

# **JOURNAL OF ALBERTA POSTAL HISTORY**

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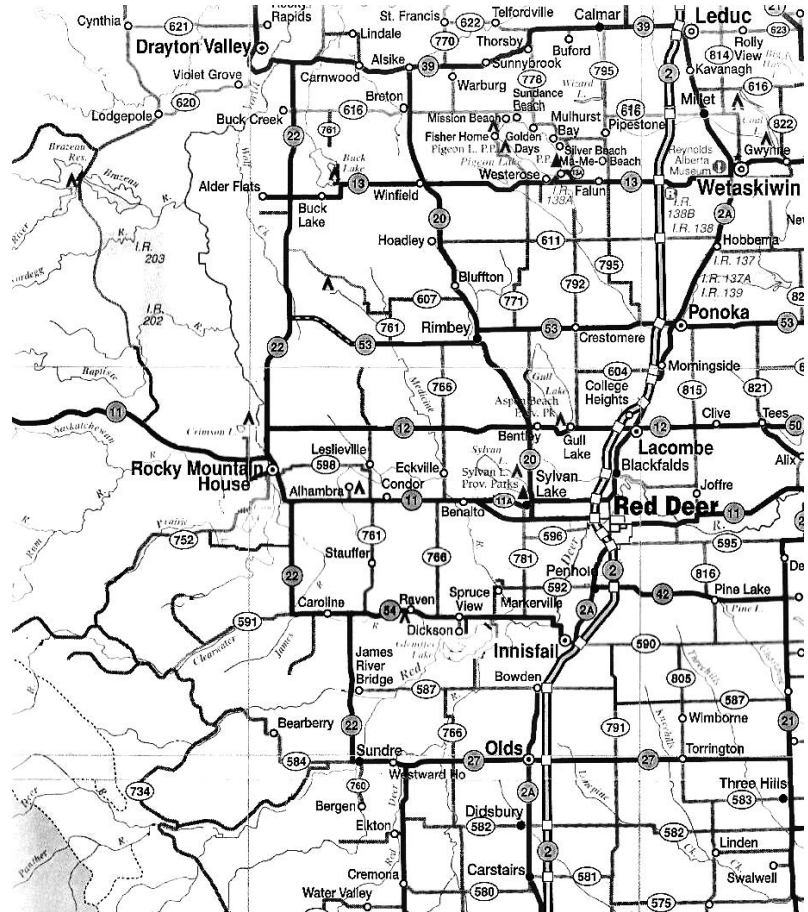
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# POSTAL HISTORY OF ALBERTA: WEST-CENTRAL DISTRICT, PART 1.

by Dale Speirs

This issue is a compilation of postal history articles about that portion of Alberta roughly between Calgary and Red Deer, west of Highway 2, excluding the districts covered in JAPH #3.

This area is generally well-watered rolling hills transitioning westward into spruce-covered foothills. Farming predominates close to Highway 2, and forestry and petroleum to the west.



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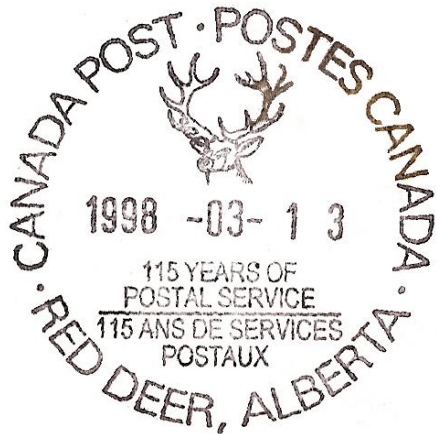
## **RED DEER**

The city of Red Deer, Alberta, is almost exactly halfway between Calgary and Edmonton on Highway 2, the main north-south route in the province. It is the dominant city of the central Alberta region. The oldest part of the town was established in the valley of the Red Deer River, a short distance upstream from where Waskasoo Creek empties into the river. Waskasoo is the Cree word for elk, and it was mistakenly translated by early Scottish settlers as “red deer”, after the species they knew back in the Auld Sod, but which is not native to Alberta. (There are, however, millions of white-tail and mule deer in the province.) To this day, the symbol of the city is a deer, not the heavier elk that is the true source of its name.

The city is in the heart of parkland country, with good moisture, fertile farmland, and numerous clumps of low wooded hills known as poplar bluffs. By 2016, it had boomed to 100,000 people as a petroleum service area. The giant petrochemical refineries of Joffre are just downstream and most of the staff live in Red Deer. It is also the trading capital of the central Alberta district, and the third largest city in the province.

The original settlers arrived in the early 1880s and were fur traders, not farmers. They settled five kilometres upstream of the current city at Red Deer Crossing, an easy ford across the river patronized by settlers and aboriginals alike. In 1884, the Rev. Leonard Gaetz arrived with his family and settled downstream where the city now is. He is considered the founder of Red Deer, and the main north-south drag through the city, Gaetz Avenue, is named in his honour. In 1883, the transcontinental railroad reached Calgary, and the following year work began on a line running north to Edmonton.

Rev. Gaetz offered the railroad surveyors land if the railway would cross where his homestead was and to build a station there, to which assent was given. This explains why the city grew up where there were steep river banks and high valley escarpments instead of the more logical shallow grade of the Red Deer Crossing. Once the railroad reached the townsite, the fate of Red Deer Crossing was sealed, and it gradually dwindled away as a town grew up around the Gaetz homestead. By 1891, the population of Red Deer was 50, reaching 2,118 by 1911, and growing steadily thereafter [1].



The first mail despatches began in December 1883 to Red Deer Crossing, to the trading post of George C. King, an ex-Mountie who would later become a Calgary postmaster. This is considered by Canada Post to be the actual start of the Red Deer post office, even though there was no official postmaster for another seven months. The stagecoach would bring a weekly mail up from Calgary, proceed to Edmonton, come back with a mail from there, and continue back to Calgary. Red Deer thus had a weekly mail but biweekly from a given city. The stagecoach had its share of mishaps crossing rivers or trying to navigate the prairie. There was no road, only a wagon track that turned to mud at the slightest drop of water.

Because of the competition between settlers at the Crossing and the Gaetz family, Red Deer at this time was basically an entire rural district strung out along the river. Any mail addressed to “Red Deer” could be to anywhere along the river. It didn’t matter since letter carrier service wasn’t to begin for decades and everyone had to come in to the Crossing to get or send mail. The Red Deer post office officially opened in August 1884, originally

at the Red Deer Crossing but later moved to the townsite in 1891. Rev. Leonard Gaetz is officially listed as the first postmaster but the post office was actually operated by his 18-year-old son Raymond. From 1895 to 1911 it was operated by Raymond’s brother, H.H. Gaetz [2]. The post office was not a particularly busy one in its first year since the main wave of settlers had not yet arrived. Postage stamp sales and other revenues were \$17.45 from its actual opening on December 1, 1884, to June 30, 1885, the end of the Canadian Post Office fiscal year [3].

(It should be noted that what archival records in Ottawa say about a post office may not reflect the actual truth on the ground. The official postmaster of a town may not have been the actual person who handled the mails. Recorded opening dates may be in advance of or after the actual opening date.)



CE IS FOR ADDRESS ONLY

Subsequent Red Deer postmasters were Harry Wallace (1911 to 1919, brother-in-law to the Gaetz brothers), Thomas Edis (1919 to 1951), George Horn (1951 to 1971), Mickey Shannon (1971 to 1975), and Earl Williams (1976 to 1983). After Canada Post reorganized its operations in the early 1980s, there was no longer a postmaster per se, just a group of managers, supervisors, and other assorted bureaucrats. Operations were split between the processing plant, letter carrier depots, and retail services.

The first few post office buildings were a variety of small places. In 1951, a large purpose-built brick building was opened on Ross Street, the main east-west street of central Red Deer (seen on next page in 1988). It was closed in 1993, as a result of a combination of dispersing letter carrier sorting to a new building and the rise of retail postal outlets (RePOs).









The Red Deer Mail Processing Plant opened in 1983, and took over not only the back office functions of the Red Deer post office but also about 100 surrounding small towns and villages in the central Alberta district [4].

Rural free delivery began in the surrounding area in 1919, with four routes. R.R. 1 was claimed by Red Deer posties to be the longest rural route in Canada with the most stops, but I have not seen this documented. William Silverberg was the carrier for R.R. 1 from 1929 to 1965. He was famous for delivering mail in winter in a home-made sleigh with skis and driven by a rear-mounted propeller. Letter carrier service within the city itself did not begin until November 1, 1948.

Red Deer also had four Suburban Service routes for outlying suburbs that were basically rural acreages within city limits, plus some farms. Rural Routes had letters delivered to individual mail boxes at the head of each driveway, while Suburban Service routes delivered only to cluster boxes.





As Red Deer grew into a city, satellite post offices were established, first as sub-post offices and today as RePOs.

<b>Satellite Post Office</b>	<b>Date established</b>	<b>Date closed</b>	<b>Address</b>
Sub #1	1959-12-01		
Sub #2	1961-11-01		
Sub #3	1966-05-02	1968-03-14	5 First Street
Sub #4	1976-03-15		6359 - 50 Avenue, Parkland Mall
Sub #5			Bower Place, Shoppers Drug Mart
RPO #1			
RPO #2 578371			
RPO #3			
RPO #4			
RPO #5 582514			Bower Place, Shoppers Drug Mart

RPO #6 594105			68 Dunlop Street, Co-op Deer Park
RPO #7 593850			5118 - 47 Avenue, Co-op Plaza Centre
089532			6350 - 67 Street, Glendale Food City
089540			3747 - 43 Avenue, Sproule's Mountview IDA
089559			3722 - 57 Avenue, West Park IDA
089567			Bower Place, Shoppers Drug Mart
089729			Franklin Mall, Ticketmaster
100897			68 Dunlop Street, Co-op Deer Park
100900			5118 - 47 Avenue, Co-op Plaza Centre
101788			Mountview, IDA
102756			Village Mall, Sobeys
111945			4407 - 50 Street, Safeway
387428			Highland Green, Value Drug Mart

## References.

- 1] Dawe, Wellington (1954) HISTORY OF RED DEER. Published by the Kiwanis Club of Red Deer. 82 pages.
- 2] Library and Archives Canada (downloaded 2008-03-07) Post offices and postmasters. ARCHIVIA NET, [www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/post-offices](http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/post-offices)
- 3] Campbell, A. (1886) Report of the Postmaster-General for the year ended 30 June, 1885. SESSIONAL PAPERS OF THE DOMINION OF CANADA 7:162
- 4] Kinnear, Bob (1998) 1883 to 1998. Published by the Red Deer Postal Anniversary Committee. 84 pages.
- 5] Hughes, Neil (1998) Alberta post offices 1876 to 1998. Published by Neil Hughes, Edmonton, Alberta. 179 pages.

