts. The Mounties had to deploy on several occasions into the area to prevent riots between the two rival work crews, both of which were armed with picks and shovels and who tried to block each other's line. There was never any actual fighting but the biggest standoff occurred near Dunshalt when the two mobs of navvies faced each other and had to be separated by the Mounties. The feud was settled by 1913 and an interlocking switch was finally spiked down. A switching station was built and named Dunshalt. Under a court settlement it was manned by the CNR, with their personnel doing the switching. The Dunshalt store was built by Henry Dougan in 1922 at the switch and rented to his second cousin Austin Stanley, who had come out west for his health.

Stanley was listed as an acting postmaster but not an official one [1]. He returned to Toronto after his lungs improved, and Robert Reid took over the store and was the first official postmaster from 1924-08-15 to 1925-03-26. Below is the postmark proof strike. Miss Valentine Dougan was a postal clerk in the store, and succeeded as postmaster when Reid sold out to Charles Fryer. The post office closed on 1926-03-24 when she married Colin Bannerman and moved away. The store continued, but the post office closed [2]. Since Dunshalt was so close to Nightingale, it was deemed redundant.



Ardenode.

Ardenode began in 1913 as a railroad siding called Hawick, in the Western Irrigation District about 5 kilometres west of Nightingale. Major George F. Davis was an Irishman who had served in the British Army in India and the Boer War. He joined the English Colony and built a general store at the siding. When the post office opened on 1915-05-15, it had to change its name because there was another town in Alberta also called Hawick, although that settlement never had a post office. The Major suggested to the Canadian Post Office the name of Ardenode, his home town in Ireland, and it was accepted. The post office briefly operated in a large tent until the store was completed. At right is the proof strike of the postmark.



The area had the advantage of being part of the English Colony and also was associated with the Western Irrigation District, run by the CPR. Davis later sold the store to the Sharman family, and on 1917-11-01 Mrs. Hylda Sharman became postmaster [1]. She served until 1922-10-06, when her son Wilfrid and his business partner Fred Anstice bought the store. Fred then became postmaster until 1959-10-31 when he retired after more than three decades. Wilfrid took over for the final decade of the post office, which closed on 1969-11-28 when the store did [2]. Ardenode dwindled away and its trade went south to the city of Strathmore, today a ten-minute drive on a paved highway. The post office and store were successful in the days when most people traveled between towns by rail, but when the grid roads became the preferred means of travel, Ardenode found itself on a side road that few people had reason to travel.

Baintree.

This area was surveyed by the Canadian Northern railway in 1914. Its name came from an incident when an early settler traveling along Serviceberry Creek had a tree fall over onto his wagon [5]. In those days, a popular type of wagon for rugged areas was a high-clearance type manufactured by Bain Wagons of Kenosha, Wisconsin. In the same way that many people today refer to a snowmobile by the trade name Skidoo, wagons of a certain type were called Bains whether or not they were actually manufactured by the company. Chuckwagons were commonly Bain wagons.



The post office location was decided by the presence of the railroad siding, not random clusters of homesteaders. The first postmaster was a Scotsman named Timothy Longbotham, who ran a general store as a branch of the Nightingale store for Gilbert Southwell. The post office opened on 1917-03-01 but Longbotham only stayed to the end of the year. At left is the postmark proof strike. The store was sold to the Wyman family. Burt O. Wyman was the official postmaster but his teenaged daughter Elizabeth actually ran it. She left on 1919-06-22 to move to Calgary where she finished her high school diploma and graduated.

The Wymans closed their store and helped a returned veteran named Thomas Taggart open a new one across the road. He was succeeded as store owner/postmaster by Ewart Cropper on 1920-11-25, who only stayed a couple of months before resigning. Next up was Peter A. McLellan, who served the longest, from 1921-03-23 until 1944-07-03. He was a devout Catholic, and on Holy Days would sort the mail but not open the post office. A bachelor, he lived in the back of the store.

After almost three decades of absence, the Longbothams bought the store back, and Tim's wife Pauline was postmaster until 1947-11-08. Her son Dave helped on the postal counter as his mother was also the grain elevator agent. The County family then owned the store, with Samuel as postmaster from 1947-11-09 to 1950-11-13, and his son Frederick until 1951-04-12. They were both grain elevator agents. The final two postmasters were David James Roberts until 1953-02-27 and Harold Edward Tucker, both elevator agents, until the post office closed on 1957-01-30. Good roads were part of the explanation for the decline, as it became easier to shop elsewhere and rural mail delivery took over. The hamlet died slowly. It and the railroad were frequently flooded when Serviceberry Creek overflowed in the spring runoff, which discouraged any new investment. The railroad tracks were abandoned in 1962, and the grain elevators gone by the early 1980s, as the grain industry slowly centralized. When the last elevator closed, only one resident was left [3].

Tudor.



The first colonists arrived in 1906 and a village was established in 1911 when the railroad came through. It was named after the British royal dynasty. The first postmaster was H.W. Leonard, who had come from Arkansas with his family and his in-laws the Schafers. The post office opened on 1912-02-01 and Leonard operated it out of his farm house until 1913-05-30. At left is the proof strike of the first postmark. E.W. Post opened a store and lumber yard, and the post office then transferred to him. He was postmaster until 1920-09-28, when he sold the store to Jessie Anderson.

Anderson was postmaster until 1922-08-02, when he rented the store to Morris Gordon, who also took over the mails. Gordon was postmaster from then until 1923-03-16. The store burned down on 1923-01-03, taking the post office and considerable holiday mail with it. Although Gordon was officially postmaster for another couple of months, neither he nor Anderson attempted to rebuild. A new store was built by George Dey and his sister in September 1923 but they did not immediately take on the post office. Leonard resumed the postmastership from his farm house after the disaster and held the position again from 1923-09-19 to 1925-11-17. Mail service was three times weekly from the village of Standard which is 25 kilometres south. The mail courier often drove his truck part of the way on the railway tracks to get through in muddy weather when the roads were impassable.

After Leonard resigned his second tour of duty, Miss A.M. Dey took the job until 1926-09-16. Morris John Kilborn owned the store and postmastership from 1926-09-30 to 1928-07-26. Leonard's in-laws, Fred and Maggie Schafer, bought the store, and their daughter Marion Naomi Schafer operated the post office from 1928-08-01 to 1935-02-25. On one occasion she and several customers were trapped inside the post office by an angry Ayrshire bull that had gotten loose. Help finally arrived but it took eight bullets to kill it.

After a couple of short-term postmasters, Aubrey Alfred Hardwick Peters bought the store. He was more commonly known as Scott or Scotty, despite being a first-generation Canadian born of English parents. The nickname was given to him by a Scottish farm labourer who called him "Little Scottie" when he was a boy. Peters was the last postmaster of Tudor, from 1935-12-09 to 1944-06-30. When he closed the store,

the post office died [3]. Tudor went into a steep decline as passenger rail traffic fell and the village found itself on a side road instead of a mainline. During the 1970s its three grain elevators, known locally as Henry VIII (because it was larger than standard elevators), Elizabeth (painted white, the colour of virgin queens), and Bloody Mary (painted red), were demolished, killing the hamlet for good. Nothing remains.

Rockyford.



Despite being a small, shallow stream, Serviceberry Creek is difficult to cross along most of its length because of its muddy bottom. Even for a human on foot or a single horse it was difficult to jump down into the muddy bottom and then try to climb out the vertical bank opposite. The photo shows a typical portion of the creek at Highway 9, where the water is only knee-deep and the banks almost at grade but a person trying to wade across it would sink in to waist level because of its muddy bottom. Trees suitable for logging as bridge planks were scarce. The land is short-grass with mostly scrub trees along the creek. The Siksika tribe eventually found an easy ford in an anomalous area where the creek flowed through boulder gravel deposits and the banks were sloped. The trail that led to this stone-covered ford was well-worn and conspicuous, easily spotted by the first white surveyors in the area, who followed it down to the creek. This was a good place to build a village. When it was established near the ford, the name for its post office was obvious.

