

# **JOURNAL OF ALBERTA POSTAL HISTORY**

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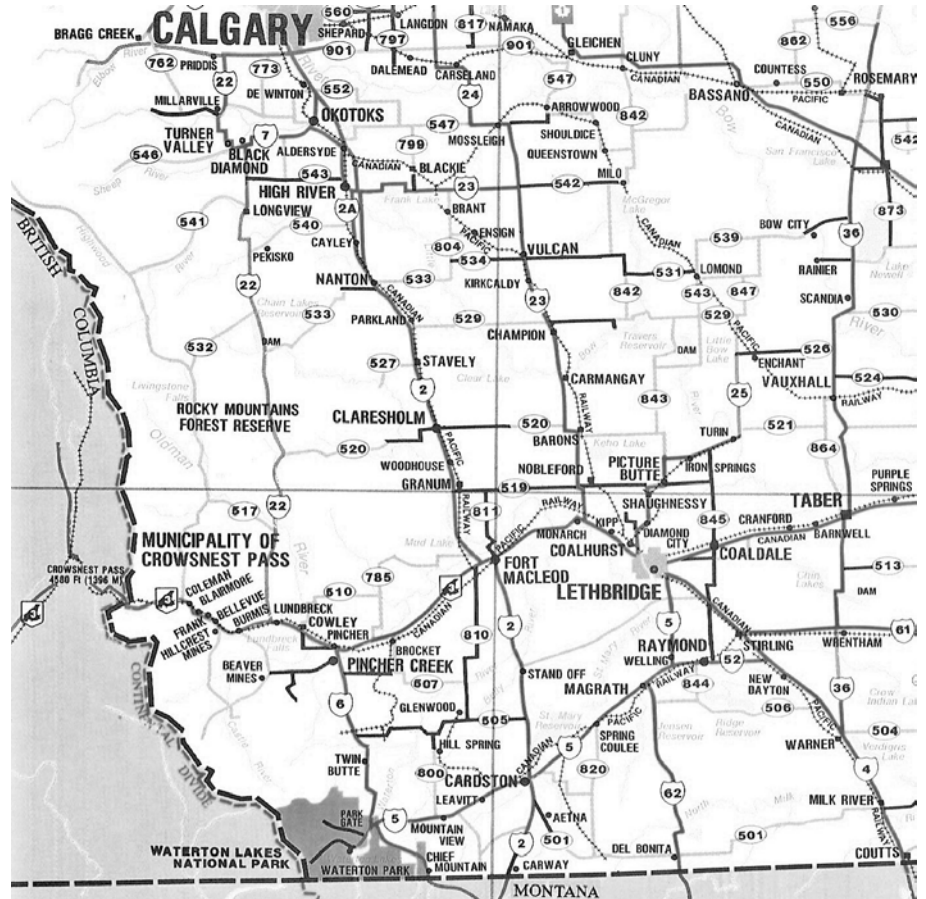
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# POSTAL HISTORY OF ALBERTA: SOUTHWEST MOUNTAINS

by Dale Speirs

This installment deals with the myriad ranch house post offices and a few towns of the southwestern mountains of Alberta. This is roughly defined as that portion of the province between Highway 2 and the British Columbia border, from the Montana border to the Livingstone valley, excluding the foothills and those districts covered under the Bow River area in JAPH #5.

The geography ranges from the mining villages of the Rocky Mountains to the cattle-ranching area of the foothills.



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## THE LIVINGSTONE VALLEY

In the southwest corner of Alberta, north of Crowsnest Pass, is a long linear mountain running north/south, known as the Livingstone Range. It is the easternmost mountain of the Rockies in that area. The foothills of the eastern slope elsewhere usually grade continuously from the mountains down to the first steppe of the prairies. In this area they are detached, with a wide valley in between. The detached foothills are known as the Porcupine Hills. The valley was homesteaded but the land was not right for dense settlement and most of the population eventually drifted away. Below is a photo I took from about 25 kilometres away with a telephoto lens in 2013, looking northwest from the Crowsnest Pass highway towards the Livingstone Range and into the valley. At centre-right is the southern tip of the Porcupine Hills.





but by then the valley was depopulated. The area is popular for wilderness tourism and camping, and a number of ranches remain. The valley today has no services or villages, but Highway 22 is heavily traveled because it is a shorter route from Calgary into Crowsnest Pass and British Columbia. The permanent population is minimal and if your car breaks down, you may have a long wait for help and a long expensive tow to the nearest repair garage.

There were a number of small post offices in the Livingstone valley. Some of them traded names between each other and it is a confusing mess to sort out all the places that re-used the same names at one time or another, and then took some other post office name. Postmark collectors have to be certain that the postmarks are correctly identified to location and post office opening or name change.

The Livingstone Range is a fortress-type mountain that dominates the valley and forms a solid wall along its western side. It is named after the famous African missionary David Livingstone, and its prominence naturally led to several locations in the valley being named after the mountain [1]. There was also a railroad siding in the Crowsnest Pass called Livingstone but mercifully when a post office opened there the CPR changed the name to Burmis to avoid confusion. All of the post offices in the Livingstone valley were ranch house post offices. There were never any villages in the valley.

The creeks in the valley empty into either the Oldman or Crowsnest rivers. Another name that appears in several places, with or without post offices, is North Fork. It wasn't just the post offices that had confusing names as the early cartographers were often uncertain as to what river was where in the area. What is now the Oldman River in the Livingstone valley was once considered as the North Fork River. Crowsnest River through the Crowsnest Pass was once the Middle Fork of Oldman River. Castle River, arising in Waterton National Park and flowing north, was the South Fork of the Oldman River or the Belly River, depending on the mapmaker. All three rivers merge at the south end of the Livingstone Valley, and past that junction are agreed to be the Oldman River.

## North Fork/Livingstone/Gillingham.

This post office was responsible for most of the nomenclatural confusion in the Livingstone valley. It was furthest south in the valley, quite close to the Crowsnest Pass railroad. (The highway, which parallels the railroad, did not exist at the time.) It opened on 1892-01-01 as North Fork, with F.R. Morris as the first postmaster until 1893-03-30. At right is the proof strike of its postmark.



F.A. Mead was the next postmaster until 1894-01-01, when the post office closed briefly. On 1894-05-01 it was renamed Livingstone, but it wasn't until 1895-06-01 that it actually re-opened, with Arthur William Gillingham as the postmaster. The proof strike of the postmark is shown at left.

Gillingham was an Englishman who had lived in Japan for many years and arrived in Alberta in 1890 with a Japanese wife and nine children. They moved around Alberta a bit but finally settled in the Livingstone valley where he opened a sawmill. It lost money and failed in 1896, and his wife died shortly thereafter.

He resigned the postmastership on 1897-06-10 but the post office actually shut in 1896. He went back to Japan, never to return [2]. During his tenure, the post office name was changed on 1896-03-01 from Livingstone to Gillingham, and kept the new name until its final dissolution.

The post office re-opened again on 1898-08-01, and quickly went through two postmasters in as many years, but fortunately they resisted the temptation to change the name. Gillingham it was. Another rancher, W.R. Vancortland, took over from 1900-03-01 until 1903-02-10. The final postmaster was Robert Henry Burn, who was postmaster until 1912-06-11, when the post office permanently closed. He was a Scotsman who had emigrated to eastern Canada before finally arriving in the Livingstone valley in 1889 to take up ranching. In addition to being postmaster, he was a School Board trustee, Registrar of Vital Statistics, and notary public. The reason for the post office closing was that Burn moved to nearby Lundbreck on the Crowsnest Pass line, where he became postmaster there. By then, roads had improved enough that the few remaining Gillingham area residents could reach Lundbreck just as easily as a ranch house post office.

As an aside, there was a Livingstone, NWT, post office that existed from 1877 to 1879 at what is now Swan River, Manitoba. Some postmark collectors have confused this with the Alberta Livingstone [4]. To make matters worse, the Swan River rises out of a different set of hills also known as Porcupine Hills. Tread carefully when dealing with any kind of Livingstone cover or postmark.

### Livingstone (The Other One).



Mrs. Mary G. Wilson grabbed the name Livingstone for her post office when it opened on 1896-04-01, it being closer to the mountain and Gillingham having changed the name of his post office a month earlier. This new Livingstone was further north, well into the valley on Todd Creek. At left is a postmark proof strike from the period after Alberta became a province in 1905. Wilson kept the position until 1913-12-29. John Bare was the next postmaster. He and his wife Alta homesteaded in the valley in 1901. While he was officially the postmaster, she actually did the work, running the post office in their house. Their ranch was halfway up the valley and evolved into a stopping house for residents at the north end coming or going to Lundbreck [2]. The final postmaster was L.O. Hartshorne from 1918-04-08 to 1920-07-26 when the post office closed. There were two other nearby ranch house post offices at this time, Maycroft and Tod Creek (spelled with one "d"), so this post office was redundant.

### Maycroft.

This post office was named after May Raper, the wife of the first postmaster [1]. It opened on 1909-12-15 with A.C. Raper as the first postmaster, a position he held until 1917-05-04. At right is the first postmark's proof strike. Another rancher, H. Kaye, then held the position at his house until 1920-09-03. He was succeeded by George Heaton who kept the job until 1935-02-11. Heaton was an Englishman from Birmingham, where his father operated a mint that supplied colonial Canada with some of its coins. George and his family arrived in Alberta in 1887 and settled in the Livingstone valley. His first house burned down, and he rebuilt in stone, which is the building in which the Maycroft post office came to be located during Heaton's tenure.





The photo shows the stone house qua post office [2].



Theodore Roosevelt Jones briefly succeeded Heaton for a year before the Wilson family took over. Miss Ethel Mary Wilson held the job from 1936-09-25 until 1940-07-26. Her mother Mrs. Ethel Helen Wilson took over until 1959-10-31, followed by Ethel Helen's other daughter Miss Helen Susan Wilson, who was postmaster until 1964-09-15 when the post office permanently closed [3]. Postmasterships ran in the family. Mrs. Mary G. Wilson, mother-in-law of Ethel Helen, was postmaster of nearby Livingstone from 1896 to 1913. The photo below is Maycroft as it was in 2013. The building in the centre of the photo is a community hall which serves the entire valley. There was one farmhouse out of the photo to the left which appeared to be the only occupied residence in the area.



## Olin Creek/North Fork.

The post office opened under the name of the adjacent creek, which in turn was named after Bill Olin, the first rancher in the area. He was formerly a bison hunter and lived a varied and riotous life. In 1906, while living along the creek, he died after a drinking binge [1]. The post office opened on 1911-09-01 as Olin Creek, with the postmark proof strike shown at right.



The first postmaster was John Samuel Hewitt, who was not content with the name and changed it on 1912-05-01 to North Fork, which it remained for the rest of its life. At left is the proof strike of the second version of a North Fork postmark, not to be confused with the earlier incarnation.

