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POSTAL HISTORY OF ALBERTA: SOUTHWESTERN FLATLANDS

by Dale Speirs

This installment deals with the myriad small towns and a few cities of the southwestern quarter of the Alberta prairies. This is roughly defined as that portion of the province from Highway 2 to Highway 842 and 843, from Highway 3 to the Trans-Canada Highway, excluding those districts covered under the Calgary area.

This area is prairie, mostly rangeland grazing, irrigation, and dryland wheat. The semi-arid climate makes for a thin population.

Index To Post Offices.

VULCAN DISTRICT

The Vulcan district, about an hour's drive southeast of Calgary, is mainly treeless flatlands with a few long hills and coulees. There is little protection against the wind. The northern boundary is Gladys Ridge, an east-west plateau which forces all the creeks in the Vulcan district to drain south. The western boundary is Highway 2, the main north-south road in Alberta. The eastern boundary is McGregor Reservoir, a long narrow irrigation project draining south. The map below shows of the area today in relation to Calgary and High River.

In the 1880s, cattle ranchers settled the area. In 1904, the first homesteaders began arriving and putting up fences, creating conflicts with the cowboys. The matter was settled during the record-breaking severe winter of 1906-07 that killed off most of the cattle and destroyed the ranching economy. From then on, wheat growers had the upper hand and the area today is mostly grain fields, ironically unfenced again because there are few livestock operations. The town of Vulcan is the headquarters of the district. Below is a map of post offices, past and present, in the Vulcan district.
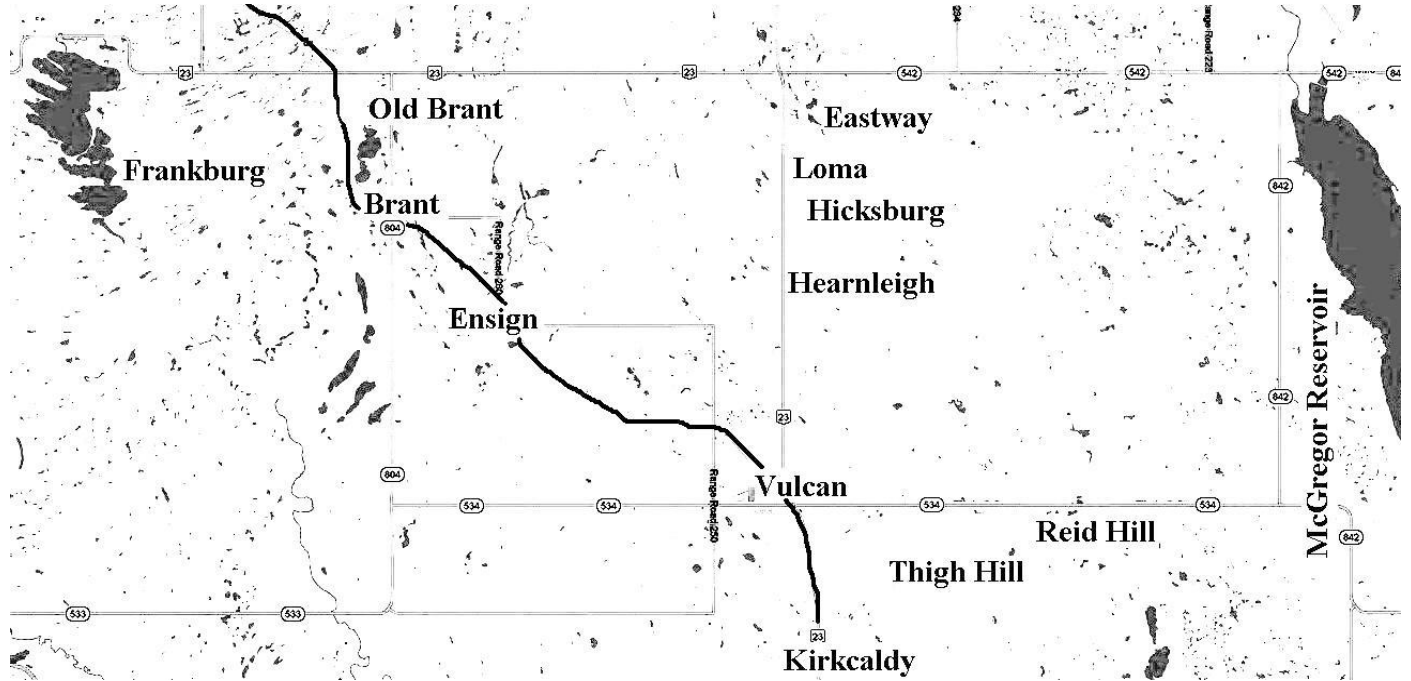
Vulcan.

Vulcan is 40 kilometres to the east of Highway 2. It wasn't until 1910 that a railway branch line was built through Vulcan and a townsite established. The village was established at a railroad siding in November 1910 and was named by the CPR after the Roman god of fire and the patron of blacksmiths [1]. It grew quickly, with 28 people by the end of 1911. It had 500 citizens by 1913, and was incorporated that year as a village. Circa 2012, it had about 2,000 residents. The town is the largest settlement today in the district and has been able to survive because it is far enough away from High River or other large towns that local residents will do their shopping in Vulcan instead.

The post office opened on 1910-09-15 with Reuben Lawrence Elves as the first postmaster [2]. He was from Ontario and came out west where his brother had settled at nearby Cayley, then taught school until going to Vulcan and opening a general store. The store/post office was initially located about a kilometre south of the village while Elves waited for the CPR to survey the townsite, so technically the post office is older than the town. In November 1910, the lots were put up for sale by the railway and the post office moved into the newborn village. It was temporarily in a tent until the Elves store was moved into town. In both locations of the store, the post office was just a small counter in a corner of the store. Population growth was so fast that the following year the store moved into a bigger location and the post office took over the old store to become a standalone operation. Until the railroad physically reached Vulcan, the mails were transported by horse-and-buggy from the railhead at Carmangay, about 30 km south of the district, to the Thigh Hill post office and from there to Vulcan. When the railroad reached Vulcan in 1911, it immediately killed the Thigh Hill post office. Thereafter the Vulcan post office was distributing point for the surrounding district [3]. At right is a proof strike of the duplex postmark from the early days of the post office.

Elves built a new brick building for the post office in 1930. The mail was transported by horse-and-buggy from the CPR station, but after one too many runaway teams and because of the long waiting for the mail, delivery then went by a hand cart, and later a half-ton truck. Elves retired on 1949-05-01 after almost four decades on the job.
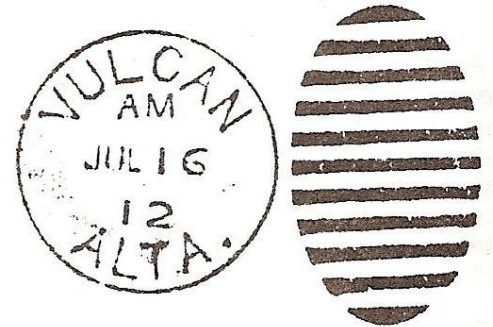
A year before he retired, the postmastership became a civil service position and the Canadian Post Office began running it directly. During his tenure, he was also the Registrar for Vital Statistics, Commissioner for Oaths, and a dozen other jobs representing His Majesty the King. One story is about him helping Roger Hubbard, an American who had homesteaded in the area. Hubbard was drafted by the U.S. Army in 1917, but never got the registered letter they claimed to have sent him. He did get a subsequent letter classifying him as a deserter. Hubbard took it to Elves, who in his capacity as Postmaster wrote to the U.S. Army that the registered letter had never been received. Then in his capacity as Commissioner for Oaths Elves provided a notarized document testifying to that, and as Registrar of Vital Statistics that Hubbard was a married man with a child on the way. Hubbard was therefore excused from duty, much to his relief [3].

John Johnston Price was the succeeding postmaster. He had originally been Elves's clerk from 1937 onward, excepting wartime service in the RCAF. In 1955, after good roads became widespread, the mail was hauled directly from Calgary by truck. A new post office building was constructed and occupied in 1965. Price served until 1981. This means that Vulcan only had two postmasters over seventy years, perhaps a record. After Price's time, turnover accelerated, with eight postmasters to the present day [4]. Below are two pictorial postmarks of Vulcan. The 2007 cancel depicts the Star Trek museum and is still in regular use. On 2016-05-05, when Canada Post issued a set of Star Trek stamps, the Vulcan post office began using a Spock cancel. This was the first Canadian postmark with a trademark notice in the cancel.

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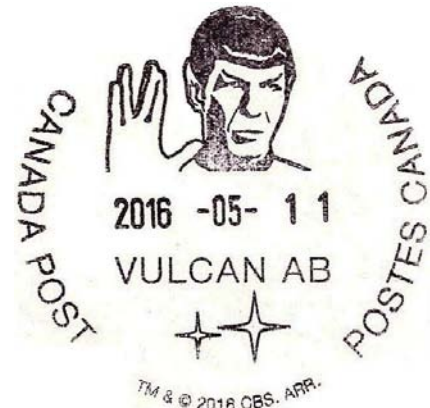
Like most rural towns in western Canada, Vulcan was declining as the population shifted to the big cities. There are no natural attractions out that way, as the town is out in the middle of the flatlands where grain farming rules. In the early 1990s, a move was started to capitalize on the connection with Star Trek and the planet Vulcan being Mr. Spock's home. In 1995, a large statue of the starship Enterprise was built, along with a nearby museum containing Star Trek memorabilia.   Below are photos of the statue and the museum as they were in 2010. Compare the photo of the museum with its equivalent pictorial cancel. Due to licencing fees and trademark problems, the starship could not be used on a postmark, nor could the words "Star Trek" be used to identify the museum. The jury seems to be out on the success of the idea but Vulcan does host an annual science fiction convention which draws a large contingent of day-trippers from Calgary, and its population seems to be stabilizing. On the next page is a photo of the Vulcan post office as it was in 2010.

The Vulcan RCAF Base.

During World War Two, the flatlands of the Vulcan district were ideal for a military airfield. RCAF Station Vulcan was built a few kilometres southwest of the townsite and began operating in October 1942. Military Post Office 1312 opened on 1943-09-09 with Sgt. J.R. Corney as postmaster [2]. He wasn't there long, only until 1943-11-05, when he got transferred to Ottawa. His replacement was the euphoniously named Sgt. C.F. Sergeant who stayed until 1944-10-10 when he was transferred elsewhere. Cpl. A.F. Ahara took over until the post office closed on 1945-04-11 after the base shut down. Cpl. Ahara changed her surname to Jones on 1945-02-23 by marriage.

The gross revenues of MPO 1312 show that it did a tremendous amount of business during its brief lifespan [5]. For the fiscal year ending March 31, 1944, the first year of its life, it reported $7,036.97 in business, compared to $15,388.05 earned by the Vulcan post office in that same time period. For Fiscal 1945, the two post offices were essentially tied at $12,000 and change each. In Fiscal 1946, the year it closed, MPO 1312 did $379.85 in business, while the civilian post office settled into the $11,000 range for the next three years. The airfield is still in use today by some small companies and private aircraft.

Thigh Hill.

This is a hill southeast of Vulcan and was not a village. The name is supposedly a translation of the Siksika place name because the hill is said to look like a man's thigh [1]. I drove around the hill and looked at it from all angles but couldn't see any resemblance, so I suspect the accepted etymology is garbled. The first postmaster Charles R. Deal was born in North Carolina, and homesteaded on the hill in 1905. At the time, the nearest settlement was Cayley, so he set up a general store on his homestead as a convenience for neighbours. A post office was set up in the store on 1907-07-01. It lasted until the railroad came through nearby Vulcan in 1911. Since the railroad was so close, there was no more need for Thigh Hill. Deal abandoned the site that year and moved to Calgary, terminating his postmastership on 1911-05-09. Another resident, Luther W. Lawes, tried to keep the post office going but on 1911-10-14 abandoned it [3, 4]. Nothing beside remains.