## BLACKFALDS

The village of Blackfalds, Alberta, is roughly 10 kilometres north of the city of Red Deer, in the central part of the province. It was founded in 1891 when the Calgary and Edmonton Railway was built, under the prosaic name of “11<sup>th</sup> Siding”. The village was quickly re-named Waghorn, after its first postmaster, Walter Waghorn (1849-1930). In 1902 it was renamed after a Scottish hamlet called Blackfaulds, but dropped the letter “u” from the name [1]. The name was suggested by a Mr. Campbell of the Canadian Pacific Railway, which had taken over the C&ER. Waghorn was no longer postmaster, and Campbell, a Scotsman, suggested the name after his home town [2]. Although the village dates to 1891, it wasn’t incorporated until 1904.

The village is located in the parkland belt of central Alberta, with good agricultural land interspersed with clumps of poplars and spruces, and well watered throughout. The surrounding lands were soon settled by homesteaders. In the post-WW2 period, the village developed as an oilfield service centre and some light industry. As the railroads declined, Blackfalds survived because it is on the main highway between Calgary and Edmonton, now Highway 2A in town, and a new Highway 2 passing by a short distance to the west. In the past few decades it has become a bedroom community for people working in Red Deer, a ten-minute drive south on Highway 2A, and very likely will eventually be swallowed up by the city sometime in the next two decades.



The first postmaster was Walter Waghorn, who named the village after himself. He served from 1891-08-01 to 1897-02-22, then resigned, but returned again from 1903-06-01 to 1919-07-10. During the interregnum William Lawton served as postmaster. There was a connection between the two; Waghorn’s son Bert married Lawton’s daughter Estella. Laurence W. Bailey was then a short-time postmaster until 1920-06-14. Lawton had sold his original homestead to the Bailey family in 1909, so there was a connection that way as well [2]. At left is the proof strike of the Blackfalds split-circle issued just before Bailey’s tenure ended. After Bailey’s short tenure, things were more stable, with J.V.N. Miller as postmaster until 1953-06-20.



Dorothy Mae Gwin succeeded as the next permanent postmaster and put in a couple of decades until 1972-03-27. Arthur David Johnston took over from her [3].

I have not been able to find any subsequent records due to Canada Post's privacy regulations. The photo shows the author's mother, the late Betty Speirs at the Blackfalds post office in 1988.



On 1990-03-02, a Friday, the Blackfalds post office was completely obliterated by a natural gas explosion. A main line in the street had been leaking at a union, and the gas flowed sideways underground into the post office basement [5].

The photos on this and the following page were taken by Betty Speirs the day after the explosion.







Andy Holzli, a Blackfalds Fire Captain at the time, wrote about it as follows [4].

*“We had a post office approx 80 ft from where the leak occurred. This was a 2000 sqr foot concrete and brick building single story. The basement was fairly small and contained only a mechanical room which, once the ground became saturated, started leaking into the basement of this structure. Once the levels became high enough the basement exploded when the furnace kicked in. Witnesses in the apartment building across the street stated a mushroom-style fireball came from the building approx 75 ft tall. Then the concussion was so severe that due to the vacuum caused by flying building debris the fireball was sucked back into the remaining hole. The front door and postage stamp machine cleared the service station across the street and landed two backyards behind. Debris from the building (not to mention mail) were found in a two-block radius of the building site. The original building site was pretty much cleared and left a hole 15 feet deep and 75 feet across. All buildings around and or across the street were severely damaged. Houses shifted off their foundations, Doors and windows blown in.*

*I lived 3/4 of a mile from the Post Office. I thought someone crashed a car into the side of my home. The blast rattled windows 8 miles away and was heard for many more. We were lucky no one was at the post office or on the street. The explosion occurred at 00:05. 500 people were later evacuated. That night the janitor was supposed to be there. He was on his way from a nearby town, decided he was too tired and went home, with the intention to return to finish up at 06:00. The postal delivery truck drops off around midnight also. He should have been inside but his highway tractor broke down 30 miles out of town and was 3 hours late. One person had entered the post office at midnight to get his mail after work. Thought he smelled gas but wasn't sure. Just pulled into his driveway when the explosion occurred; never had the chance to call anyone about it. We were 19hrs on scene. The only thing that stayed in the area was the 3 ton safe. It was at the bottom of the hole.”*



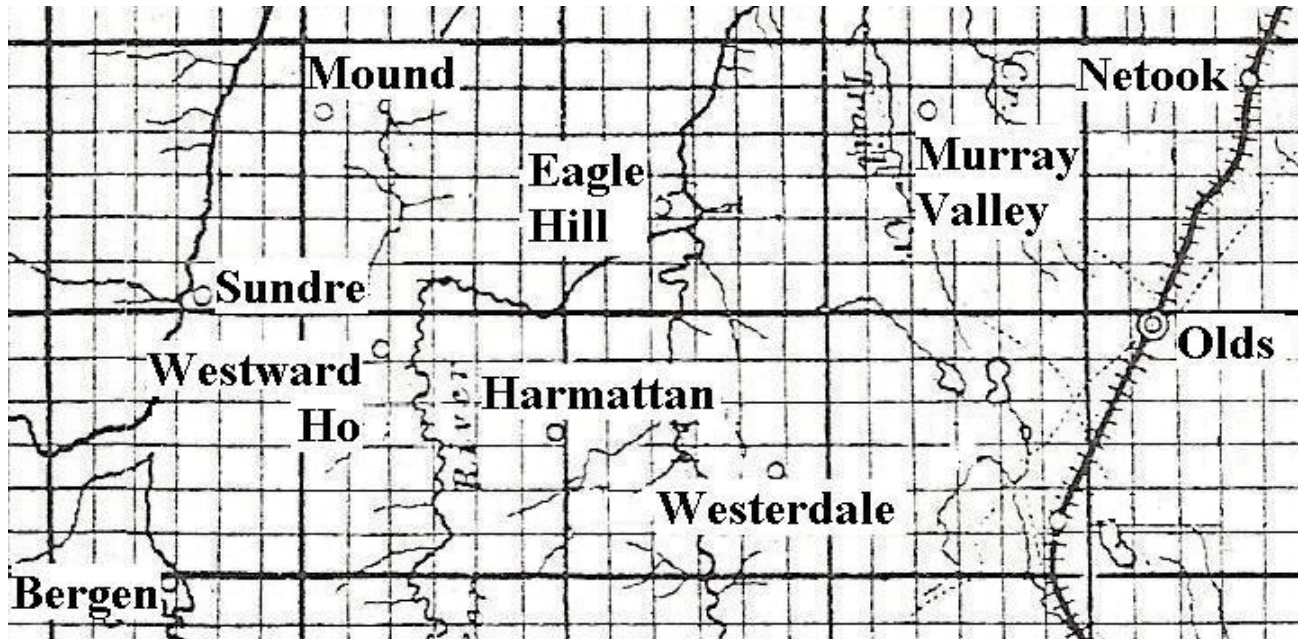
The post office re-started on the following Monday in a nearby strip mall, with all services except lock boxes [5]. The safe was the only thing that survived the explosion. Since a regular handstamp came into use immediately, it must be presumed that the hammer had been inside the safe. The postmark shown at left is from the first day of resumed service, obtained by Betty Speirs. The post office has since been established in a permanent location on the main street.

## References.

- 1] Sanders, Harry (2003) THE STORY BEHIND ALBERTA NAMES. Published by Red Deer Press, Alberta. Page 52.
- 2] no author (1972) WAGON TRAILS TO HARD TOP: HISTORY OF LACOMBE AND AREA. Published by Lacombe Rural History Club, Alberta. Pages 536 and 563
- 3] Library and Archives Canada (downloaded 2011-03-28) Post offices and postmasters. [www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/post-offices/001001-100.01-e.php](http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/post-offices/001001-100.01-e.php)
- 4] Holzli, Andy (2001-02-22) Underground gas leak. <http://www.firehouse.com/forums/archive/index.php/t-15609.html>
- 5] Alberts, Sheldon (1990-03-03) Blackfalds reeling from gas explosion. CALGARY HERALD, page 1

## OLDS-SUNDRE DISTRICT

Olds is located on Highway 2, the principal north-south route in Alberta, which parallels the railway between Calgary and Edmonton. It is about an hour's drive north of Calgary. Today it is a prosperous college town with Olds College, specializing in agriculture and the trades, being the major employer. Sundre is the next largest town and is to the far west of Olds in the Rocky Mountain foothills at the opposite end of the district. The area in between has a sprinkling of now-extinct post offices, most of which are only place names and a couple of which survive as hamlets. Farming and resource extraction are the major occupations. Below is a map of the area showing all the post offices past and present. The small squares are a mile on each side.



The death of post offices between Olds and Sundre can be correlated in general to the development of good roads. Olds survived and prospered because it was on the main north/south highway in Alberta and adjacent to a major railroad. Sundre has been able to cling to life because it is just far enough away from Olds as to make it less trouble for residents to shop locally. Sundre has just barely enough primary industry to justify people living there in sufficient density to support a town. All the other post offices in between were too near either Olds or Sundre to survive. The bigger settlements eventually swept up the commerce of the district into their orbits and wiped out the smaller settlements.