Hewitt put in 32 years as postmaster, finally retiring on 1943-08-26. He is shown on the next page while on a mail run, date unknown (taken from reference 2). His son Bob couriered the mail between North Fork and nearby Heath Creek post office, while John carried the mails between North Fork and Cowley, located at the mouth of the valley on the Crownsnest Pass railway. Both men also carried small amounts of groceries and dry goods to sell to other ranchers along the way, and accepted paying passengers. At the ranch house, mail day for North Fork was Fridays, which brought in the neighbours for socializing while they waited for their letters [2].

After Hewitt retired, his daughter-in-law Susan (married to John's son Edward) took over the post office until 1948-06-11. It then changed locations to the Dejax ranch, with Mrs. Annie Ellen Dejax the final postmaster until 1962-11-01, when depopulation forced closure of the post office and conversion to a rural mail route.



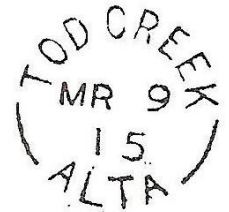
### Heath Creek.



The first homesteaders along this creek were William H. Heath and his family, and the post office took the name of the creek when it opened [1]. This is the next creek north of Olin Creek, both of which empty into the Oldman River. The postmark proof strike is shown at left. The only postmaster was Claude E.D. Lowe from 1915-08-20 to the closure on 1926-10-31, when he left the valley [2]. Thereafter mail service was to North Fork [3]. With only one or two families left to receive mail, it was pointless to have a post office.

### Tod Creek.

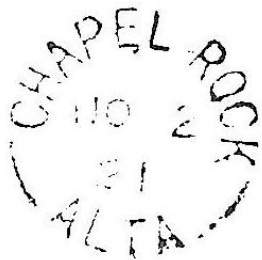
The creek was named after the first settler on its banks, William Todd. The creek name is correctly spelled on maps with two “d”s, but the post office always operated under a spelling error that was never corrected [1]. At right is the postmark proof strike with the spelling error. The post office opened on 1915-04-01 with William Roberts as the first postmaster. Mail distribution was from Lundbreck. Wilber S. Pharis took over the post office on 1919-10-27 but only lasted a few months until 1920-04-28. He was succeeded by Philip Badot, who stayed four years in the position. Mrs. C.V. Raybourne took the job on 1924-09-23 until 1930-11-27, when her husband Clarence assumed the postmastership for a brief period until 1931-04-06. From there the post office went back to the Pharis ranch, where Wilber’s wife Nellie Ann Pharis held it until 1953-03-14. Her son Hilton Roy Pharis then became the final postmaster until the post office closed permanently on 1964-09-15 and became a rural route out of Lundbreck [3].



## Chapel Rock.

There is a 1,600-metre high butte in this area, which some people fancied looked like a church and which gave the post office its name. At right is a photo of it taken by me in 2013. I looked at it from many angles and couldn't see the resemblance but maybe I'm not religious enough. It is a navigational landmark in the area because the surrounding foothills are covered by grass or trees, while Chapel Rock stands out because it has the only exposed bedrock. The locality was originally known as Chapel Butte, but by the time the post office opened the residents were calling it Chapel Rock.





Chapel Rock was the last post office to open in the valley, on 1921-12-01 with Alfred McNeill as the first postmaster. At left is the postmark proof strike. On 1924-04-18 it moved to the ranch of William J. Bort, who died in office on 1939-07-16. During his tenure, the house and post office burned down on 1935-11-26, with everything a complete loss. He was succeeded by his son Ladislav Bort, who held the position until 1945-05-15 when the post office permanently closed [3]. Thereafter mail service was out of Lundbreck. When I went through the area in 2013, there was only one occupied ranch house.

### **Summary.**

When the Livingstone Valley was first homesteaded, like many other areas in western Canada it was over-colonized, with too many settlers for what the land could support. The ranch house post offices in the south end of the Livingstone Valley were done in more by good roads connecting to the Crowsnest Pass than by depopulation, but the northern half of the valley simply could not support an agricultural community dense enough to justify post offices. The construction of a paved highway down the centre of the valley in the 1970s meant that rural mail delivery was faster and easier than running a post office could ever be. There are a few ranches left and a small provincial park, but no villages, not even a seasonal one for the tourist trade. The combination of depopulation and good roads finished off the post offices of the valley.

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- 2] New Horizons Board of Pincher Creek (1974) PRAIRIE GRASS TO MOUNTAIN PASS. Published by Pincher Creek Historical Society, Alberta. Pages 321, 498, 509, 547, 555, 573 to 574, and 590 to 593.
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## CROWSNEST PASS

The Crowsnest Pass is the southernmost pass of the Canadian Rockies, connecting southwestern Alberta with southeastern British Columbia. Crowsnest Mountain is a conspicuous sight in the pass, not because it is higher than the other mountains but because it stands alone in an open area, while the other mountains are crowded together in jumbled ranges.



At left is a 1909 real-photo postcard showing the mountain. There has never been any consistency in spelling the name of the pass and its lake, river, and mountain which also have the same name. I will use the Crowsnest spelling which is what the Canadian Geographical Board prefers, but the name is frequently seen as Crows Nest, or Crow's Nest. The origin of the name has also been muddled. The Siksika, Piikani, and Cree tribal names referred to the mountain in the sense of the bird, but it happened that in 1852 a raiding party of Crow Indians from Montana was ambushed in the pass by the Siksika and wiped out. This was



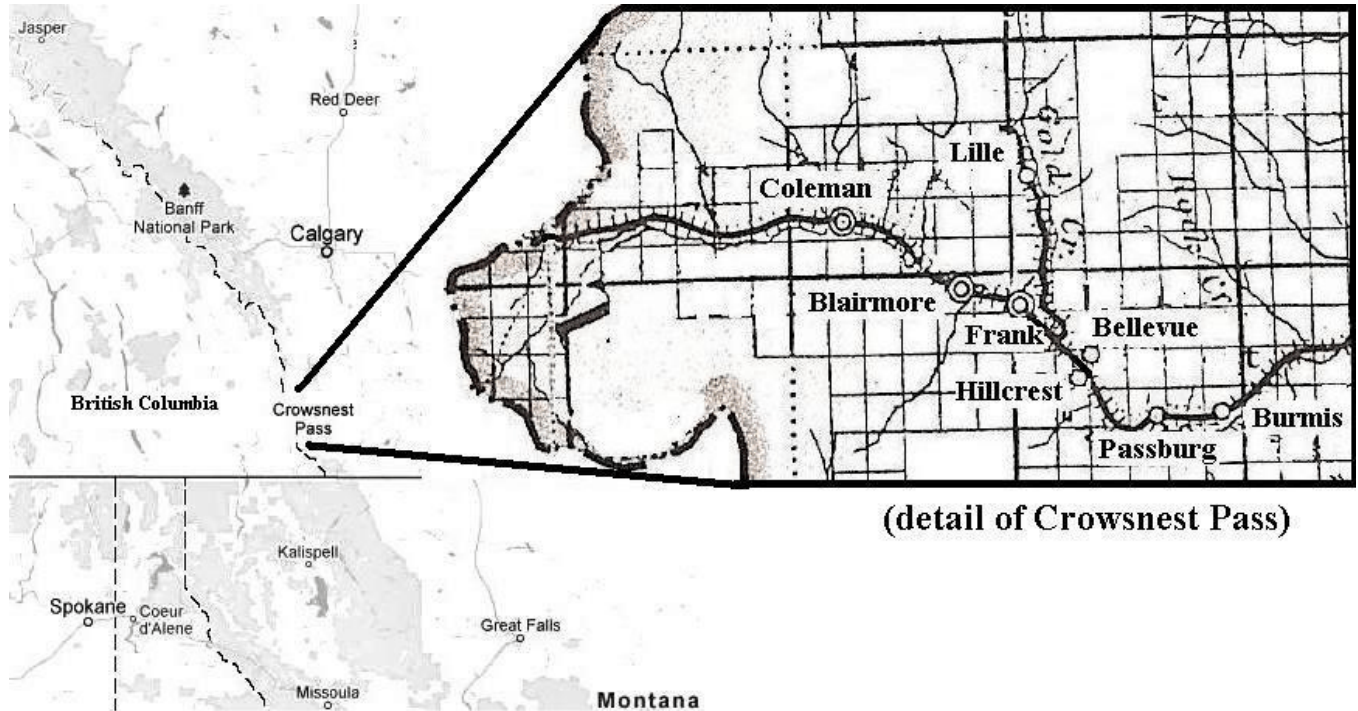
commonly said by pioneers to be the origin of the name, but that was based on the English name for that tribe. The three Canadian tribes had different names for the Montana tribe that were distinct from their name for the bird, so the etymology is derived from either the mountain looking like a crow's nest or an actual nest of the bird somewhere along the pass [1].

The pass straddles the border and goes as far west as Fernie, British Columbia. The political boundary between the two provinces is the continental divide, and the history of the British Columbian side was disconnected for geographical and political reasons. There was a post office called Crowsnest on the west side of the border just inside British Columbia. The valley is quite narrow in places and several lakes along its length filled the width, forcing early travelers to hike over a ridge on the north side to get past them. The railroad and highway both follow along the banks of the Crowsnest River so closely that a map of one of them is essentially a map of the other two. Later, blasting and infilling allowed the construction of a railroad and highway around the edges of the lakes.

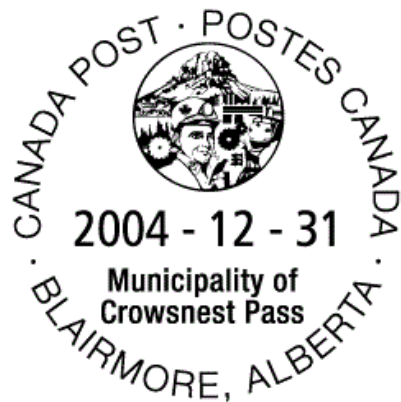
The earliest settlers and explorers noticed the abundant coal deposits, as a result of which the pass became a string of mining villages. Due to the large proportion of single men in the population, Crowsnest Pass developed a reputation as a wild and violent area. The Mounties and clergy were perpetually dealing with speakeasies, brothels, and gambling houses, and several constables died in the line of duty. In 1903, the Frank Slide occurred when the north face of Turtle Mountain fell into the pass, burying at least 76 people in the village of Frank, about which more later. Coal mine explosions were not uncommon, killing many miners over the years. Labour strikes were often long and bitter. The coal industry died in the 1960s and today the valley's economy is a shadow of its former self. The major industry is now tourism.