Reid Hill.
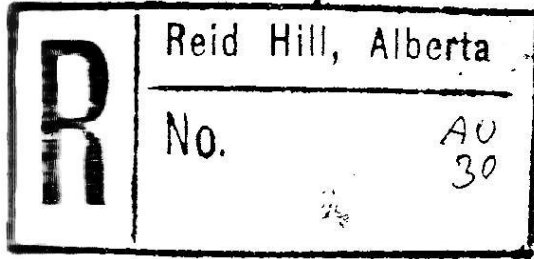
As the name suggests, this post office was on a large hill. It opened east of Vulcan on 1906-06-15 on the homestead of Orick A. Reid, the first postmaster. At left is the proof strike of its registration postmark. The Mounties maintained a small post at Reid Hill during this time. Mail service was from Stavely, 60 kilometres southwest on the CPR mainline running south from Calgary. Delivery was once a week on Fridays and was a social occasion for settlers to come in to the Reid farm. Reid was postmaster until 1908-01-10. By that time a nearby crossroads on the flatlands west of the hill had started to develop into a hamlet with a general store, church, cemetery, and town hall.

The post office was moved there into the general store of Herbert Cooper and gave its name to the nascent hamlet. The Coopers had emigrated from England in 1903 via Manitoba. In addition to a homestead, Cooper was Commissioner for Oaths, Justice of the Peace, and Registrar of Vital Statistics. The store was also a stopping place for travelers, particularly for the Mounties who were now based elsewhere but still rode through the district regularly.

Cooper sold the store/post office on 1916-11-17 to Sydney Hopkins, who operated it until 1918-01-25. He was a bachelor who owned the first automobile in the district, a Model T Ford. He went into the Canadian Army and sold out to Ernest Bridgett. Hopkins came back from the army and bought back the store, becoming postmaster again from 1921-10-24 to 1926-12-07. He then sold out to Beverley D. Lockhart (a man; in those days Beverley was a common male name). The deal included a quarter-section of land, which turned out to be useful to the Lockhart family as the Great Depression erupted. Lockhart sold out and gave up the postmastership on 1932-08-04, and the family moved into Vulcan where they bought another general store with better prospects. The post office and store went through four more owners/postmasters until the store burned down in 1937.

Given the combination of the Great Depression and good roads that put Vulcan within easy reach, there was no point in trying to sustain Reid Hill anymore. The post office was permanently closed on 1937-05-15 and was replaced by rural mail delivery from Vulcan [3]. Shown at left is the last remnant of Reid Hill hamlet as of 2012, a collection of gravestones salvaged from the cemetery before it was ploughed over as cropland (photo by the author). The hill itself can be seen on the horizon, and the store was out of the photo to the left.

Kirkcaldy.

Kirkcaldy was founded in 1911 when the railroad went through and is named after a Scottish town. It never prospered because it was too close to Vulcan and as good roads were built over the next couple decades it became only a few minutes drive to Vulcan. The post office was always located in a general store, and the store owner was always the postmaster. Other than the store, the only long-lived businesses were the grain elevators and the railroad section depot. Wallace E. McKenzie opened the post office on 1915-01-15 and held it until 1917-02-24. At right is the proof strike of its first postmark. Since it was on the tracks, mail service was direct from Calgary. Howard W. Reeves then took over as postmaster until 1918-03-15.

Ernest W. Frost was the next postmaster to 1920-09-27. He was an English immigrant who first settled in Calgary, then Vulcan, and finally Kirkcaldy. After he sold the Kirkcaldy store he opened a new one in Lomond not far to the east. Mrs. Lorena Mallory then served until 1924-07-18. Her husband Grant was descended from United Empire Loyalists in New Brunswick who had first homesteaded in Manitoba during a series of bitter cold winters. A friend had gone to the Alberta foothills to scout the land, and came back with amazing stories about the chinook winds that evaporated the snow and warmed the air in hours. This was enough to convince the Mallorys to abandon Manitoba.

The Mallorys sold the store/post office but stayed in the district to work full time as farmers. Arthur Joseph Maisey became the next postmaster and stayed on to 1945-12-22 when he retired. He was an English immigrant who was a cabinet maker by trade, and worked in various locations around southern Alberta before settling at Kirkcaldy. After the store was sold, Mrs. Elva Margaret Carnegie, became the next postmaster. She was the daughter of Grant and Lorena Mallory. On 1970-02-09 the Kirkcaldy post office was permanently closed. [3]. Today there are only a handful of buildings and the freight trains go straight through without stopping. On the next page is a panoramic view of Kirkcaldy as of 2012 (photo by the author). The false-fronted building at right was where the post office once was.

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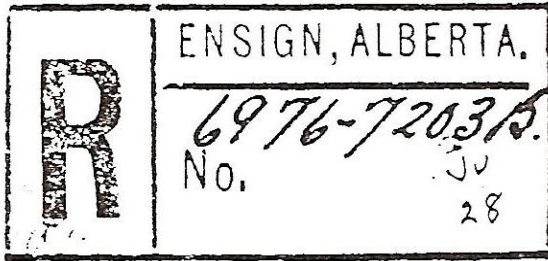
Ensign.

The next settlement north of Vulcan on the railway was Ensign, named after the Red Ensign flag of Canada [1]. Sam Tucker opened the post office in his general store on 1911-06-15. At left is a proof strike of the registration postmark. The store and Tucker's postmastership both ended on 1920-03-31, and the building became the United Farmers of Alberta meeting hall. Norman Young took over the postmaster job and ran it in his store, which was a converted church he had moved in from Frankburg in 1917. His daughter Ruth wrote that their dog Scamp occasionally burrowed into parcels arriving at the postal counter, which meant that her father had to reimburse the recipients for damages. One can only assume that they really, really loved their dog to put up with its expensive behaviour. Young sold out to Philip L. Bourque, who became the new postmaster on 1927-05-22. He and his wife were originally from the francophone area of New Brunswick. On 1938-03-29, during his tenure, the store/post office burned down and was rebuilt from scratch. Bourque retired as postmaster on 1943-10-07 after selling the store to the Barkers. Ellen Blanche Barker was postmaster until 1948-09-09, when they sold the store to the Mooneys [3].

Wilma Boyd Mooney was postmaster until 1950-10-15 when the store burned down again. They gave up, and there was a gap in postal services until a new store was begun by the Markert brothers. Russel Charles Markert became the new postmaster on 1953-11-01 and held on to it until 1959-01-19, when the brothers sold out to the McFaddens. Donald Claude McFadden, son of the owners, operated the post office until 1964-05-14. It was bought by Harry Smith but he turned over operations to his daughter and son-in-law, and Verna Mae Carruthers became the postmaster until 1967-06-14. The store closed and the post office moved to another store operated by James L. Massam, who stayed with it until 1973-02-03. William Ross Ferguson then took over the postmastership until 1975-01-06. The final postmaster was F.C. Haynes until 1986-01-31 when the post office permanently closed [4]. Ensign is now a hamlet 15 km off the main highway. In the days of passenger rail traffic, it was busy, but once the grid road system was upgraded to good gravel then it found itself off on a side road out of the main transportation routes.

Brant.

What is now called Old Brant was founded under the name of Brant in 1904 by E.E. Thompson and so named because of the abundant geese in the area. The scientific Latin name for geese is *Branta*, as seen on this stamp. The post office was opened in Thompson's general store on 1905-05-01 with his brother-in-law Charles H. Kelly listed as official postmaster. However, Thompson's sister Mary did the actual postal work because Charles was a ranch manager for Thompson, who had a wide variety of business interests around the countryside. The first mail courier was W.B. Parker, who left Brant at 08h00, traveled to High River, and was back in Brant by 18h00. He initially did this twice a week and then later three times weekly as roads improved.

In 1909, as the railroad approached the district, it became obvious that it was going to miss the Brant townsite. Roughly half of the residents moved northwest to Blackie, which was on the tracks, and the rest moved to a railroad siding where the present-day Brant now is. Archibald C. McIntyre became the new postmaster at the new location on 1909-06-22 and operated the post office in his general store and telephone
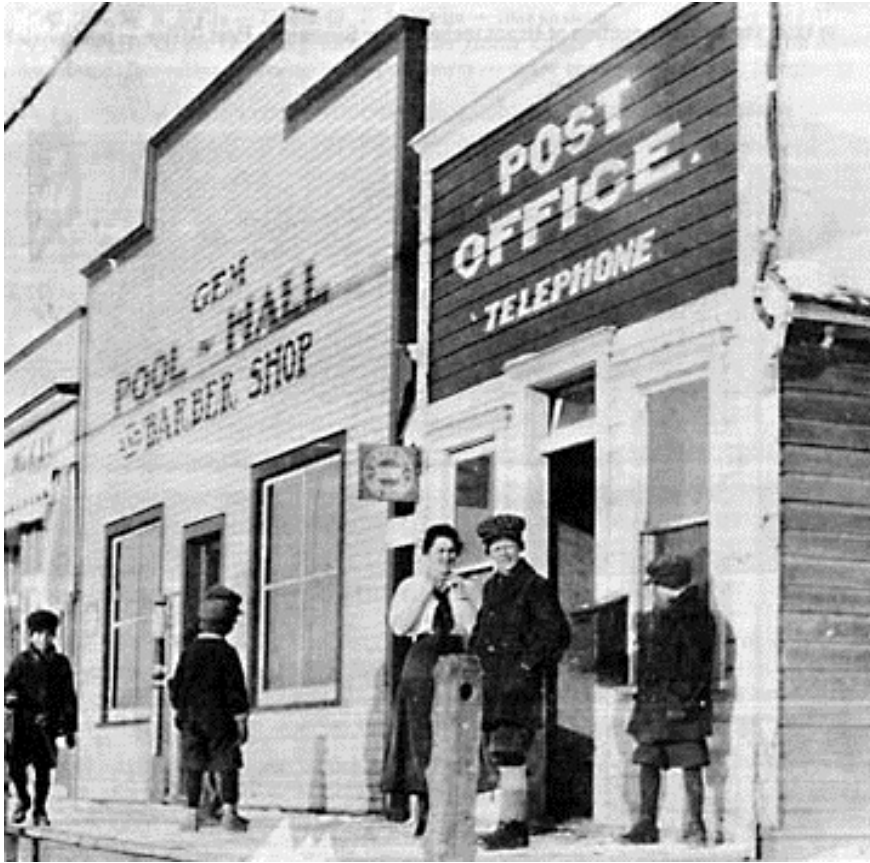
exchange. The photo shows the post office in its new location. Thompson and Mary Kelly were silent partners in the new venture as well. Brant now got its mail via the railway directly from Calgary and became a distribution point for the surrounding district [3].

McIntyre sold out and moved to back to Oregon where he had family, with Thomas Arkless Johns becoming the new postmaster on 1912-09-10. Johns was previously the district mail courier for McIntyre and after becoming postmaster, his brother Jim became the new courier. The store/post office burned down in 1913 but Johns was able to save the mails and postal equipment. For the next three months it operated out of Johns's house until a new standalone post office building was put up. This post office was later preserved and moved to Calgary, where it is now in Heritage Park, an historical village operated by the City of Calgary. Strangely, it was then outfitted as a pioneer dentist's office, not a post office. (There is a post office in the park but it is from Cayley.) Johns stayed as postmaster until 1942-06-22 when illness forced him to resign.

At left is a proof strike of the duplex cancel from that era of the post office. Johns died in February 1950. His wife Coral took over as postmaster until 1950-10-09, when she re-married and moved to High River.

Fred William Burley was the next postmaster, serving until 1966-10-11. The post office operated in a combination grocery store and bulk fuel supply depot. Burley sold out to Clarence Stabler, who served as postmaster from 1966-10-26 to 1971-01-02. By this time, Brant was in serious decline as good roads killed off one village after another. Imperial Oil closed the fuel depot in 1970, and the store became very shaky. The only other business left in the village was the grain elevator. Stabler sold out to the Beatsons. Mrs. M.A. Beatson was postmaster for a few months. The Beatsons couldn't make a go of it, so the store and postmastership reverted back to Stabler on 1971-12-03. He kept the position until 1974-02-02. His widow Mrs. J.M. Stabler became postmaster for a month, then her son W. Stabler from 1974-03-26 to 1975-08-01. In looking back at the gross revenues of the Brant post office [5], the Old Brant location maxed out at about $400 per year. The new location got up to about $1,100 per year and stagnated in that range for decades. Allowing for inflation, its real-dollar revenues slowly declined as the village did.

By 1989, the post office had moved into a house. The photo on the next page shows the author's mother the late Betty Speirs in front of the house. In 2012, about 100 people lived in the hamlet of Brant. At right is the regular business postmark of the post office.

As of 2012, the post office was in a tiny vinyl-sided shack, which may or may not be the smallest post office in Canada but certainly ranks in the top ten. The front door opens into a lobby with just enough room for the door to swing wide without hitting the box numbers on the interior wall. In the centre of the boxes is a Dutch door whose bottom half serves as the customer counter when it is open.

