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POSTAL HISTORY OF ALBERTA: WEST CENTRAL DISTRICT, PART 2

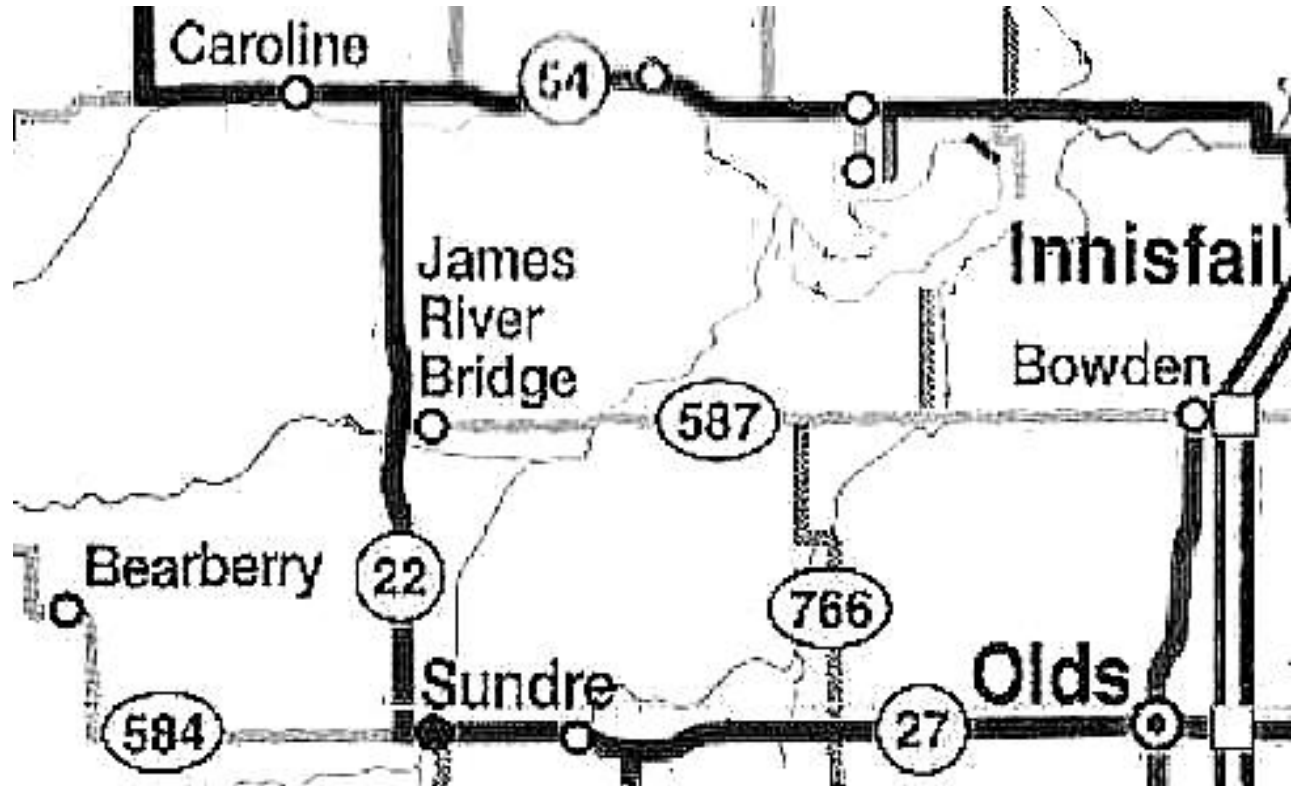
by Dale Speirs

[Part 1 appeared in JAPH #9.]

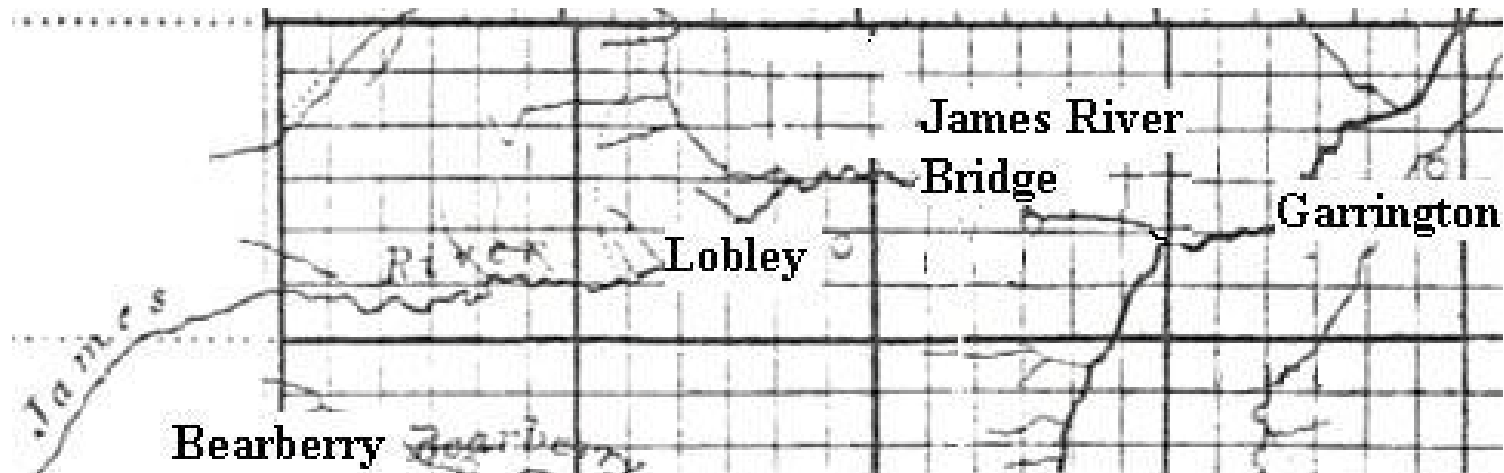
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The Clearwater, James, and Raven rivers form a drainage basin in the Rocky Mountain foothills west of Olds, Alberta. The economy depends on resource extraction, agriculture, and tourism. Below is a basic map of the area today in relation to some surrounding towns.