The coal industry began declining during the Great Depression and was terminally ill by the 1960s. Because the villages and hamlets were all within riding or walking distance of each other or the railway, it was common for a settlement in the pass to persist for decades after its mine closed, as the miners would simply commute to work at a new mine by train or walking. Elsewhere in western Canada in the pioneer days, tiny post offices were established in large numbers due to bad roads, and then died out as good roads appeared and made it easier to get mail via rural free delivery or shop elsewhere. In Crowsnest Pass, bad roads were not a major problem because of the mainline railway through the narrow valley. Many Crowsnest Pass settlements and post offices existed long after any economic rationale for their existence had disappeared.

This section only discusses villages that had a post office but there were numerous hamlets and populated place names too tiny to mention. Below is a 1922 map (inset on larger map) modified to show the postal villages in the Crowsnest Pass. The small squares are one mile on a side. Coleman, Blairmore, Bellevue, and Hillcrest Mines still have their post offices. Frank is still extant but no longer has a post office. Lille, Passburg, and Burmis are extinct mining villages, with little or no trace of them left beyond a few ruins here and there.



(detail of Crowsnest Pass)



In 1979, the Alberta provincial government merged every settlement in the pass, with or without a post office, into one new long municipality called Crowsnest Pass. Local identity dies hard though, and the post offices of the merged municipality are still known by their previous names. Canada Post gave them all identical pictorial postmarks, with only different post office names, as seen at left. Crowsnest Mountain can be seen in the background of these postmarks.

## Blairmore.

Blairmore is in the middle of the Alberta section of the Crowsnest Pass and had the first post office, which opened on 1899-09-01 with Henry Edward Lyon as postmaster. His name was often mis-spelled as Lyons, including on the Post Offices and Postmasters Website [2]. Blairmore began as a railroad siding in 1898 called Tenth Siding, then briefly The Springs before it was named in honour of A.G. Blair, the federal Minister of Railways. Lyon was the CPR station agent, and Felix Montalbetti was the section foreman. Both claimed squatter's rights to the townsite and the litigation dragged through the courts until 1907. As a result, development of the village was slow, since no one wanted to buy lots if the title wasn't clear.

The post office was not in the railway station but in a log building directly across from the station, and shared quarters with Lyon's general store. He was also Mayor, a magistrate, school board trustee, and the first person in the pass to own a motor car. Lyon Creek, which flows through the centre of Blairmore, is named after him. At right is a proof strike of the Blairmore duplex postmark. When the Frank Slide occurred in 1903, he and his post office assistant James Harrington Farmer were the first outside rescuers on the scene. Farmer had previously been a bank manager in Frank. The store was closed down in 1911 after Lyon's wife died, leaving him with ten children, and the post office moved to the north side of the village to share a building with a real estate agency that Lyon owned [3]. In 1914, someone broke into the building and set it on fire. The post office and its mails were a complete loss. It was re-established in a building across the street where it remained for the rest of Lyon's term as postmaster.



Lyon was officially postmaster until 1919-06-10, but in actual fact he had joined the army in 1916 and gone off to war. His assistant James Farmer ran the post office and became official postmaster on 1919-09-02. On the next page is a 1922 postal card postmarked during Farmer's tenure. During his time as postmaster, Farmer served seven years as Mayor of Blairmore from 1926. He remained as postmaster until 1948-01-01, but was seriously ill during his later years. His assistant Harold McPhail ran the office although he was never an official postmaster [4].

CANADA



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FOREST FIRES



THE ADDRESS TO BE WRITTEN ON THIS SIDE

RECEIVED  
JUN 5 1922  
RECEIVED



Charles Want, Esq.,  
~~Blairmore - Alberta.~~

*nrh [signature]*

In 1948 the Blairmore post office became a civil service position. Robert McDougall Bannan was the third postmaster of Blairmore. During his tenure the post office moved in July 1955 into the Federal Building as the government consolidated all its services. Bannan stayed until 1958-06-05, when Joseph Angelo Semenzin became acting postmaster. John Joseph Stephen Yanoto became official postmaster on 1959-04-01, and Semenzin returned to his previous duties, eventually putting in more than three decades with the post office. Thereafter followed a string of civil service postmasters.

### **Frank.**

Frank is located at the base of Turtle Mountain where Gold Creek flows into Crowsnest River. Like the other settlements in the pass it was a coal mining village. Frank's history was forever shaped in 1903 by one of the largest landslides in world history. In the pre-dawn hours of April 29th, at 04h10, the north top of Turtle Mountain leaned out over the valley and broke off directly above the coal mine. A thick slab of limestone 400 metres high (the height of the Twin Towers), 1.2 km wide, and 150 metres thick fell through the air, hit the base of the mountain, shattered, slid across the valley floor for three kilometres, and went up the far side, covering 1,500 hectares. The eastern part of Frank, mostly residential, was buried thirty metres deep in places. The known death toll is 76, but there was a construction camp completely buried which did not have a record of all who were living there, so the probable number is higher. In addition, many workers camped out independently on the valley floor, and their names and stories will never be known. The commercial side of the village and other residences on the west side of Gold Creek were not affected, other than a blast of air from the landslide shaking all the buildings and causing some minor damage to the structures. The blast of air also caused panic among the sleeping inhabitants who were physically tossed out of their beds and who thought the End Times had come [5].

On the next page is a real-photo postcard taken a few months after the landslide. The area still looks much the same today. The image shows where the residential district once was. The post office was on the far side of the rockfall, to the right outside the photo.



FRANK SLIDE 1903.

7827

The Frank post office opened on 1901-08-01 with S.W. Gebo (originally Gibeau) as the first postmaster. Gebo had come out west the year before exploring for coal and found a good seam at the base of Turtle Mountain. Not having sufficient capital to develop the mine, he contacted A.L. Frank of Montana, who came up north and bought out Gebo for \$30,000, which was a fortune in those days. Mine development commenced immediately and the two men are considered the founders of the village. Gebo was elected the first mayor of Frank, and after two terms was succeeded by J.H. Farmer from Blairmore. Because of his many other duties, Gebo resigned as postmaster on 1901-12-02, only a few months after taking on the job. Frank was on the rail line, so it always received its mail directly.

J.E. Woods then took over as postmaster in a general store until 1904-11-22. It was on his watch that the Frank Slide occurred. The post office was outside the rockfall zone. The landslide buried the railroad, so for several months until a new track was built over the rubble, the local Mounties met the trains on either side and carried the mails on horseback across the disaster zone. Since the mails were never completely stopped but only briefly delayed a few hours, there were no markings on any covers. I would refuse to buy any Crowsnest cover with a marking purporting to be mail delayed because of the landslide. Frank was on the western edge of the landslide, the interior side of the pass, and therefore was cut off until the replacement rail line was built. Train passengers had to take a very bumpy ride by stagecoach over the debris.

A.V. Lang was the next postmaster after Wood, serving until 1910-11-09, keeping it in the store. James Maylor followed as postmaster until 1912-11-27. Isaac Wilson then became the first long-serving postmaster, until his death on 1928-12-28. After a placeholder came and went, Miss Juanita Garrison served from 1929-01-03 until her father Elmer settled into the job on 1932-02-29. He served until 1950-12-01. During this time the post office moved into a standalone building. On the next page is an airmail cover sent to Frank during Juanita's tenure; the Frank backstamp is shown at lower left. There was no airmail service to Crowsnest Pass at that time (and very little anywhere else in western Canada beyond experimental flights), so the stamp would have only paid for the service within the USA.





**VIA AIR MAIL**

*R. F. Karlner,  
Frank, Alberta,  
Canada.*



backstamp

Frederick George Pryor succeeded Garrison and stayed until 1958-03-08. After him came Frank Svoboda, who moved the post office to a new lot, and held the postmastership until 1960-05-21. Svoboda was not a man to be bound by rules, and occasionally closed the post office so he could go fishing. He would leave a sign on the door telling customers the mail would be distributed the next day. The final postmaster of Frank was Gladys Wyatts, who kept the position until the post office closed on 1969-08-27. Thereafter mail service and box numbers were out of Blairmore [3].

Over time, the village migrated further west away from the landslide. The post office was unscathed but as happened with many other businesses, the building was later moved north of the railway line to a safer location. The coal mine re-started and continued to operate until 1917 when a detailed geological report said it was further destabilizing the mountain. It shut down and eliminated the last vestige of industry in the village [5]. The village continued to exist though, because it was within walking or riding distance of other mines, so many of the miners saw no reason to move house. The post office therefore persisted for five decades after its original reason for creation was gone. The landslide became a tourist attraction, and today there is an interpretive centre on the highway where it crosses the rockfall.

### **Coleman.**



Coleman began as a planned community by the International Coal and Coke Co. and was incorporated in 1903. The company wanted a respectable town for married miners and their families, so title deeds prohibited the sale of liquor and imposed other restrictions to prevent the problems that other mining towns in the pass had with their rootless populations. It was originally known as McGillivray Hill or Paulson's Camp, but when formally established was named after Coleman Flumerfelt, the daughter of the townsite manager. Initially the Canadian Post Office objected to the name because there were already several Coleman post offices across Canada, but they relented. The post office opened on 1904-05-01 with M. McKay as the first postmaster. The post office burned down in 1905 and McKay resigned on 1905-04-14 as postmaster. The post office then moved three times over the next six years as three different postmasters came and went. At left is a proof strike of one of the postmarks.

By 1908, the Coleman post office was fifth in Alberta in terms of money orders issued although its population was not fifth in the province. The inhabitants of Coleman were mostly immigrants, many of whom sent money to relatives elsewhere [3].

Frank George Graham became a long-serving postmaster from 1913-04-02 until his death on 1937-08-21. He had originally settled in Frank, where the family was just outside the landslide zone, which shook them emotionally as well as physically. Coleman, just being born about then, seemed safer. The Grahams operated a general store in Coleman from December 1903 onward. When they took over the post office a decade later, his wife Mary became the assistant behind the counter until her death in 1929. Their son Frank Harold Graham then took over the store and post office from 1937-08-21 until his retirement on 1961-10-31. After the Grahams gave up the post office, Melville Alexander Cornett became postmaster until 1976. He was born and raised in the pass, served in World War Two, then worked in the coal mines before becoming postmaster. The post office went through two more postmasters before closing on 1991-10-10 and being replaced by a retail postal outlet. The current outlet was in a drugstore, Remedy's Rx, as of 2012.

## **Lille.**

Lille began in 1901 as French Camp, a mining hamlet established by the Societe Anonyme du Chemin de fer Houiller de Canada, a group of French investors led by J.J. Fleutot. (His daughter was the one who named Bellevue.) It was located at the top of Gold Creek, north of Frank, on an extremely steep slope. The railroad spur built to serve it had twenty trestle bridges in ten kilometres over the meandering creek, and the grade was such that engines could only move three cars at a time. The Frank Slide destroyed the lower half of the track, and it wasn't until November of that year that a new line was built. That same year, the settlement was renamed Lille, after the French town where the owners had their headquarters. In 1910, there were 400 inhabitants in the village. By 1912, the best quality coal had run out, and combined with very high maintenance costs for the railway, the mines were no longer economical. The village was dead by 1913, and everyone and everything moved to other mines in the pass, mostly Bellevue and Blairmore [3].