Frankburg.

Frankburg was a settlement on the eastern shore of Frank Lake in the far northwest corner of the Vulcan district. The lake is an intermittent lake, holding water only in wet years. In average years, it is a marsh, and in dry years it is pasture. It is at the head of the drainage of the Little Bow River system, which drains the land along the western half of the Vulcan district. It was colonized by a group of Mormons from Utah led by Christopher H. Frank. He had initially arrived from Utah at Cardston, in the deep southwest of Alberta, and which was the Mormon headquarters in the province. Early settlers in what became the Frankburg area spoke highly of the land and its possibility, so in 1902 Frank made an excursion with a group of them to look over the possibilities. That was a wet year, and when the group arrived in the vicinity of the lake that later was named after him, the lush rangeland convinced him and others to file for homesteads. He went back to Utah to collect his family and organize a colonization company. When they arrived in 1903, the climate was going through a cycle of wet years, and the lake was at its fullest extent [7].

A prosperous village grew up and on 1905-05-01 the post office opened [2]. Christopher Frank served as the first postmaster until his death on 1924-06-27. At right is a late postmark proof strike. Christopher's daughter Matilda then took over the job until 1930-10-19. During the drought of the Great Depression, Frank Lake dried up completely and became an alkali flat, occasionally used as an airstrip. The village was gradually abandoned. Mrs. Leah Christena Bushman was the final postmaster after Matilda, but on 1932-07-31 the post office closed. Mail service thereafter has been from a rural route via Blackie.

Ironically the lake re-formed in the late 1940s. Although modern maps show it as a large lake, the north half is now a wetlands conservation project to encourage ducks and geese, while the south half is a mixture of drained land, marsh, and intermittent water. Because of good roads, with Blackie and High River only a short drive away, there has been no need to re-open a post office and the village is permanently extinct. All that remains is the cemetery, as shown on the next page. Where the lake once was is on the far horizon.

Eastway.

Melbourne P. Marshall was the only postmaster of Eastway, which operated from 1912-01-01 until 1917-11-14, when it became a rural route. The proof strike of the postmark is shown at right. This was a general store and post office located in the residence of the Marshalls on their homestead, and was not a village. The name was chosen by Marshall's wife Anne. It referred to the fact that the main communication line in southwestern Alberta was the CPR line running south from Calgary to the American border. From the perspective of people living along the line, the Marshall homestead would have been considered as "the East". The mail was carried by Anne's brother John Bond, who with another brother had arrived earlier in 1896 and operated a horse ranch nearby [6]. There is no trace left today of where the post office was.

Hicksburg And Loma.

George C. Hicks emigrated from Idaho in 1902 with his wife and family, driving their herd of cattle north. The Hicks family settled just north of where Vulcan is now, although it didn't exist then. Mail service was by courier from High River. Hicks built a general store on his homestead and the post office opened on 1906-02-01. He held the position until 1908-04-30. He died while fence-riding (checking and repairing barbed-wire fences) when he tripped while jumping down from his wagon and impaled himself. The widow moved back to Idaho.

There was a gap of two months when there was no post office but on 1908-06-10 Richard Conlin started up a new post office called Loma on his homestead nearby. The postal archives list this as a continuation of Hicksburg, but since the location, name, and postmaster were all changed it would be better to consider this as a new post office in the same neighbourhood. The post office was in a general store, but both closed on 1909-05-13 when the Conlins moved to Vulcan in anticipation of the railroad arriving there.

The post office then moved again to the homestead of Grieve Elliott. It was in a candy store the Elliotts had wisely opened directly across the road from the Cottonwood rural school, and which was of course very popular with the children. That must have been a licence to print

money! A proof strike of a new postmark for Elliott is shown at left. I suspect that Conlin kept the old hammer or threw it out when the move was made. The post office permanently closed on 1914-04-21 when the Elliotts bought a fruit farm in British Columbia [3]. Nothing remains today of the post office.

Hearnleigh.

Edward and Sarah Hearn came out west from Ontario in 1905. The post office opened on their homestead on 1908-03-16. The name was a combination of Hearn and the town of Leigh, in Surrey, England, the home of the area's first homesteader, Henry John Amey. When Hearn had first come out looking for land, Amey was the one who drove him around to view the countryside and convinced him to settle in the area. Prior to the post office opening, Hearn had carried the mails through the district. The photo on the next page shows him hauling the mail in 1907 on his rural route. The mail came from Brant twice a week, and Hearn was punctual enough along his route that neighbours remarked they could set their watches by him.

Hearn later became seriously ill and relinquished his position as postmaster on 1916-07-26 to his neighbour Thomas Blair. Blair died in 1921 while still in harness. His widow Edna became the final postmaster from 1921-12-20 until 1922-08-23, when rural mail delivery took over again. Although she was officially postmaster, Hearn resumed the actual work until his illness returned, forcing the post office to permanently close. Hearn died in May 1924. Since this was a farm house post office, no trace remains today.
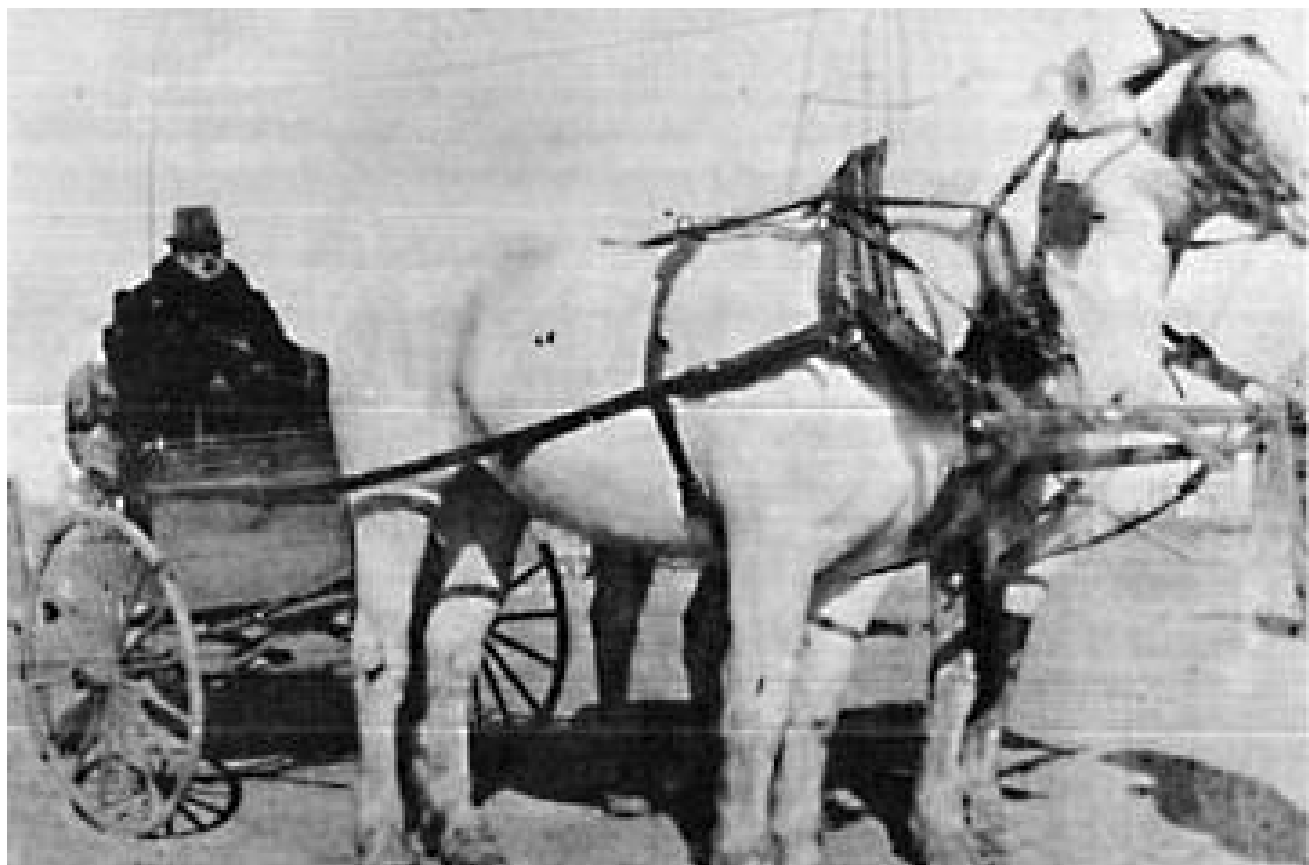
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1] Karamitsanis, Aphrodite (1992) PLACE NAMES OF ALBERTA: VOL. 2. SOUTHERN ALBERTA. Published by University of Calgary Press, Alberta. Pages 42, 67, 73, 120

2] Library and Archives Canada (downloaded 2012-01-03) Post offices and postmasters. www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/post-offices

3] various authors (1973) WHEAT COUNTRY: A HISTORY OF VULCAN AND DISTRICT. Published by Vulcan and District Historical Society. Pages 1 to 11, 26 to 29, 57 to 64, 77 to 86, 225, 306 to 307, 352, 363 to 365, 407 to 409, 441 to 442, 503, 520, 546 to 547, 596, 615 to 618, 662 to 664, 740, 902 to 903

4] Hughes, Neil (1998) ALBERTA POST OFFICES 1876 to 1998. Privately published by the author, Edmonton, Alberta.

5] Canadian Post Office (1944 to 1946) ANNUAL REPORT OF THE POSTMASTER GENERAL. Appendices C and D.

6] various authors (1972) TRAILS TO HIGHWAYS. Published by Eastway Ladies Social Club, Alberta. Pages 17, 38, 136 to 137, 212 to 214

7] various authors (1971) FENCELINES AND FURROWS Published by Fencelines and Furrows History Book Society, Blackie, Alberta. Pages 35 to 38

NANTON AND DISTRICT

Nanton is a town on Highway 2 about an hour's drive south of Calgary, at the junction of Mosquito Creek and Nanton Creek. The district is just northeast of the Porcupine Hills, a range of foothills of the Rocky Mountains, and was settled in the late 1800s. Ranching was initially the major industry, then farming, and nowadays also petroleum and tourism. The main route of travel in this area for aboriginals and pioneers was a wagon trail along the eastern edge of the Porcupine Hills called The Leavings, which ran from Calgary to Fort Macleod. The Canadian Pacific Railway built a north-south main line from Calgary to the American border that was completed in 1892. It followed the general route of The Leavings trail but stayed further east on the flatlands. In the 1950s, Highway 2 was extended south from Calgary alongside the railroad. It was substantially rebuilt from the 1990s onward, and is today the main north-south route in Alberta for truck freight and cars.

Nanton is the home of a military aviation museum, and being directly on the main highway, has managed to survive while other villages have depopulated. One reason is that Highway 2 not only goes through the centre of the town but it splits into two separate one-way lanes a block apart, thus doubling the frontage for businesses catering to travelers. At right is a modern map of the district in relation to Calgary.