### **Lone Pine.**

Prior to the construction of the Calgary and Edmonton Railway, the only settlement near what is now the city of Olds was the Lone Pine Stopping House. It was located on the Calgary-Edmonton Trail, a wagon track notorious for its poor condition. In good weather it took a week to travel the length between the two cities and no one did it unless they were absolutely serious. Lone Pine was a prominent location a few kilometres northeast of present-day Olds where an unusually tall tree stuck up from a swampy spruce forest. It was universally used by aboriginal tribes and European settlers as a navigational landmark. The original tall tree was later chopped down by an uncaring settler who made it into a water trough for his cattle.

In 1886, after the excitement from the Second Riel Rebellion had died down, a Quebec soldier who had come out west with his regiment decided to stay. Jean Baptie Langlais, on the advice of a stagecoach operator, opened a stopping house at the Lone Pine. It was made a distribution point for mail, although it was not an official post office during Langlais's tenure. When the Calgary and Edmonton Railway began operations in 1891, every stopping house on the trail instantly went out of business. A one-week trip in ideal weather by stagecoach became a smooth luxurious 12-hour ride by train. Langlais then filed for a homestead and became a farmer [1].

A point of confusion for postmark collectors is that from 1909 to 1916 there was a post office called Lone Pine southeast of Olds but which was not related to the stopping place. That post office got its name because it was on Lonepine Creek, which begins near the original stopping house. Any postmarks of Lone Pine are of the unrelated post office and are outside of the scope of this article.

## Olds.



The Canadian Pacific Railway built a siding where the city is today and named it Sixth Siding. Once it was decided to establish a station and water tank there, CPR officials re-named it after their traffic manager George Olds. He soon retired and opened a general store in the settlement named after him. He handled the distribution of mail on an unofficial basis but was never postmaster. The village grew quickly, and on 1892-04-01 a post office was opened with John W. Silverthorn as first postmaster. He bought George Olds's store and ran the post office inside it. At left is the proof strike of the first postmark. The Olds post office was hit by a thief in 1904 who blew the safe open with dynamite and made off with \$100 in stamps, \$60 in cash, and two gold coins. The Mounties tracked him to Regina where he was found with some of the items still in his possession. While being brought back to Olds for trial, he jumped from the train but was recaptured shortly thereafter [5].

Silverthorn resigned as postmaster on 1908-04-04 and was succeeded by his neighbour John Albert Bush, a jeweler. The photo shows Bush in his post office in 1915. He was Olds's longest serving postmaster, staying until 1949-09-31. During the 1918 influenza epidemic, Bush was the only postie still standing on his feet, and single-handedly sorted the Christmas mail and worked the front counter. He worked daily from 07h00 to 01h00 the next morning in order to meet the mail trains and get the mail done [3].



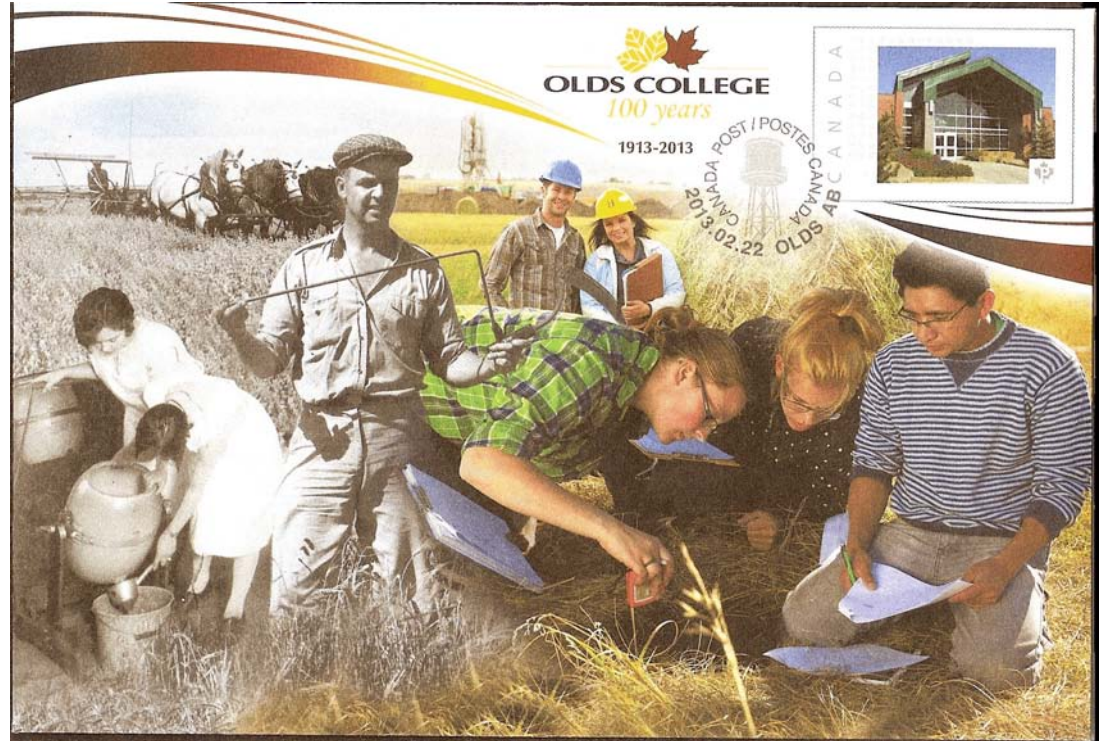
After Bush, there was a brief interregnum with a placeholder before Edward Outten took over as a civil service postmaster on 1950-04-29, by which time the post office became a standalone government operation. He served until 1958-09-30, and was followed by a string of civil servants in the Canadian Post Office. Below is the main post office building in 2012, much as it has been for the last several decades.







Olds was now a city in 2015, with about 8,300 residents. At left is a pictorial postmark which sums up the basis of Olds' economy: agriculture, petroleum, and Olds College. The College celebrated its centennial in 2013, for which Canada Post issued a commemorative cover.





In addition to the main post office, Olds has a retail outlet in a Sobeys supermarket, shown below in 2012. This outlet opened on 1989-11-20 as an IGA supermarket, then a Mayfair store, and then back to IGA [12]. Sobeys bought out IGA in 2009. What struck me about this outlet is that the Canada Post sign is unusually large. Most retail outlets use a smaller sign and often away from the store sign.





The postmark of the Sobeys outlet was an open rectangle instead of the usual large circle that most other retail postal outlets used.

### **Harmattan.**

Harmattan was a place name and not a village. The post office was named after the harmattan winds of the Atlantic coast of Africa, which are dry, hot winds that blow from December to February [2]. This was probably in analogy to chinook winds, which are warm winter winds that come out of the Rocky Mountains near this locality. The Harmattan post office opened on 1900-05-01 with Mrs. Annie Davis as postmaster. The post office was located in the Davis ranch house, and the mail came from Olds. The proof strike of the first postmark is shown at right.



What was unusual about this route was that many of the mail couriers were women. In those days of bad roads and worse weather, the job was considered hard enough for men, so it was uncommon for women to do it. A young widow named Mrs. Ball was the first courier to Harmattan, riding a saddle horse. Her successor was Mrs. Fifield, who used a horse team and wagon. On one occasion Fifield's husband traded one of the horses for another while they were in Olds, which she didn't find out until the livery stable ostler brought the team out. The new horse was not trained to a team and balked. Mrs. Fifield wasn't aware of this until after the mail was loaded and the new horse put his head over the other horse's back and refused to move. Mrs. Fifield did not use a standard buggy whip like everyone else but preferred a bull whip, as taught to her by her father. According to witnesses, she let go the whip with a CRACK! directly over the new horse, splitting its ear. He hit the collar at full speed, and the mail departed town that day faster than it had ever done before or since [3].

On 1902-01-01 the post office moved to the Gavin Hamilton ranch with him as the new postmaster. It later changed hands to Walter Levesley who was postmaster from 1904-10-01 until 1909-10-06 on his ranch. O.O. Taylor, a storekeeper, took over next and held it until 1918-03-01. The store was a crossroads store, not in any village. After him, three placeholders quickly came and went, until John Henry Johnson bought the store, became postmaster on 1921-05-12, and served until 1948-01-21. He was succeeded by his son Albert Victor (Bert) who had previously been storekeeper/postmaster at nearby Eagle Hill [4]. Bert served as Harmattan postmaster until 1961-03-20, so between him and his father the family put in four decades with the post office. Three short-term postmasters then came and went before the post office permanently closed on 1966-08-31, a victim of good roads, and was replaced by Olds Rural Route #2.

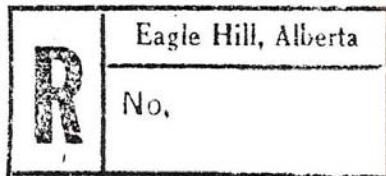
### **Murray Valley.**

This location was named after Scottish homesteader James Murray. He had originally settled in the Jumping Pound district west of Calgary in 1886, but a drought destroyed his ranch. Assisted by two of his sons, he took his last remaining cow, four horses, and a wagon north to Olds in 1889, then west to the valley that bears his name. He chose the valley as his new homestead because it had a spring and the bottomlands were well watered. The rest of his family soon followed and they became the first settlers.

The Murray Valley post office was opened on 1903-06-01 and lasted until 1927-02-09. There was only one postmaster, a local homesteader named Jonathan Phillips, one of Mrs. Ball's relations (her maiden name was Phillips). James Murray's daughter Agnes was married to

Jonathon. The post office was supplied from Olds via a zigzag route that went through other rural post offices. It was only a crossroads store post office, and no village existed. In 1927, Jonathon lost an eye while hunting. The post office closure was not entirely because of this misfortune but certainly didn't help [11].