Settlement began in 1908. E. Watson opened a hardware store, and became postmaster from 1914-07-20 to 1915-09-17. Several proof strikes of the postmarks are shown below. The railroad had come through by then, and thus the mail always came that way. Rockyford is in the extreme northeastern corner of the Western Irrigation District. The fact that the village was at a crossroads between the railroad and the ford ensured that it would survive and be larger than the other settlements. The store and postmastership changed hands twice during World War One. On 1918-08-31, it moved to a pharmacy, where it was to stay for most of its subsequent history. Leon L. Plotkins was a Frenchman who had come out west for his health, and during his tenure as postmaster owned the pharmacy. In 1921, he married and changed careers, becoming a newspaper editor. The official records say he was dismissed as postmaster in 1921 for political partisanship, so presumably that was a result of him writing an editorial that rubbed someone in Ottawa the wrong way [1].



Albert Henry Erswell was a pharmacist who bought the drug store and became postmaster on 1923-06-19. He was quite active in local politics, eventually becoming a school board trustee. This was not a sinecure and the duties were onerous enough that he resigned the postmastership and handed it over to his wife Agnes on 1940-06-22. As World War Two heated up, he joined the army medical corps and left for duty with Agnes in tow. Mrs. Anita Reish became postmaster from 1941-03-22. The Mitchell family arrived in Rockyford in November 1945 and bought the pharmacy from Erswell. Mrs. Winnifred M. Mitchell became postmaster on 1946-12-31, and later her husband Ken officially took over on 1947-04-30. He stayed until 1959-07-29 when he got a job in a Vancouver veterans hospital as a pharmacist. Miss Mary Nashchuk was a clerk in the pharmacy and took over temporarily as postmaster on 1959-07-30.

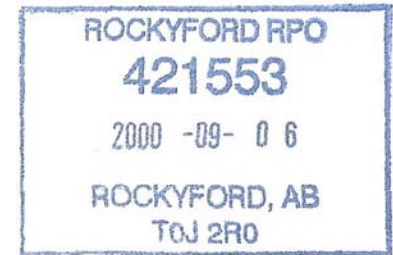
After that there was a series of postmasters coming and going. Somewhere along the line the post office moved into a standalone building. The last standalone post office was demolished in the 1990s and is seen below in 1989, with the late Betty Speirs in front of it.





The Rockyford post office was replaced by a retail outlet in a combined general store/cafe/insurance agency, shown here in 2011. Immediately on entering the door, one pivots hard left and walks past the insurance secretary's desk to an anteroom where the postal counter is.

Below is the first day of use postmark for the retail outlet obtained by Betty.





At left is the pictorial postmark; the area around Rockyford is noted for its pheasant hunting. Rockyford is the largest village along the creek, with a population of about 325 circa 2012. It seems likely to outlive the others along the stream. It is far enough away from large towns or cities that ranchers in the surrounding area will prefer to shop in Rockyford. The post office dwindled from a standalone operation to a retail outlet in a store, but this cannot be attributed to local economic decline. Canada Post is steadily privatizing its front counter operations as a matter of policy to get away from high-cost union workers, and even in large cities is replacing its post offices with retail outlets.

Redland.

Redland is located downstream of Rockyford at the end of Serviceberry Creek where it empties into the Rosebud River. The name is said to come from the soil colour, but I think the historians who suggested that etymology never actually visited the place, because as far as I could see when I was there the soil was brown [5]. However, the Redland-Rosebud area is at the extreme western end of the Drumheller Badlands, and there are outcrops of ironstone and red shale just downstream from Redland, so that appears to be where the name really came from. Just downstream of Redland on the river (not the creek) is the village of Rosebud. The straight-line distance by land is about three kilometres. In 1913, when the Canadian Northern was building the rail line along Serviceberry Creek, it was the practice of railroads throughout the prairies to build sidings every tenth mile. The Redland and Rosebud settlers feuded over who should get the siding since they were so close together, but the railway used diplomacy and gave them both a siding.

The first settlers were the Wishart and Martin families, who arrived in 1883 and homesteaded side by side, later intermarrying. Mail was originally brought on horseback from Gleichen, about 50 kilometres south, and distributed at the Dave Wishart farmhouse [3]. This area was anomalous compared to the organized colonies upstream, in that it was settled by random homesteading. It was too far away from the CPR

line for the railway to consider a colony. The CNR line came through decades later but that railway never bothered with colonization schemes, preferring instead to try to highjack some of the CPR's trade. Relations between the two railways along Serviceberry Creek were always tense and courtroom disputes between them were not uncommon.

Twenty years later, Samuel E. Dafoe built a general store after the CNR railroad came through. He became postmaster on 1914-12-18, staying until 1915-08-10. At right is the proof strike of the first postmark. Dafoe was bought out by local homesteader John I. Martin, who kept the postmastership until 1916-07-07, when the Wishart family got back into the mail business. Ben Wishart, John's in-law, had the store and was postmaster until 1919-04-29. At that point, the postmastership passed to a local preacher, the Rev. George Love. He moved the post office into his house, which he had bought from the Martin family. An attachment was built onto the house for the post office. His wife Emma took over the job from 1921-10-08 to her death on 1935-05-12, at which point the title reverted to George. He stayed with it until 1936-11-09, when he passed it on to the Jepps family, who bought the house.



Mrs. Winnifred Jepps then became the longest serving postmaster, staying for three decades until her retirement on 1969-06-04, when the post office closed permanently. Today the hamlet of Redland is six acreage homes on the valley floor of the south bank of Serviceberry Creek. The grid road it is on is called Redland Road but there are no signs marking the actual hamlet. The railroad is abandoned, and Redland is far off the main roads.