The Lille post office opened on 1906-02-01, with William Price Williams as postmaster [2]. He was a Welshman who had originally gone to the Pennsylvania coal mines, then came to Canada. He worked first at Anthracite, near Banff, as a general superintendent and engineer. In the same capacity he came to Lille and subsequently Bellevue. He was very likely postmaster in title only and would have seconded the

actual duties to someone else. Below is a photo of Lille taken in 1907 and shows the post office on the righthand side. Williams gave up the postmastership on 1908-07-13 and handed it over to Frederick Matthew Thompson, who owned the general store. Thompson stayed as postmaster until 1912-08-31 when the post office permanently closed after the mines shut down. He moved the store to Blairmore. In this case, the post office and village failed to persist because they were too far from the railway mainline, not just because of the horizontal distance, but because of the very steep climb up the slope.



## Bellevue.

Bellevue was built on the eastern side of the Frank Slide to exploit coal seams just down the slope from Lille. Elsie Fleutot was visiting the Crowsnest Pass, and exclaimed "*Quelle une belle vue!*" ("What a beautiful view!") when admiring the scenery for the first time. Her father, a director of the coal mine, overheard her and named the company town thusly [6]. J.J. Fleutot opened a mine near the townsite in 1904. The village grew rapidly and a post office opened in a general store on 1907-06-15 with Thomas M. Burnett as the first postmaster. Although the official postmaster, he concentrated on the store side of the business and Nora Mitchell actually ran the post office. At right is a proof strike of the Bellevue duplex postmark.



Every village in Canada has had its Great Fire, and Bellevue was no exception. On 1917-08-28, all but three buildings of the business district were wiped out. Burnett gave up the postmastership a few months later on 1917-10-10, but that was just the official discharge date, as he abandoned the ruined store and post office immediately after the fire [3]. He didn't have the heart to start over again.

Frank Bosely was postmaster from 1917-11-22 until 1924-08-15. Watts Goodwin then became a long server from 1924-11-04 to 1950-03-14, during which time the post office became a civil service job in 1948. He was an Englishman who did a lot of roaming around the world before finally settling in the Crowsnest Pass as a Draegerman (mine rescue worker) and church choirmaster. After a brief placeholder came and went, John Daniel White took over as postmaster from 1950-08-16 until 1978-08-02. On the next page is a cover sent from Bellevue during his tenure. Since then several more civil service postmasters have held the job. The mail came via the railroad, then in the 1950s by truck.

*Bellevue United Church*

BELLEVUE, ALBERTA



*Board of Home Missions  
The United Church of Canada.  
Room 715  
85 St Clair ave E.  
Toronto "7"  
ont*

## Hillcrest Mines.

Hillcrest Mines is directly across the Crowsnest River from Bellevue and its post office opened the same day. Charles Plummer (Chippy) Hill, an Idaho man, prospected coal seams in the area in 1898 but didn't get the Hill Crest Coal and Coke Co. incorporated until 1905. Hill was the official postmaster from 1907-06-15 to 1911-05-16, but as a mine owner it is unlikely that he spent much time behind the counter and he would have delegated the job to a clerk [3].

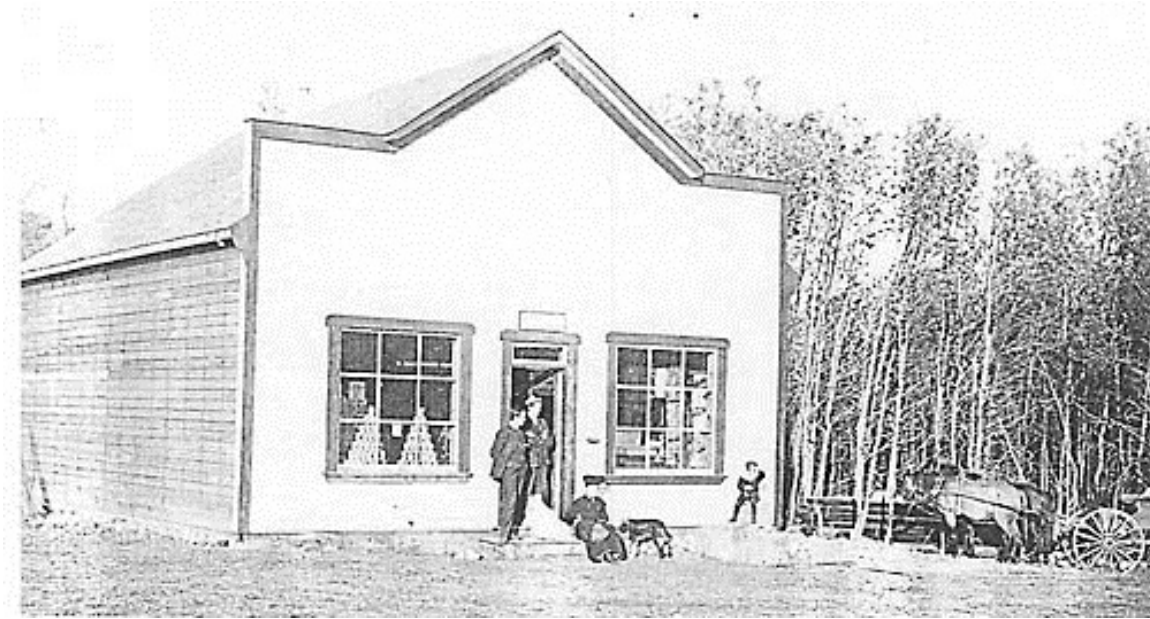


The post office then moved from the mine office into the general store of George Edward Cruikshank who held the job until 1920-05-10. At left is a proof strike of the duplex cancel used during his tenure. He had originally been a partner of Thomas Burnett across the river in Bellevue, so undoubtedly knew the postal counter. The store then changed hands four times over the next sixteen years, with the storeowners coming and going as postmasters. Fred McDougall then served from 1936-05-01 to 1955-03-20. After him were at least four more postmasters before Canada Post's privacy rules kick in. Hillcrest Mines is on the railway so mail came that way before trucks took over in the 1950s.

## Passburg.

This settlement began as a grassy hollow at the eastern end of the Crowsnest Pass where rustlers would hide their stolen cattle. They discovered that cattle were content to graze in the bottomlands without bothering to climb out of the valley (cattle are just as lazy as humans). The Mounties caught on to this and in 1883 established a post there which became known as Police Flats. Coal mine developers William Hamilton and John Kerr later arrived and prospected the seams. By this time cattle rustling had been replaced by coal mining as the major industry, and the Mounties withdrew from Police Flats. Leitch Collieries was founded in 1907 to work the mine, and the area was briefly known by that name. Prior to the opening of the post office, mail was couriered from the Frank post office by William Kerr, John's brother.

William Kerr opened a general store at the mine and became postmaster on 1908-06-01. The photo below shows him proudly posing in front of the post office when it opened for business. Mrs. Hamilton supplied the name Passburg for the new post office, a rather uninspired name referring to the Crowsnest Pass. Initially there was no mail service by train as was the case with the other post offices in the pass. Instead, mail was carried on horseback via the Hillcrest Mines post office, often by the Hamilton's young daughter Jesse. During a bitter mining strike in 1911 she was used as a courier to cross the picket lines. The miners knew her and that she regularly rode her pony to the mine to see her father, so they would give her candy and let her through, unaware the child was carrying mail and the payroll for the scabs.







A proof strike of the first postmark is at left. Kerr sold the store to J. Norman Rowell who became the new postmaster on 1910-05-05. Once a spur line to the mine was built, mail arrived via a catch post system. Rowell served as postmaster until being dismissed for political partisanship on 1914-08-17. This is puzzling because while a number of postmasters in Alberta were removed from office after the 1911 federal election when the Tories came to power, the date is a rather late one. It was when the opening shots of World War One were being fired. Leitch Collieries, with which the Kerrs were associated, had just won a coking coal contract with some Balkan nations. The contract was repudiated by the Balkaners when the war started, and Leitch Collieries was left without markets for its coal. The mine soon shut down and Passburg never recovered. The Rowells didn't stay long and moved to Wapella, Saskatchewan [3].

John Kerr then became the final postmaster, serving until his retirement on 1938-01-24. He died shortly after, and so did the post office as no one else was interested in running a general store in the moribund village. Today only a few ruins are left where the village once was. Passburg was a more difficult commute to the remaining coal mines because it was on a discontinued spur line, not the main line.

### **Burmis.**

Coal was found in the Burmis area circa 1900 but it was a decade before any serious development began. The CPR built a flag stop called Livingstone after a nearby mountain range. When the time came to establish a post office, that name was already in use elsewhere so Burmis was created. It is a combination of the names of two pioneer ranchers in the area, Robert H. Burns and Jack Kemmis. The Burmis post office opened on 1910-10-01 with E.A. Westfall as postmaster, but he didn't even last out the month in that capacity, leaving on the 24th. At right is the proof strike of the first postmark.



A second try began a few months later with D.D. Dewey becoming postmaster on 1911-01-01. He was succeeded by J.C. Chester on 1911-09-09 who served until 1916-10-27. Storekeeper W.A. Brown then became postmaster until he sold the store on 1920-11-23 to James H. Eddy who took on the position. He resigned as postmaster on 1932-08-02 and moved to British Columbia where he took up a fruit orchard.

The post office then separated from the Eddy store, which continued to be operated by his son James Jr, and Allan McIsaac became the longest serving postmaster of Burmis from 1932-10-31 until his death on 1957-09-12. His widow Mary Catherine McIsaac carried on the post office until 1964-10-04. Both the village and the post office slowly dwindled away. First the mine ran out of coal and closed. Since all the villages in the pass were so close to each other, this did not mean immediate abandonment because miners would commute down the rail line to other mines. The lumbering industry started up at Burmis in 1936 and operated until 1960, until the best trees were gone [3]. Three more postmasters came and went before the post office permanently closed on 1968-04-28. Only ruins exist today.