### Eagle Hill.



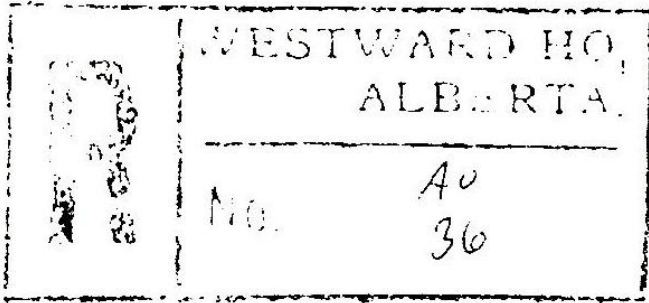
The name is a translation of the Cree tribal name for the area, and the birds once nested there [2]. The area was settled in the late 1890s, and the post office opened in the Howard Brothers crossroads store on 1903-06-01. The proprietor Thomas W. Howard was the first postmaster and stayed until 1908-02-08. At left is the proof strike of the registration postmark. The brothers tried to sell the store/post office by claiming to have discovered gold in a coulee behind the store, but the supposed gold was salted into the ground and no one believed them. The Alberta foothills are not known for gold deposits and the geology is wrong for them [10].

After a placeholder came and went, F.R. Johnson operated the store and post office from 1908-11-06 until 1915-11-12. He was succeeded by H.O. Yewell from 1916-01-15 to 1920-01-27, then Lee McOmber until 1924-05-03. A.V. (Bert) Johnson, of the Johnsons of Harmattan, bought the store and operated it until 1934-10-16, when he moved back to nearby Harmattan. Hugh Alexander Skinner was the next postmaster and store owner from 1934-10-23 to 1940-11-16. Bert Johnson then reappeared as postmaster for a year until 1941-11-22. At this point the store finally passed to another family, and Emanuel Christensen was postmaster from 1941-11-22 until his death on 1949-05-05. His son Martin took over but eventually closed the store and post office on 1955-12-23.

Despite good roads and a declining population, the post office refused to stay dead and re-opened on 1957-03-25 in a ranch house. Mrs. Irene Victoria Fifield was postmaster until 1963-06-18. I have not been able to determine if this was the original Mrs. Fifield of the bull whip fame or a daughter-in-law, but probably the latter as the original would have been of very advanced years by that time if she was still alive. After her, a brief placeholder marked time for a few weeks until the final and permanent closing of the Eagle Hill post office on 1963-08-16. Since then, mail service has been via rural delivery from Olds.

## Westward Ho.

E.A. Wheatcroft was the first postmaster of Westward Ho, from 1905-04-01 until 1910-01-01. The unusual name for the post office was after Charles Kingsley's novel WESTWARD HO, which Wheatcroft was reading at the time [2]. Westward Ho was initially a ranch house post office before moving into a crossroads general store. The post office then went through six postmasters in the next decade before the store finally failed. The Rock family took over, running the post office in their farm house, with Miss Jane Rock as postmaster from 1921-11-08 to 1928-09-19, followed by James Rock until 1941-08-27. Below left is the 1936 proof strike of the registration postmark.



A new general store opened and Mrs. Alma Scarlett was then postmaster until 1956-09-06, while her husband Al operated the store. After her came Albert Sydney (Bud) Guitard until 1961-01-10. The Scarletts wanted to get into farming and Guitard was tired of it and wanted a store, so the two families swapped their properties at par. They helped each other adjust to the new lifestyles and were good friends thereafter [6]. There was then a temporary postmaster, before Andrew Joseph Koenig became the final postmaster from 1961-11-14 to the closing of the post office on 1970-02-27.

Good roads made it more efficient for everyone to shop in Sundre, which is now only a few minutes away on a paved highway, and thus the mail service became a rural route. Westward Ho is a hamlet today scattered over a kilometre, surviving on a large county park of that name adjacent on the Little Red Deer River. There is also a trailer park that has more than 300 campsites, used both as residential by local oilfield and construction workers, and by summer campers.

## **Mound.**

The area was named in 1895 after an adjacent low hill by the first settler, a squatter named H.A. Muntz [2]. He relocated elsewhere a few years later and his land was properly homesteaded by Rev. Phillip Juan Neary, from Nebraska. By 1905 all the land in the area had been taken up and a ranch house post office opened on 1905-03-01. Neary was the first postmaster, serving until his death on 1909-08-16.

Settlers described the method of operation of the post office as a joint duty of Rev. and Mrs. Neary. On mail days when there were customers waiting, she would dump the letters on the living room floor and sort them on her hands and knees. If she found a letter for someone present, she would hand it to her husband, who would postmark it with a Mound cancel and then hand it to the recipient. Any letters not called for would be put in a box and stored under the dining room table until someone came to pick it up [6].

After Neary's death, his son Longard took over as postmaster until 1920-07-10, when he married and moved to Calgary. His sister-in-law Ellen, married to his brother Willmot, succeeded as postmaster until 1922-10-31. They had taken over the Neary parents's farm and the post office continued to operate out of the house.

Mrs. Florence Gastle, sister of Ellen Neary, became the next postmaster and served until 1945-03-20. She kept the post office on a little table next to the door of her house, with everything piled together. The adjacent wall had the public notices which post offices everywhere were obliged to put up. There were a few chairs along the wall where customers could wait for the mail to be sorted and visit with each other.

Mail days were always social occasions in a world with no telephones or good roads, the one place where everyone could get together and catch up on the news. Mrs. Gastle sorted the mail on her bed in the next room, and any mail not called for would be bundled for later pickup. On the next page is a postal card mailed to Elisha Gambill and forwarded to Mound in care of his twin brother Bob. Florence was their sister [10].

CANADA POST CARD

THE ADDRESS TO BE WRITTEN ON THIS SIDE



Elisha Gambill, Esq.,

Lehley, Alta.

*Of Bob Gambill  
Mound*





After Mrs. Gastle sold the farm in 1945 and retired, there was a brief caretaker before the next postmaster, William Cook, from 1946-08-01 until his death on 1958-07-16. For the first time the Mound post office moved out of farm houses and into a standalone building. This was actually a small gatehouse that Cook built by the front gate to his farm, shown below. After his death, his widow Minnie was acting postmaster but she got into a feud with Ottawa bureaucrats, who wanted to pay her only half of what her husband had been making [3]. This was what today is referred to as “creative dismissal”, as the Canadian Post Office was trying to clear out all the ranch house post offices and replace them with cheaper-to-operate rural routes. In the case of Mound they succeeded; Mrs. Cook resigned in a huff and the post office permanently closed on 1958-09-26.



## Bergen.

The forested hills west of Olds were popular with Norwegian immigrants because the land was so similar to Norway. When the population warranted a post office, it was named Bergen after the Norwegian city. All of the postmasters were homesteaders and almost all of them had sawmills on the side [1]. John T. Johanneson was the first postmaster from 1907-11-01 to 1908-06-17 and operated the post office out of his house. A couple of postmark proof strikes are shown below.



H.M. Gulson then took over the post office until 1913-09-09, moving it into his general store. Gerhart Pearson bought the store and was postmaster until 1915-08-28. C.O. Johannesen, a sawmill operator, was the next postmaster until his death in 1920, moving the post office back into a house. Charles John Erickson was then postmaster from 1921-05-26 until 1937-11-28. He used various members of his large family to courier the mail and provide an express and passenger service [7]. Like many rural couriers, he took passengers on the side and carried small freight such as milk cans or eggs.

John James Davidson was the first non-Norwegian postmaster, as the bloodlines started to thin out in the area and English became the dominant language. He served until 1949-09-09. The final postmaster was Russel Clare Cook until the post office closed on 1970-02-19 and became a rural route. Bergen today consists of a crossroads general store, a very tiny county park on the banks of Bergen Creek with barely enough room in the parking lot for my Honda Civic to make a U-turn, and a few scattered acreages. The sawmills did their job and the area is mostly pasture today, with the only remaining forest in the Bergen Creek valley where it is too swampy or steep to cultivate.

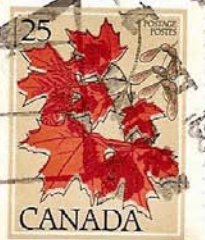
## Sundre.

Nels T. Hagen, a Norwegian immigrant, was the first postmaster of Sundre and named it after his birth place in Norway. Originally Sundre was in close competition with a nearby settlement called Derby Town. In the great flood of 1915, both towns lost their bridges over the Red Deer River which connected them to Olds. Sundre rebuilt its bridge but Derby Town did not and soon died out as a business centre. It never had a post office. The Sundre post office opened on 1909-12-15 and Hagen stayed as postmaster until 1919-10-16. The post office was originally on his farm, but Hagen was a full-blown entrepreneur and built a general store, livery barn, stopping house, and had the only telephone in the district. The post office quickly moved into the store [3].

The store and postmastership changed hands twice in the next couple of years before reverting back to the Hagen family. The country was going through a recession at the time and since the homesteading rush was over, it was a difficult time for businesses. Nels Hagen became postmaster again on 1923-08-01 and stayed until 1932-10-25. During the 1920s, mail service was once a week on Fridays, officially to arrive from Olds at 14h00 but in wet weather the mail seldom came in before 18h00. The roads were yellow clay that stuck to everything and built up in thick layers on the wagon wheels, making it difficult for the horses to pull the load. One pioneer settler of that era remarked in 1927 that: *“With thirty miles of dirt road between Olds and Sundre the stated hour of arrival on the notice board in the Sundre post office was a mere gesture in the field of public relations.”* [9].

Frederick Washington Jeannot then took over the store and post office from 1932-12-31 to 1938-03-15. He and his brother had been trappers but the fur market collapsed during the Great Depression. His brother-in-law was William Cook, who later became postmaster of nearby Mound [1]. John A. Macleod bought the store and was the next postmaster from 1938-05-21 to 1946-01-24. Clifford MacBeth followed as postmaster until 1976-12-10. During his time the post office became a civil service job on 1948-04-01 in a standalone building,. The next page shows a commercial registered cover sent in 1983 during MacBeth’s tenure.