This is a map of the post offices that operated at one time or another in the James River area. The small squares are one mile on a side and represent the sections of land. Homesteaders claimed a quarter-section when settling on the land.



James River Bridge.

The modern-day bridge, photographed in August 2016, with no inhabitants for kilometres.





The post office of this name, which is not by the river or the bridge but several kilometres northeast of it, was established on 1916-07-01 with M.P. Martin as the first postmaster. He served until 1919-12-26. Prior to the post office being established, the homesteaders had to ride to a long-extinct hamlet called Mound for their mail. Eventually they settled on a system of one of them riding out on behalf of the others, but in 1914 they petitioned for a post office of their own. Martin ran it in his house [1].

Mrs. Martha Darling was the next postmaster, with her husband Thomas as the mail courier. The mail route changed over to Sundre, and the post office was in the Darling house, shown at left. They were an older couple. It got to be too much work for their age, so they gave it up in 1930. The post office remained closed for five years. Residents had to ride out to some other post office to get their mail.



The James River Bridge post office re-opened on 1935-10-01 in the Ritten general store, with Ferdinand Bernard Ritten as postmaster until 1937-01-08. This was and still is a crossroads store and there was no village. His brother Joseph then took over as storekeeper/postmaster until 1946-04-18. They sold the store to Frederick Lovern Simington who was then postmaster until 1950-10-03.

Lloyd George Fletcher then bought the store and was postmaster until 1952-12-04, when his wife Anne Margaret took over until 1965-06-30, when the store was sold. At left is the original split-circle postmark still in use in 1963 during the Fletcher tenure.

Charles Wilcox Irwin was the next postmaster, from 1965-11-08 to 1971-12-31, and in turn sold out to Jim and Isabel Neil, who bought it just in time for the coldest winter recorded in the district. Isabel then became the postmaster, but at that point the postal archives stop [2]. The store/post office changed hands in 1980 and Betty Christianson became the new postmaster, as of 2008 still in the position [3].

Today the post office is a combination general store/service station with residential quarters above the store. The photo on the next page shows the store/post office in 1989. The woman standing at the door is the author's mother, the late Betty Speirs. When I visited the place in August 2016, it looked much the same, save for cosmetic changes and the addition of an awning that made the post office sign invisible from the highway. I also noticed it was up for sale, and by the time this article appears in print it may have a new operator.



Bearberry.

The post office name is taken from both the Cree and Nakoda names for the area. The berries were extremely abundant in this area of the foothills, and humans (both aboriginal and white) and bears took advantage of them. The first settlers began arriving in the district between 1900 and 1910, but the district was always marginal for farming so far into the foothills. The post office opened in the farmhouse of Mrs. Agnes Battensby on 1909-07-01. At right is the proof strike of the postmark. The mail arrived once a week from Sundre at the convenience of the courier, depending on the weather and how muddy the trails were. There were no roads in the early days, and the trails meandered from one farmhouse to another instead of being on the grid road allowances.



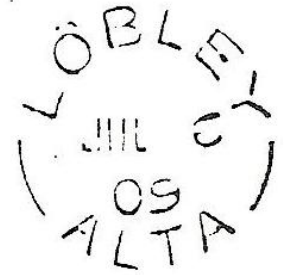
The post office changed hands on 1910-07-21 and went through five postmasters over the next fourteen years. During this time, it was always a farmhouse post office, and moved from one quarter-section to another at intervals [4]. The farmhouse postmasters kept small supplies of goods and necessities brought in from Olds but were not really store operators. Rather they just used the position as an opportunity to make a little extra on the side by selling to residents calling to pick up their mail.

On 1924-11-12, George Pearce became postmaster. He established the post office in a newly-built general store at a country crossroads. One of his sons couriered the mails, occasionally by automobile if the roads were dry. Mail service increased to two times a week. Pearce gave up the store and post office. Mrs. Isabella Kijos became the new postmaster on 1935-04-22 and the post office reverted back to a farmhouse. She resigned on 1942-09-27 and the post office went back to a general store.