The map below shows the pioneer post offices; the small squares are a mile on each side. The double-dash line adjacent to the railroad is the original The Leavings trail.
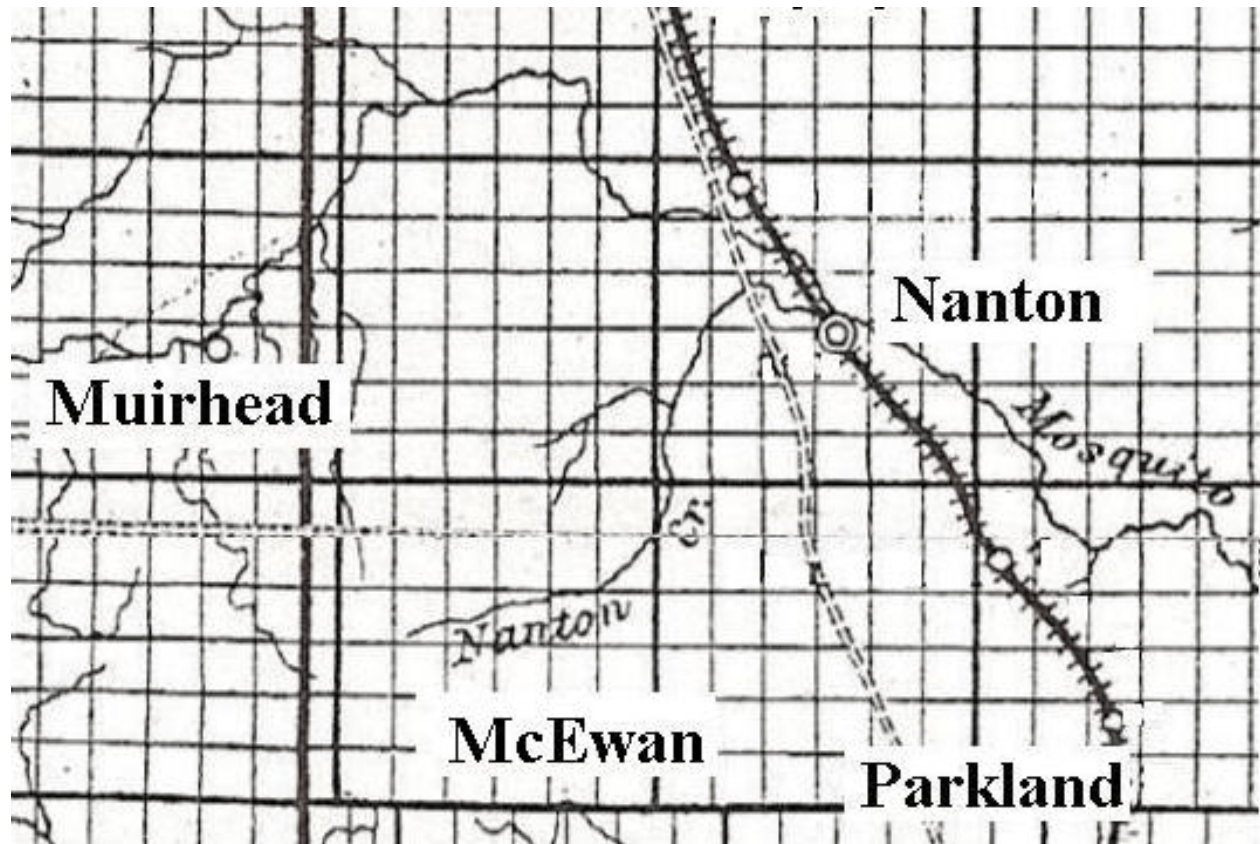
This and the next page show the two sides of a postal card issued in 1972 depicting a view looking to the west at the Porcupine Hills adjacent to Nanton. It gives a good indication of what the area looks like. Today, Highway 2 runs along the transition zone between the foothills to the west and the flatlands to the east.

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Canada Postes Postage **8**

Farming & Ranch country in the Foothills — Alta.
Un ranch aux pieds des montagnes Rocheuses, en Alberta

1 AB—1

Mosquito Creek.

Nanton began life in the early 1870s as Mosquito Creek Crossing. The Siksika tribe called it Pahmahsois, which means "foul water creek" and accurately described the immediate area. In 1881, Joseph Trollinger built a stopping house at the crossing. He was a Californian ex-whiskey trader who had been shut down by the Mounties and forced to go legit. His wife Lucy was a Piikani native famous for her cooking. Joe was an excellent gardener and grew vegetables not often seen outside the cities in those days. In consequence, the stopping house was very popular with travelers. It was, however, a very basic log cabin with a sod roof and dirt floor. In 1884, John Higinbotham, later the postmaster of Lethbridge, stopped at Trollinger's place while en route from Calgary to Fort Macleod.   In his autobiography, Higinbotham noted the constant smoke from dried bison dung smudges to keep the mosquitoes at bay. He slept under the kitchen table in his bedroll, which was considered a prime location because if it rained he would stay dry [6].

A post office named Mosquito Creek opened on 1887-07-01 with Trollinger as postmaster but he only stayed two months in the job. He inherited a fortune in California but since there was no possibility of people there accepting Lucy into polite society, he arranged for her to return to the Piikani Reserve, with regular payments from him to keep her comfortable [2].

After Trollinger left for California, the North West Mounted Police established a post near the stopping place. As a courtesy, the Mounties distributed mail along their route between Calgary and Fort Macleod. It was strictly informal and had no schedule. At main posts in southern Alberta, a Sergeant was appointed to act as an unofficial postmaster in the Orderly Room. He would sell postage stamps and handle incoming and outgoing mail for both NWMP and civilians [7].

On 1890-07-01, the Mosquito Creek post office re-opened with Daniel V. Mott as postmaster. He and his wife Allie were originally from Ohio and ranched in the Porcupine Hills. They re-activated the stopping house and post office but only ran it for a year because the railway from Calgary was approaching them. As the railroads advanced through Alberta, they shut down the stopping places one by one. The post office closed on 1891-10-05 and the Motts sold their ranch. They then moved to Fort Macleod to operate a lumber yard. That was the end of Mosquito Creek as a post office name.

Nanton.

A north-south railway line was completed through the area in 1892, connecting Calgary to the American border. Land sales agent Augustus Meredith Nanton promoted real estate development along the tracks for the CPR. The inhabitants of Mosquito Creek agreed that the settlement's original name was not likely to encourage settlers. The citizens decided that Nanton was a suitable person to honour, and so his name was chosen for the post office [1]. A nearby creek that flowed into Mosquito Creek was also named for Nanton, and for even better reason as its original name was Shit Creek. This commemorated a legendary incident from frontier days on the nearby The Leavings trail, when a group of freighters made camp on the creek to water their oxen and rest. For supper they ate what turned out to be a bad batch of baked beans, as a result of which it was two days before they were well enough to travel again. (From ref. 2, page 25; I am not making this up!) The present-day townsite developed at the junction of the two creeks.

The first post office to use the name Nanton opened on 1893-07-01 with John Dawson Norrish as postmaster. At left is the proof strike of the first postmark. It was actually on his RL Ranch property, not at the railroad siding where the village was growing. Twice a week he rode to the siding and picked up the mail from the CPR section house.

Norrish had served with the Mounties when they first came out west, and took his discharge in 1879 to ranch in the Porcupine Hills district. After militia service during the 1885 Riel Rebellion, he returned and bought the RL Ranch. He had a sideline selling remounts to the Mounties. His method of breaking horses to the saddle was to ride them hard to get the mail, which undoubtedly made the trips more exciting than any other mail route. Norrish sold the ranch in 1902 and moved his family to Calgary [2].

Hugh Murray Shaw took over on 1902-05-01 as postmaster. He was a rancher who saw a demand for a general store at the Nanton siding, and so built one, later adding a livery stable. The post office was moved from the RL Ranch to the village. Shaw's postal clerk was Cora White, a pretty and cheerful young woman. She was chosen to attract business to the store, particularly from lonely bachelor cowboys who came in to pick up their mail and stayed for the company, hopefully doing a bit of shopping as well. Shaw gave up the post office on 1904-03-

31 when he married (not Cora) but remained active in village affairs. He later served in the House of Commons as the M.P. for Macleod riding. The photo below shows him at his farm.

Shaw's general store was bought by Robert McLaren, who became the next postmaster of Nanton. He and his brother had a farm implement business which did very well as homesteaders flooded into the area. They sold the store to Charles Henry Marshall who also had a hardware store and who became postmaster on 1906-07-09. He moved the post office into its own quarters on the ground floor of a building he owned. Marshall built up several businesses in the village and in 1914 took in his son John as a partner. At that time, post offices were political appointments and the Marshalls supported the wrong party, so Cyril Hobart Wheeler took over on 1914-07-31 as postmaster. He moved the post office to a different building and became Nanton's longest serving postmaster, holding the job until 1952-08-23. In 1948 the postmastership became a civil service position. At left is a portrait of him.

Every prairie town has had its Great Fire and Nanton was no exception when its central business district burned down on 1924-02-09. The buildings were almost entirely wooden, packed together with no clearance, and when a furnace overheated on a cold winter night in a grocery store, the result was inevitable. The fire reached the post office but the staff managed to remove the mails, postal records, furniture, and private mail boxes by the time the flames spread there. The building burned and the blaze continued until it reached a brick building where it was finally contained. The Marshall building, upwind of the blaze, was at that time owned by a lawyer named J.C. Hiebert. He graciously moved his office into vacant space upstairs, and the post office returned to its old location. It re-opened a day later and carried on from there.

After Cyril's retirement, his son Alfred John took over the office. He had worked for his father as a postal clerk for many years, then served in World War Two. Alfred died in office on 1965-09-15.

Miss Ruth Kynoch Dick then became postmaster. She was the daughter of Scottish immigrants who operated a butcher shop in Nanton. Ruth was postmaster until 1975-06-03 when the peculiar notation "Voluntary demotion to Assistant 2" shows up on her record [3]. I have not been able to find out why; it may have been her advancing years or there may have been an incident. Agnes Fowler succeeded to the job, after which Canada Post privacy rules have blocked the records. The post office building has relocated a couple of times since. Below left is the office in 1988, since converted into a medical clinic. Below right shows the new building as it was in 2014.

The Bomber Command Museum Of Canada.

Nanton's main tourist attraction is the Bomber Command Museum of Canada, operated by the Nanton Lancaster Society. The museum is located directly on the southbound lanes of Highway 2 through the centre of Nanton, and a better location couldn't be found. Below is a photo I took in 2014 during the 70th anniversary D-Day commemoration, showing their centerpiece attraction, a restored Lancaster bomber. The plane is in working condition and is taxied out to the street for special open-house days.

The Lancaster bomber is the subject of a pictorial postmark used by the Nanton post office, shown below. The museum publishes a newsletter, mailed out with a Nanton bulk permit, a 2008 example of which is shown on the next page.

Nanton Lancaster Society
Box 1051
Nanton , AB
T0L 1R0

Norman E. Maki   3333

Calgary, AB
Canada

Muirhead.

Peter Muirhead was a pioneer rancher who settled the area in 1898. By the time the post office bearing his name opened, he had relocated his herd to Seven Persons in the extreme southeast of Alberta. Muirhead was never a village, and the post office was either in ranch houses or a crossroads general store. Roy Brydges was the first postmaster of Muirhead when it opened on 1912-03-01. At right is the proof strike of the first postmark. Roy stayed until 1929-05-09, when he left for Michigan, most probably due to domestic troubles as he was married three times in his life, the first two while he was in Muirhead. His unmarried sister Frances Elizabeth Brydges took over the post office, located on her parent's ranch in their house. She got married in 1933 and on March 14 that year the new postmaster became David Anderson.

Anderson was a Scotsman who came to Alberta in 1924. He took over the Muirhead Mercantile general store, located on a crossroads in the ranching district. When he became postmaster a few years later, the post office moved from the Brydges ranch to his store. He gave up the store and the post office on 1935-06-22 when he married and moved to his widowed mother-in-law's ranch nearby to help her. The store was bought by John Garrett Maneely, who also became postmaster. He kept it until 1941-09-15 when he sold out to Sam and Marie Andrews. She became postmaster and ran the store, while Sam had a trucking business. Marie only stayed with the store and post office for a year, as Sam was called up for service and went to Europe with the Postal Corps.

Dwight and Evelyn Tuttle then bought the store. Evelyn was the final postmaster from 1942-11-02 until the post office permanently closed on 1951-11-12. They didn't keep the store long and sold it to Ernie Fisher, but Evelyn continued as postmaster and the post office moved into her house. Fisher died in 1944 and the store with him. The post office lingered but good roads finally finished it off [2]. Ranchers in the district are now served by a rural mail route out of Nanton.

MacEwan andMcEwan.

This ranch house post office opened on 1903-11-01 with John H. MacEwan as its first postmaster. There is no consistency in the spelling of his surname in postal records, local histories, rural school records, or maps, and it often appears as McEwan. I have read the records as closely as possible and it seems the "Mac" spelling was probably the correct one.   At right is the proof strike of the MacEwan postmark.

MacEwan was a cousin of Nanton's first postmaster John Norrish. Below is a 2013 view of MacEwan's ranch, looking west at the Porcupine Hills.   The MacEwan school was located in the immediate foreground of the hayfield, indicated by a commemorative marker just outside the photo.   The school building was moved into Nanton years ago and now serves as a tourist information bureau on the northbound lane of Highway 2.