B. & E. Lynn  
Box 195,  
Sundre, Alta  
T0M 1X0



**R**  
No. 809  
SUNDRE, ALBERTA

SH 10

Hansrah's Seeds Ltd.  
Lacombe, Alberta  
T0C 1S0

103

03.06  
CARTE EXPEDITEE  
FINAL NOTICE  
DERNIER AVIS  
RETURN ON  
RETOURNEZ LE

This photo shows the post office in 1989, with Betty Speirs standing by it.







In 1990, a retail postal outlet started up at Esso Plus Foods, transferring in 1993 to Diamond Jims, which closed sometime in the early 2000s [12]. At left is a postmark of the Esso outlet.

The main post office moved in the 1990s or early 2000s and today is in a shopping plaza, as shown on the next page as it was in 2012. Circa 2014, Sundre's population was about 2,600 people and it is the dominant town of that part of the foothills. It is far enough away from competing large towns that residents prefer to do their shopping there instead of driving to Olds.





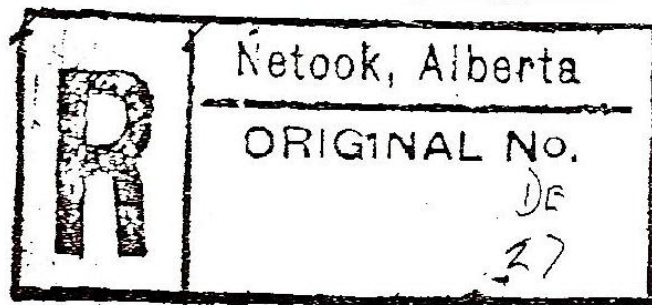
## Westerdale.



Westerdale was a ranch house post office, named after a parish in Yorkshire, England [2]. Joseph Bolton was officially postmaster, from 1910-08-01 until his death on 1929-07-18, but his wife Annie actually ran the post office. She was the sister of Mrs. Fifield of bull whip fame, who brought the mail to the Bolton ranch from Olds. At left is a postmark proof strike. After the death of Joseph, their son Joseph Edward took over until the post office closed on 1932-02-29. It was done to death by good roads and became a rural route out of Olds.

## Netook.

Netook was the next siding north of Olds on the Calgary-Edmonton railway. It was very near the original Lone Pine Stopping House and the name is the Siksika tribal name equivalent for "lone tree" [2]. Considering that Netook was on a major transportation route, its post office was surprisingly late in opening. It opened on 1928-03-15 and closed on 1958-04-11. The mail was sent and received via a catch post, and the train did not stop. Below is the proof strike of the registration postmark.





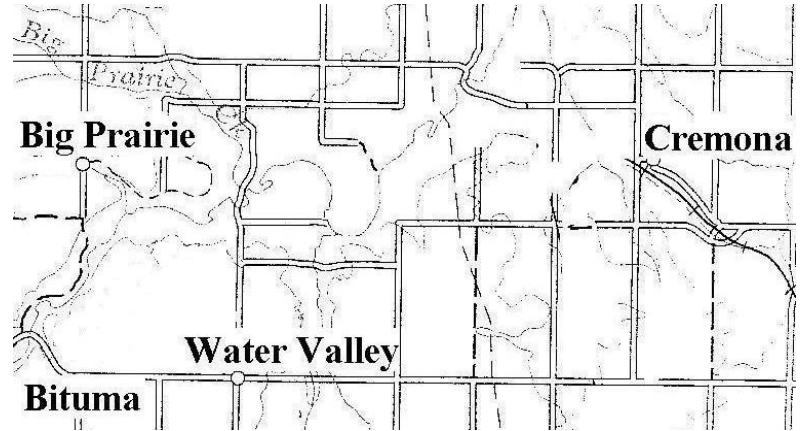
Fred Smith was the only postmaster, serving until his death. He was born in the Olds area, the son of Latvian immigrants who had changed their surname to an English one. In addition to the post office, he also was a nurseryman [8]. He never married, so the post office and tree nursery were sufficient to support him. The photo shows him mowing the lawn in front of his post office. One suspects that the only business of the post office came from Smith's nursery. By the time of his death, Highway 2 had become a paved highway and Olds was only a couple of minutes away, so the post office permanently closed.

## References.

- 1] various authors (1980) OLDS: A HISTORY OF OLDS AND AREA. Published by Olds History Committee, Alberta. Pages 7 to 14, 43 to 45, 143, 421 to 423, 476, 524
- 2] Harrison, Tracey (1994) PLACE NAMES OF ALBERTA: VOL. 3. CENTRAL ALBERTA. Published by University of Calgary Press. Pages 79, 114, 173, 179, 263
- 3] various authors (1968) SEE OLDS FIRST. Published by the Olds Old Timers Association. Pages 74 to 75, 118 to 122, 128, 137, 203 to 212, 234, 256
- 4] various authors (1977) ZELLA REMEMBERS: FROM OIL LAMPS TO OIL WELLS. Published by Zella Women's Institute, Didsbury, Alberta. Pages 96, 201 to 202
- 5] Jensen, Bodil (1983) ALBERTA'S COUNTY OF MOUNTAIN VIEW : A HISTORY. Published by Mountain View County No.17, Didsbury, Alberta. Pages 79 to 80
- 6] various authors (2000) WAGON TRAILS PLOWED UNDER. Published by Eagle Valley Book Club, Alberta. Pages 27 to 31, 136 to 137, 205 to 206, 240 to 241
- 7] various authors (1969) ECHOES OF AN ERA. Published by Kinette Club of Didsbury, Alberta. Pages 58, 94
- 8] various authors (1985) MEMORIES OF SAMIS AND NEARBY DISTRICTS. Published by Samis History Book Committee, Alberta. Page 169
- 9] Jackson, Geoffrey (196?) THE PIONEER LIFE OF MR AND MRS J.R. JACKSON. Privately published by the author, Edmonton, Alberta. Page 10
- 10] Bowman, Gladys (1967) GARRINGTON POST OFFICE, 1907. Published by Sundre Roundup, Sundre, Alberta. Pages are unnumbered. The author was the daughter of Garrington postmaster H.C. Mondey.
- 11] Miller, Mildred L. (1994) GLIMPSES OF THE PAST, 1894-1994. Published by Hainstock Centennial History Book Association, Bowden, Alberta. Pages 170, 227 to 228
- 12] Hughes, Neil (1998) ALBERTA POST OFFICES 1876 to 1998. Privately published by the author, Edmonton, Alberta.

## WATER VALLEY DISTRICT

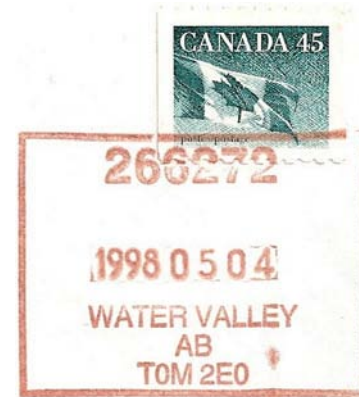
Northwest of Calgary about an hour's drive is an area where the foothills begin to transition westward into real mountains. As latecoming homesteaders arrived in Alberta in the early 1900s, the good land on the prairies was mostly taken up, so they were forced to try and farm in the foothills. It didn't pay, and the inside edge of the foothills was as far as the wave of settlement could reach. Part of this area was the Water Valley district. Below left is a modern map of the area in relation to Calgary. The map below right shows the original and now defunct post offices of the pioneer era. For scale, the grid roads are normally one mile apart east-west and two miles north-south, but because of the hilly terrain, many were not built or had to zig-zag.



This hamlet is in the foothills and while still extant, lost its post office after 2006. It was originally colonized by a few homesteaders and lumbermen but today relies on tourism. A school district was established in the 1920s and a contest held among the students to name it, Water Valley being the successful entry. The post office then took its name from the school [1]. Whatever other troubles may have vexed the settlement over the years, drought was not one of them. The land is moist and forested. Water Valley hangs on today with a few local stores, rodeo grounds, and schools.

Guy McCauley Gazeley opened the first post office in a general store on 1937-03-01 and held the postmastership until 1949. The mail route was from Carstairs. Gazeley was an American immigrant, coming to the area in 1906 and homesteading with his family in an adjacent valley. From the 1920s he lived in Crossfield and moved to Water Valley in 1937 where he homesteaded again, this time with a general store. He retired in 1949 and with his wife finished out their days in British Columbia where their daughter lived.

Walter Victor May took over the store and post office on 1949-12-01 until 1964, after which his wife Irene took the job until 1967-07-26. The store rotated ownership for the next few decades until the post office was converted in 1993 into a retail outlet [2, 3]. Below left is a CDS postmark from the post office days and below right is a POCAN cancel from the retail outlet.



The photo below shows Betty Speirs at the Water Valley post office in 1989. It changed hands a couple times more before the outlet closed, although the store is still operating.