The store went through five owners/postmasters before James Vinson took over on 1946-11-16. He was a returning veteran who had served in the European theatre of World War Two. He was the final postmaster until the post office closed for good on 1968-04-01, although he kept the store open a few more years. The official reason was “*closed due to its limited usefulness*” [2]. The residents of Bearberry then became part of Sundre Rural Route #2.

Lobley.

The Lobley family homesteaded in the district in 1906. The first post office opened on 1909-07-01 in the farmhouse of Fred Lobley. At right is the proof strike of the first postmark. The mail route was via Sundre, usually by land. Beginning in the winter of 1936-37 it was occasionally flown by a ski-equipped bush plane, a very novel thing at the time for a rural area. Such mail was in a closed bag and did not receive any airmail markings, nor was any extra charge made for the service. The photo below shows the mail plane being met by a delegation of local residents. Fred Lobley is second from the left [1]. At the time the photo was taken, sometime during the winter of 1936/37, the temperature was -40°C .



Fred Lobley retired on 1945-11-05 and was succeeded by Edward Pekse. The latter was born on a homestead near Lobley's homestead. He moved the post office to his farmhouse but didn't stay long in the job, resigning on 1947-03-08. A couple of acting postmasters came and went over the next few months. The post office permanently closed on 1947-12-22. Thereafter all mail service was on a rural route out of Sundre.

Garrington.



The only postmaster was C.H. Mondey, who served from 1908-05-01 until his death on 1949-05-16. The post office was named after his stepson. At right is the proof strike of the first postmark. His widow Christina was briefly acting postmaster but on 1949-09-30 the office permanently closed and Garrington became a mail route from Bowden [2, 5]. Mondey, his wife, and her two children by a previous marriage had homesteaded in the area in 1905. They were English, and he had previously worked in the London post office before emigrating.

The post office was always in their farmhouse, and consisted of a table in the corner of a small room with a box underneath to hold the mail. One wall of the room was covered with government notices. Residents waiting for the mail to arrive would sit and gossip in the living room. Mondey was also Registrar of Vital Statistics and miscellaneous government jobs. In 1915, Mondey was on active service overseas, so the post office temporarily moved a mile north to the farm of Miss Helen Muir, who carried out all the duties of a postmaster. She was not, however, an official postmaster on the government books.

Before the post office opened, the Mondey's seven-year-old daughter Gladys would ride to the Mound post office for the local mail. She would walk to a neighbour's ranch to borrow a horse (the Mondey's did not have any at the time; they used oxen), then make a day-long trip to the post office and back again, stopping off at neighbours along the way to give them their mail.

In her memoirs, she mentioned that as she crossed the farms, she had trouble opening and closing gates, which were not made to be operated by small children. On one occasion while she was off the horse and struggling with a gate, the saddle slid down underneath the horse's belly, with the mailbag firmly attached, so she had to walk to the nearest farmhouse for help. The local farmer then walked back with her, got the mailbag off, and re-cinched the saddle. The mailbag was tied back on again and Gladys rode off on her route [6].

After the Garrington post office opened, the mail arrived once a week on Fridays, and as roads slowly improved it also came on Tuesdays. The first courier was Ferinando Bertozzo, a Swiss immigrant, who used a pony and two-wheeled cart. The road was only a muddy track and

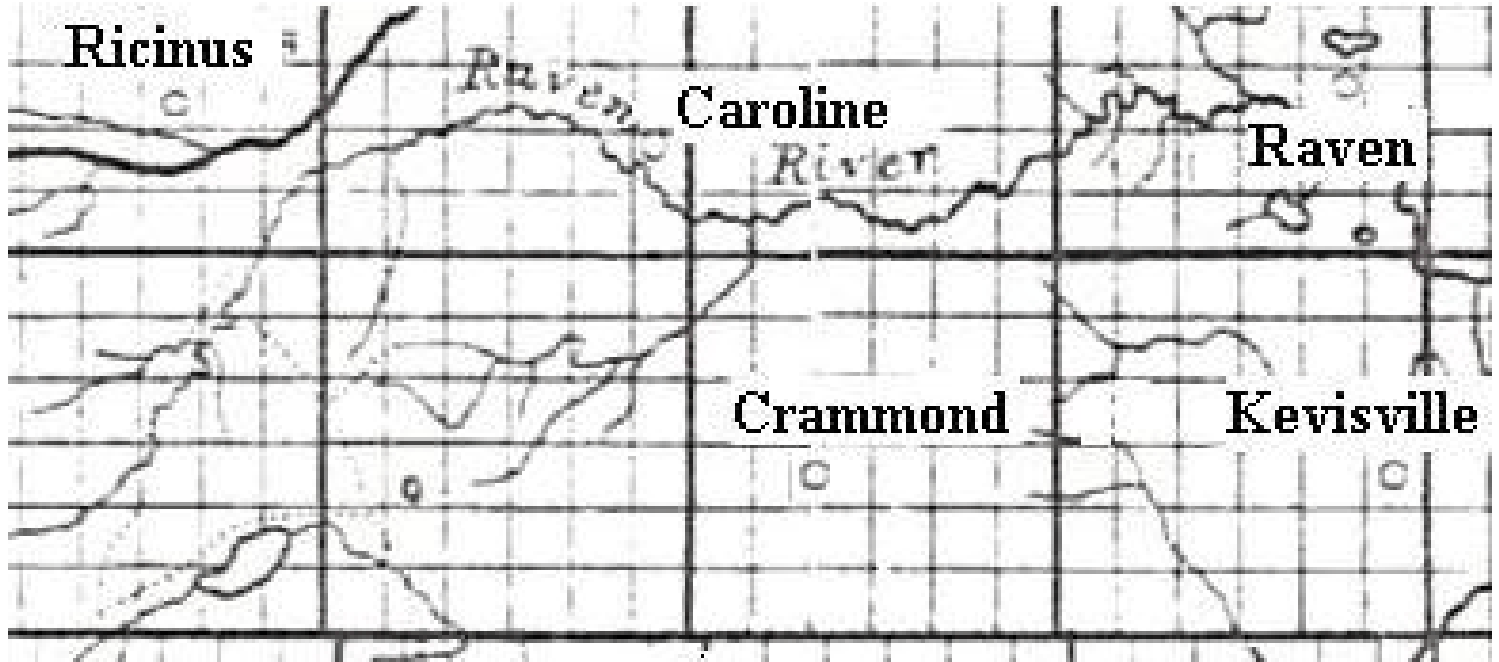
very rough traveling. Bertozzo found that he couldn't take pioneering and abandoned his homestead and the mail route. Charles Hudson, who had come out west with Mondey, took over the route. He was often ill, so his wife drove the route, leaving her baby girl with the Mondeys while she did the mail.