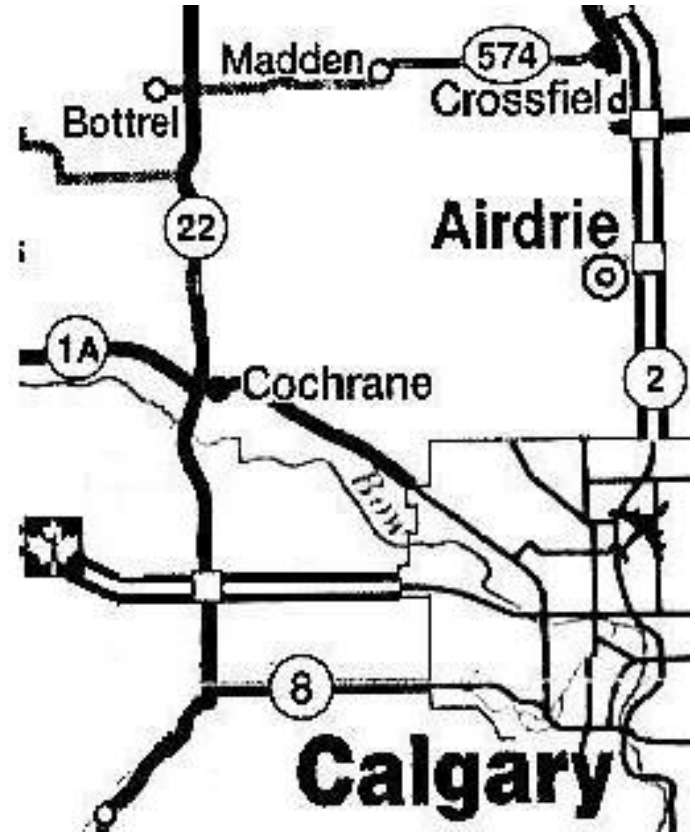
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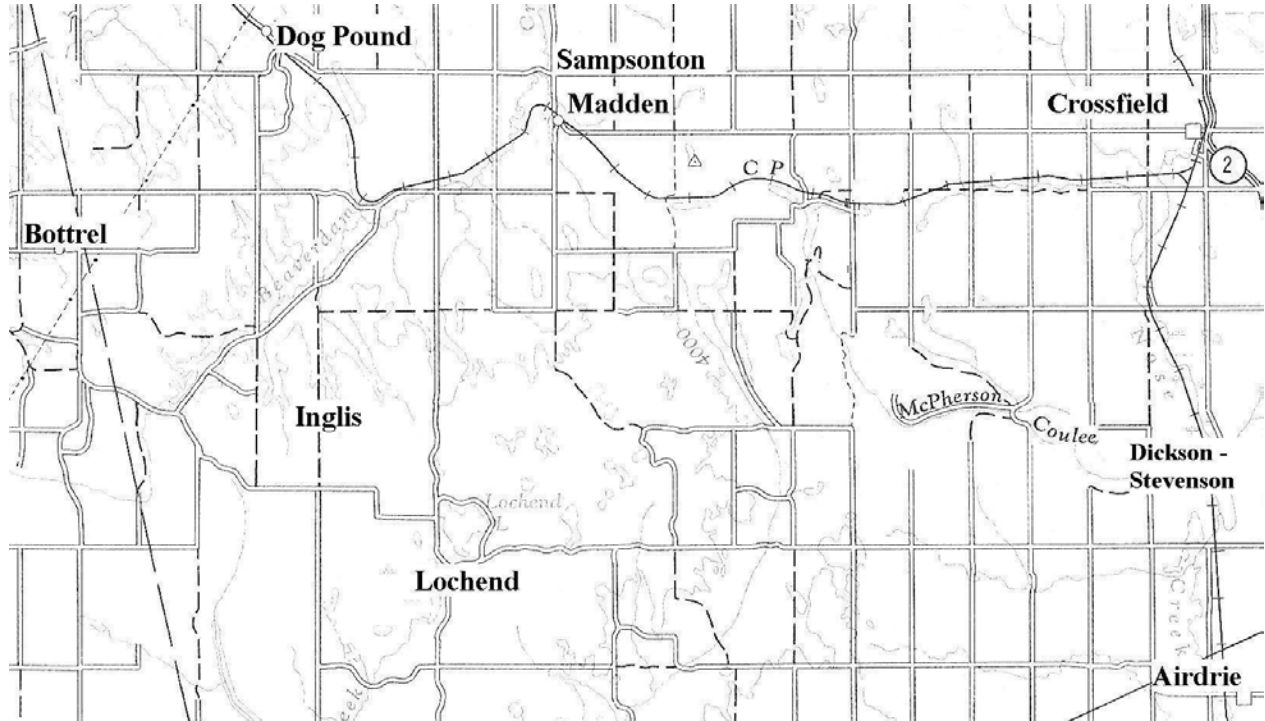
THE COULEE DISTRICT

The area just northwest of Calgary is a transition zone between the Rocky Mountain foothills and the prairie steppes. It is dissected by numerous coulees, which are large glacial meltwater channels that today have only small creeks meandering down them or a string of linear sloughs in their bottomlands. The most prominent in the area is McPherson Coulee, which empties out onto the flatlands and which in its central section can be fairly described as a canyon. The western side of the district is forested, and the vegetation gradually reduces to grass-covered slopes by the time the coulees reach the prairie steppes. Ranching is predominant along the western side and crop farming in the eastern half, but throughout the area there are hundreds of acreages of city commuters cutting up the land. At right is a generalized map of the area today.

The main north-south route in Alberta is Highway 2, which runs from the American border to Calgary, then 250 km north to Edmonton. Just north of Calgary on the highway is the city of Airdrie, today a 20-minute drive on the highway but in pioneer times a full day of travel over muddy tracks etched into the prairie sod. When the railroad was built in 1891 from Calgary to Edmonton, travel time dropped from 7 days to 12 hours one way. After World War Two, the abandoned Calgary-Edmonton pioneer



trail was rebuilt and became Highway 2, now a four-lane divided highway, reducing the trip to four hours. Airdrie in 2012 had a population of 40,000 and is a dormitory community for Calgary. Crossfield is just off Highway 2 about 15 km north of Airdrie and had a population of 3,000. All the other settlements in the coulee district west of the highway have dwindled into hamlets at best, and some have left little or no trace. Below is a map of all the post offices in the area, past and present.



Dickson-Stevenson Stopping House.



The first settlement in the area was just north of present-day Airdrie, along the pioneer trail between Calgary and Edmonton. John Dickson opened a stopping house in 1883 at a location he calculated would be one day's travel from Calgary. Shortly after, the Stevenson family settled beside him. The settlement was a cluster of log buildings at the mouth of McPherson Coulee, one of the largest and most prominent coulees in the area, and which was a natural route into the foothills. The photo at left shows all that remains today, a tiny graveyard containing two of the Stevenson family and an unknown traveler who died suddenly while staying at the stopping house. On the centre horizon of the photo is a dark area that is the mouth of McPherson Coulee. The photo on the next page shows the entrance into the coulee.



There was never a post office at the stopping house but there was informal mail service to the district. The North West Mounted Police routinely stayed there while on patrol, and as a part of their regular duties they carried mail as a courtesy. The stagecoaches began carrying mail between principal towns, which the stopping house was not, but since they stayed the night en route to Edmonton, there can be no doubt that the driver left or picked up mail for the coulee district. There were also freight companies traveling up and down the Calgary-Edmonton trail, such as Addison McPherson, a rancher after whom the coulee is named and where his cattle roamed while he was on the freighters. It took two weeks to make a round trip between Calgary and Edmonton, and during bad weather it often took two weeks just to go one way [10]. The few settlers in the McPherson Coulee area came to the stopping house to pick up mail or leave a letter to be carried to the next post office. When the railroad came through in 1891, the stopping house died instantly with the first train through, but the Stevensons remained there as farmers and eventually took over Dickson's land in the district.

With the arrival of the railroad in 1891, a siding was established just south of the old stopping house and named Airdrie after a Scottish town. Initially there was no post office, but a mail sack would be thrown off at the railway station and one picked up. The railroad section foreman would ferry the mail to the Stevenson ranch, where Johnston Stevenson took charge of it for distribution to other ranchers in the district. Later the mail was dropped off directly at Stevenson's farm by the simple expedient of flinging it out the mail car door as the train went by. This was highly unofficial but the railway mail clerk on the Calgary to Edmonton run had a brother who ranched nearby and wanted to make certain the mail was expedited. The mail clerk would lean out of the train as it went by and chuck the mail bag out. Occasionally he would miss and the bag would land in a slough. Johnston Stevenson then had to use an old horse trough as a canoe and paddle out to get the mail bag.

The mail came through once a week on Fridays, which became a social occasion as all the ranch folk would gather at the Stephenson house to wait for the mail. There would be singsongs and everyone caught up on the news and gossip [2]. Matters were formalized when the Airdrie post office was opened on 1900-07-01 with Johnston Stevenson as postmaster. Despite its name, the post office was actually located on Stevenson's farm, not at the railroad siding to the south. On 1903-03-27, Arthur Bowers took over the postmastership, moving the office to his general store at the siding. The Stevenson site thus faded out of the postal history of the area permanently, and henceforth the Airdrie post office was always actually in Airdrie [3].

The Dickson-Stevenson area later became known as Helmsdale, and appears on maps today as this place name. There was a Helmsdale post office in central-east Alberta near the Saskatchewan border, but this is entirely unconnected with the stopping house and the two should not be confused. Postmark collectors should be aware that Helmsdale postmarks are of this eastern post office, open 1913 to 1962, not the place name near Airdrie.

Airdrie.

Arthur Bowers was officially the second postmaster of Airdrie but he was the first to live in the village. When the post office was at the Stevenson farm, its annual gross revenues were no higher than \$36. In the first year at the Bowers store gross revenue jumped to \$201 and was \$533.97 by the end of his tenure [12]. The Bowers moved to the coast, and on 1907-03-12 George Hatt became the new postmaster. He served until his death on 1912-02-25, by which time gross revenues were over \$1,000 and steadily increasing. Phillip Edwin Rickard then took over as postmaster until 1916-09-02. He was postmaster in name only, and his wife did the actual work, although he carried the mails to and from the train station. A.C. Bradshaw was the next postmaster until 1919-09-18. Rickard either lost the postmark hammer or had worn it out, because a new split-circle postmark was proofed for Bradshaw, as seen at right.