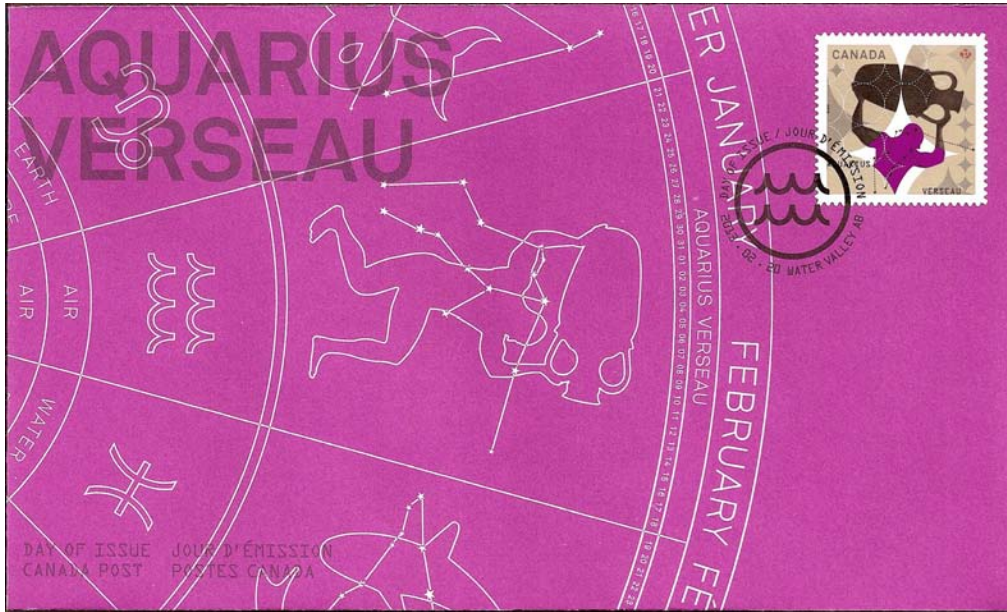




Mail service today is through a group of supermailboxes and one street letter box for outgoing mail, located on the west side of the rodeo grounds, as seen at left. When I visited the site in July 2012, I dropped a self-addressed envelope in the letter box to see where it would be cancelled. It received a Cremona pictorial postmark. Besides indicating the mail route, the use of a pictorial postmark indicates that such covers with them are not necessarily philatelic.



On 2013-02-20, Canada Post issued a set of stamps for the signs of the zodiac. The Aquarius postmark was that of Water Valley, the first-day cover for which is seen below left. Since the post office had been closed about five years, this postmark is purely fictitious. Below right is a computer-enhanced close-up of the fake postmark. I find it difficult to believe that out of all the thousands of existing post offices across this country, Canada Post could not find one that was in actual operation with an appropriate name for an Aquarius stamp.



## Big Prairie.

This was a foothills general store with the post office opening on 1909-11-15, with J.E. Tilleard as first postmaster until 1914-06-22. There never was a real village. The proof strike of the postmark is shown below. The word “prairie” was often used in pioneer days as simply being a large pasture or a clearing in a forest, not necessarily the wide-open flatlands we associate it with today. This post office was the terminus of the Carstairs mail route, and at the very end of civilization.

Arthur Binney then took over the store and postmastership until his death on 1933-05-17. The store moved a short distance during his tenure to a new site on his land. The Ottawa bureaucrats told Binney he had to post a public notice about the impending move in case anyone objected, but neglected to specify where. Binney nailed the notice to a tree deep in the bush at the back of his land. After his death, his clerk Annie Cartlidge took over the job. In 1937 she married and changed her surname to Pawson [4]. She carried on until the post office closed on 1960-01-29.



## Bituma.

This settlement began under the name of Skunk Hollow as a sawmill location during a building boom in the pre-World War One era. No one has been able to determine how the name originated beyond speculating that one of the pioneers tangled with a black-and-white striped miscreant. Bituminous coal was discovered by the lumbermen and several mines soon opened, but they were hampered because there was no railroad up into the foothills, and coal had to be hauled out by horse and wagon. In the boom this was barely economical and once the economy cooled the mines failed. The inhabitants dispersed and nothing remains today [4].

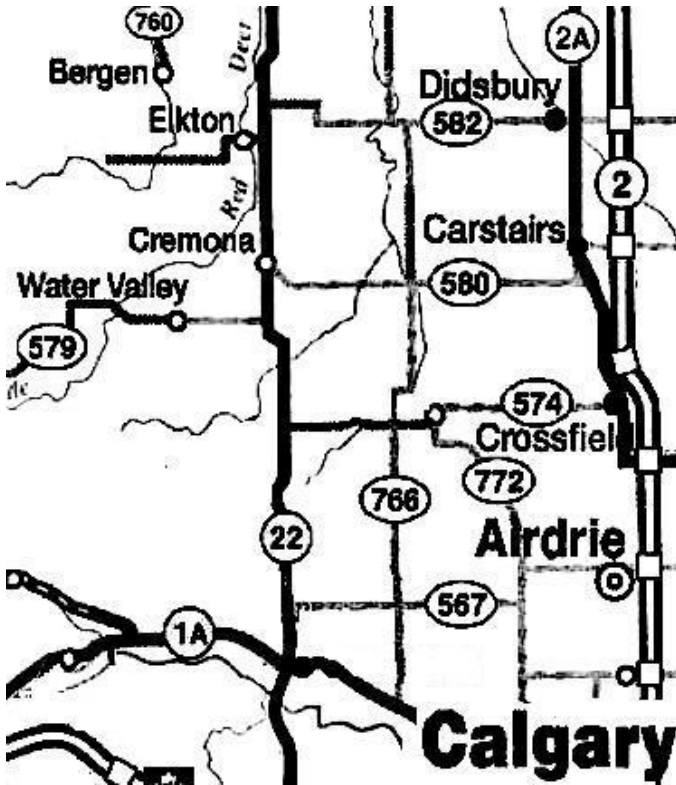


The post office was only open briefly at the height of the boom. Thomas Burrows was its sole postmaster, from 1913-02-01 until 1914-08-20, just before the war started. At left is a proof strike of its only postmark. When the post office opened, the inhabitants agreed it needed a more dignified name, so Bituma was chosen from its coal industry. This post office should not be confused with Bitumont, a different post office located in the Athabasca Tar Sands of northeastern Alberta. Bituma refers to bituminous coal while Bitumont refers to bitumen, the lowest grade of petroleum.

## References.

- 1] Sanders, Harry M. (2003) THE STORY BEHIND ALBERTA NAMES. Published by Red Deer Press, University of Calgary. Page 98
- 2] Library and Archives Canada (downloaded 2011-12-19) Post offices and postmasters. [www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/post-offices](http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/post-offices)
- 3] Hughes, Neil (1998) ALBERTA POST OFFICES 1876 to 1998. Privately published by the author, Edmonton, Alberta.
- 4] Yates, Lorraine (1975) BITUMA AND WATER VALLEY. Published by Jan Truss, Water Valley, Alberta. Pages 3 to 4, 9

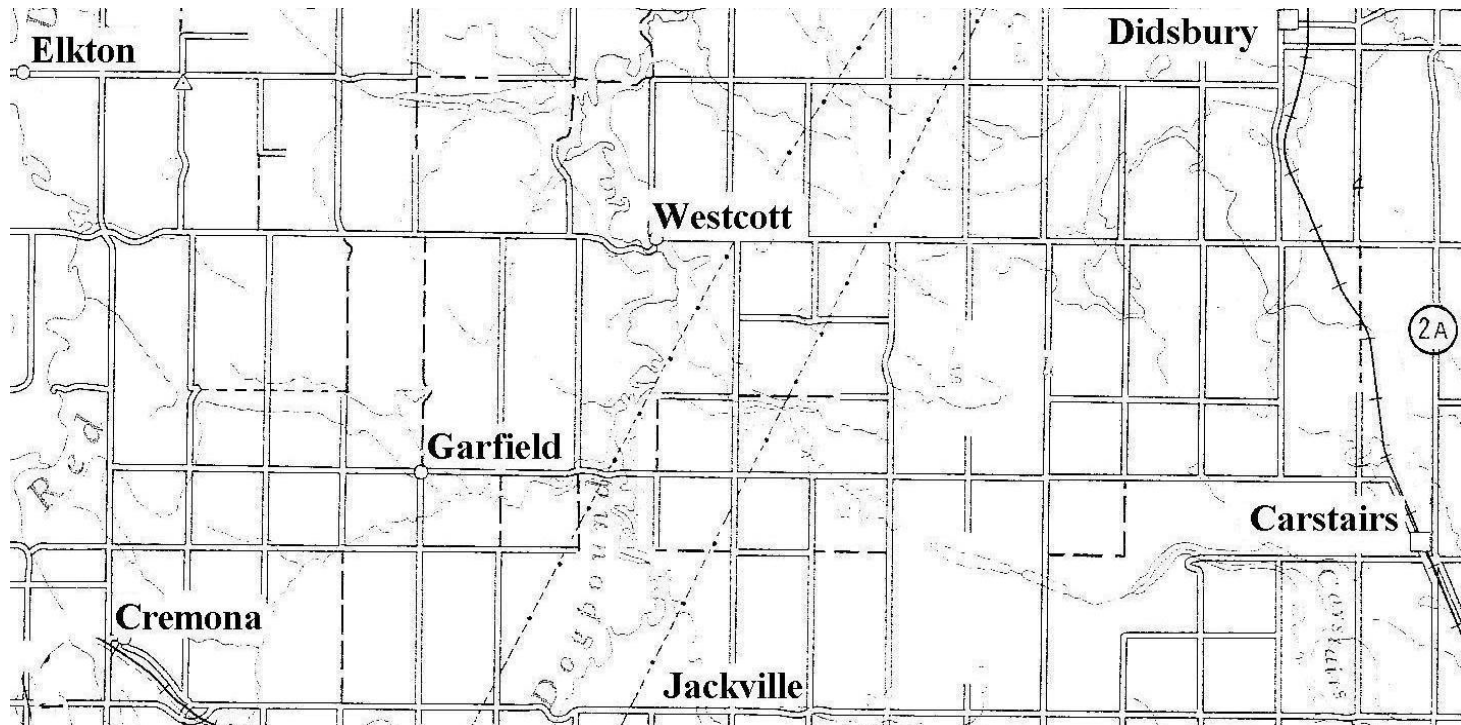
## CARSTAIRS, DIDSBURY, AND THE MENNONITES



The main north-south transportation link in Alberta is the Highway 2 corridor running south from Edmonton to Calgary and thence to the American border. The railroad came through along this route in 1891, and only then was there a major surge in colonization. That section west of the railroad between Carstairs and Didsbury to the Rocky Mountain foothills, was first settled by a sprinkling of ranchers, then homesteaders from scattered origins, and finally by a systematic group of Mennonites from Kitchener, Ontario. The area today is mixed farming, and the towns along the highway are prospering. The land is rolling hills transiting between the Rocky Mountain foothills on the west side to the prairie steppe east of Highway 2.