References.

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- 2] Library and Archives Canada (downloaded 2012-03-19) POST OFFICES AND POSTMASTERS. www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/post-offices/001001-100.01-e.php
- 3] Lutz-Wallace, Bryan (2007) Stories behind the markings. BULL MOOSE (postmark study group of Postal History Society of Canada) 65:677
- 4] various authors (1978) RECOLLECTIONS OF THE HOMESTEAD TRAILS. Published by the Bearberry Wapitana Society, Bearberry, Alberta. Pages 1 to 18.
- 5] Harrison, Tracey (1994) PLACE NAMES OF ALBERTA: VOL. 3. CENTRAL ALBERTA. Published by University of Calgary Press. Page 17, 47, 99, 205
- 6] Bowman, Gladys (1967) GARRINGTON POST OFFICE, 1907. Published by the Sundre Round-Up newspaper, Sundre, Alberta. Pages are unnumbered. The author was the daughter of Garrington postmaster H.C. Mondey.

Caroline.

The map below shows the post offices, past and present, along the Raven River.



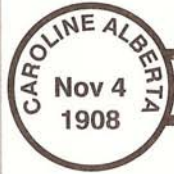
Settlement of the Caroline area began in 1903 along the north bank of the Raven River, although the present-day village is further north, away from the river. Harvey Augustus Langley and his wife Cynthia homesteaded near the river in 1907. Langley opened the post office on 1908-08-15 and named it after his daughter Caroline Rebecca [1]. She was, however, always known as Reba to family and friends. Below is a photo of the Langley family, with Reba, Harvey, and Cynthia.



Below is a cover that was issued on the centennial of postal services to Caroline and on the next page is a close-up of the Picture Postage stamp on the cover. The postmark is the original device used by Langley.



HARVEY, CYNTHIA AND CAROLINE LANGLEY 1908



2008 - Let's Celebrate 100 Years



Other settlers established a village to the north which took the name of the post office by default. The post office was originally in a corner of the farmhouse. In 1912, the Langleys decided to take advantage of the traffic to their house of people coming to get their mail and began selling sundries and supplies from a table. By 1917, the business had grown to the point where a new building was constructed for the store and post office adjacent to the farmhouse. Langley served until 1921-06-01 as postmaster, when he sold the store to James H. Lightbown [2].

Lightbown took over as postmaster for a couple of years but had trouble managing the business so he relinquished it back to the Langleys. Cynthia Langley became postmaster from 1923-06-08 until 1927-08-24. Reba helped behind the counter from time to time, but by then she was married, then divorced and a single mother, and finally re-married. She ended up working as a postal clerk about three days a week for her mother. Harvey Langley continued to operate the store until 1945 but the post office moved in 1928.

After a brief tenure by Myrland Burrett Hunter as postmaster, who had been Cynthia's assistant, the post office moved away from the farm to the blacksmith shop of Herman D. Suhr in the village. He became a long-serving postmaster from 1928-08-22 to 1946-04-02. His health began to decline and he sold out, moving to Red Deer [3].

There were seven postmasters who came and went in the next five years, before Mrs. Marie Antoinette Schlamp became postmaster on 1950-12-01 and served two decades until her retirement on 1972-09-16. During her tenure the post office became a semi-staff position with

the Canadian Post Office in 1966. As part of Canada Post's purge of rural post offices in the early 1990s, the Caroline post office was closed on 1992-10-21 and immediately replaced by a postal outlet [4]. Below is the post office in 1989. The woman is Betty Speirs.





In August 2016, I visited the retail postal outlet in a general store, shown below.

Unfortunately I couldn't get a better angle for the photo because the entire street was torn up for utility construction.

Raven.