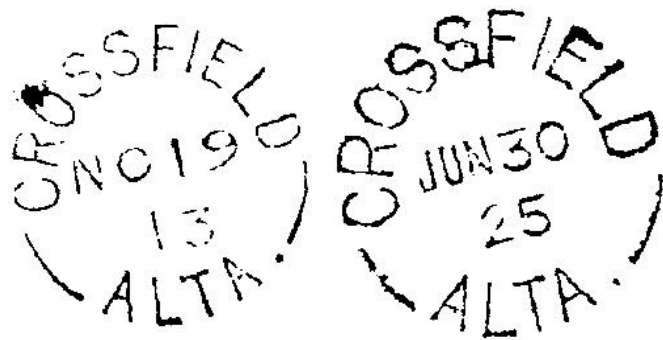
The local butcher Dave Duncan then became postmaster until his death on 1928-02-06. The post office was run in a separate building, but after his death his widow Edith, who had two small children to look after, became postmaster and moved it into the butcher shop. She and her family lived in the back. She rented out half the shop to a grocer and used the other half for the post office. She remarked how people would try to take advantage of her by knocking on the back door after office hours and asking for their mail, but she was firm about it and did not let people take advantage. Edith retired as postmaster on 1957-01-27. In 1938, during her tenure, rural mail service was started out of the Airdrie office, with two routes.

Philip Gordon Bevan took over after Edith retired, although the post office remained in the Duncan shop until the federal government completed a new building for it in 1960 [2]. From there a succession of government employees held the job. The photo below shows the post office as it was in 1990. As the town grew into a city, a retail postal outlet (RePO) opened in an IDA Drugs on 1989-07-25. As of 2012, there were four RePOs plus the main post office to serve the city [4].



Crossfield.

Following the usual procedure of a railroad siding every tenth mile, the next one north of Airdrie was named Crossfield after a railway surveyor. A stopping house opened in 1890 but business was sparse until after the turn of the century when settlers began arriving in greater numbers. The first settler was James A. Sutherland, who also became the first postmaster on 1902-08-01. It was located in his hardware store and lumber yard. In late 1909 he moved to Drumheller, in east-central Alberta, to start new businesses there. Accordingly, Charles McKay became the second postmaster on 1910-01-22. He operated the post office out of his combination implement store, telephone exchange, and electrical lighting plant. McKay was a man of many parts and was also an undertaker. That must have been where the big money was since he abandoned the Crossfield post office on 1916-08-23 for Lethbridge, a bigger town with a higher death rate. The proof strikes of Crossfield split-circle postmarks are shown at right.



The next three postmasters were temporary placeholders, followed by Robert Whitfield who acceded to the job on 1918-04-30. The Whitfield family were printers and published the local newspaper. Whitfield took over the post office from McKay's location and moved it into the front of the printing shop. His daughters Mary and Ada actually ran the post office, and his son J.H. was the letter carrier on Rural Route #1 out of Crossfield, which had 42 boxes over 42 miles. Whitfield resigned as postmaster on 1925-01-07.

Frank Mossop was an English immigrant who worked at variety of occupations before settling in as postmaster for almost exactly twenty years from 1925-03-31 to 1945-02-26. The post office was across the street from the train station and Mossop would push carts of mail bags across to meet the next train. He was a genial man and didn't fuss about regulations. Anyone late to the post office could catch him at the station and hand him a letter direct to go into the mailbag as it was put on board [5].

After Mossop, there was a brief interregnum before Russell Shantz became postmaster from 1947-04-15 to 1974-04-26. The Shantz family were part of a Mennonite colonization scheme further to the north at Carstairs and Didsbury, and several other post offices to the north had postmasters named Shantz. In April 1948, the post office became a civil service job. The photo below shows the post office in 1990, with the author's mother, the late Betty Speirs, in front of it.





At left is the pictorial postmark still in use by the post office. Crossfield has grown with the local agricultural and petroleum industry, as well as some commuter traffic to Calgary. Its future bodes well.

Madden.

The hamlet of Madden is about 15 km straight east of Crossfield. Its present-day name is after a pioneer homesteader Bernard Madden, who settled in the area in 1876. However, when the post office opened on 1906-10-01, it was under the name of Sampson. Before going further, it must be noted that there was a considerable overlap of postmasters between Madden and that of Bottrel, about 10 km west-southwest of Madden [3]. A number of Madden store owners, who were also postmasters by default, headed west for greener pastures. Bottrel will be discussed further on.

The first postmaster was Arthur Sampson, who operated the post office in an isolated country store one mile north of Madden. Sampson was never an actual settlement, just a crossroads place name. Sampson resigned on 1908-12-29 and left the area [6, 7]. The post office then moved to present-day Madden but kept the name Sampson for a while. There were a couple of short-term postmasters after Sampson left before Ephraim Buschart took over on 1914-05-06 and stayed for six years until 1920-02-23. He would later be a postmaster in Bottrel from 1923 to 1926. Guy H. Burke took over the general store/post office of Sampson from 1920-06-01 to 1927-03-15. Shown at right is a proof strike of a registration postmark that was ordered during Burke's tenure. After him there was a brief placeholder postmaster and then the Tidball family took over until 1947.



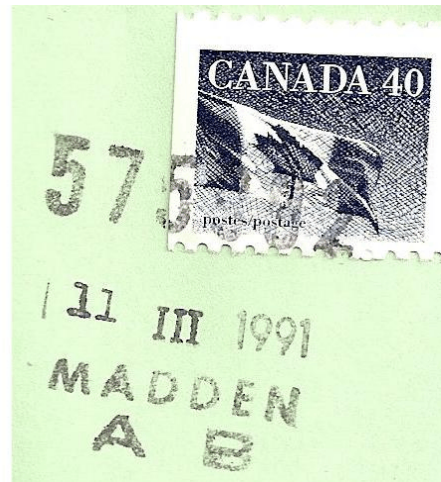


Historically the mail couriers brought the mail from Crossfield across relatively flat land. When the CPR built a branch line in 1930 west from Crossfield through Madden and Dog Pound, the mail came via rail. The rail line never paid its way and was abandoned in 1978. The mail reverted to couriers, this time traveling on good roads. The post office name was changed to Madden on 1931-05-01, not long after the railroad came through. At left is the proof strike of the new Madden postmark.

Three postmasters came and went until Harold Percy Hardy settled in for the long term from 1954-11-15 until his death on 1971-07-28. His widow Jane briefly held the position until 1972-09-19 when she sold the store. Three more postmasters held the job in quick succession until Norm Dodd became the final postmaster from 1976-10-26

until 1991-03-20 when his store closed. At right is the final POCN postmark of Madden, used a few days before the post office closed.

The next page shows Betty Speirs in front of the Dodd post office in 1989. Today Madden is served as a rural route with supermailboxes within the hamlet itself. The following photo, on the subsequent page, taken by the author, shows Madden in October 2011. The Dodd store, seen in the distance, is now a private residence. Mail delivery is to the supermailboxes at right of photo.







The Tidball Family.

The Tidballs were postmasters of both Madden and Bottrel, and it is easier to consider those two post offices together during the family's tenure. The patriarch of the family was William Edwin Tidball, who emigrated from England and initially settled in North Dakota. He married Minille Smith there. They later came to the coulee district with their daughter and five sons, to operate general stores and a ranch [8]. William Edwin Tidball was postmaster of Madden from 1928-03-31 to 1929-12-06. He was also postmaster of Bottrel from 1928-11-13 to 1929-12-02. In other words, he was postmaster of two villages simultaneously. The Madden postmastership then went to his son Albert Edward, who kept the job until 1932-03-15. During that time period, another son Thomas took over the Bottrel post office until 1933-02-28.