At left is a modern map of the area. There are three post offices in the district remaining today: Carstairs, Didsbury, and Cremona. The rest have become extinct.

The map on the next page shows all the post office settlements past and present in the area. For scale, the grid roads are one mile east-west and two miles north-south. The two dashed lines running diagonal across the centre of the map are power lines.



## **Carstairs.**

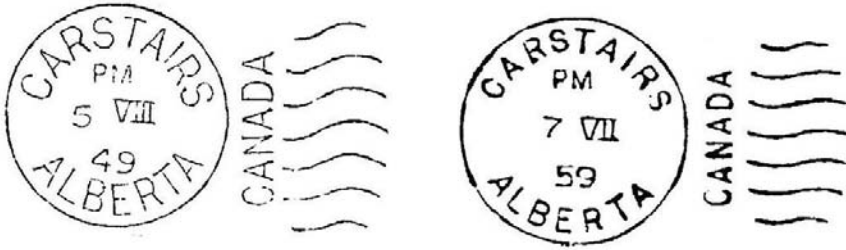
Carstairs was named by the railway after a Scottish town. Although he did not name it, one of the local Mounties in the area in 1885 was Capt. F. Carstairs, who by coincidence had ancestors from that town. Settlement in the area dated to the 1880s and increased steadily after the Calgary-Edmonton railroad was built in 1891, thus ensuring the viability of the town when a siding was established at its location. Donald McCrimmon applied unsuccessfully for a post office in 1895. He was the section boss for the railway and the only one who lived at the siding. Prior to the post office being established, mail would be left at the platform and local ranchers would ride in and pick up their mail and often for their neighbours. It seems likely that the post office was denied for insufficient population at the time.

E.W. Stone was finally successful on 1900-09-01 in getting a post office [1]. By that time, the siding had a general store and blacksmith shop in addition to the railway station and section house. About 30 families resided in the surrounding district, mostly Mennonites. The post office grew because it was a distributing point for the district mails from the railway. Although Stone was officially the first postmaster, the post office was operated by his clerk A.R. Shantz, who was one of the Mennonite settlers about whom more in a moment. Stone left the area to homestead at Dog Pound to the southwest of Carstairs, and on 1902-05-01 Shantz became the next postmaster. He opened a lumber yard and located the post office there, and lived above the shop. He never bothered with regular hours and residents were accustomed to visiting him at all times of the day to pick up their mail. By 1909, Shantz had expanded the post office quarters and had clerks assisting him.

In those days, the postmastership was a political position. After the federal government changed hands in 1911, Harold Boucock tried to displace Shantz but failed. However, Joseph George King had better connections in Ottawa and took over as postmaster on 1913-08-27. He moved the post office into his store, which was in a building he purchased from Mrs. Stone. The politics didn't stop then, as King became embroiled in controversies with the local newspaper editor, which carried on for years. In 1919, King got into a fistfight with the editor over a letter with four cents postage due. Since it happened in a post office building, the postal inspector was called into the case, but no disciplinary action resulted [2]. Presumably the postage due was paid.

King died suddenly on 1935-12-17 and his daughter Edna took over briefly as postmaster. She was replaced by Jim Lewis on 1936-05-30. Lewis stayed in office until 1948-05-13, and kept it in the King family building. He was succeeded by the local grain agent John Brookman,





who bought new land for the post office and moved it in 1950. Brookman became semi-staff in 1948 and the post office began running as a standalone operation. Examples of its postmarks in that era are shown at left.

The post office was expanded in 1964 to make room for more box numbers. It is seen in Figure 4 as it was in 1989. The woman mailing letters is Betty Speirs.

During Alberta's centennial year in 2005, this office used this pictorial postmark.





The post office made another move and is now in larger quarters as shown here when I saw it in 2012.

## **Didsbury.**

The next railroad siding north of Carstairs became Didsbury, named by the railway after a town in England now that is now part of Manchester. The first settlers arriving in 1894 were Mennonites from Kitchener, Ontario. They were ethnically German, and the streets of Didsbury all had German names until World War One. Their leader was Jacob Y. Shantz, who was personally asked by Prime Minister John A. Macdonald to help colonize the region [3]. The Shantz clan was an extended one and they were all over the countryside. There was a now-extinct hamlet named Shantz west of Didsbury, although it never had a post office.

Rev. Jacob B. Detwiller was the first postmaster of Didsbury from 1895-01-01 to 1900-08-29, and was the father-in-law of A.R. Shantz at the Carstairs post office. He distributed the mail from the immigration shed, which was where new homesteaders first reported when they arrived looking for land [4]. Most were Mennonites as he was, and many were discouraged at the first sight of the area. In later years Detwiller told a newspaper reporter that his main job at the shed was convincing his fellow settlers not to immediately turn around and go back to Ontario. Notwithstanding their qualms, the land was fertile and the majority of settlers did well.

Colin McPherson then served briefly from 1900-11-01 to 1901-08-15. David S. Shantz was the next postmaster, from 1901-11-01 until his dismissal on 1913-02-26 for political reasons, as the new federal government replaced him with their supporter, William Hunsperger [1]. I have not been able to determine David's relationship to the Carstairs postmaster A.R. Shantz but they were undoubtedly related since they both came from Kitchener, Ontario, were Mennonites, and lost their jobs at the same time for being in the wrong political party. Hunsperger was Mennonite but obviously voted differently. During Shantz's time, mail service to the area east of Didsbury was by a horse-and-buggy that would set out on Monday and go as far east as Trochu and Carbon, returning by Wednesday, and then setting out again on Thursday and repeating the trip.

On the next page is a postcard sent from Didsbury in 1908 by yet another Shantz, given name Arthur B., relationship unknown. This was sent during the golden age of postcards, when millions of people exchanged postcards, as can be seen from Shantz's message.

# POST CARD

For INLAND Postage only this space may be used for communication.

The Address only to be written here



SEAL  
MR 23  
1908  
LTA

Didsbury March 23rd 1908

Dear Friend

I rec your Card a few weeks ago and was very much pleased with it. I am sending you a scene taken from the National Park at Banff which is about 80 miles west of where I live. I will be glad to hear from you soon.  
Remain Sincerely yours

4268

Arthur B Schantz Didsbury Alberta

Miss Nettie Brown

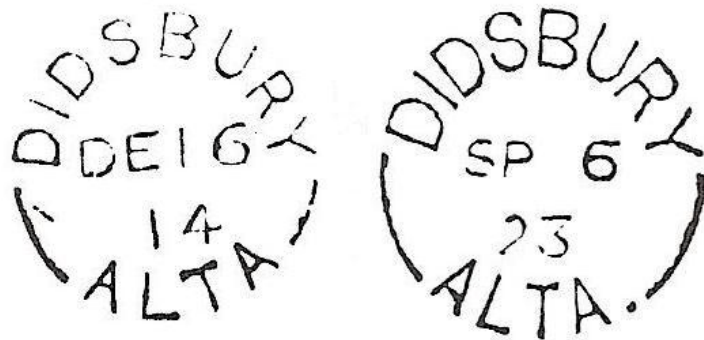
Glassville

Carleton Co

H. B. Carr

Illustrated Post Card Co., Montreal.

Hunsperger was postmaster from 1913-04-02 until his health failed in May 1922. He did not live long out of office and died in August. His assistant clerk William Harvard Thomas Morgan, a Welshman, took over the job, although he wasn't officially appointed postmaster until 1923-03-03. Below are proof strikes of two split-circle postmarks from that era. Morgan had been a letter carrier in Calgary before World War One. After serving overseas, he returned and settled on a farm near Didsbury (his wife was from the area). During his early years as postmaster, Morgan walked seven kilometres to work from the farm. It was said by his neighbours that they could set their watches by him going past. Morgan was actively involved in organizational volunteerism. He was president of the Alberta Postmasters Association from 1929 to 1938, and of the Canadian Postmasters Association from 1934 to 1937. The Didsbury post office became a civil service position on 1948-04-01 as the local economy grew. Morgan retired as postmaster on 1954-08-30.



After Morgan retired, a couple of placeholders came and went before Charles Alexander Wrightson, Morgan's nephew, became postmaster on 1955-03-01. His father was Morgan's brother-in-law. Postal records cut off at this time but local histories report that to at least 1969 and probably longer Wrightson was postmaster [5]. There followed a succession of postmasters but dates are not available due to lack of postal records.

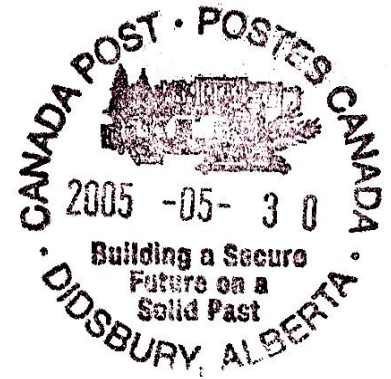


The post office moved into a standalone building in the 1960s, still in use as of 2012 when I visited the town.





Shown here are a sampling of modern Didsbury postmarks: a square POCON rectangle, a machine cancel, and a pictorial postmark.



## **Cremona.**

The village is in the rolling hills just where the Rocky Mountain foothills start to get serious, and is named after an Italian town famous for its violins, and which was the home of Stradivarius [6, 9]. The first postmaster was Smith Jackson who began the appointment on 1906-07-01. He had come out west on the advice of his older brother Squire (they all had unusual first names) as a cure for bad lungs but died of tuberculosis on 1909-07-16. His widow Lillian A. Jackson took over for a short time but then passed the position on to William Andison, who took over on 1910-08-01.

Squire originally proposed the name Honley for the post office, after the Jackson brothers' hometown in Yorkshire, England, but the Canadian Post Office rejected it because it was too similar to a Saskatchewan post office called Hanley. Smith and Lillian then suggested Cremona, which was accepted.