### **Epilogue.**

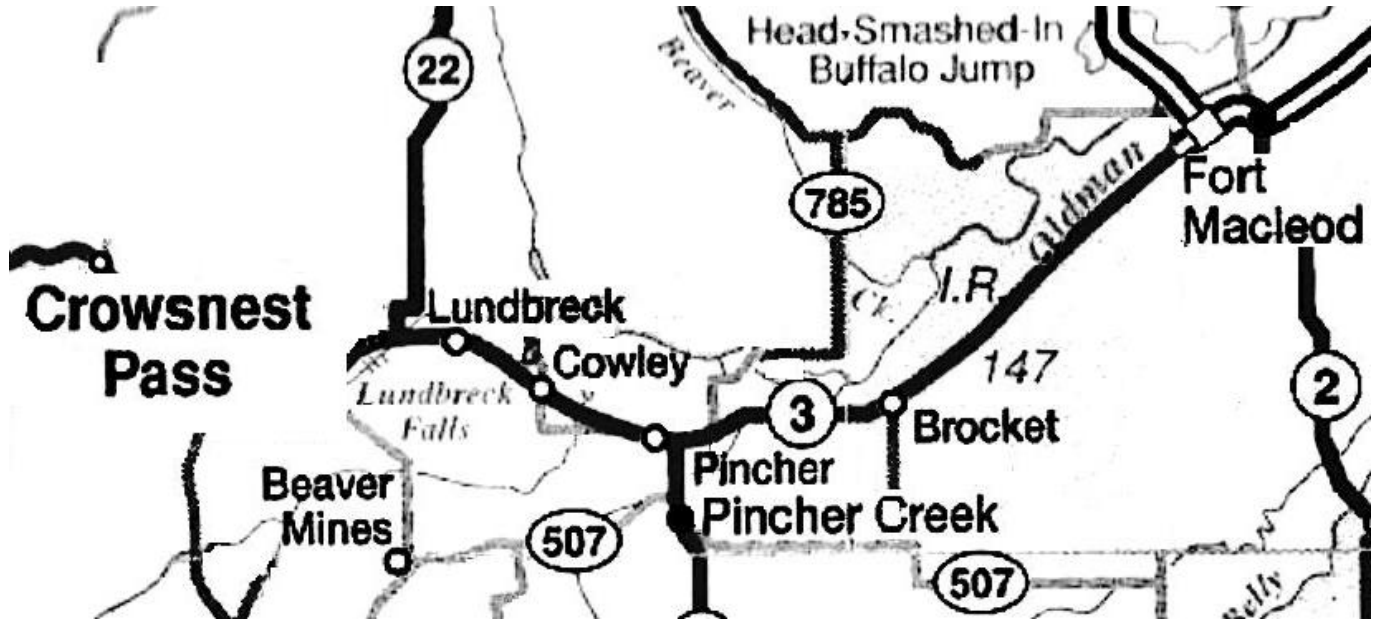
Unlike elsewhere in rural Alberta where good roads killed off many rural villages and post offices [7], the settlements of Crowsnest Pass often lingered for decades. Since the vast majority of traffic through the pass in the early days was via the main line or a few spur lines of the railway, the residents of the valley were not as troubled by bad roads. If a coal mine closed, it did not destroy the village immediately as would have happened out on the prairies or with other single-industry company towns. With easy commuting by train or just walking, miners saw no reason to uproot themselves just because they had to work a few kilometres down the valley. Thus many post offices of Crowsnest Pass persisted on well past their reason for creation.

## References.

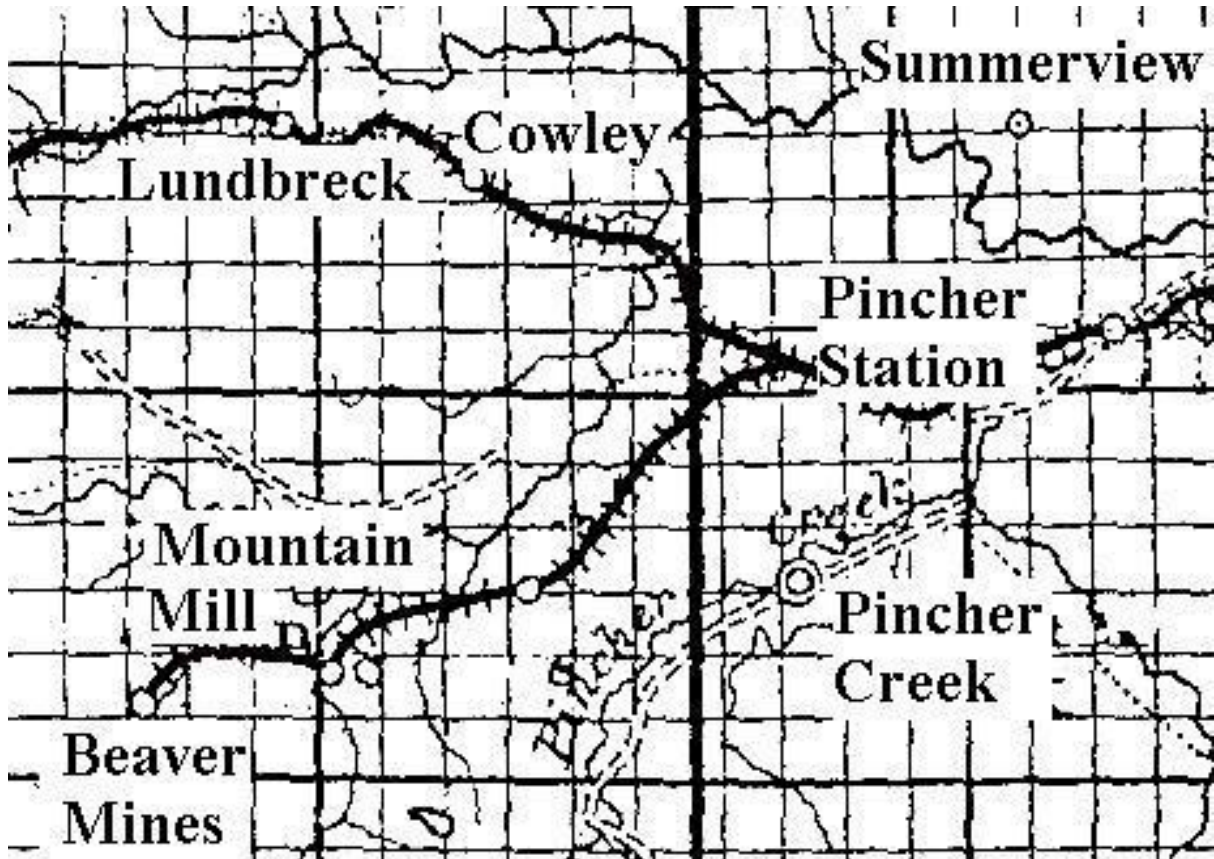
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## THE PINCHER CREEK DISTRICT

The Pincher Creek district is just outside the Crowsnest Pass in southwestern Alberta. The district is in the Rocky Mountain foothills, with large wooded areas. The earliest settlers were ranchers, miners, and lumbermen. Since the Crowsnest Pass is a major transportation route into British Columbia, several towns have prospered more than they might have further east out on the prairies. In recent years, wind energy has also kept the local economy alive. Below is a modern map of the Crowsnest Pass and Pincher Creek districts.



The map below is based on a 1922 map and shows the post offices dead and alive of the Pincher Creek area. The small squares are a mile on a side.



## The Wind.



Weather systems generally flow from west to east in southern Alberta. The Crowsnest Pass is unusual among most Rocky Mountain passes in that it is at level ground and does not require a climb up and over, so the winds coming out of the pass reach full strength.

My experience in driving the area, only slightly exaggerated, is that my car burned a quarter-tank of gasoline heading west into the pass and about two drops coming back out eastbound with the wind behind. Regular wind speeds of 170 km/hr are not uncommon in the district.

The area became popular in recent years for wind turbine farms. The photo on the previous page shows one of the numerous lines of wind turbines northwest of Pincher Creek in 2013. There are so many wind turbines that it has become difficult to take scenic photos without them cluttering the skyline.

The Pincher Creek post office has a pictorial postmark depicting one of the wind turbines, shown below. In 2005, a set of landscape definitives was issued by Canada Post, one of which depicted wind turbines near Pincher Creek.



## Pincher Creek.

The principal settlement of the district is Pincher Creek, with about 3,800 inhabitants in 2014. The post office name comes from an incident in 1868, before the area was systematically settled, when a group of prospectors were fording a stream. There was an accident and a pair of farrier pincers (used to trim horse hoofs) was lost in the water. In 1874, a party of North West Mounted Police (today the Royal Canadian Mounted Police) were crossing the creek during a drought and one of them found the pincers, rusted but useable [1]. In the 1880s, settlement began to speed up, and a townsite was laid out in 1882. Until 1883, mail service was via Fort Benton, Montana, and all mail departing Pincher Creek had to use American postage stamps. It was carried as a courtesy by North West Mounted Police, who used Fort Benton as a supply point.

In 1883, the CPR transcontinental railroad reached Alberta, and mail routes shifted to Medicine Hat or Calgary. That year, James H. Schofield, an ex-Mountie, opened a general store at Pincher Creek. On 1884-07-01 the post office opened with himself as postmaster [2]. Prior to him opening the post office, the Orderly Room Sergeant at the NWMP post sold postage stamps and handled both incoming and outgoing mail for Mounties and civilians alike [11]. Schofield soon took a partner, Henry Ernest (Harry) Hyde, and they built the store's business up to the point where they received and accepted an offer from the Hudson's Bay Company to buy them out. The HBC wanted one of them to stay on as storekeeper and postmaster, so they flipped a coin and Hyde won the toss. Hyde stayed on as store manager for HBC and became the second postmaster on 1890-11-01, serving until 1905. He had originally driven an ox train for the HBC between Calgary and nearby Fort Macleod [3, 4].

A brief caretaker postmaster came and went after Hyde, and then D.C. McDougall served from 1906-07-01. McDougall was succeeded by Thomas John Cumberland, who became the longest serving incumbent from 1912 to 1949. During his term, the post office became a civil service position in 1948. An example of a postmark from his tenure is shown at right, a proof strike of the duplex cancel.