After those two sons moved on, yet another son Edred Edwin took over the Madden post office until 1933-03-01, while Edred's youngest brother William Arden held the Bottrel postmastership until 1935-05-22. Thomas, who had been at Bottrel, came to Madden and followed Edred as postmaster until 1937-01-15. Meanwhile, back at Bottrel, son Oliver James became postmaster until 1948-11-22. William Arden moved back to Madden and took over from his brother Thomas as postmaster until 1947-10-31. After 1948 all the Tidballs seemed to have had their fill of being postmasters. The exception was Oliver James, who moved to Waterton National Park and became its postmaster in 1950.

Bottrel.

Edward Botterell established Dog Pound Ranch in late 1880s where the coulees meet the mountain foothills. It was re-named the Botterell Ranch in 1892. The ranch was sold to John T. Boucher in 1905 who built a cheese factory and store in 1908 and opened a post office in it. When he opened the post office, Boucher mis-spelled the name but it was never corrected. At right is the proof strike of the first postmark.



Bottrel still exists as a hamlet on the bottomlands of the coulee, with the original general store in business sans post office, and four houses clustered around it. The photo below shows the store in October 2011, with green cluster boxes at left of photo. Dog Pound Creek flows beside the store on the east (behind the camera) and that area is now a tiny county park with a half-dozen campsites.



Boucher opened the post office on 1909-12-01 and kept it until 1918-08-06. Four postmasters came and went as the store changed hands, until the Tidballs bought it. William Edwin Tidball and his sons assumed the postmastership as previously mentioned. After the Tidballs sold out, William Milroy became post master from 1948-11-30 until his death on 1955-01-08. There were a couple more brief postmasters until the final postmaster Franklin Samuel Gathercole, who held the job from 1958-09-16 to the closure of the post office on 1969-03-31.

The mail for Bottrel came from Cochrane to south, not from Crossfield to the east as was the case for Madden. There was never any rail line so the mail was always brought in by horse and later by motor vehicle. After the post office closed, Bottrel became part of Cochrane Rural Route #1. Today the area is served by green cluster boxes.

Dog Pound.

This settlement was originally a Cree winter camp in the bottomlands of a narrow coulee that led into the mountains where there was good hunting. The name comes from their use of one section of the creek that flowed through the coulee as a pound for their dogs. Today the settlement is a linear hamlet stretched out along a road on the north coulee slope. The name has been inconsistently spelled as one word or two words. Modern maps show it as a single word but post office records and pioneer accounts spelled it as two words. Prior to the opening of the post office, homesteaders received their mail by favour from Cochrane. Anyone traveling to town would pick up everyone else's mail and distribute it en route. If the recipients lived further down the line, the mail would be kept for them until they visited, so some mail took six weeks to go what was only a day or two's travel on horseback.

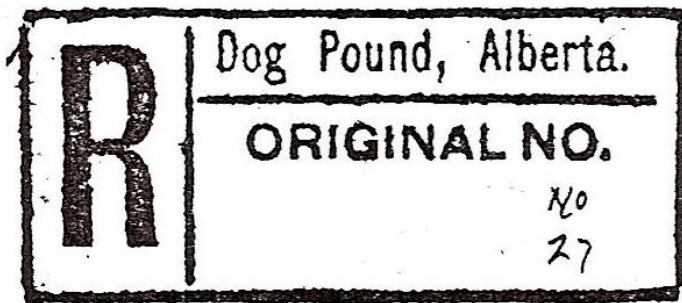
The post office opened under the name of Bradbourne, after an English town where the first postmaster, Mrs. Amy E. Smith, came from. It opened on 1900-01-01 but was operating unofficially before that. This was a ranch house post office on the Dicky Smith Ranch, later renamed the Virginia Ranch. Dicky died in 1902 and his widow sold the ranch, ending her tenure as postmaster on 1903-03-03. James Firstbrooke bought the ranch from her and continued as postmaster of Bradbourne. He sold the ranch and ended his postmastership on 1904-06-02. The new owners were not interested in the post office, so it was transferred to another ranch, operated by Cornelius Grain. The photo on the next page shows Grain's ranch house, where the post office was located [11]. During his term of office, the name was changed back to the traditional name for the area, Dog Pound, on 1905-03-01. He sold his ranch and his tenure ended on 1919-09-10.



The new ranch owners declined the post office, so George Bruce Hunter took over as postmaster until 1932-04-06. Not long after the CPR railroad came through Dog Pound (via Madden), John Caldwell Jack accepted the post office from Hunter and ran it in his general store at the Dog Pound siding until 1960-12-02. The mail route switched from Cochrane to Crossfield via rail, although some of the mail still went by horse. The photo below shows mail courier Woodrow Hoffman on horseback in January 1936, towing a sled full of mail from the Dog Pound area to Madden [11].



During this time period there were some newer residents who felt that Dog Pound was an undignified name and wanted to change it back to Bradbourne. The old-timers rallied against this move and the Canadian Post Office agreed, citing possible confusion with a post office in Bradbourne, Manitoba [9]. Some proof strikes of postmarks are shown below. Samuel Oxman bought the store from Jack and became the final postmaster. Against the wishes of the residents, Dog Pound post office was closed on 1970-03-10 and it became a rural route served by cluster boxes.



Lochend.

The district west of Airdrie and Crossfield has many intermittent bodies of water in the coulee bottomlands that are lakes in wet years, sloughs or marsh in average years, and pasture in dry years. Most have since been drained by ditches and converted to pasture or cropland. One such lake was about halfway between Madden and Cochrane. A Scotsman named Joseph K. Laidlaw settled on the south shore in 1896 and named his ranch Lochend. Other homesteaders in the area began referring to the unnamed lake as Lochend Lake, which is a redundancy since Lochend means “lake end”. The lake has since dried up and when I visited the site in 2011 it was marshland with a few small sloughs, although Google and other maps still show it as a lake.

The post office opened on 1905-06-01 with Laidlaw as the postmaster. It was a ranch house post office and there was never any village there. Mail distribution was out of Cochrane by horse or, in Lochend's final days, by motor vehicle. No railroad went near the place. Other ranchers settled around the perimeter of the lake, and pioneer reminiscences tell of how the neighbour children would skate across the lake in winter to pick up the mail [2]. Laidlaw resigned the post office on 1908-06-25 and it moved to his neighbour's ranch. Robert Knight was the new postmaster and held the position until 1911-03-23. After he resigned, Laidlaw returned to the postmastership until 1929-12-31, when the post office permanently closed and the area became part of a Rural Route. The ranches are now transected by several paved highways and many are cut up into acreages. The Lochend area is convenient to Calgary and is popular with commuters, although still no village has developed.

Inglis.

