

# The Post Office at Vimy Ridge, Hislop Township, District of Cochrane

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Vimy Ridge brings forth images of Canada's greatest battle in Northern France, where over 10,000 were killed or wounded April 9-12, 1917. Searching on the internet brings up dozens of pages detailing what took place just after Easter 1917.

But another Vimy Ridge is located deep in the bush of Northern Ontario. It is a small settlement not to be found on any road maps, nor will search engines discover it. Fortunately, a Temiskaming & Northern Ontario Railway timetable helped pinpoint the location of this settlement.

The Temiskaming & Northern Ontario Railway reached Matheson in April 1908. Until then, there was no easy access to the area other than the difficult haul through Northern Ontario's bushland. The Ontario Government was eager to open much of this land to settlement, enticing folks to clear and farm the fertile land. Such was the case at Vimy Ridge. With the construction of the Ferguson Highway in the mid-1920s, the transportation of goods became less of a problem. However, with greater mobility, the local population favoured the larger centers, and the small communities started to diminish in size and importance.

The Vimy Ridge settlement grew, and by the 1940s, it could be proud of its general store, school, church, and a post office that received mail daily, except on Sundays, from the North Bay & Timmins R.P.O. service (T.&

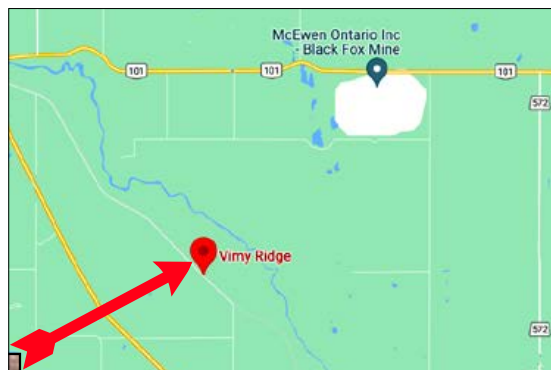
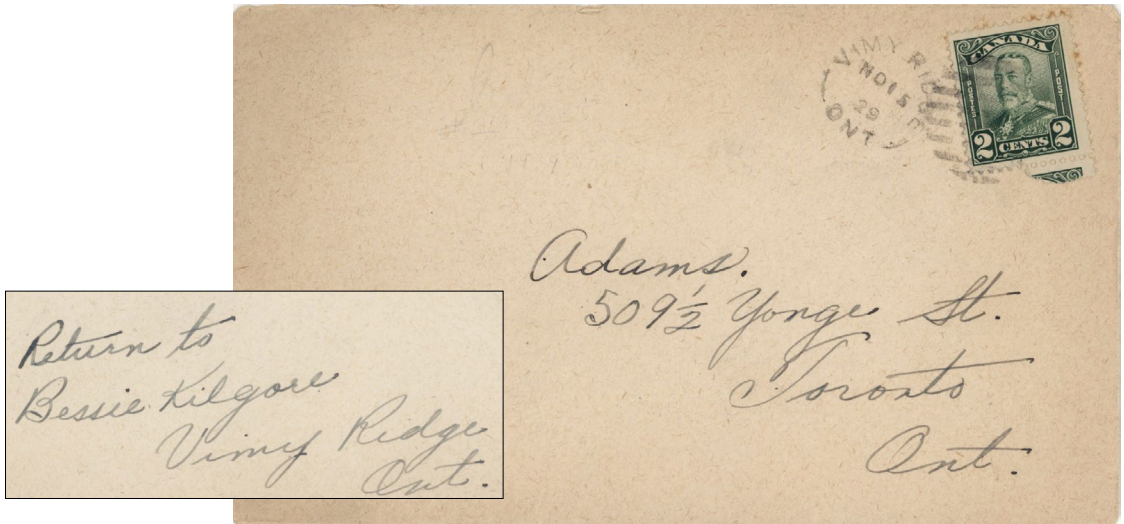


Figure 1: Vimy Ridge is located along the Temiskaming & Northern Ontario Railway just east of Highway 11 and some 8 km south of Matheson, Ontario.

N.O. Railway). The *Ontario Postal Distribution List* for 1926 states that mail arrived via trains 17 and 18 on the North Bay & Cochrane R.P.O. service. It appears that the train stopped at Vimy Ridge. However, by 1941, Vimy Ridge received and dispatched its mail via the catch-post service provided by trains 47 and 46, North Bay & Timmins R.P.O. The 1944 and 1945 *Lists* indicate that Vimy Ridge mail was routed via Matheson. This, of course, would coincide with the office's closure between May 1944 and April 1946. The 1951 *Ontario Postal Distribution List* again indicates catch-post service via train 47 but only on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays.



Figures 2 & 2a: VIMY RIDGE ONT / NO 15 / 29. A letter to Adams, 509½ Yonge Street, Toronto, from Bessie Kilgore, Vimy Ridge, Ontario. These letters to Adams in Toronto are reasonably common, but an internet search could not track who they were. Was it possible that the Adams Furniture Co. may have had a customer base covering the province? [Ed.: Cover is reduced to 80%].

The Report of the Postmaster General for 1924-1925, financial year ending March 31, 1925, states that gross revenue for that year was \$286.33 for this non-accounting office, justifying upgrading Vimy Ridge to a full accounting office, No. 4827, shortly thereafter and before October 1, 1931. However, the depression years were tough, resulting in a gross revenue drop to \$108.18 for the year ending March 31, 1939. The office closed May 31, 1944. Following World War II, the Vimy Ridge post office reopened on April 13, 1946, reverting to non-accounting status operating under number 83488. The financial report for the year ending March 31, 1949, states that gross revenue of \$109.13 was only pennies more than that of 1939. Had the local folk left the area, or was modern transportation taking them to Matheson, a mere 9 km to the northwest?