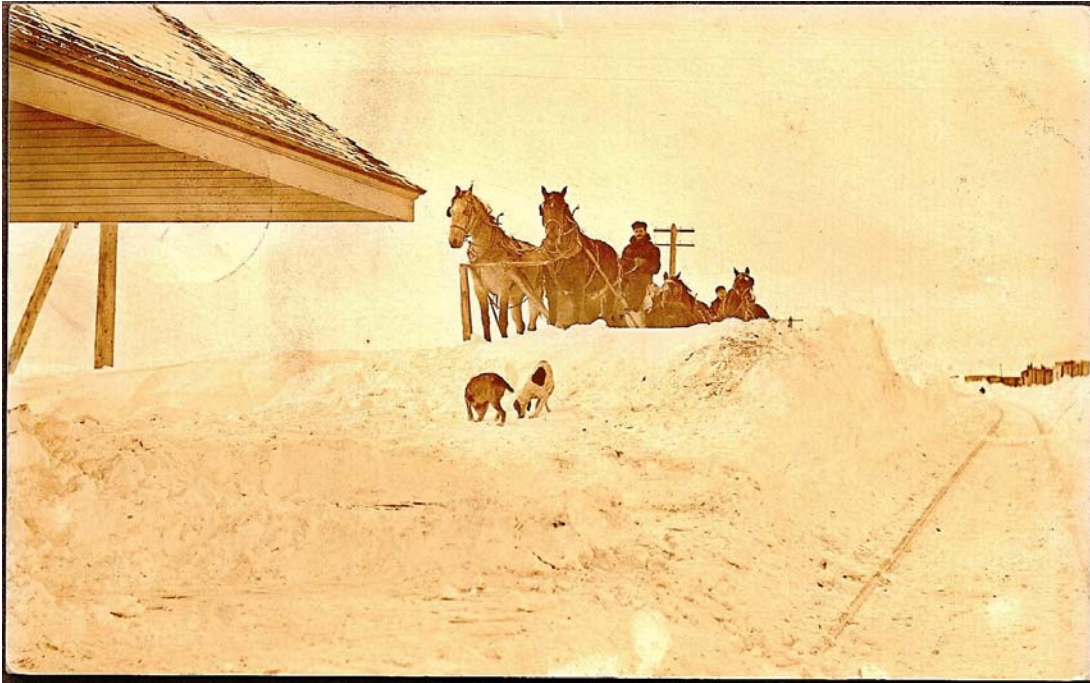




James Douglas Fraser then took over as postmaster until 1971, when he was promoted to postmaster of Yellowknife, Northwest Territories. Since then he has been followed by a succession of civil servants. In the 1960s a standalone post office was built. The photo below shows the building in 1989 and it looked much the same in 2015.



The mail for Pincher Creek came from the railway at Pincher Station, and although only a short distance it could be troublesome in winter since it was on a slope. One pioneer's daughter, reminiscing about her father Jack Kelly carrying the mails between those two post offices, mentioned that if the courier was carrying registered mail and missed the train, he was not paid no matter what the excuse was. On several occasions, the couriers would abandon a stuck sleigh or wagon and try to carry the mails on foot to make the station in time [7]. Despite the workload, the contracts were greatly valued as a source of cash money. As an example, the 1916 contract held by W.R. Dobbie (Kelly's father-in-law) paid \$686.40 for the fiscal year. That was very good money in those days of uninflated gold-backed currency [8]. Below is a real-photo postcard of Pincher Station after a February 1911 snowstorm, showing horse teams clearing the rail line and station.



## **Pincher Station.**

When the CPR built the Crowsnest Pass line, it bypassed the existing settlement of Pincher Creek in order to keep the line on relatively flat land instead of having to build extra bridges across the winding creek. A new settlement called Pincher City was established at a railroad siding three kilometres north of Pincher Creek. There was also a not unnoticed advantage in that the CPR owned the new townsite and could sell the lots to a fresh crop of settlers. It grew rapidly at first but soon leveled off, the population peaking in 1911 at 150 people. It eventually faded away into a unincorporated hamlet within the county. Even though it had the advantage of being on the railway and later the main highway, it could never out-compete the well-established Pincher Creek such a short distance away.

James W. McKnight was the first postmaster when the post office opened in his general store on 1906-08-01 under the name of Pincher. The name was modified on 1906-10-01 to Pincher Station. It was the distribution point for Pincher Creek as well as having its own mail. With regular trains on the main line, the mails were distributed three times per day. McKnight resigned in 1906 as postmaster after selling the store.

The new postmaster was W.J. Hatfield who kept the job until 1909, when he was replaced by Richard Walter Morgan. The latter had been a CPR dispatcher in various locations throughout western Canada until he resigned in 1907 and set up a general store at Pincher Station. The post office moved into Morgan's store, but he lost it in 1911 due to political partisanship when the federal government changed hands from the Liberals to the Conservatives. Morgan's replacement was Fred Pemberton, who was a Tory, and held the job until 1919.

War veteran W.W. Scott then took over until 1923, followed by Thomas W. MacKay to 1927. W. Percy Neilson became the next postmaster but died in office on 1931-12-12, and was succeeded by his widow Elizabeth, who stayed until 1935. She sold out to William Laidlaw. The cycle repeated when he died in office on 1946-10-27 and his widow Florence took over until 1951. After a brief placeholder, Edward G. Myles kept the job from 1951-09-01 to 1953. The final postmaster was Mrs. Eleanor Jean Hoedl until the post office permanently closed on 1954-04-06.

Today Pincher Station is still a hamlet but has become the de facto industrial district of Pincher Creek because it is on the highway and railroad. The two settlements are now within sight of each other, and it can be safely predicted that as Pincher Creek expands northward, it will annex Pincher Station within a decade or two. Below is a photo I took in 2013, looking southeast from a wind turbine, with Pincher Station in the foreground and, just across a few yellow canola fields, the northern suburbs of Pincher Creek. Most of Pincher Creek is hidden from view in this photo because it is down in a valley past the suburbs.



## **Mountain Mill.**

This settlement was a disastrous attempt to convert the nearby Piikani tribe to an industrial way of life by building a lumber mill and flour mill and training them as factory workers. The aboriginals had only just been settled onto Reserves, and the Mounties still had trouble keeping them there, much less anyone from Ottawa turning them into day labourers. The federal government established Mountain Mill in 1879, and in 1881 it was sold off to a lumber company owned by an Ottawa senator, and thereafter run by white men [1]. It was a typical, if well-meant, government boondoggle.

Eventually some prosperous years allowed a village to grow, and Miss Maggie E. Scobee became the first postmaster on 1899-10-01, serving until 1904. Mrs. M. McIlquham was the next postmaster until 1906, followed by Mrs. M. McGregor from 1909-08-16 to 1911-09-22. The local industry began struggling, as other lumber mills opened up throughout the Crowsnest Pass. The place became a shadow of itself and faded away. Mrs. H.R. Parsons was the final postmaster until the post office closed on 1912-07-10.

## **Beaver Mines.**

Further into the mountains from Mountain Mill was Beaver Mines. Coal extraction began in 1907 when Western Coal and Coke Co. bought a homestead from pioneer George Ballantyne. A spur line was built from the Crowsnest Pass railway and the company sold its coal to the CPR. The company lost the contract in 1912 and closed the mine. The hamlet never grew any further, but the post office managed to hang on until 1962.

M.F. Torpy was the first postmaster from 1911-12-15 until 1918. Thomas Lowery then took over the job briefly. He had previously been a wrangler for the mine, looking after its pit ponies. Reverend Gavin Hamilton, who had the Presbyterian pulpits in both Mountain Mill and Cowley, briefly took the postmaster job until 1920-08-23. He turned it over to none other than George Ballantyne, who bought a rooming house and converted the ground floor into a general store and post office. The family lived upstairs. Mail from Pincher Creek arrived three times a week thanks to the spur line.

The photo below shows the store/house/post office in 1934, with Mr. and Mrs. Ballantyne standing on the deck by the front door. Note the customers' horses at left; the truck was a rarity in those days and location [10]. Ballantyne served until his death on 1943-08-29. His daughter Mrs. Elva McClelland and her husband Sam took over the store and post office, and she was postmaster until 1945. They sold out and moved back to her father's original homestead where it all began so many years ago [3].





Three postmasters came and went in the next two years before Percy William Keeping stayed longer, from 1947 to 1955. The final postmaster was Mrs. Elizabeth A. Judd to the closing of the post office on 1962-07-31. A postmark proof strike from her era is shown at left. The hamlet has a population of about 100 circa 2015, and relies on tourism and ranching. There is now a paved highway connecting it to Pincher Creek by a 20-minute drive. It was impossible for me to get a decent photo of the hamlet because it is stretched out along a curve of the highway screened by trees and all the buildings are set back into the spruce forest.

### **Cowley.**

Cowley is at the south end of the Livingstone valley and the east end of Crowsnest Pass. It has the distinction of being pictured on both a stamp and a postal card, both as aerial views looking west to the Rocky Mountains. The next two pages show the two sides of the postal card issued in 1972. At right is a stamp issued in 1980 that depicts the same aerial view but taken at a different time. As is obvious from the views, Cowley is an agricultural village, with a bit of industry from lumbering and petroleum.



Canada Post Office Postes canadiennes  
Pre-stamped postcard Carte postale timbrée



**Canada** Postes Postage **8**

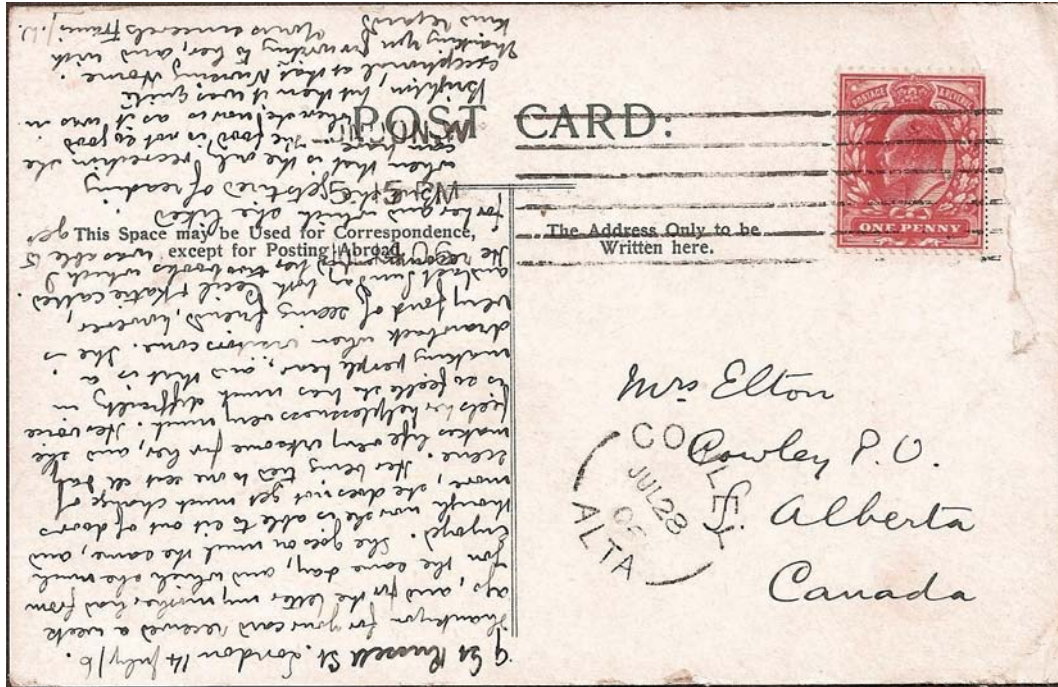
Strip Farming in the Rocky Mountain Foothills — Alta.  
Labour par planches au pied des montagnes Rocheuses (Alb.)