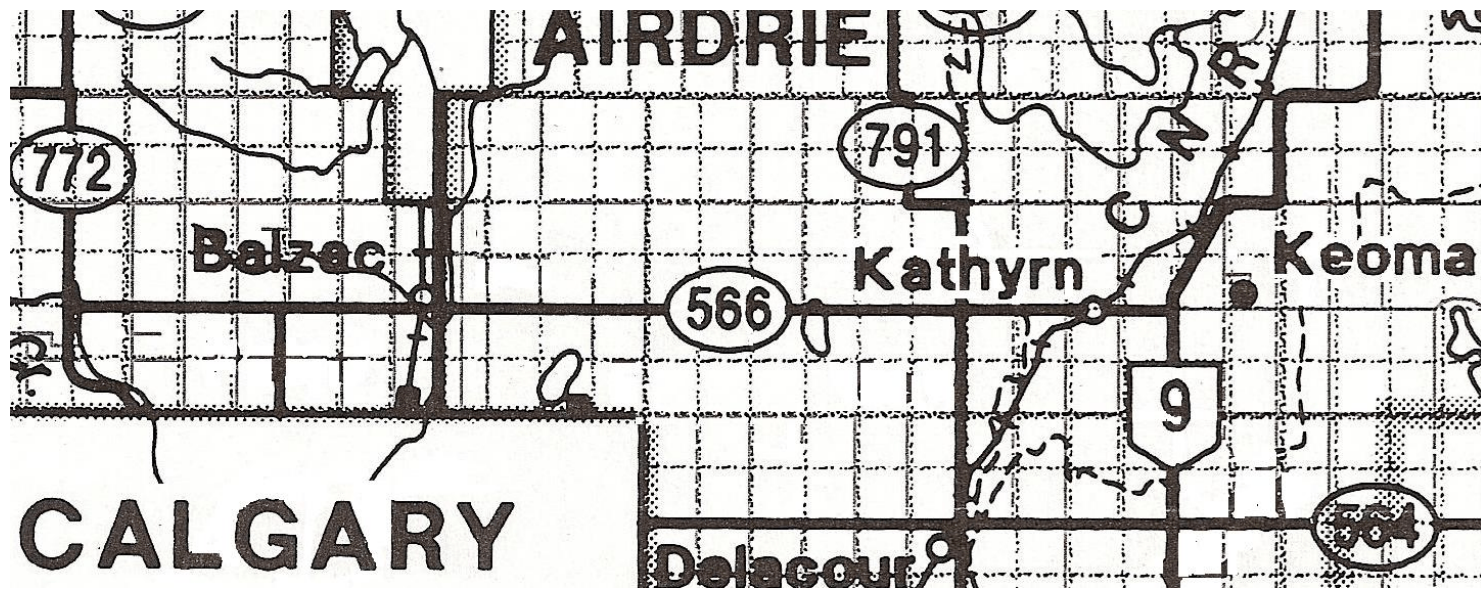
This ranch house post office was named after a prominent pioneer family who settled in the area during the 1880s. The only postmaster was Alfred (Fred) McCrady, who held the job from 1912-04-01 until 1921-09-30 when the post office closed [3]. Shown below is the proof strike of its postmark. There was a small school nearby but no settlement ever developed, and eventually the population faded away. The post office was about halfway between Lochend and Bottrel and was a triumph of hope over necessity. Since it was directly on the mail route from Cochrane to Bottrel, it was no stretch to have it just be a stop on a rural route. No trace of the post office remains today.



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- 12] Canadian Post Office (1900 to 1948) ANNUAL REPORT OF THE POSTMASTER GENERAL. Appendices C and D.

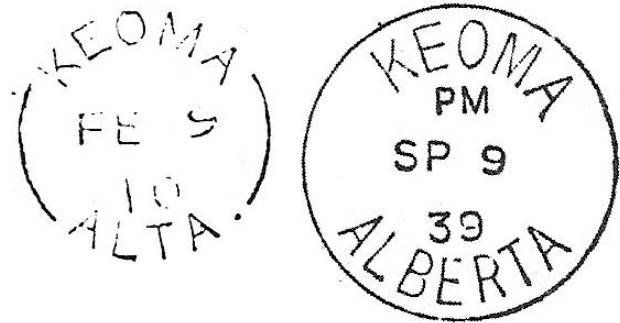
NORTHEAST OF CALGARY



Kathyrn and Keoma.

Roughly 35 km northeast of Calgary out on the prairies are Keoma and Kathyrn, now hamlets in Rocky View County on the north side of Highway 566, the former east of Highway 9 and the latter west of Highway 9. Both of them once had post offices, which were briefly subsumed into one in their dying days, and vanished completely a couple of years later. The nearest post office today is in the village of Irricana, about 15 km to the north on Highway 9. The three settlements are only ten minutes apart by modern paved road. In those pioneer days, the roads were wagon tracks that turned into linear mudholes anytime it rained, and it took most of a day to travel the distance by horse and buggy.

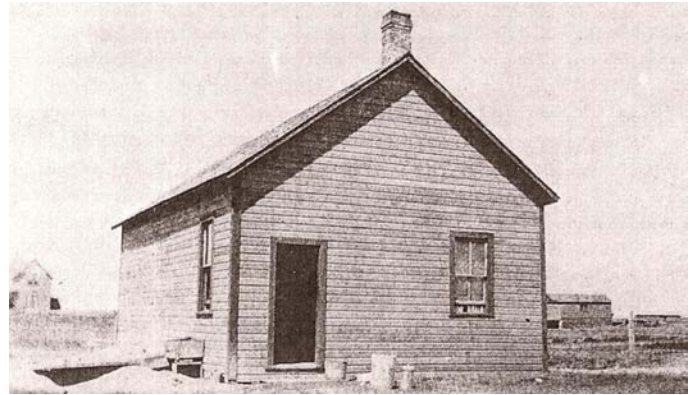
The first to open a post office was Keoma, which operated from January 15, 1910 to June 27, 1986. The name is given in books and Websites as being a native word for “far place” or “over there” but none of them specify what tribe the name came from [1]. All the sources I saw obviously copied the attribution from each other. The area is in the contact zone between the Cree of central Alberta and the Siksika (Blackfoot) of southern Alberta. The word wasn’t in any Cree dictionary I consulted and I couldn’t find one for the Siksika language, so I am guessing it comes from the latter. The village was settled as part of the Canadian Pacific Railway irrigation lands, and is in the treeless flatlands traditionally inhabited by the Siksika.



The list of postmasters for Keoma from the Library and Archives Website [2] is as follows.

Name of Postmaster	Date of Appointment	Date of Vacancy
F.H. Fleming	1910-01-15	1911-11-14
W.M. Galloway	1912-04-24	1915-03-22
G.N. Anger	1915-05-22	1920-05-10
William S. McNeill	1921-02-28	1923-02-10
George Wilson	1923-08-27	1925-09-04
Mrs. Mary Gray	1925-11-01	1931-11-06
Mrs. Emma Lee	1932-02-08	1939-02-11
Palmer Victor Lee	1939-02-28	1939-10-30
Thomas Wm. Sherwood Hull	1939-10-31	1939-12-30
Mrs. Doreen Parlett McKay	1939-12-31	1953-08-17
Donald Harry Miner	1953-08-27	1986?

The photo shows the Keoma post office as it looked in 1921 during the tenure of postmaster Bill McNeill [3]. He lived in the back of the building. The penultimate postmaster was Doreen McKay, whose family had moved in from nearby Kathryn in 1939. The name McKay was very common throughout the area. The final postmaster was Mrs. Dorothy Miner, who presumably was de facto postmaster while her husband was de jure postmaster [3]. The Keoma post office officially closed on 1986-06-27 and its responsibility was transferred to the Kathryn post office.





Kathryn is an interesting post office name. A pioneer homesteader named Neil McKay offered land to the Grand Trunk Railway (today the Canadian National Railway) for a train station on condition that the site be named after one of his daughters, Jessie or Kathryn (spelt with “ryn”). There already was a post office named Jessie, so Kathryn was chosen as the name. It turned out that the land was unsuitable and too close to Irricana, so another site was chosen on an adjacent farm, but the naming privilege apparently still held. The sign painter mis-

spelt the name as Kathryn (with an “yrn”) and it stuck when the post office was opened. The village was founded in 1911 but a post office didn’t open until 1919, still with the typographical error. The final postmaster was J. Vallee when Kathryn post office closed on 1991-06-04.