The post office name is a direct translation of both the Cree and Siksika names for the locality [1]. The first settler in this area was William Berry from Nebraska, who arrived in 1901. He liked the area so much that he wrote his parents and encouraged them to come up north. His father Thomas and several brothers all filed for homesteads. On 1905-02-01 the first post office opened, with Thomas Berry briefly as the postmaster until he resigned on 1906-11-19. At left is a proof strike of one of its postmarks. The post office was located in his general store on his homestead adjacent to the banks of the Raven River. It was not a settlement, just a crossroads store. Once there was a fire in the store while Mr. and Mrs. Berry were away, date unrecorded, but the building was saved when the children formed a bucket brigade from the river. No mail was lost.

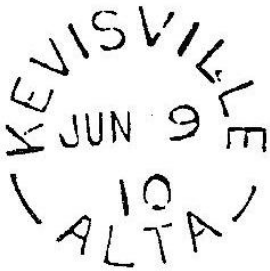
The sawmill industry was booming in those days and more mail was handled than might be expected of just a few dozen homesteaders. Lumbermen often camped out by the post office en route into the foothills. On one occasion, the Berrys supplied meals, horse feed, and camping to a party of 33 men and 66 horses at \$1 each. Undoubtedly many of the men took advantage of the post office to write home [5]. Berry soon became tired of running the store and sold out. The post office went through four postmasters in the next few years. It came back to the Berry family when Thomas's daughter Hazel was briefly postmaster from 1911-06-13 until 1912-12-01. It then went through another three short-time postmasters until the Walker family bought the store.

Frederick Walker became the postmaster on 1920-05-20 but in October of that year passed the position to his wife Annie, who remained postmaster until 1941-11-07. The store and post office burned down on 1929-01-28 and everything was lost, but the Walkers started over from scratch. They then sold the store to their daughter Gertrude and son-in-law Norman Beale. He became postmaster from 1941-11-08 until his death on 1951-08-30. His widow Gertrude kept going briefly as postmaster until 1952-04-25, when she sold the store to Walter Roy Simpson. He was a Manitoba man who was looking for something better, but only lasted until 1954-04-24. The store/post office changed hands twice more. The final postmaster was Mrs. Marjorie Jean Jensen, from 1968-05-15 to the permanent closure of the post office on 1970-08-07.

Since then the mail has been distributed on a rural route out of Innisfail [2]. Below is a photo of the hamlet that I took in August 2016. There are a couple of small businesses and a few houses. The hamlet is today on Highway 54, a paved road that runs directly from Innisfail to Caroline. I dropped a self-addressed envelope into the supermailbox shown in the photo, and it was returned to me with an Innisfail machine cancel.



Kevisville.



The first settler arrived in 1895 in what was originally known as the Red Raven district. By 1910, homesteading was well underway and there were enough people to justify a post office. The first postmaster was Charles William Kevis, who served from the post office's opening on 1910-05-16 until his death on 1936-06-01. He was an Englishman, ex-India Army. The post office was located in his farmhouse and his son Edgar was one of the mail couriers, bringing it in from Markerville. At left is the proof strike of the first postmark.

There were no roads at this time, just muddy tracks that followed the tops of ridges and wound their way from one homestead to another. The standard practice was for each new homesteader to cut a trail through the bush from where his neighbour left off and run it directly (or as nearly as the terrain would allow) to his house, rather than use the official road allowances. The trails thus zig-zagged past every farm house in the district. The mail couriers would dispose of or pick up mail en route but anyone who lived past the postmaster's house had to come in to get their mail [5].

After the death of Kevis, Raymond Long McKain became the new postmaster, moving the post office into his general store. Shortly thereafter, he built a new and larger store to handle the post office and the extra business it brought in. There was no village; this was just a crossroads store. The McKains also owned a sawmill near Ricinus which proved more profitable, and as it was too much work to run a sawmill, store, and post office, they decided to simplify their lives. In 1946 they sold the store/post office business and leased the building to George Everett Oliver, who became postmaster on 1946-03-01 and held it until his death a few months later on 1946-08-08. McKain's wife Elizabeth was then briefly acting postmaster. Melvin and Ethel Ross bought the store outright but only stayed in the business a year, with Ethel as postmaster from 1946-10-01 until 1947-12-01.

Ralph Edward McColman was the next store owner/postmaster, from 1947-12-23 to 1951-09-20. He sold out to the Gibbons family, and Philip Leo Gibbons became the next postmaster until 1960-06-06, when the store again changed hands. Gibbons was suffering from poor

health and couldn't run the operation anymore. Hubert C. Drummond was the final postmaster until the post office permanently closed on 1962-06-30. The Drummonds moved the physical store building to Caroline, and thereafter the mail was distributed out of Innisfail [5].

Ricinus.

This locality was on the Clearwater River west of Caroline, well and truly into the forested foothills. The name is the scientific Latin name for the castor oil plant, but why it was chosen I haven't been able to find out. All the local histories are silent on the matter. The plant is a tropical Old World species and is not native to Alberta. There is a completely unrelated native plant, the cow parsnip, which looks a bit like castor plants, so I surmise that it may have been a case of mistaken identity.