2 AB—1





Cowley was originally known as French Flat because the earliest settlers were Quebecois. The largest landowner in that area was F.W. Godsall, a rancher. When the railroad came through and a siding was built, Godsall was given the honour of deciding the post office name. He created the name from "cow" and "ley" (pasture), taking his text from the elegy by Thomas Gray: "*The lowing herds wind slowly o'er the lea*". It was a familiar sight in the area to see the herds of rangeland cattle ambling down to the watering holes [4]. James Erskine Davison was the first postmaster. He was a Nova Scotian who had come out west in 1898. He built a general store with a counter for the post office and served as postmaster from 1900-04-01 until 1907. At first he lived in the back of the post office section but later built a separate house [3]. Below is a postcard mailed from England through his office in 1906.



The next store owner was Donald R. McIvor who served as postmaster until 1912, when he was dismissed from office. After the 1911 federal election, when the government changed hands, hundreds of postmasters across the country were booted out, since at that time the office was a political favour position. The following postmaster, Matthew Alger Murphy, evidently voted the right way. He was also the longest serving, staying four decades in the job until 1952. He had previously been a CPR man, initially as a telegraph operator and then as a station agent. He had come to Cowley in 1902 with the railway.



Mrs. Marjorie Haugen was the next postmaster, holding the position until 1956. She was followed by Mrs. Edith Dean Evans who kept the job until 1961. Mrs. Alice M. Sapeta was next. She was Alice Clinton when she first succeeded to the job but a month later married. The postmastership has changed hands since but Canada Post privacy rules cut off the list. During the subsequent years the post office moved into the village hall. At left is a 1989 photo of the post office, still located in the same building in 2015.

## Lundbreck.



Lundbreck is closest to the Crowsnest Pass and is considered to be the eastern boundary of the pass. Near the village are the Lundbreck Falls of the Crowsnest River, a popular tourist attraction which look much like the Niagara Falls except they are only ten metres high.

At left are the falls in 2013, with one of the ubiquitous wind turbines peeking over the horizon.

The settlement began as a coal mining village and the name is derived from the mine owners Lund and Breckenridge. The post office opened in the Rogers Brothers general store on 1906-04-01, with H.H. Rogers as the first postmaster. He gave up the job in 1910, and another storekeeper named A.H. Knight took over until 1912-04-09. Knight had originally operated a general store in Cowley, but after the Great Flood of 1906 had moved to higher ground in Lundbreck [3]. (Every Canadian settlement has a Great Flood, Great Fire, and Great Blizzard.)



The next postmaster was Robert Henry Burn, who had come from Scotland and homesteaded near Pincher Creek. Immediately prior to taking on the Lundbreck postmastership in 1912, he had been postmaster at nearby Livingstone, which, however, is outside the Pincher Creek district and whose story has been told elsewhere [13]. At left is a postmark proof strike from his tenure. Burn didn't stay in the Lundbreck position long, resigning in 1913.

There was then a steady turnover of postmasters every two years or so, until James T. Walters became postmaster on 1920-08-15. He and his wife Violet were originally from the Pincher Creek area but had lived in various places throughout Alberta before finally returning to the ancestral ranch [3]. He served until his death on 1953-05-11, when his widow took over the job and stayed until her retirement in. After a placeholder came and went, Stanley Bialkowski was postmaster from 1960 until 1970. Mrs. Nellie Morden then served for eight months before Mrs. Jessie McCulloch took on the job on 1971-01-04.

The final postmaster was D. Hudson before the post office closed on 1990-11-07 and was replaced by a retail postal outlet, which it has been ever since [6]. On the next page is a photo that shows the post office in 1989 a year before it closed. The woman standing in front of it is the author's mother, the late Betty Speirs.



The retail outlet in 2014, shown below, is in a combination general store and ice-cream parlor. There is a cooler in front of the postal counter, so to hand an envelope over or receive a parcel requires a very long stretch!



## Summerview.



This location was north-northeast of Pincher Station, located on the southern end of the Porcupine Hills. It got its name because it had both southern exposure to the sun and was sheltered by the hills from north winds [9]. All the postmasters ran the office out of their ranch houses. The first postmaster was L.A. Langton when the office opened on 1904-04-01, but he stayed only a few months. The post office was then shuttered until Charles Smith re-opened it in January 1907. At left is the postmark proof strike from his tenure. He died in July 1908 and was replaced by Thomas Hare, who only lasted to his death on 1909-09-26. Two short-term postmasters came and went until E.J. Scott settled in from 1913 to 1919. The post office rolled over twice more before Mrs. Emily Rebecca Watson became the final postmaster from 1927 until the final closing on 1933-07-11. During its tenure the post office moved around a bit from one homesteader's house to another but stayed in the same general area.

## The Peigan Reserve.

Brocket is the only post office on the Peigan Reserve northeast of Pincher Creek, which today has a population of about 1,500 Piikani. It was established in 1900 on the Crowsnest Pass rail line and was named after Brocket Hall, Hatfield, England, where a CPR director came from [9]. The Piikani population was widely scattered across the Reserve, and not until the 1950s did tribe members begin moving into Brocket [12]. They preferred to shop in Pincher Creek where there was better selection and lower prices than the general store in Brocket, so probably most of the mail would have gone out through the Pincher Creek post office.

The Reserve had a hamlet called Peigan which never had a post office, which may be a confusing point for postmark collectors because there was a different post office in Alberta called Peigan. It was located south of Medicine Hat, nowhere near the Reserve, and later changed its name to Ranchville [2]. The Brocket post office opened on 1908-05-15 with F.G. Leonard as the first postmaster. In 1910, Mathilda Harrad took over as postmaster. She and her husband Charles were English immigrants who lived in a variety of places. She resigned the post office on 1920-07-28 when the two of them moved to Fernie, British Columbia [3].



W.C. Miller was the next postmaster until 1934. Bottom left is a proof strike of a registration postmark made during his tenure. He was succeeded by Mrs. Winnifred Edith Legge, who became the longest serving postmaster until 1969-12-02 when she resigned. She was followed by three others but Canada Post privacy rules kick in after 1970 for them [2]. Bottom right shows the pictorial postmark which publicizes the post office's location on the Reserve. Brocket is on Highway 3, which has enough traffic to help keep it surviving.



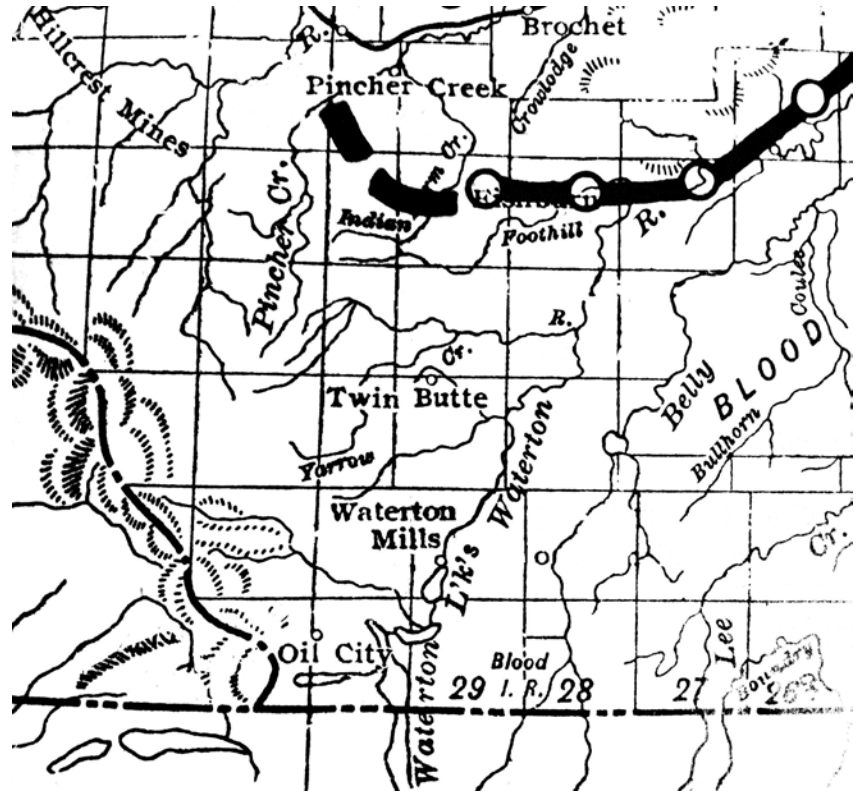
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## WATERTON NATIONAL PARK

In the extreme southwestern corner of Alberta is Waterton National Park, with British Columbia its western border and Montana on the south. Shown at right is a 1919 map of the general area. The thick black line angling out of the top right corner is the only railroad in the district. Throughout its history, Waterton National Park was only served by roads or boat traffic on the lakes. The railroad never went near the park settlements, so mail had to be carried over what in the early days were linear mudholes rather than roads.

Postal services arrived relatively late despite all the economic activity. There were three post offices, the now-defunct Oil City and Waterton Mills, and the still extant Waterton Park office located in the only townsite. The park and lakes were named after an English naturalist Charles Waterton, who had nothing to do with the Rocky Mountains. The naming caused resentment among locals, both white and native, but the name stuck with the Ottawa bureaucrats in those days of the British Empire.



The park's history is bifurcated, on the one hand the subject of constant attempts to pump oil from beneath its alpine meadows, and on the other a natural beauty spot now preserved as one of the great national parks. The oil seeps were outside the park area for many years, and even when they were inside, the well owners had the right of prior occupancy.



In 1914 the park boundaries expanded to include the oil fields but it wasn't until 1938 that the federal government bought out the last of the wells and/or the final claims were abandoned and reverted. During 1966 and 1967 the government expropriated the remaining freehold lands and mineral rights. The Lineham #1 well is now preserved as an historical site as the first oil well drilled in western Canada [1]. At left is a 1910 map that gives a better idea of the mountainous terrain in the lakes district in topographical terms. Above is a stamp that shows the terrain in visual terms.

## Oil City.

The native tribes of southwestern Alberta knew of oil seeps at Cameron Creek, now within Waterton National Park. The first white man to learn of them was George “Kootenai” Brown in 1886. He was an English expatriate who wandered into the area and eventually married a native woman. He settled in and later became the first park warden.



Beginning in 1889, various petroleum claims were filed and wells drilled but none of them had any success. In 1895 the Waterton Lakes area was set aside as a forest preserve but did not include the oil seeps to the northwest of the lake.

The first producing well, owned by John Lineham, began pumping in 1902. Oil City was platted on part of the Lineham property where it straddled what was originally Oil Creek but is now called Cameron Creek. At left is a 1902 photo of Oil City, with a wooden drilling rig at right.

The oil industry always struggled because of primitive technology that was only good for shallow wells. It wasn't until much later that petroleum geologists learned that the oil fields in Waterton were very deep, and the seeps were just minor leakage along fault lines. None of the wells ever made it down into the deep fields, and seldom produced more than 300 barrels per day. An additional problem was the failure to case the wells, so the drill holes kept collapsing in and choking off the flow [1].