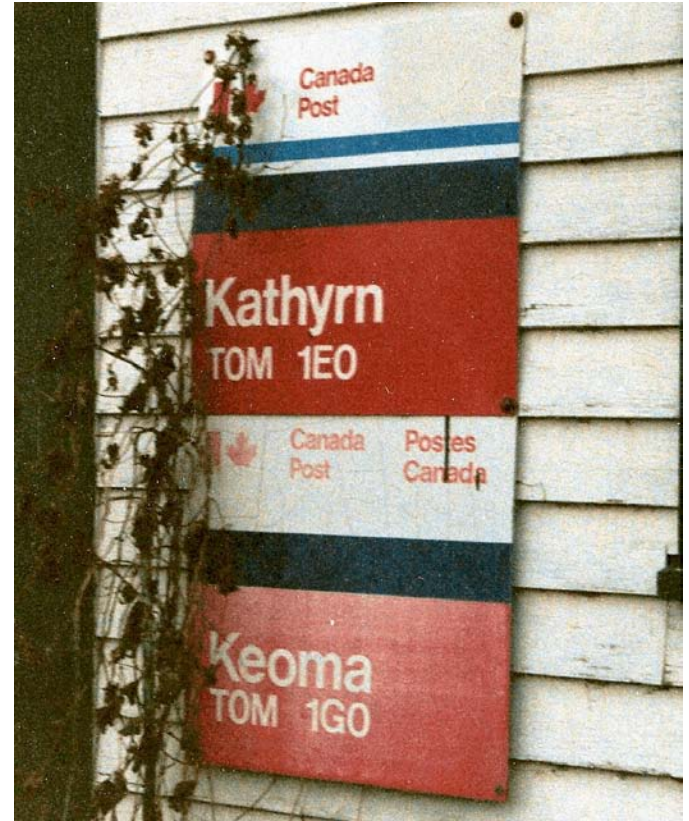
Name of Postmaster	Date of Appointment	Date of Vacancy
Bernard N. Lewis	1919-01-01	1919-08-01
Ferdinand A. Boltz	1919-10-08	1920-03-25
Clifford C. Cox	1920-06-12	1920-08-12
Elbert Everett Saunders	1920-09-29	1928-01-03
Wilfred McLeod Switzer	1928-04-02	1932-01-05
Elbert Everett Saunders	1932-05-10	1942-06-16
Harry Thomas Sobey	1942-07-16	1945-03-19
Mrs. Dorothy Ruth Saunders	1945-07-01	Acting -
Frank Walter Saunders	1945-10-09	19??
Betty White	19??	
Sue Beattie	19??	
Gail Szabon	19??	

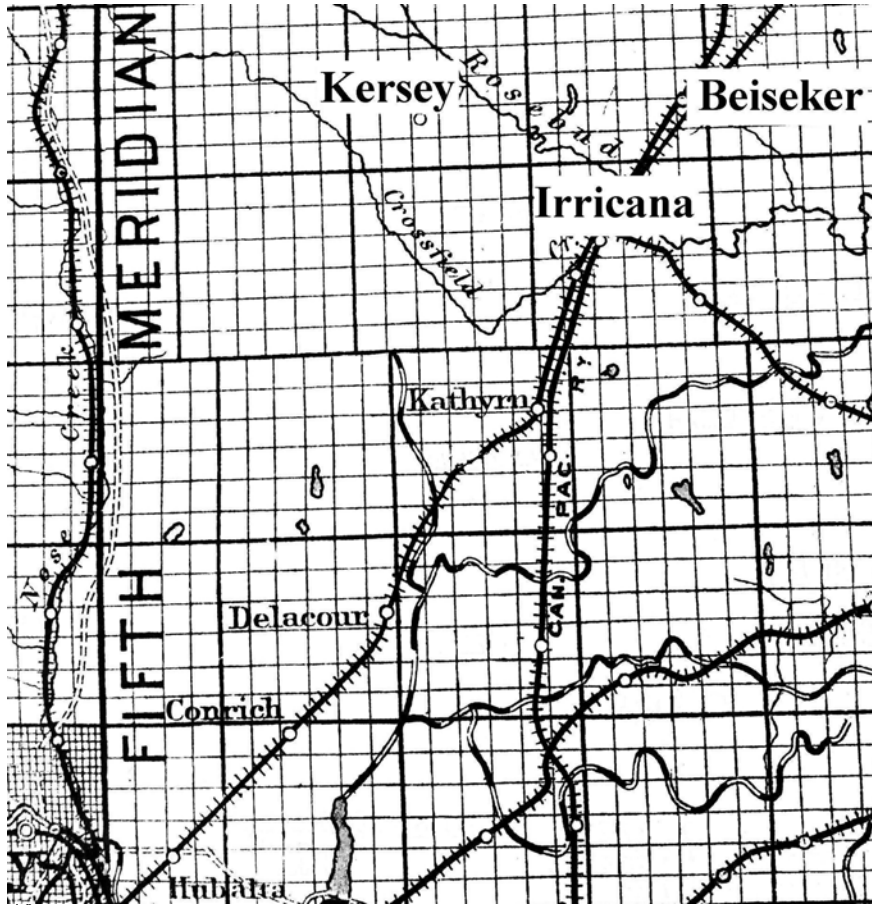
When the Keoma post office was closed, responsibility for postal service was transferred to the Kathryn post office. The postmaster got the sign off the closed post office and nailed it on the wall below the Kathryn sign. My mother Betty Speirs visited this dual post office in 1989. She is seen standing next to the post office.



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Both the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) and the Canadian National Railway (CNR, then the Grand Trunk) ran tracks closely parallel to each other through the area from Kathryn to Beiseker. This had to do with the terrain, which is treeless flatlands with poor drainage. There are abundant sloughs, marshes, and alkali flats throughout, forcing both railroads to follow ridges that required minimal clean fill for the trackbeds.

The CPR reached Beiseker and Irricana in 1910, and the CNR arrived in 1911. For both villages, the CNR had the mail contracts. The CPR has pulled its tracks but the CNR still runs today. Both villages are prosperous, with newer houses evident. Beiseker has about 800 people and Irricana about 1,200 people. At left is a 1922 map of the area.

Beiseker.

Thomas Beiseker was a director of the Calgary Colonization Company (CCC) that sold land to homesteaders in the area. He lived in North Dakota and as far as is known never went near the village that bears his name. He donated land for a townsite and the village began developing in 1909 as the railways approached the area. Later the CPR bought out the CCC for its own colonization plans [1].

P.H. and Elizabeth M. Black opened a grocery store in 1909 at Beiseker. The post office opened on 1910-04-01 with P.H. as the postmaster. The first canceller sent to the post office mis-spelled the name as “Beisker”, so a second canceller was ordered. In those days, supply orders were handwritten, so it is easy to see that poor penmanship could have caused the mistake.



error



corrected

P.H. died after only a year in office, so his widow Elizabeth took over on 1911-06-30 and ran the store and post office by herself for a couple of years. She sold the store to J.C. Stillmanks, who became postmaster on 1913-11-26, and then she remarried and moved elsewhere. It was belatedly discovered that Stillmanks wasn't a Canadian citizen and he was soon removed from office, although he kept running his store [2].

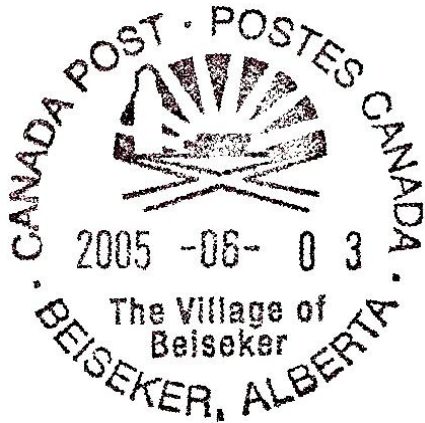
The postmastership then went to O.E. Stevens on 1914-03-26. He moved the post office into his small store, and lived at the back of the building. Charles J. Fryer bought the store/post office and became postmaster in 1921.

He in turn sold out to Carl Frederick (Charlie) Lohrke, who on 1927-08-23 became postmaster. Lohrke was an American homesteader who arrived near Beiseker in 1910. After seventeen years of farming, he and his wife Phoebe tired of the work and moved into town. Besides the post office they had a small store and insurance agency.