A veteran of the Boer War in South Africa, Frederick Miles was born June 13, 1879, in Bath, England. He married Alice Mary Shoebottom in London, Ontario, on June 24, 1903. They started their family with the first two of five children being born there. Soon thereafter, they moved to Brooking, Saskatchewan, where their third and fourth children were born. The family remained there until sometime after 1916, when they moved to Vimy Ridge. In 1920, the fifth and last child was born in New Liskeard. They had arrived at Vimy Ridge and remained on their homestead for most of their active lives.

Frederick Miles served as Vimy Ridge's sole postmaster, resigning just three weeks before his 65th birthday. The post office closed and would not reopen for almost two years. He died April 22, 1955, and is buried in the Kirkland Lake Cemetery (also known as the Swastika Cemetery) alongside his wife Alice



Figure 3: Memorial stone for Frederick Miles and his wife, Alice Mary Shoebottom, in the Kirkland Lake Cemetery (also known as the Swastika Cemetery). His family thought of him as a military man.

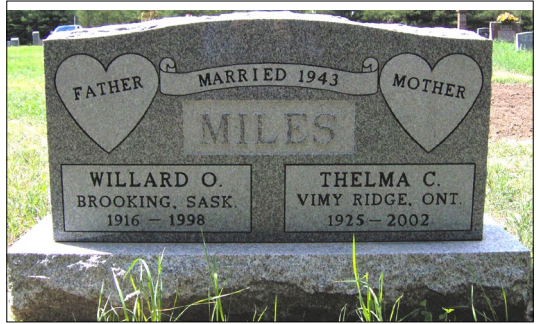


Figure 4: Thelma Constance Miles rests in the Hillcrest Cemetery, Matheson, Ontario. Stone appears to indicate that she was born in Vimy Ridge. A search on [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org) suggests that she might have been born in Manitoba.

Mary Shoebottom (June 11, 1882 – April 22, 1966).

The Miles family's fourth child, Willard Osler (Aug. 21, 1916 – Aug. 2, 1998), was born in Brooking, Saskatchewan, and came with his family to Vimy Ridge. In 1943, he married Thelma Constance Miller.

She became postmistress at Vimy Ridge on April 13, 1946, serving until June 7, 1960. The post office closed very shortly thereafter. Thelma Miller was very interested in local history and was instrumental in the opening of the Matheson Museum, which was named after her.

The question remains: Why was the post office named Vimy Ridge in 1919? When the Post Office Department was petitioned to establish a post office in a community or settlement, it was often left up to the appointed postmaster to give a name to the post office. The Post Office Department would only object if it conflicted with another office by the same or a similar name. As previously noted, and as shown on his grave marker in the Swastika

Cemetery, Frederick Miles was a military man. It is possible that when the post office opened with him as postmaster, he chose the name to commemorate the Battle of Vimy Ridge (April 1917), or perhaps he lost a friend in that battle and chose the name in that person's honour. Inquiries at the local level have not yielded an answer.

On the operations side, the office was equipped with a broken circle date stamp measuring 19.5 mm, with arcs of 5.5 and 5.0 mm, respectively. This device was proofed January 19, 1919, just 4 days after the post office's opening. This date stamp was reported to have been used between 1920 and 1943. However, on January 22, 1938, a 24.0 mm circular date stamp was proofed. It is known used between 1943 and 1955. (Fig. 5)

To handle its money order business, the office received a 24.0 mm MOOD date stamp proofed September 6, 1930. Registered mail was endorsed with an R-box hand stamp. Only one R-box was proofed, most likely from the second period of operation; others likely exist.



PROOF STRIKE  
Type A1  
(19.5-mm, arcs 5.5, 5.0 mm)  
proofed January 19, 1919

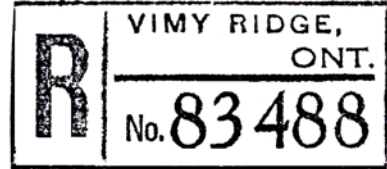


PROOF STRIKE  
Type MOOD  
24.5-mm  
proofed September 6, 1930

VIMY RIDGE / ONT.  
PM / MY 13 / 43  
This dated piece  
postmarked with the  
CDS hammer  
introduced in 1938.



PROOF STRIKE  
Registration Box  
50 x 22 mm  
undated, most likely  
second period of  
operation



PROOF STRIKE  
Straightline Non-Accounting MOON number  
undated, most likely second period of operation



PROOF STRIKE  
Type CDS  
24.0-mm  
proofed January 22, 1938

Figure 5 – Vimy Ridge post office was equipped with a number of devices to process the daily mail.

Figure 5: Vimy Ridge post office was equipped with several devices to process the daily mail.

Upon closure in 1946, patrons along Vimy Ridge Road and the settlement of Vimy Ridge were required to make the nine-kilometre trek to Matheson to pick up their mail. The small volume of mail was insufficient to establish a postal route.

### Acknowledgement:

We thank Mr. Bob Browne for his willingness to share his memories of times past. His grandfather was a construction foreman for the Temiskaming & Northern Ontario Railway from 1906 to 1907. Mr. Browne lives on his grandfather's homestead at Belleek, 3¼ kilometres south of Matheson.

### References:

- *Report of the Postmaster General*, 1925, 1939, 1949.
- *Ontario Postal Distribution List*, 1926, 1941, 1944, 1951.
- *Temiskaming & Northern Ontario Railway timetable*, 1937, 1946.
- Thelma Miles Historical Museum, Matheson, Ontario.
- Correspondence with Mr. Bob Browne, grandson of Samuel Browne, construction foreman on T&N.O. Railway (1906-1907), Belleek, Ontario.
- Telephone conversation with Mrs. Connie Clark, Frederick Miles' granddaughter, Shillington.