The post office opened in Oil City on 1905-06-01 and lasted barely longer than the initial wave of drilling, closing on 1907-12-20. John Lineham was the only postmaster. He had been born in Ontario in 1857 and came out west in 1880 where he prospered. He spent the rest of his life looking after his many businesses in the Calgary-Okotoks-Turner Valley area, with excursions down to Waterton. By 1900 he was a wealthy man, and prominent in both local and territorial politics. He died relatively young in 1913 from cardiac dropsy. During his time as postmaster, he was constantly traveling about southern Alberta looking after his business interests, so it seems very likely that he had a clerk to do the actual running of the post office.

The Oil City post office's one full fiscal year had \$60 in gross revenue, about what a farmhouse post office might do out on the prairies. Because so many roughnecks and prospectors were coming and going, and there was little in the way of a permanent population, the men were seldom away from civilization for long. Most of the mail would have been hand-carried by favour or put into the postal system in nearby villages outside the Waterton area such as Pincher Creek or Twin Butte, both a short distance north of the park.

## **Waterton Mills.**

All the petroleum activity generated a demand for lumber for buildings, derricks, barrels, and fence posts. Although the Oil City post office had shut down, men were still trying their luck in the area. The search for the main field of oil continued, although no one knew that it would not be successful for a generation yet. The Hanson brothers of Montana opened a sawmill at the north end of the lakes in 1907. The photo below shows Waterton Mills the following year. They ran into financial difficulties of various kinds over the next few years, and in 1911 their buildings and chattels were auctioned off by the sheriff. The brothers then switched to the tourist trade, operating a large motor launch on the lakes as a sightseeing boat. They sold this operation in 1916 and returned to the USA [2].





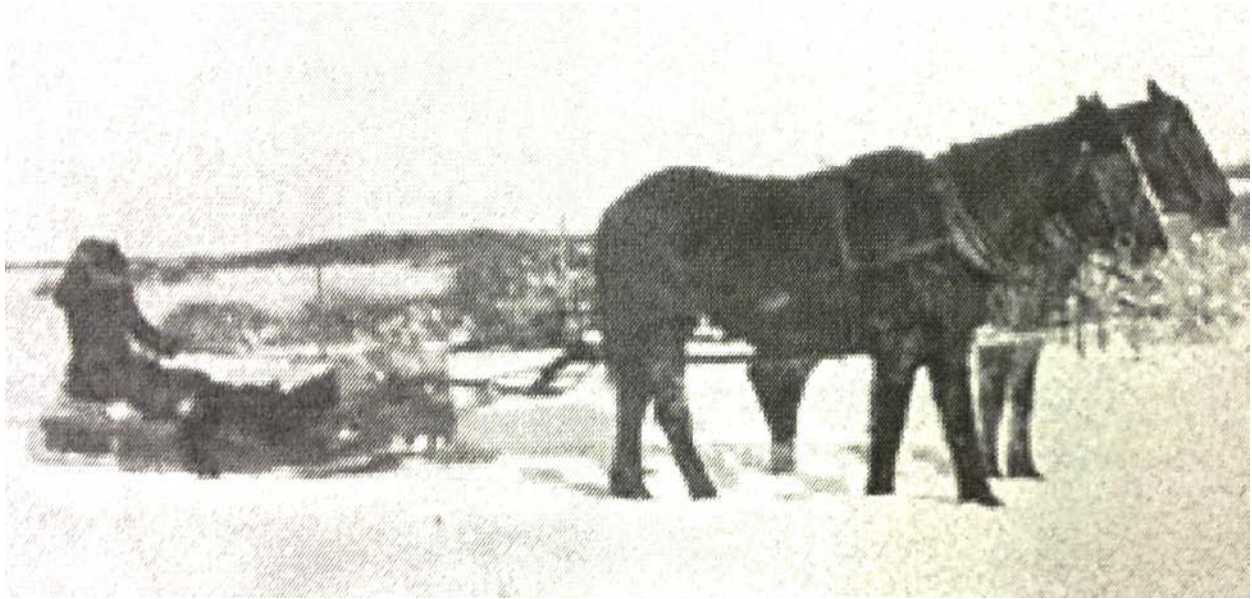
The closure of the Oil City post office interrupted mail services but not for long. The demand for postal services still existed, so six months later on 1908-06-01 a new post office opened at the sawmill, with Henry H. Hanson as the postmaster. He was to be the only one until the post office closed on 1916-05-31 due to his departure. The proof strike of its postmark is shown at left.

### **Waterton Park.**

The Waterton townsite was initially established in 1903 where Cameron (Oil) Creek flowed into Waterton Lake, but full-scale lotting and development didn't begin until 1911. John F. Hazzard opened a small hotel in the townsite in 1911. Mail service was from Waterton Mills, but the townsite grew and on 1915-07-20 the post office opened in the hotel with Hazzard as postmaster. The Waterton service was initially summer only. The entire park was abandoned in winter save for a few caretakers and hunters. Hazzard was also the mail courier and brought the mail in from the village of Twin Butte, but these extra duties proved to be too much and in 1917 the mail transportation was taken over by J.L. Allred of Twin Butte [3]. Mail service was over muddy tracks because no railroad ever entered the park, and it wasn't until after World War Two that the road was upgraded to good gravel and then paved. Some mail came up the lake from Montana but because Waterton Park is essentially a cul-de-sac, it never had the advantage of connecting to through routes. In 1917, the post office moved into a standalone building.



Hazzard gave up the postmastership on 1918-04-30. After a brief caretaker postmaster came and went, Arthur H. Harwood became the longest serving postmaster in the park, taking over on 1919-07-11 and staying three decades until 1950-01-20. He was originally from Twin Butte and had worked in Waterton as a camp cook. Later he took the positions of police magistrate and mail courier before becoming postmaster. The photo below shows him sometime in the 1910s bringing in the mail from Twin Butte with a horse team and sleigh [4]. During his tenure, the Prince of Wales Hotel opened in 1927 on the north shore of the lake near the townsite, a somewhat stately pile that is a smaller version of the Banff Springs Hotel or Chateau Lake Louise. It is still there today, and brought in much tourist trade that also increased the volume of mail significantly. By 1920, there were more than 100 residents in the village, with a general store and two dance halls to cater to tourists.

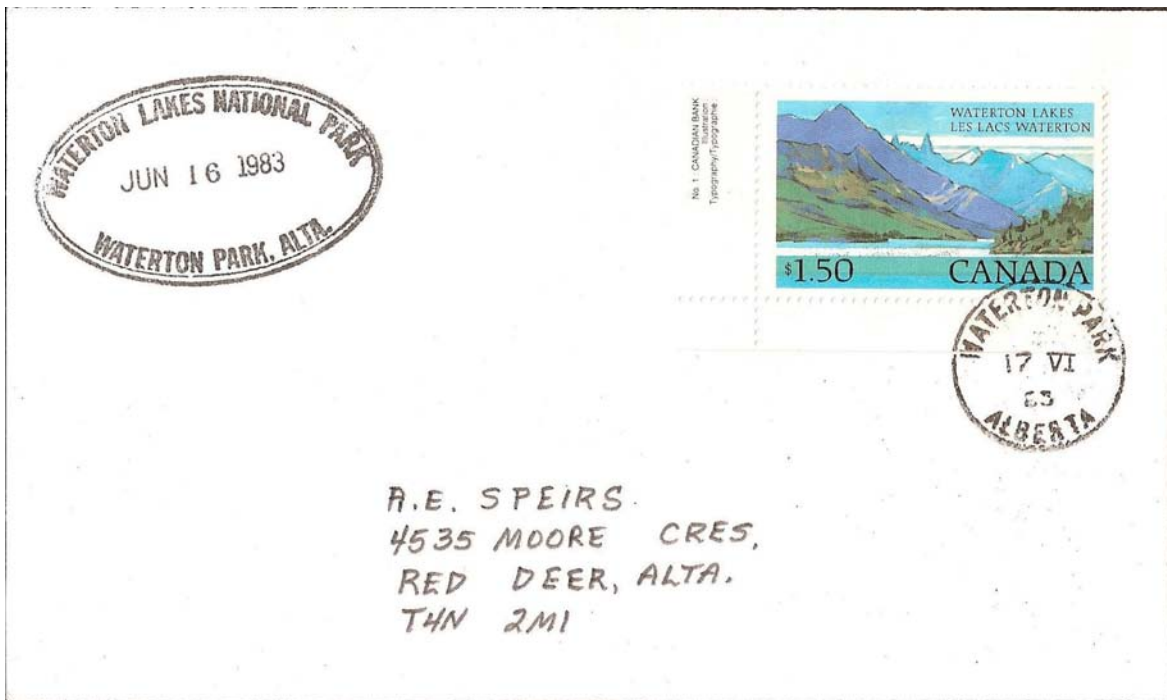


Oliver James Tidball took over from Harwood, He had previously been postmaster of Bottrel in west-central Alberta, and evidently wanted a change of scenery. He stayed on until 1959-12-28. During his time, the mail route switched from Twin Butte to Pincher Creek, which was further north, but good roads made it practical to go directly to a main mail distribution centre instead of handing it off down the line. His wife Nellie Marie briefly held the postmastership after him but on 1960-09-21, Lars P. Brandvold took over and held the job until he retired on 1976-12-31. The post office became a civil service position on 1966-07-01.



Several postmasters have come and gone since then, and the post office moved into a new building along the way. This building is seen at left, with Mount Vimy in the background. Because of the low angle of the photo, the lake is invisible but it is between the far houses and the mountain. The photo was taken in 1989 but as of 2012 the building looked much the same, except having a new sign with the updated Canada Post graphics. The woman standing at the post office door is the author's mother, the late A.E. (Betty) Speirs.

Like most post offices, several postmarks are in use, including some older versions that may be put aside for one reason or another and then re-used. The cover below shows a CDS postmark which was not used earlier in the year for reasons explained a few months earlier in a letter to Betty Speirs. The letter is illustrated on the next page, and is from the postmaster explaining that he hasn't yet received a 1983 date slug for his CDS, and thus him using a messy POCN cancel.



Memo Note

To

A

Mrs. Speirs

From

De

Red Deer  
Postmaster  
Waterton Park

579173

WATERTON

18 IV 1983

Date

ONE  
10

I received your letter  
and cards for cancelation.  
I do not at this  
time have my steel  
1983 canceling date.  
Rather than use the  
large square cancel  
I will keep your  
cards until steel  
date arrives.  
If this is not satisfactory  
please let me know!



Canada  
Post

Postes  
Canada

45-066-073 (1-75)

The post office is officially called Waterton Park, but over the years there has been some inconsistency. Below left is a 1999 postmark that refers to it as simply Waterton, while the pictorial postmark below right a few years later uses the correct name.



The Prince of Wales Hotel and the lake were depicted on a 2015 stamp.



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