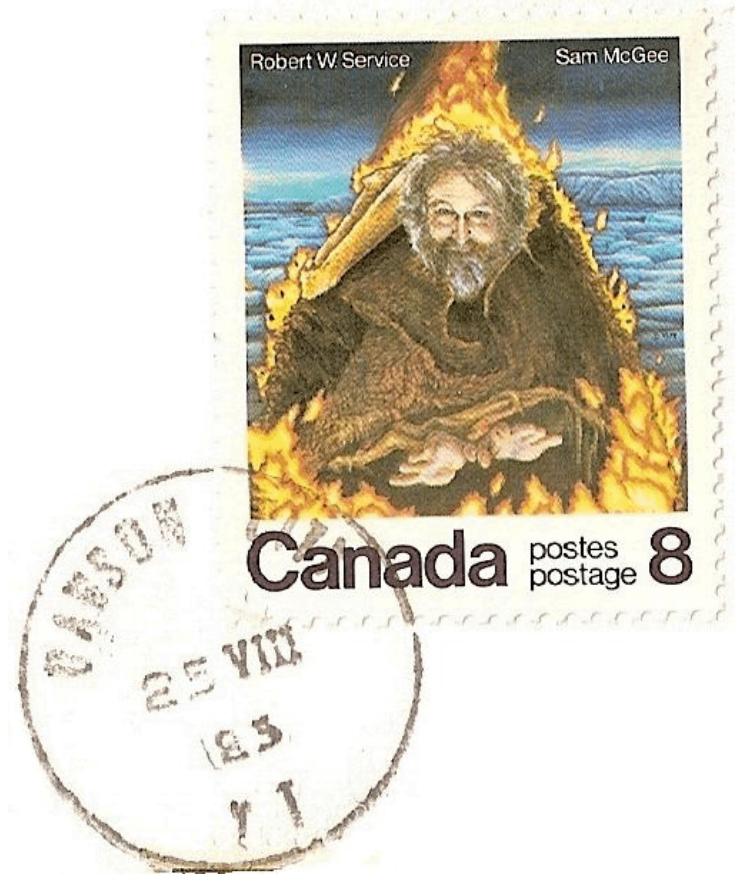
In the autumns, Charlie and his son Carl Frederick William (Carl) would work on harvesting crews, so Phoebe would run the post office. The building burned down in 1945, taking the post office and its contents with it, but was rebuilt. After the fire, the post office was moved to a temporary shack until a new building was constructed. The new place was a confectionery in half of the building and the post office in the other half. The post office became a civil service position in 1948. Charlie retired in 1950 and Carl succeeded his father. Carl's wife Vera took over as postal clerk. In 1969, a standalone post office building was constructed by the Canadian Post Office. It is still in use, and the photo at left shows it as of 2014.

Carl retired in 1971, and Kenneth Neil Peers succeeded him. Peers was from Empress, Alberta. During World War Two, he served in the Canadian Postal Corps. Afterwards, he was in business for several years at Empress before becoming postmaster at Acadia Valley. He then transferred to Beiseker in 1971. Canada Post records cut off after that due to privacy legislation but a local history mentions him as still in the job in 1977. He was succeeded by G.A. Wilkinson sometime later [3]. Below left is the Beiseker pictorial cancel, and below right is the regular business postmark.



Beiseker has one claim to fame in the wider world. It is the burial place of William Samuel McGee (1868-1940), who farmed just outside the village. Prior to taking up the farm, he worked in the Yukon, where the famous poet Robert Service was a clerk in the bank where McGee had his account. Service asked McGee for permission to use his name in a poem, the famous “The Cremation Of Sam McGee”.

The real McGee was born in Ontario, but the corpse in the poem was based by Service on a Tennessee man who froze to death in the Yukon. At right is the stamp, cancelled in Dawson City.



Irricana.

Irricana is part of the Western Irrigation District and was colonized by the CPR. The name is a contraction of the phrase “irrigation canal” [4]. Hugh Miller opened a store at the newly-platted townsite in 1909. The post office opened in a corner of the store on November 1st with Miller as postmaster. At right is the proof strike of its first postmark. The store/post office was originally in a tent until a proper building could be erected. Miller gave up the post office after the building burned down in late 1926.



The post office then went to Alexander Bruce Hay on 1927-01-03, who operated a garage. He built an addition on the back for the post office, with living quarters at the rear. Hay was a Scotsman who emigrated to Canada in 1912. After moving around the prairies a bit, plus overseas service in World War One, he finally settled in Irricana. During World War Two, as postmaster he was responsible for registering aliens, mostly German immigrants, for both Irricana and Beiseker. Charlie Lohrke, the Beiseker postmaster at the time, was not allowed to do the job because of his German name, although strangely the government still trusted him to handle the mails [5].

Hay gave up the post office in 1956 because it was too much work for him. His garage by then included the John Deere agency, a General Motors dealership, and he was Registrar of Vital Statistics. Frederick J. Bell then took over on 1956-11-30 as postmaster. He was born and raised in Alberta. In 1954, he came to Irricana to work in his father’s insurance business. Two more Bells succeeded him, then L. Cathcart until the post office was closed on 1991-11-20 as part of Canada Post’s purge of rural offices [3].



The Irricana post office was lastly located in a house, as shown in the photo taken in 1989, with the author's mother, the late Betty Speirs, standing in front of it.

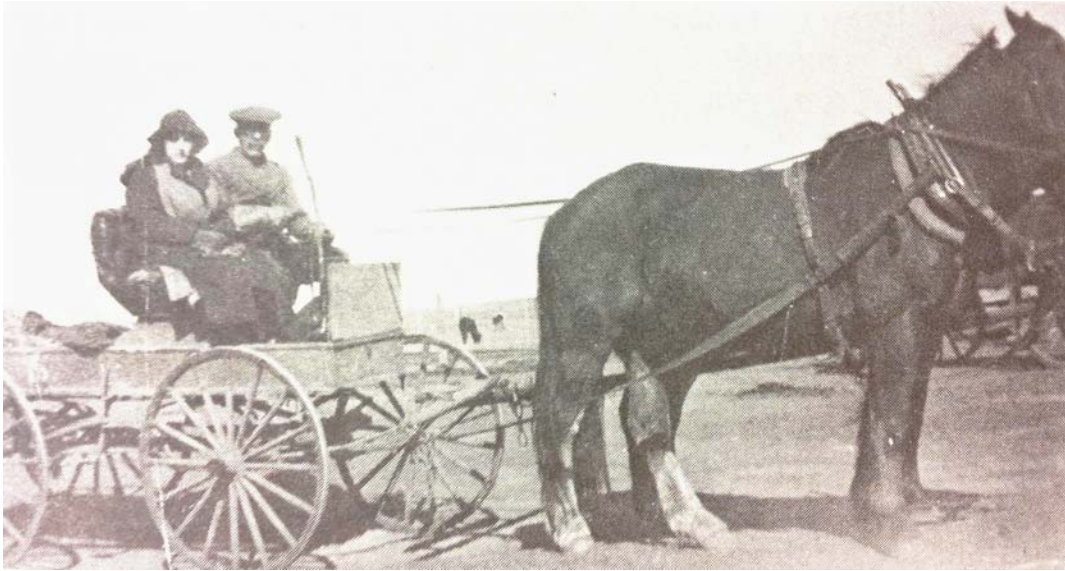
Irricana then became a retail postal outlet. As of 2014, it is in a cafe/video store. The interior layout is interesting. The café lounge, with large plush chairs, has the postal counter along the east side and the box numbers form the south wall. Customers can pick up their mail and then take three steps to a comfortable chair to read it. Would that other postal outlets were as comfortable! The postmark of this outlet is shown below. The outlet is shown on the next page.





Kersey.

This was a farmhouse post office west of Beiseker in the area of the CPR colonization scheme. The area was settled by British immigrants and was known as the English Colony, although the majority of settlers in it were not English. The post office name is after a village in Suffolk, England [4]. Thomas Howden was the postmaster when it opened on 1912-10-01 until his death in 1931. The Howdens were from Scotland and had come to the area in 1911. At right is the proof strike of Kersey's first postmark.



The post office was supplied from Irricana every Friday, and the local residents would gather for the mail at the Howden house. At left is a photo of Thomas and his daughter Jesse on a mail run. The mail bag can be seen in the back of the wagon.

His widow Catherine Annie took over from her husband after his death and served until 1937-12-31 as postmaster. The post office was then closed as being of limited usefulness and the mail service converted to a rural route. Good roads eliminated any need for the post office, as by then Beiseker was only a short drive away.

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