John MacEwan was originally from Washington State and worked as a freighter on The Leavings trail. In 1886, he joined the CC Ranch on Mosquito Creek as a foreman. He took up a homestead in 1890 in the nearby Porcupine Hills, and in 1894 married Kate Harrison. In their ranch house, Kate kept a tiny general store to save neighbours the trouble of a long trip into town. John was postmaster until 1911-07-21. Below is a family portrait of the MacEwans at their ranch house/post office. John is the bearded man standing on the porch. John and Kate sold the ranch in 1911 and retired to Calgary [2]. The post office closed for more than a year.
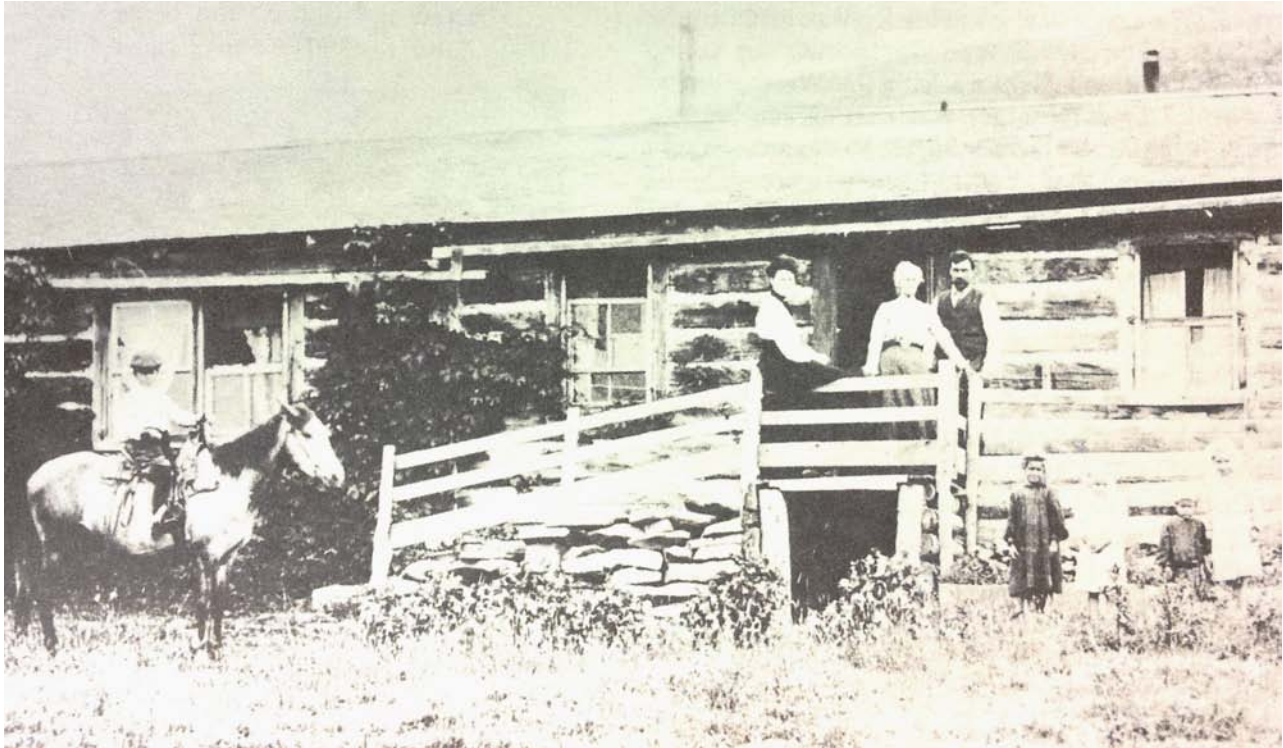
On 1912-11-01, John S. Teegarden opened McEwan post office on his ranch. The spelling was definitely "Mc", not "Mac", and so remained for the life of the post office. AT left is the proof strike of its postmark.   Teegarden sold the ranch in 1917 and the postmastership transferred to its new owner, Sidney Young. He officially became postmaster on 1918-02-02 but didn't keep the post office running long. Young was an Ontario man who came to Alberta in 1904 and worked in various places and jobs before buying the Teegarden ranch. He gave up the office on 1919-10-25 but stayed on the ranch. The post office closed permanently and was replaced by a rural mail route [2].

Parkland.

The source of the name of this settlement on the railroad is not what one might think. The railroad siding was originally called Hog Town by the section men because Bailey Powell had built some hog pens there in 1903.   The townsite was platted by Powell and his father-in-law W.J. Parkhill, both of Ontario. The original name proposed for the post office was Parkhill but there already was a post office by that name in Ontario, so the name was adjusted to Parkland. It was billed as the next Chicago (as was every other hamlet developing on the prairies in those days) but few wanted to live in such a nondescript place and the promotion failed [1].

William D. Sharman, of Brooklyn, New York, arrived in 1906 and built a general store at the siding. The post office opened on 1907-03-01 with Sharman as the first postmaster. The photo on the next page shows him posing in front of his store. He left Parkland in 1912 to go homesteading in Montana and never returned. Sharman was a teetotaler but he kept a bottle of whiskey under the counter. When someone came in to pick up mail, cold and tired from the trip from his ranch, Sharman would offer him a shot for medicinal purposes. If he was busy with customers when the mail arrived, he would dump the bag's contents on the postal counter and let people pick out their mail [2, 4].

Alfred Edward Jones came out west in 1909 and opened a hardware store in Parkland. He took over as postmaster on 1912-11-13 when Sharman left and expanded his store into a large general store. The photo below shows him standing at the door to his establishment. His health began to fail so he sold the store to his brother-in-law David Allan, who became postmaster on 1926-06-30. He had arrived as a homesteader in 1904, then moved into Parkland in 1922 to work for Jones. Allan sold the store a few years later but remained as postmaster until 1947-07-10, running it in the same building.

In October 1945, the post office was hit by professional safecrackers. Allan regularly received large sums of money on the evening train to handle farmers' business. He had $8,000 in the safe the night the post office was hit, a huge sum back in those days before inflation. The thieves ignored the store contents, the mails, and other visible valuables, and went straight to the safe. This indicated that they had been watching Allan and knew specifically about the cash. Years later elsewhere, a man who had been arrested for a different crime confessed to the Parkland theft [4].

Jones died in 1937. Allan later married his widow Minnie, making her his second wife. The first Mrs. Allan, Minnie's sister Anna, had died in 1943. Three of their children, Earl, Doris, and Olive, worked as clerks in the Parkland post office at various times. After Allan retired in 1947, Alfred and Minnie Jones' son Ira took over the store and post office. Ira was only briefly postmaster until 1948-12-29 when a gravel business he had started proved to be more profitable and he left the store to his brother Ken.

From there the post office shifted to a new family and moved into their house. Loyd (only one "L") Elmer Spring had been born and raised in Nanton. His father was a house painter and Loyd worked for him a short while before starting a trucking business. Loyd married Beatrice Hawk of Parkland. He took over the post office for a short time but handed it over to Beatrice, who on 1950-01-15 became postmaster. They later divorced but she continued as postmaster, changing her name in the postal records to Beatrice Carlson on 1957-11-30 when she re-married [3]. She retired on 1978-12-31.

Her clerk Mildred Crick succeeded her as postmaster, and the post office moved into the Crick residence. Mildred's husband Bud renovated a room in the house for the post office. It was only open a few hours a day. By that time, Parkland was fading fast, having reverted to a hamlet in 1975, and down to about fifty inhabitants. Highway 2 made Nanton only a few minutes away by car. Crick retired in 1987 and the post office temporarily moved to the residence of Ron Thompson which, ironically, was the original store of Alfred Jones. The post office closed on 1988-11-19 and the hamlet is now served by supermailboxes [2, 4, 5]. The photo on the next page shows the post office a few months before it permanently closed. The author's mother, the late Betty Speirs, is standing by the door.

References.

1] Sanders, Harry M. (2003) THE STORY BEHIND ALBERTA NAMES. Published by Red Deer Press, University of Calgary, Alberta. Pages 80, 225 to 226

2] various authors (1975) MOSQUITO CREEK ROUNDUP. Published by Nanton and District Historical Society, pages 12 to 25, 33 to 44, 57 to 58, 64 to 65, 138, 170 to 171, 188 to 190, 249 to 250, 276, 311, 351, 384, 421 to 422, 446, 452 to 453, 499 to 502, 525 to 526, 546 to 549, 561 to 562, 584

3] Library and Archives Canada (downloaded 2013-09-09) Post offices and postmasters. www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/post-offices

4] Kindt, Faye (editor) (2001) MOSQUITO BITES AGAIN. Published by Hamlet of Parkland and District Historical Society, Stavely, Alberta. Pages 24 to 25, 166 to 167.

5] Hughes, Neil (1998) ALBERTA POST OFFICES 1876 - 1998. Privately published by the author, Edmonton, Alberta.

6] Higinbotham, John D. (1933) WHEN THE WEST WAS YOUNG. Published by Ryerson Press, Toronto. Page 75

7] Getty, Ian (1975) NORTH WEST MOUNTED POLICE OUTPOSTS OF SOUTHERN ALBERTA 1874 TO 1904. Published by the Alberta-RCMP Century Celebrations Committee, Calgary, Alberta. Volume 3, page 484.

CLARESHOLM AND DISTRICT

Below left is a map of the pioneer post offices of the Claresholm area; the small squares are one mile on each side. Woodhouse still exists as a hamlet but no longer has a post office. In the 1950s, Highway 2 was built alongside the railroad and is now the major north-south route in Alberta. The railroad tracks were lifted in recent decades after freight transport went to semi-trailer trucks and residents began driving cars instead of taking the passenger train. Nowadays Claresholm and Stavely have the only two remaining post offices. Below right is a modern map of the area in relation to Calgary.
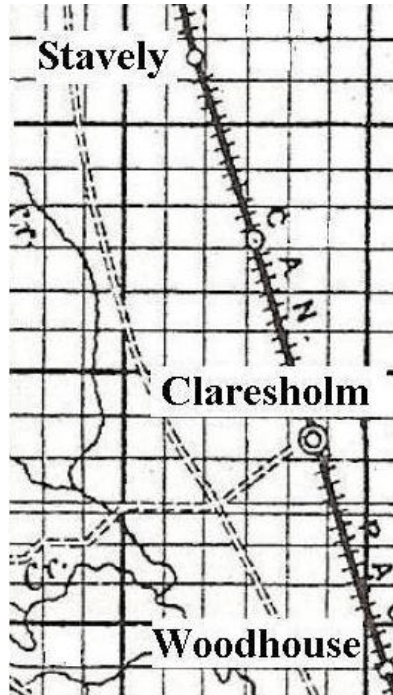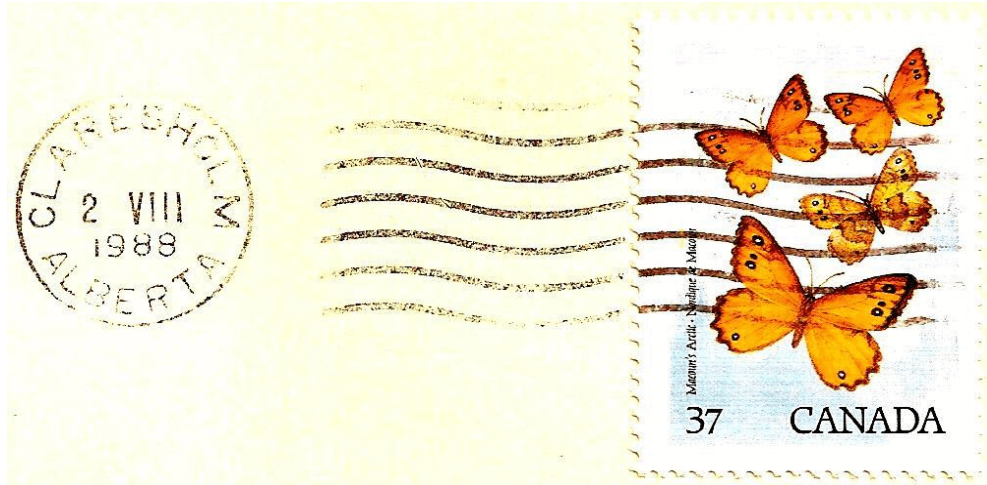
Claresholm.

The first ranchers arrived in the Claresholm area in the 1880s and operated vast acreages until their leases were taken away from them to open up the land for farmers. The first homesteaders came from North Dakota in 1902 and the following year a village was organized at a railway siding nearby. CPR superintendent John Niblock named it after his house in Medicine Hat, which in turn had been named after his wife Clare. Like most sidings, it was located in a slight hollow so that parked boxcars wouldn't run away, and because it was adjacent to a large slough from which steam locomotives could take water. The newborn village drilled a well to supply water to the townies but it sucked dry both the slough and the aquifer beneath it. In December 1909, a pipeline was completed from Willow Creek and allowed the village to grow again. Much of central Claresholm today is built on the old slough. The population of Claresholm in 2013 was about 4,000.