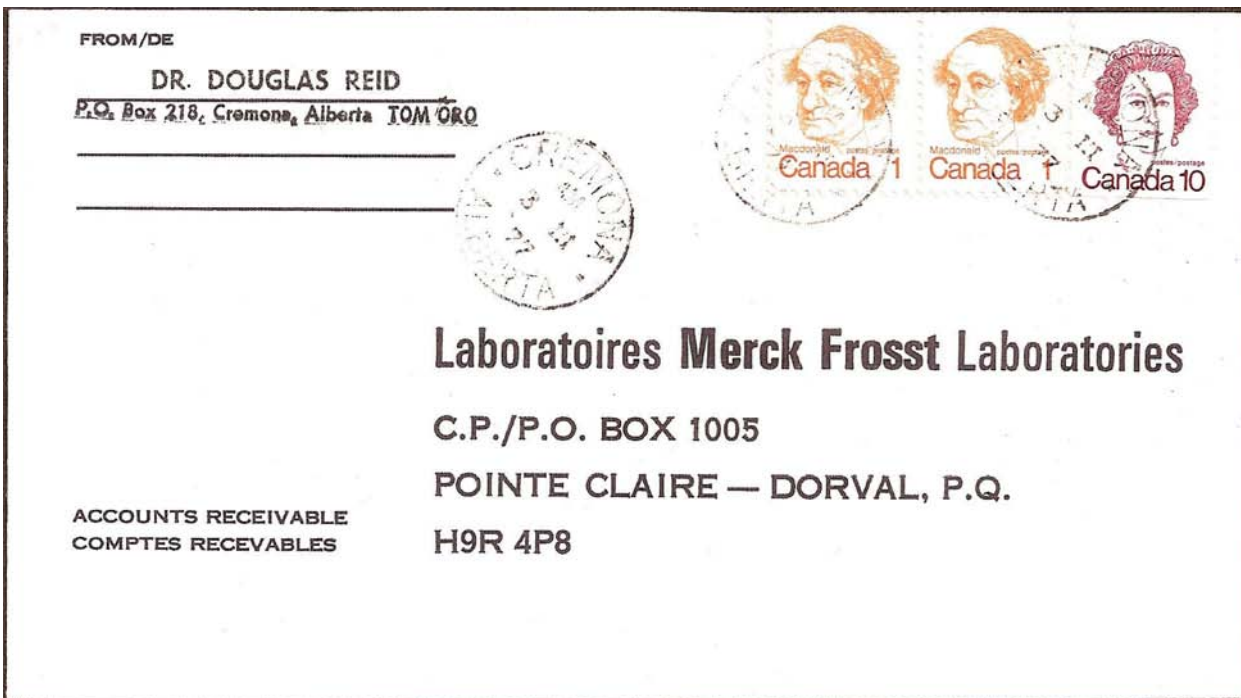
John (Jack) McBain was the next postmaster as of 1913-05-26. He was a Scotsman who had come out west with his two brothers, and all three homesteaded adjacent to each other. Jack bought the general store at Cremona and carried the mail by horse-and-buggy from Carstairs, stopping off along the way with the mail for Jackville in between the two villages. His mail route also went west to Big Prairie and Bituma in the foothills. He resigned the post office and Squire Jackson was the new postmaster from 1916-04-20 to 1917-08-08. McBain kept the mail route for a while longer so it may have been a case of too much work that caused him to cut back on postal duties.

The store was bought by a Carstairs general store and they tried to run it from a distance. They went through two store managers, who were also ex officio the postmasters, in quick succession. Giving it up as a bad job, they sold out to Charles Pearson, who became postmaster on 1918-12-23. He used a truck to haul the mail as the roads had started to be improved. Maj. W.E. Tiddall held the job and store from 1921-01-04, then J.A. Palmer from 1923-12-10 to 1928-03-31. Squire Jackson then returned to the postmastership until 1929-04-09.

After a placeholder came and went within a few months, Leo Ewing Fisher took on the job on 1929-09-19 and held it until his death on 1932-02-17. It was during his tenure that the railroad arrived, angling up to the northwest from Crossfield, which was the next siding south of Carstairs on the main north-south line. Funding for the railway dried up just as it hit town, and Cremona became a cul-de-sac on a short

line. Had it been extended further as a through line, the railway might still be operating today, but with only a few small villages on the line it was never profitable, and the line was abandoned in 1978. Fisher's widow May held the postmastership briefly but on 1932-08-15 it went to Norman Chester Campbell [2, 7, 8]. He served until 1946-01-22.

The next postmaster was Patrick John Maynes, who was replaced by Daisy Sullivan on 1969-12-30. In 1966, the position became a civil service job, and the post office moved to a standalone building. Below is a 1977 cover using an elderly CDS cancel.



A different CDS from 1998 is shown below left, and an Alberta Centennial pictorial cancel at below right.



Cremona is far enough from Highway 2 that it doesn't have much competition from Carstairs or Didsbury even with good roads, and was therefore able to maintain itself as a respectable-sized village. The post office is still in the same building as of 2012 when I took the photo on the next page



## Jackville.



Jackville was a ranch house post office halfway between Carstairs and Cremona. Since it was directly on the rural mail route, it was an obvious candidate to be killed off once good roads were built. There never was a true settlement here, and it was just a place name. The derivation of the name is unknown; there were several men named Jack in the area and the Jackson family were well known nearby. The first postmaster was Archibald Gentles, who came out from Scotland and settled on a homestead adjacent to his son [7]. The post office opened on 1904-05-01, and a proof strike of the postmark is shown at left. Local rancher John Arthur Heal took over on 1905-09-01, followed by Charles F. Carlin on 1909-10-27. Carlin abandoned his homestead and was replaced by J.H. Miller on 1916-05-15. The post office closed on 1917-11-26 and became a rural route out of Carstairs.

## Westcott.

This post office was due north of Jackville, more in line with Didsbury. The original name for the post office was Kansas, as a number of American homesteaders came from there. The name was later changed to Westcott, after a town in Berkshire, England [6]. The village grew up quickly and seemed prosperous. It received a weekly mail from Didsbury. The first postmaster was E.B. Hunsperger, of the Didsbury Hunspergers, who took office on 1903-06-15. He resigned on 1905-01-06, and was replaced by William Wilson, who bought the store the post office was in. Wilson was known as Old Weary because whenever anyone asked how he was, he replied "I'm very weary". It was during Wilson's tenure that the post office changed its name from Kansas to Westcott on 1908-08-01. The proof strike of the new name is shown at right.





J.F. Moir succeeded Wilson as postmaster on 1916-05-09. Moir had arrived with his family in 1910. Westcott at that time had two stores, and he bought the one that didn't have the post office [5, 8]. He later bought out the other store from Wilson and thus became the postmaster, holding that position until 1945-04-19. The post office then turned over three more postmasters before Sydney Whitlaw became the final postmaster on 1954-08-14. The post office closed for good on 1968-03-31. Good roads killed it, and mail service from then on was via Didsbury Rural Route #1.

### **Garfield.**



Like Kansas/Westcott, Garfield was colonized by Americans, and named after one of their presidents. It was on the Carstairs mail route and the post office opened relatively late in the history of the district. There was no village, and it was nothing more than a crossroads store. Richard Haener was the first postmaster from 1926-06-01, the postmark proof strike of which is shown in Figure 19. He sold his general store to Arthur Thomas Thompson who was postmaster from 1929-04-03 until 1940-05-31. The store/post office was totally destroyed by fire on 1933-02-28, taking all the mails with it. It was relocated to a new building a few hundred metres to the east [2].

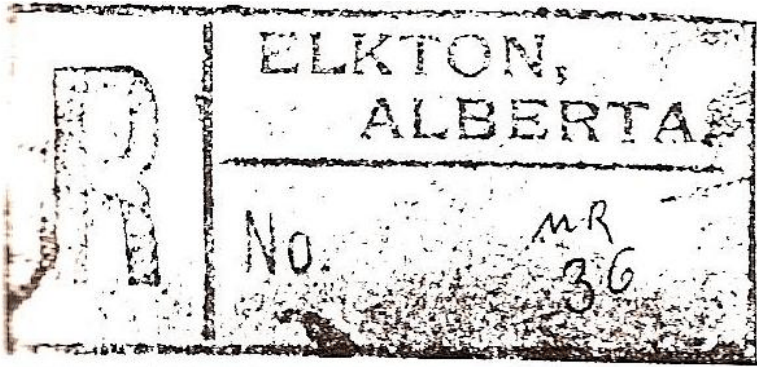
Douglas Horace Bird then bought the store and became postmaster on 1940-07-01. He had emigrated from England with his brother in earlier years. Although Bird stayed officially postmaster until 1945-12-10, he was away on military duty in the later stages of the war and his wife ran the post office during his absence as an acting postmaster.

In the postwar era, there were four postmasters/store owners who came and went as good roads put the store into a decline. The final postmaster was Mrs. Mollie Whitlow from 1952-01-31 until the post office closed on 1956-06-11. Nothing remains today. It is now on the Carstairs rural mail route.

## Elkton.

Elkton was on the edge of the foothills straight west of Didsbury. Robert Brown was one of the earliest ranchers in the district, arriving in 1895 from Scotland. He also opened a general store for the area and by 1898 had an informal mail service going. When the post office opened on 1907-06-01, he named it after a Scottish town and not the animal as many people mistakenly think. He sold the store and his land to George Hergert, and moved to Calgary, which was booming at the time. Hergert assumed the postmastership on 1914-07-30 and stayed for the duration of the war until 1918-04-18, when he sold out to Wilson Blain. Blain lasted until 1922, when Hergert came back as postmaster from 1922-12-02.

A long-duration postmaster was A. Luft, from 1925-08-27 to 1945-06-26. Below left is a proof strike of the registration postmark used during Luft's tenure. His wife briefly served after him, and then Harold Joffre Erickson became the final postmaster. He served from 1946-06-10 until the post office closed on 1969-03-14 and became part of Didsbury Rural Route #1, done in by good roads [5]. The original split-circle postmark seems to have sufficed for the entire post office history, as shown by a 1962 usage at below right.



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Pages 18, 39, 47, 178, 186 to 187, 229
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