The Ricinus post office opened on 1913-08-01 with Mrs. A. Godley as the first postmaster. The proof strike of the first postmark is at right. The Godleys were a family of seven who came from Red Deer in 1906. Five of them then filed for adjacent homesteads, and the post office was in the farmhouse of the parents.



Their son Ed helped with the post office and carried the mail via Caroline. After his mother's death, Ed then became postmaster on 1924-04-02 and continued in the job until his death on 1941-12-23. The photo on the next page shows him standing in front of the post office circa the 1920s. During the latter part of his administration the post office was moved into a crossroads store operated by the Oper family.

The Opers had come to the district from eastern Alberta, having lost their farm there in 1933 because of the great drought. They rented Ed Godley's farm and started up a small store nearby. The mother of the family, Adda Oper, became Godley's postal assistant, and it was during the final stages of his illness that the post office moved into the Oper store. After his death, Adda's daughter Birtis became a temporary postmaster. The mail was then carried by George Samuel Cliff, who hauled milk and cream of local farmers to Dovercourt, which is northwest of Caroline about halfway to Rocky Mountain House. The mail route therefore switched that way [3].



Birtis only stayed a short while as postmaster and married not long after. George Cliff then became postmaster on 1942-04-01. He was an English immigrant who homesteaded at Ricinus in 1925. In 1927, a few years after Ed Godley became postmaster, Cliff took over his mail route. After Cliff became postmaster, he had his daughter Irene as an assistant, and his son Jerry hauled the mail and the milk. It was a very informal farmhouse post office and kept no fixed hours. Residents simply rode in anytime to pick up their mail. If George was out in the field, he left the plough and horses standing while he went and helped the customer. Both George and Jerry gave up their positions on 1963-05-31.

Walter LaVerne Doyle then took over as postmaster until his death on 1967-05-26, followed by his son Francis Allan Doyle until 1968-04-02 when he resigned the job. There was a brief placeholder until 1968-10-15, when the post office permanently closed. Good roads helped convert everything into a rural mail route.

Crammond.

This post office opened on 1937-08-16, which is surprisingly late in the history of the district. No one knows the origin of the name. It appears to have been a farmhouse post office as there was no village, and local histories are largely silent about it. At right is the proof strike of the first postmark, which was a CDS since the era of split-circles had long passed. Harold Stanley Dix was the first postmaster, serving until 1939-12-05. He was born in the district of parents who had homesteaded there prior to World War One [3].



After a brief caretaker postmaster, Mrs Ethel Mary Patterson became postmaster from 1940-01-27 to her death on 1946-09-24. The post office changed postmasters every two or three years thereafter, and somewhere along the way moved into a crossroads general store. Samuel K. Dixon became postmaster on 1955-06-01 but didn't own the store. He was a war veteran who was homesteading nearby and worked part-time at the Crammond store for cash wages. When he resigned, the store owner Arthur Lee Lamb took over as postmaster on 1957-04-25 until 1963-07-30 when he sold the store. Lamb had homesteaded in the area in 1910. The final postmaster was Mrs. Margaret Emily Dingman until the post office permanently closed on 1968-06-28 and became a mail route.

References.

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- 2] Library and Archives Canada (downloaded 2012-03-19) POST OFFICES AND POSTMASTERS. www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/post-offices/001001-100.01-e.php
- 3] various authors (1979) IN THE SHADE OF THE MOUNTAINS. Published by Ricinus-Caroline History Committee, Caroline, Alberta. Pages 55, 71 to 72, 139 to 140, 150 to 151, 174 to 175, 192 to 193, 268 to 275, 318 to 319
- 4] Hughes, Neil (1998) ALBERTA POST OFFICES 1876 to 1998. Privately published by the author, Edmonton, Alberta.
- 5] Heinsen, Annie (1973) GRUB-AXE TO GRAIN. Published by Area Historical Society, Spruce View, Alberta. Pages 182 to 184, 187 to 190, 199, 201, 212 to 213