The leader of the North Dakota homesteaders was O.J. Amundsen, who also laid out the townsite and platted it into lots. The first inhabitant of the village was a Manitoban named William Moffat. He arrived at the siding in March 1902 with ten carloads of lumber and then had to wait three months before the next settler arrived. During the wait, he was the only man within kilometres. Once a Mountie rode up and asked him if he was lost. Moffat replied "I guess not", and told that story about himself for years afterwards. After settlers began buying lots from Amundsen and lumber from Moffat, a post office was opened on 1902-12-01 with Moffat as the first postmaster. He became the first mayor, then a Member of the Legislature of Alberta. He was defeated in 1917 by suffragist Louise McKinney. Calgary newspaper publisher Bob Edwards wrote: "*Mr. William Moffat was the only gentleman in the House; he got up and gave his seat to a lady.*" Moffat died in 1926, full of years and honours [1].

William C. Bowen was the next postmaster, from 1906-04-01 until 1908-04-01. George Simpson then became Claresholm's longest serving postmaster from 1908 until his death on 1941-12-19. Bowen was his brother-in-law, and the two were in business together dealing in coal and wood. The Simpson family initially lived above the post office and business. Although Bowen was officially postmaster, Simpson ran the post office. In 1908, the business failed, Bowen left, and Simpson became the official postmaster. In 1937 the post office moved into a public building [2].

After a temporary postmaster came and went, John Allan Wannamaker took the job on 1942-11-01 and served until 1961-08-24. During his tenure the post office became a civil service position in 1948. The Wannamakers were United Empire Loyalists who came to the Claresholm area a few at a time between 1905 and 1914, with John the last to arrive. The next postmaster was John William Baker but the local histories and the Post Offices and Postmasters Website are silent thereafter. The post office was well established as a government-run operation and still is today under Canada Post. Below is a machine cancel from 1988.

Louise McKinney.

Claresholm is very proud of its connection with the suffragist Louise McKinney, not just for her fame but because she and her husband were among the founding settlers of the town, having arrived in 1903. Below is a photo I took in 2013 of the entrance to the Claresholm post office.

Note the large bronze plaque on the left side of the entrance of the post office. Below left is a close-up of the plaque, which honours McKinney. At right is a 1981 stamp depicting her. The building in the background is the Alberta legislature, a recognition of her suffragist activities.
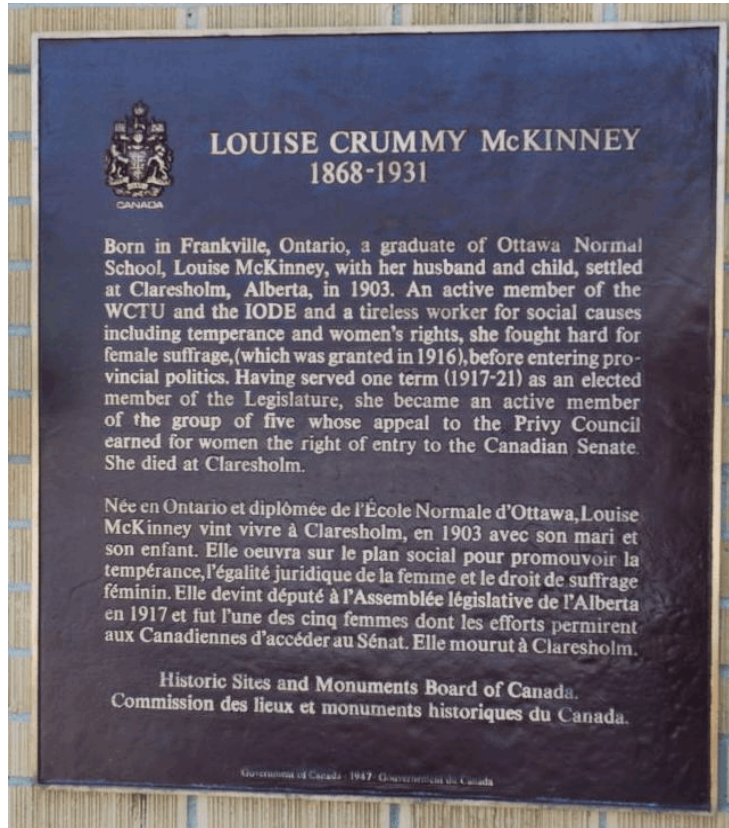
Claresholm Air Bases.

The flatlands east and south of Claresholm were ideal for airbases. In 1941, the Royal Canadian Air Force opened an airfield operated by 15 Service Flying Training School. Military Post Office #1306 opened on 1942-03-25 with Sgt. W.H. Wray as the first postmaster. There were four more NCOs who served as postmaster during the brief life of the airfield. The post office closed on 1945-04-13 as the war wound down [2].

The arrival of the RCAF was a tremendous boon to Claresholm as might be expected. In Fiscal Year 1941 the Claresholm post office had $8,147.72 in gross revenues [5]. This doubled to $16,199.08 the following year as the airmen poured in, along with camp followers such as civilian contractors, tavern owners, and food suppliers.

The post office annual revenues thereafter stayed in the $14,000 range through the war and into the early 1950s as prosperity returned. MPO #1306 peaked in the $12,000 range for the last two years of its life before closing.

The Cold War reactivated the base and MPO #502 opened on 1955-08-22 with Sgt. J.V. Nault as the first postmaster. The usual staff rotations occurred and he was succeeded by four NCOs before the post office closed on 1958-08-22. Unfortunately the Postmaster-General annual reports stopped providing revenues after 1952, but presumably the airfield in its second life did give a boost to post office revenues.

Woodhouse.

This post office was a railroad siding on the main line between Calgary and Fort Macleod. It was named after William E. Woodhouse, a superintendent with the CPR out of Calgary. The post office opened on 1916-12-01 with Jonathon G. Dickinson as postmaster until 1925-06-27. At right is the proof strike of its first postmark. Dickinson was an Englishman who originally came out to the Barr Colony near Lloydminster, which was a disastrous failure. After a failed attempt at homesteading in Saskatchewan, he came to Woodhouse on the recommendation of a friend. With his brother he operated a general store, within which was the post office. There was no railway station and the mails were exchanged by catch post. They traded the store for a quarter-section of farmland to the man who would be the next postmaster.
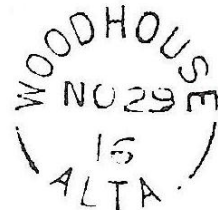
A Scotsman named James T. Campbell took over the store, he not liking farming and the Dickinsons not liking shop-keeping. He kept the store for two decades, then sold it to the Webers so he could go into the plumbing and hardware business. Mrs. Mae Violet Weber took over as postmaster on 1945-09-18 when she and her husband bought the place. They were also farming at the time, and between the two operations there was too much work, so they sold the store/service station/post office to Russel and Rosemary Brown. Rosemary became the new postmaster on 1950-02-01 but gave it up a few months later on June 2, when the post office closed permanently [1].

There was too much competition from Granum to the south and Claresholm to the north, both only a five-minute drive away on the new Highway 2. Today Woodhouse is a hamlet with no services of any kind.

Stavely.

The Stavely post office was named after local rancher Staveley Hill. His surname was not considered suitable, partly because the village is out on the flatlands, and also because "Hill" is not a very distinctive name. The post office name had a spelling error that was never corrected, "ly" instead of "ley", and still operates as such.

In 1917, the son of Hill, a judge in England, wrote to Stavely council asking that the spelling be corrected. A council meeting, with then-postmaster James Rea in attendance, considered the complaint. Rea, who ultimately had the final say on the post office name, refused to go through the trouble and facetiously suggested that the name be further simplified by deleting the remaining "e". (I suspect that another reason is that Rea's name was frequently mis-spelled as Rae.) A councillor then suggested that if Hill's son would cough up for the cost of a new hockey arena being considered at the time, then Stavelyites would be pleased to correct the name. A letter was so despatched to England. The reply was that the judge wasn't going to pay extortion to the colonies for a sport he never heard of. After that, the matter died and Stavely it was and is [3].

The Stavely post office opened on 1903-07-01with W.R. Brand as the first postmaster. The Brand family had come out west from Ontario and were mainly storekeepers by trade, although some of the younger sons filed for homesteads in the Stavely area. W.R. was dismissed from office on 1912-02-28 for political partisanship, post offices in those days being part of the federal spoils system. His successor William LaMere came and went within a few months. Thomas Childs then became postmaster on 1912-12-05 and stayed until 1917-04-07 when he resigned [2].

The Rea family then began a long run as postmasters. Childs was succeeded by James F. Rea, who served until his death on 1927-01-07. James and his wife Selina were from Ontario and Quebec respectively, and arrived out west by separate paths. They met and were married at Stand Off, about 80 kilometres south of Stavely on the Piikani tribal reserve, where she worked in her brother's store. They ranched in the Porcupine Hills until 1917 when they moved into Stavely [4]. After James's death, Selina became postmaster and stayed until 1949-12-31 when she retired. During her tenure, the post office became a civil service position in 1948.

Selina's son Alfred Neville Rea, nicknamed Hap, had started working in the post office in 1923 as an assistant to his father. He married Lucille Jones, a South Dakotan, in 1937 and they lived above the post office until their children started arriving. When his mother retired, Hap took over as postmaster until his death on 1971-02-17, just a few months before his intended retirement. His widow Lucille was briefly postmaster but retired a short time later.

Doreen Liptak took up the postmastership on 1972-08-24. She had been postmaster at Barons, Alberta, about 50 km east-southeast of Stavely, and this was a lateral transfer. Post office privacy rules kick in after this point [2] but the post office continues on today with a succession of civil servant/Canada Post successors.

The photo shows the Stavely post office in 1988 with the author's mother, the late Betty Speirs, posing in front of it. As of 2013 it still looked much the same other than a wheelchair ramp added to the righthand side of the steps and the deletion of the stamp vending machine.

Below left is an elderly CDS postmark still in use in 1988. Below right is a pictorial postmark honouring its rodeo, established in 1929 and which was the world's first indoor rodeo.

E.C. Webster

One of Stavely's most prominent citizens was Edwin Charles Webster, shown below. He was never with the post office but was very active as a philatelist and produced thousands of airmail, first-day, and event covers, all addressed to him at Stavely. Webster was born in Ontario and as a young man worked in West Virginia where he was friends with both the Hatfields and the McCoys, of the famous feud which was only just tapering out by then. He came to southern Alberta in 1908, settled in Stavely, and spent most of his life in the insurance business there. Webster held numerous elected and appointed positions on the town council and school board, including a term as Mayor, and was actively involved in sports clubs [4].