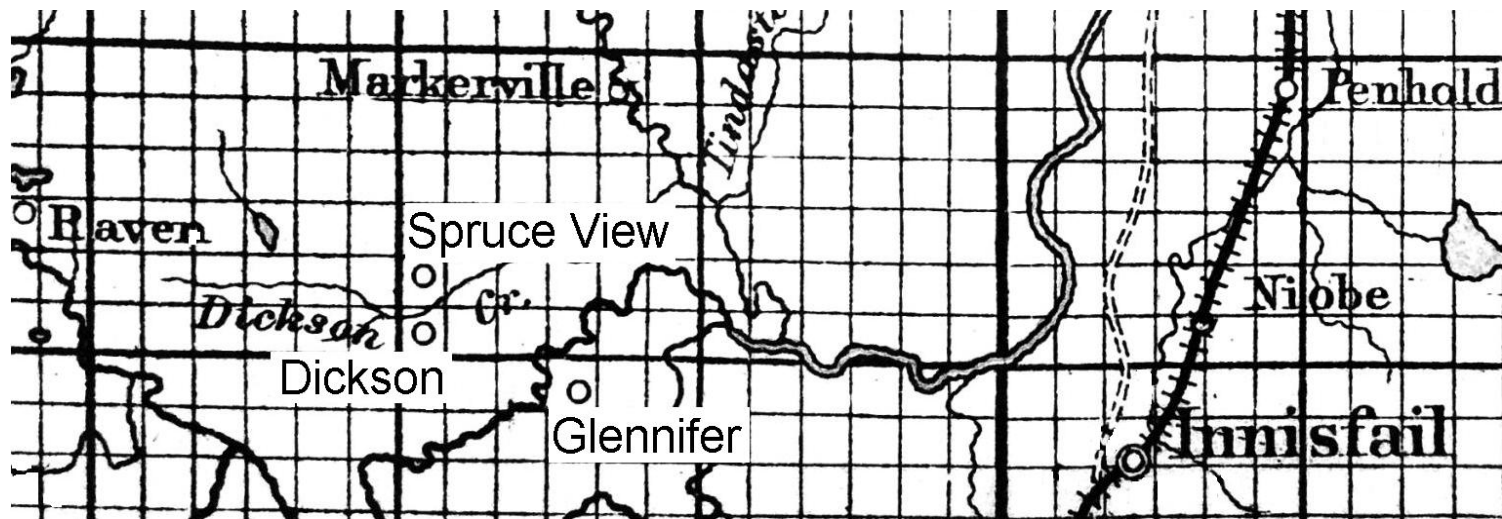
Gleniffer Lake.

Colonization of what is today the Gleniffer Lake district in west-central Alberta began in 1903 when Danish homesteaders left their original claims in Nebraska and came north en masse. The Danish language was predominant until World War Two, by which time the younger generation took over. The children of the homesteaders preferred to speak English, and the “Little Denmark” culture of the settlements faded away as the elders died off.

Two hamlets arose, Dickson and Spruce View. As was typical of the prairies, good roads killed off modern growth since farmers shopped in the bigger towns, in this case, Innisfail, which is now a fifteen-minute drive east on a paved highway instead of an all-day trip over a muddy track. The decline of the hamlets was partially reversed when a dam was completed in 1983 on the Red Deer River nearby, creating a large reservoir called Gleniffer Lake. The water is intended for the city of Red Deer downstream, but the reservoir was also planned as a summer resort and provincial park. As a result, the hamlets now have good seasonal employment from fishermen, boaters, and campers around the lake.

The map below shows the modern district with the reservoir. The map on the next page shows the district in pioneer days.





Dickson.

This hamlet is at the northwest corner of the reservoir. It was named after Dickson Creek, which flowed by the settlement. In turn, the creek was named after an early settler, a Norwegian immigrant who had shortened his surname from the original Benedickson. The post office opened on 1906-02-01 in the home of its first postmaster, Carl C. Christiansen, and his wife Laura [1]. They were part of the first wave of Danish settlers. He had come out first in winter, and chose land which looked like good pasture. To his dismay, the spring thaw revealed it was slough grass, under water for most of the summer [2].

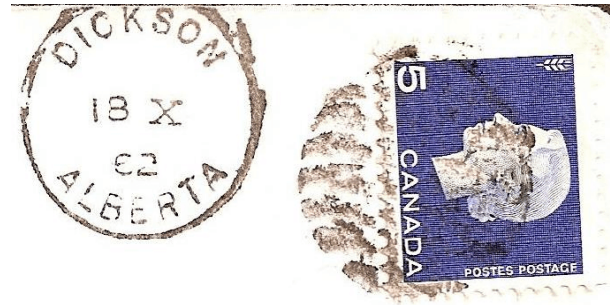


After struggling for a while on the few dry knolls on his claim, Christiansen built a store nearby, where a hamlet grew up around it. He moved his family and the post office to the store in 1909.

They lived on the second floor above the store and post office. Carl was postmaster until his death on 1945-11-27. The photo at left shows him in the store in 1916.

Carl Christiansen was succeeded by his son, the rather unfortunately named Homo Gerhart, who kept the store and post office going. Homo died on 1965-01-03, and his position was taken over by his son Carl Gordon. By this time, the population of the area was thinning out as the children and grandchildren left the farms. Matters worsened when a paved highway bypassed Dickson three kilometres north, and went through the hamlet of Spruce View instead.

Below left is the proof strike of a replacement postmark that Carl ordered in 1923 (enlarged). Below right is a duplex postmark from Homo's tenure.



The Dickson post office closed on 1970-02-13 and was replaced by a rural route out of Innisfail. Today Dickson is served by a group of supermailboxes, which I photographed in August 2016.



Spruce View.

This hamlet is just north of Dickson, a few minutes drive on a paved road. It is the main entrance to the Gleniffer recreational area. Like Dickson, much of it was swamps and sloughs. The Dickson Drainage Board was formed in 1919 to solve the problem in both areas. Spruce View owes its continued existence to the construction of Highway 54 through it in 1959, which connects Innisfail to the foothills further west. The crossroads and turnoff to Dickson then absorbed most of the economic activity that might have gone to Dickson.