Webster collected Canadian postal history in the days when it was being born as a distinctive branch of philately, when most collectors still said "the stamp's the thing". He joined the Calgary Philatelic Society in 1936. For many years he wrote a column on Canadian stamps for the American magazine WEEKLY PHILATELIC GOSSIP. Webster suffered a serious stroke in late 1951 and died a few months later in February 1952. Below is one of his many covers.
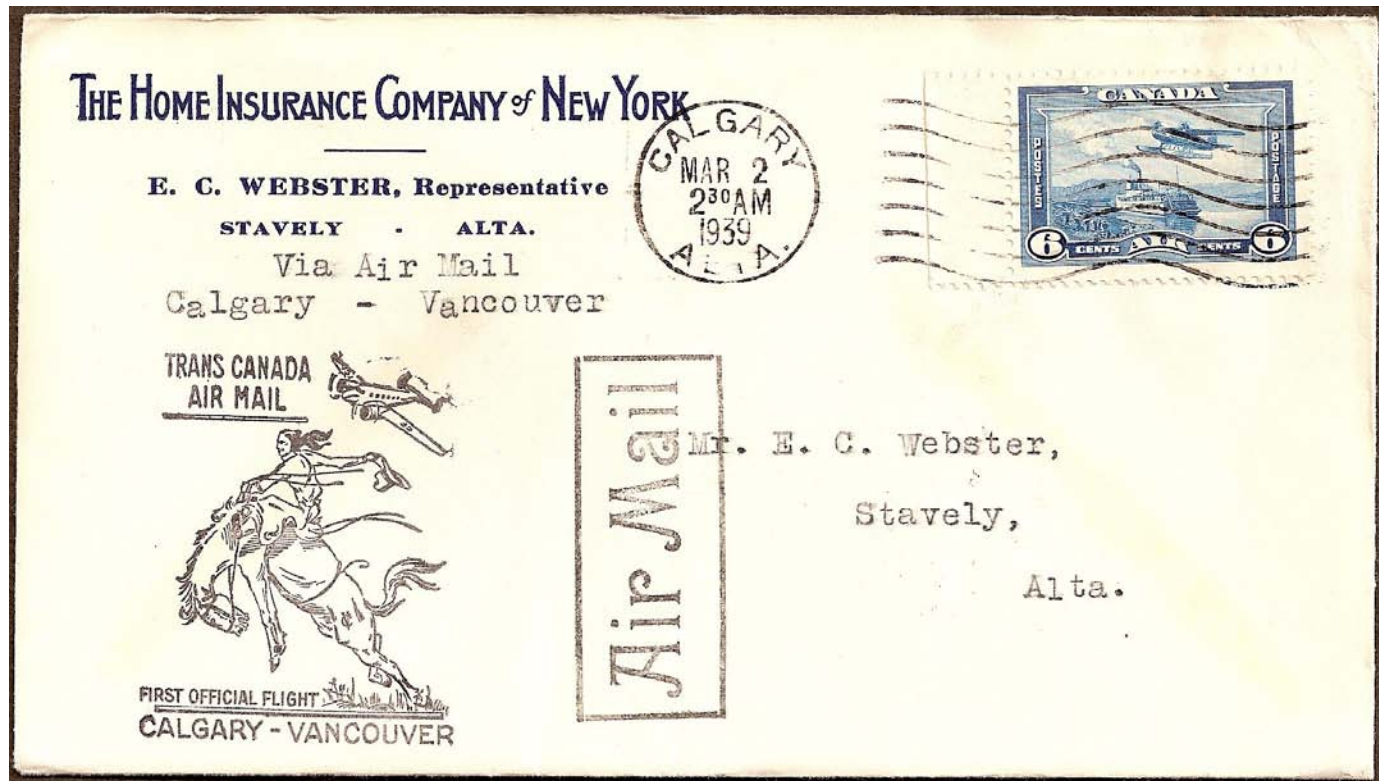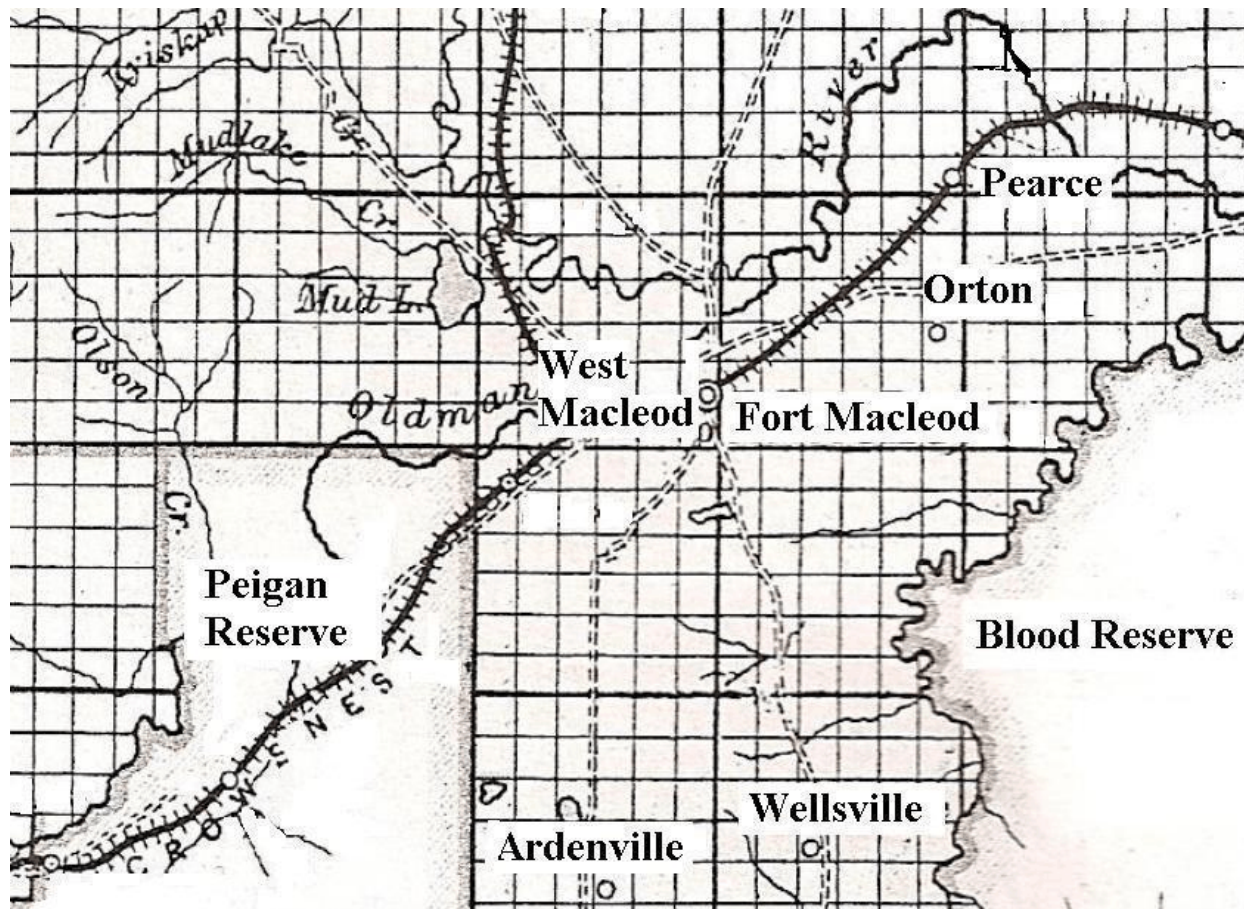
References.

1] various authors (1974) WHERE THE WHEATLANDS MEET THE RANGE   Published by Claresholm History Book Club, Alberta. Pages 5 to 21, 179 to 189, 207, 220 to 229, 340 to 343, 367, 434, 485 to 489

2] Library and Archives Canada (downloaded 2013-09-09)   Post offices and postmasters. www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/post-offices

3] Anonymous (1937-03-03) Incorrect spelling of town name gave rise to concern in high circles. CALGARY HERALD, page 9

4] various authors (1976) THE BUTTE STANDS GUARD. Published by Stavely Historical Book Society, Alberta. Pages 15, 65, 163 to 165, 287, 349 to 351, 414 to 415

5] Canadian Post Office (1893 to 1952) Report of the Postmaster General. SESSIONAL PAPERS OF THE DOMINION OF CANADA,   Appendices C and D

FORT MACLEOD AND DISTRICT
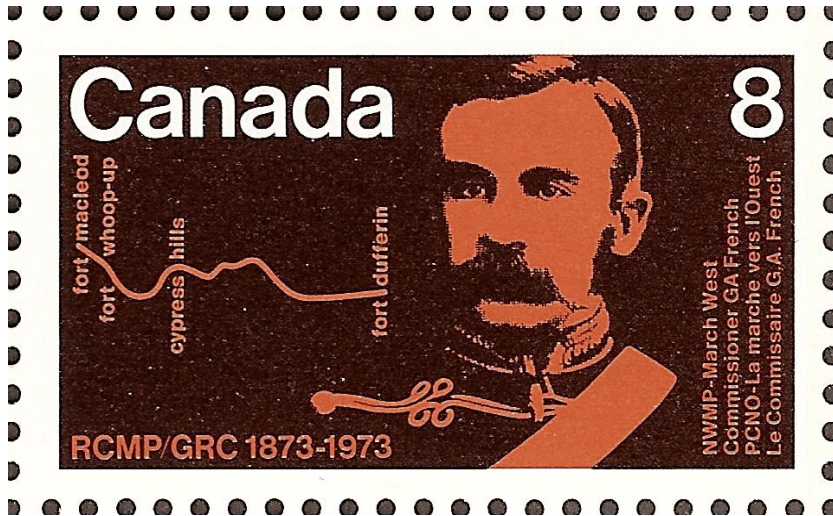
Fort Macleod is today a small town in southwestern Alberta with a population of 3,200 circa 2014, but its present-day status of a sleepy rural town belies its importance in Alberta history. It is located between two large tribal reserves, both members of the Blackfoot Confederacy. To the southeast is the Blood Reserve of the Kainai, the largest Reserve in Canada, and to the southwest is the Peigan Reserve of the Piikani. Fort Macleod was established in 1874 as the central command of the North West Mounted Police (NWMP) for Alberta. Today the NWMP are known as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. The RCMP are strictly a police force, but the NWMP was a paramilitary force, with both police and military powers. The NWMP trekked west in 1874, as shown on the stamp illustrated at left.

On the next page is a map of the district in pioneer days, modified from a 1922 map. The small squares are a mile on each side, and the double-dashed lines are the original oxen freight team trails.

Map showing Fort Macleod area with West Macleod, Pearce, Orton, Wellsville, Ardenville, Peigan Reserve, Blood Reserve, Oldman River, Mud Lake, Olson Cr., and the C. & E. Crowsnest railway line.

On arrival in southern Alberta in 1874, the Mounties first eradicated the whiskey traders and established the Queen's law in a land that had none. In the late 1800s as the native tribes were being settled onto Reserves, the Mounties were kept busy dealing with them. In the 1890s, north-south and east-west railroad main lines crossed at Fort Macleod, triggering an economic boom. In 1913, the prairie economy collapsed and Fort Macleod and district stagnated for decades. The town lost its place as the central settlement of southwestern Alberta to Lethbridge and declared bankruptcy in 1924. In a condition of a bail-out, the town agreed not to borrow money for fifty years, bringing growth to a stop.

Today it relies mainly on tourism, agriculture, and petroleum servicing. Wind turbine electrical generation has also developed in the last two decades in the surrounding area. As the railways declined in importance, the highways rose. The major highways followed alongside the tracks, and many cross each other in the Fort Macleod area today as major freight roads to and from the USA. Highway 2 is the north-south route and Highway 3 runs through the Crowsnest Pass just to the west. Lethbridge has usurped most of the potential of the area, though.

Fort Macleod: Before The Post Office.

In 1874, the NWMP built a fort on an island in the Oldman River. A hamlet quickly developed around it. Colonel James F. Macleod was the commanding officer and played a major part in Alberta's history over the following decades. The fort was established on the island for defensive reasons, but was regularly flooded in the spring. Charles Wood remarked in 1882 that: "*Each succeeding springtime the betting is almost even that the whole concern, fort, town, and inhabitants, will form a stately procession on the watery road to Winnipeg.*" (Wood's knowledge of geography was off the mark, as none of Alberta's water drains into Winnipeg.) Fort Macleod was finally relocated in 1884 upstream onto the surrounding plateau and it was there that the town developed and still is. By 1884 the threat of attack by local tribes wasn't as likely, so the defensive perimeter wasn't needed anymore.

Macleod was honoured in 1986 with a stamp, the other one of the pair depicting Chief Crowfoot of the Siksika, his friend who helped maintain the peace as the tribes were settled onto reserves. The next page shows a first-day cover signed by a Macleod descendent and numerous RCMP staffers at Fort Macleod.

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From 1892 to 1952, the "Fort" part of the name was dropped and the town was known as Macleod. The original name was restored as part of a drive to recognize the town's history. In the early years, the name was often mis-spelled with an "Mc" instead of "Mac", including postmarks. The Colonel always spelled his name with the "Mac". To confuse the matter further, there was a post office in British Columbia that used Fort McLeod ("Mc", not "Mac") as its name from its opening in 1937 until it changed its name to McLeod Lake in 1952, thereby allowing the Alberta town to reclaim its original name [1]. For consistency, I will refer to the town only as Fort Macleod, even when discussing the years when it was just plain Macleod.

Prior to the establishment of a postal system in southern Alberta, the Mounties acted as mail couriers, ostensibly as a courtesy. This service gave them an excuse to monitor the comings and goings of settlers, and a constable could ride out to a ranch on a friendly visit to deliver a letter while keeping tabs on people. Without railroads, mail delivery was slow, infrequent, and not on any reliable schedule. The NWMP originally were supplied via Fort Benton, Montana. Anyone sending mail from southern Alberta had to obtain American stamps or rely on someone else to pay the postage for them when the letters reached Fort Benton.

When the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) transcontinental line reached Alberta in 1883, all supply lines switched direction and came out of Medicine Hat or Calgary. Both the Calgary and Fort Macleod post offices opened on 1883-10-01. In 1892, a north-south railroad running from Calgary to the American border increased the quality of mail service dramatically. Before the railroad, Alberta mail from the north would often zigzag to Fort Walsh (today Maple Creek), Saskatchewan, where it would pile up until the next NWMP supply convoy happened to be going to Fort Macleod. On one occasion in early 1883, a police patrol arrived with a half-ton of mail which had been accumulating for months [2].

The CPR and the townsfolk began a feud that started when the north-south railroad went past Fort Macleod 5 km west of the townsite instead of coming into it. When the CPR built the east-west Crowsnest Pass line, they routed it outside the town and platted a new site called Haneyville, where the station was built. This was an obvious attempt to sell lots at the new location. The inhabitants already having moved once, they stubbornly refused to do so again and eventually the CPR conceded defeat. Haneyville is today a grain field with no trace of its brief existence as a railroad depot. It never had a post office, but postmark collectors should be aware that there was another unrelated Haneyville in central-east Alberta, near Castor, which did have a post office.

Just north of the junction of the two rail lines was a short-lived hamlet and post office called West Macleod, again an attempt by the CPR to capitalize at the expense of the original settlers. It failed after a few years. West Macleod will be discussed further on. The railroad eventually did come through the townsite; an example of an RPO postmark is shown at left.

Fort Macleod: The Mounties And The Hanging Postmaster.

When the post office officially opened on 1883-10-01 at Fort Macleod, it was under the control of the NWMP for the practical reason that they were the only ones at the time who could operate it. It was in the Orderly Room, and Sgt. W.R. Turner was the first postmaster. The general public came in to pick up their mail, and Turner also rented out private boxes. Below is the proof strike of its postmark, with the name mis-spelled as Fort McLeod.

After the fort relocated uphill to a drier location, Duncan J. Campbell took over on 1885-01-01 as the second postmaster. He was originally from Quebec and settled in Fort Macleod at the request of NWMP Commissioner Acheson Gosford Irvine, who made him Sheriff of the Court in the Macleod Judicial District. Campbell was also the local hangman, and sent a few convicted men through the gallows trapdoor when not sorting the mails or serving papers for the court. At left is a photo of him from that era. When the railroads came through in the 1890s, his post office workload increased to the point that complaints arose. In 1898, railroad navvies and gandydancers on the CPR lines complained they weren't getting their mail, as a result of which the Lethbridge postmaster John Higinbotham was sent to straighten out the post office at Fort Macleod. He found bags of old mail that were unsorted and stacked in a corner [3].

Campbell passed his postal duties on 1903-08-01 to Samuel Heap, who had been a Staff Sergeant in the NWMP. After marrying in 1897, Heap left the force to take up ranching in nearby Pincher Creek. His wife was unhappy living on an isolated ranch far from civilization, so Heap rejoined the Mounties. He later took on the postmastership, serving until 1909-04-12. The post office was in a storefront.

Fort Macleod: After The Pioneer Era.

After Samuel Heap, the next postmaster was Alfred Francis Grady.   He was the first Fort Macleod postmaster to have no connections with the Mounties. Grady arrived from Ontario in 1884 and operated a hardware store until he took up his postmastership. He served on the town council, including three years as Mayor, and was very active in community affairs. At right is a proof strike of the postmark during the time when the town and post office were called Macleod. Grady's final day as postmaster was 1911-11-28, when John McKay took over. Grady was removed for political partisanship reasons. In those days, postmasterships were patronage positions. In the September 1911 federal election, the Tories defeated the Liberals, and thereafter hundreds of postmasters were replaced by party loyalists. McKay served only a short time until 1913-06-02.

During the Campbell to McKay tenures, the post office was in what the local newspaper editorialized was a "*little ramshackle shell where there isn't room to swing a cat, still less to transact the postal business of a growing and thriving town*".   The Mayor and others made a trip to Ottawa and funds were promised for a new building. The outbreak of World War One put the kibosh on that. R.T, McNichol, who succeeded McKay as postmaster, did some renovating of the existing building to get by. He had three clerks working for him, an indication that Fort Macleod was a busy town.

On 1924-08-12, Francis Patrick Walshe took over and became the longest-serving postmaster of Fort Macleod, staying until 1958-10-30. His name was commonly mis-spelled Walsh in many records. The post office grew and became a civil service operation in 1948.   The name change of the town also brought new postmarks, a sample of which is a CDS proof strike shown at left.   Walshe retired on 1958-10-30 and his wife Margaret became a brief placeholder until Curtis James Butler became the next permanent postmaster on 1959-02-03.

Butler was a Manitoban whose family came out west when he was a boy and in 1930 settled in Fort Macleod. After army service in the war, he worked in the petroleum industry before becoming postmaster. At left is a 1964 duplex cancel from the Butler tenure. In 1986 he retired from the postmastership [4].

The next postmaster was Leonard Francis Tilbe, who had begun working for the post office in 1965 in various locations throughout Alberta. He returned to Fort Macleod as postmaster after Butler retired. The Fort Macleod Philatelic Society was formed on 1984-01-04 and Tilbe was the first President of the club [4]. I have found nothing more about the club beyond this mention. An Internet search was negative and it was not mentioned in philatelic periodicals of the day. It appears to have been a short-lived local club with no connections to the greater philatelic world. Canada Post privacy regulations have deleted the names of subsequent postmasters.

At left is a pictorial postmark from the 2000s, showing the old fort, teepees, and what appears to be a thundercloud building up behind them. A replica of the fort has been built on the main street of Fort Macleod for the tourist trade.

In 1950 the post office moved into a large newly-constructed government building shared with the RCMP. As of 2014, it was still in the same building, although the Mounties have since moved to their own building.   Below is a photo I took of it in June 2014.

Macleod MPO #1303.

During World War Two, a pair of training airfields were opened near Fort Macleod. Just southwest of the town, and today its municipal airport, was the base for 7 Service Flying Training School. There was an auxiliary airfield near Pearce, a short distance to the northeast. The bases became operational in 1940 and in late 1941 the first large intake of flying cadets arrived [4]. Military Post Office #1303 opened on 1942-03-16 when Sgt. D.R. Bell became the first postmaster. As one might expect with military bases, there was a constant turnover of staff. Bell was transferred elsewhere and on 1943-06-30 Sgt. W.C. Keeling became the next postmaster. He was transferred out on 1944-10-09 and Cpl. G.S. Thompson became the final postmaster. The MPO closed on 1944-11-14 as the war effort in southern Alberta started to wind down.

The gross revenues of Fort Macleod post office had been relatively stagnant throughout the late 1930s in the $8,000 range [5]. When the airbases opened, gross revenue suddenly jumped to $12,321.95 for Fiscal 1941, and $20,916.23 for Fiscal 1942. Revenue stayed in the $18,000 to $20,000 per year for the rest of the war. Once MPO #1303 was fully operational, it was doing about $8,000 gross revenue per year, peaking at $10,957.12 in Fiscal 1944. After it closed, Fort Macleod gross revenues dropped to a level of $16,000 give or take for the next decade. Some of it was due to inflation and the rest due to Canada having shaken off the Great Depression because of the war.

Henrietta Edwards.

Among Fort Macleod's most famous citizens was the suffragist Henrietta Edwards. She was a Quebec native who was active in women's rights in a number of areas where she lived. Her husband was a medical doctor and they arrived in Fort Macleod in 1903, where he provided medical services to the Kainai tribe of the Blood Reserve. Henrietta continued to agitate for electoral reform and wrote several books. She died in 1931 in Fort Macleod. In 1981, a stamp was issued to honour her memory.

West Macleod.

West Macleod was on the north-south CPR track just north of the junction with the east-west Crowsnest Pass line. The area was known as Mekastoe, after the Kainai name for Chief Red Crow of the Blood Reserve. The West Macleod post office opened on 1894-09-01 with John Steinhoff as the first postmaster. At left is the proof strike of its postmark.

The CPR put pressure on local businesses to move to the new location, but the townspeople actively opposed what they perceived as a rival townsite. Having moved once already, they were opposed to any attempt at resettling, whether West Macleod or Haneyville. They hired a buckboard driver to convey passengers between the train station at West Macleod and Fort Macleod. On 1897-09-01, James R. Scott became the second postmaster but only stayed a few months on the job. The third and final postmaster was J.V. Richards, whose tenure lasted only a brief time from 1898-05-01 to 1898-09-27, after which the post office permanently closed and the fate of West Macleod was sealed [1].

Ardenville.

This post office was named after Arden Simpson, an early homesteader. Despite its name, it was never a village, only a ranch house post office. It opened on 1910-12-01 with Delmar Barr as postmaster. He had come out west because of lung trouble said to be asthma, and it was hoped the dry climate of Alberta would help. He and his wife Ellen homesteaded next to the Simpsons. The post office was located in a room of the Barr house. The mail went through Ardenville twice a week, and in 1911 a public pay phone was installed for the benefit of the local homesteaders. Delmar's health remained poor, and reading between the lines of local histories it seems probable that he had tuberculosis. His teenaged sons Victor and Glen helped run the post office during his weak spells. On 1916-10-16 Delmar died of pneumonia [2, 4].

Delmar's widow Ellen took over as postmaster until 1928-02-21 and then again from 1932-03-17 until 1948-07-14 when the post office permanently closed. During the interregnum, Archie McKinnon was postmaster but who he was or why there was such an interregnum I cannot find in local histories. Ellen had a large brood of children and grandchildren to help her around the farm. She usually had fresh-baked cookies for those stopping in to pick up their mail. After the post office closed, Ellen sold the farm to her son Victor and retired to Fort Macleod. Thereafter the mail service was via a rural route from Fort Macleod.

Pearce.

This railway siding was named after William Pearce, a CPR executive, and opened on 1910-06-01 with J. Leundrick as the first postmaster. At right is the proof strike of the postmark. P. Koole took over on 1913-01-25 and became the longest serving postmaster, staying until his death on 1950-12-07. There were numerous Kooles in the area who had come over with other Dutch immigrants and colonized the area as a group. The widow Jesse Koole briefly looked after the job but it then went to Percy and Virginia McFarquhar.

The McFarquhars were originally from Fort Macleod, had farmed in various places, and then bought a general store at Pearce. Virginia became postmaster on 1951-04-01 until her retirement in 1960, dying in 1963. Percy took over as postmaster on 1960-04-01 until his retirement on 1964-07-31. By then Highway 3 had been built, which generally followed the railway but before reaching Pearce veered away at a cut-off angle. This left the village on a side road that no one had any reason to travel, and with the decline of passenger railways, the end was nigh.

The final postmaster was Mrs. Mary Elizabeth Thompson, who moved the post office into her house. The death of the local economy due to the bypass meant there was little use for a post office, and on 1968-04-30 it permanently closed. A rural mail route out of Fort Macleod now serves the few remaining residents [4]. I drove through Pearce in June 2014 and only five inhabited houses were left. The main street, also the only street, was a narrow one-lane gravel road that more resembled a back alley.

Orton.

Large numbers of the Orr family settled in the district during the first decade of the 1900s as part of the Mormon diaspora from Utah. The post office was named after the school district, which in turn was named Orton after the family [2]. This was a farm house post office. When the post office opened on 1907-03-01, Josiah Orr was the first postmaster. Ernest Champagne, who lived on an adjacent quarter-section, took over on 1915-09-01 and served until 1924-02-28. Josiah then took back the post office to his farm but it was a losing cause. On 1926-10-31, it closed for good and was replaced by a rural route from Fort Macleod. Orton exists as a hamlet today but is far from Highway 3. The Mormons in southern Alberta were noted for their abilities in irrigation farming and it is still used in the area. The area is now a mix of irrigation, rangeland grazing, and dryland wheat.

Wellsville.

This farm house post office opened on 1910-12-01, the same day as Ardenville, with George Wells as the postmaster. Below is the proof strike of the postmark. After his death on 1928-05-23, it was taken over by his son Egbert Wells and moved to his farm on an adjacent quarter-section. The post office closed on 1929-12-31 and was replaced by a rural mail route [1]. George's grandson Allen wrote that the farm failed due to poor quality soil which only produced a few good crops before exhausting the nutrients. The family eventually abandoned the farm during the Great Depression [6].

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