Mail service for Spruce View was initially a rural route from Innisfail. A post office did not open until 1967-09-18, with Jens Kobbero as the first postmaster. He was a Danish immigrant but not a pioneer; he and his family came to Canada in the 1950s. They settled first in Nova Scotia, then Calgary, and finally in Spruce View in 1961. Jens and his wife Ruth opened a café on the highway, and later added the post office to it.



When the post office opened, the name was spelled as one word, viz Spruceview. On 1968-05-01, it was split into two words and so recorded officially [1]. Kobbero retired on 1973-07-03 and was succeeded by Mrs Margaret M. Stewart. Canada Post records cut off after her because of privacy laws, but there have been several more postmasters.

The importance of the highway to Spruce View's existence is uppermost in the minds of its citizens, as shown by the pictorial postmark. Without the highway, it would not exist.

Sometime subsequent to Kobbero, the post office moved into a standalone building directly on the highway. I took the photo in August 2016.



120202 02:32 TZE D4D D87 77777777

www.canadapost.ca 11111111

www.postsc.ca 11111111



Gleniffer.



Gleniffer was a short-lived farm house post office that operated from 1913-10-15 to 1918-04-30, with William Robertson as the only postmaster. He was a Scottish immigrant who arrived in 1902, just ahead of the Danes. The post office was named after his home in the Gleniffer Braes, a range of hills just southwest of Paisley, Scotland. When the Dickson Dam was completed and the Red Deer River valley flooded between his farm and the hamlet of Dickson, the reservoir was named Gleniffer Lake. The proof strike of the first postmark is shown at left.

The lake is today a popular tourist resort. The post office would have been right on the northeast corner of the reservoir. I drove around the area in 2016, but couldn't determine if the post office site, that is, the Robertson house, was flooded or up on dry land.

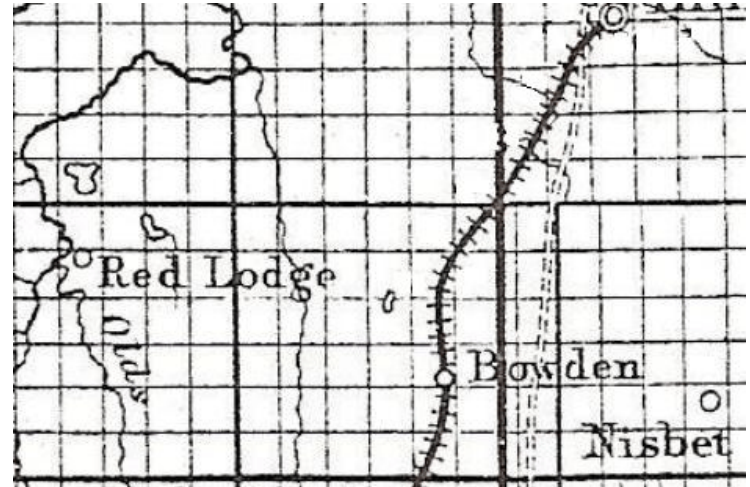
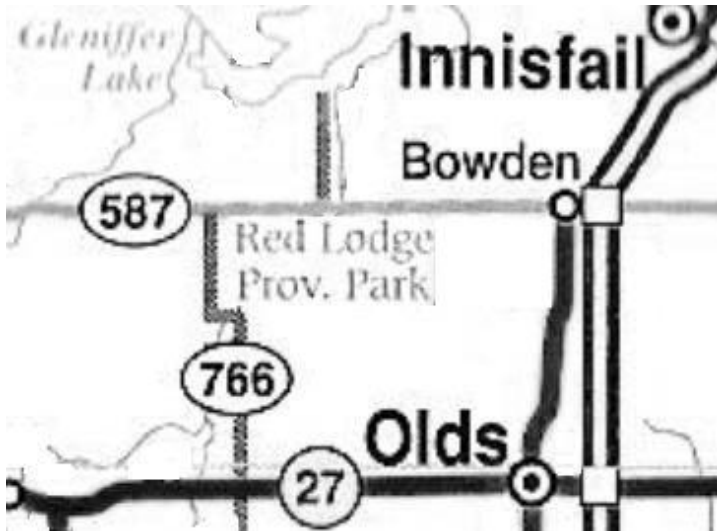
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- 2] various authors (1973) GRUB AXE TO GRAIN Published by Spruce View School Area Historical Society. Pages 31, 43, 247 to 248
- 3] Harrison, Tracey (1994) PLACE NAMES OF ALBERTA: VOL. 3. CENTRAL ALBERTA. Published by University of Calgary Press. Page 102

Bowden.

This town began life as Siding 7 on the Calgary and Edmonton Railway when it came through the area in 1891. The railway was immediately sold to the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), who operated it thereafter. Several competing townsites were clustered around the siding. The closer ones eventually merged and became the town, while the more distant sites faded away. The area surrounding the siding was mostly marsh, sloughs, and intermittent lakes during pioneer times. Much of it has been drained since. Because of this, the best location for the townsite was not immediately obvious at first. Indeed, the CPR had to divert the track route somewhat to find a dry location for Siding 7. When settlement began, a CPR official renamed the siding after his wife's maiden name [1].

Below left is a modern map of the area. The map at below right shows the pioneer post offices. The small squares are a mile on each side.





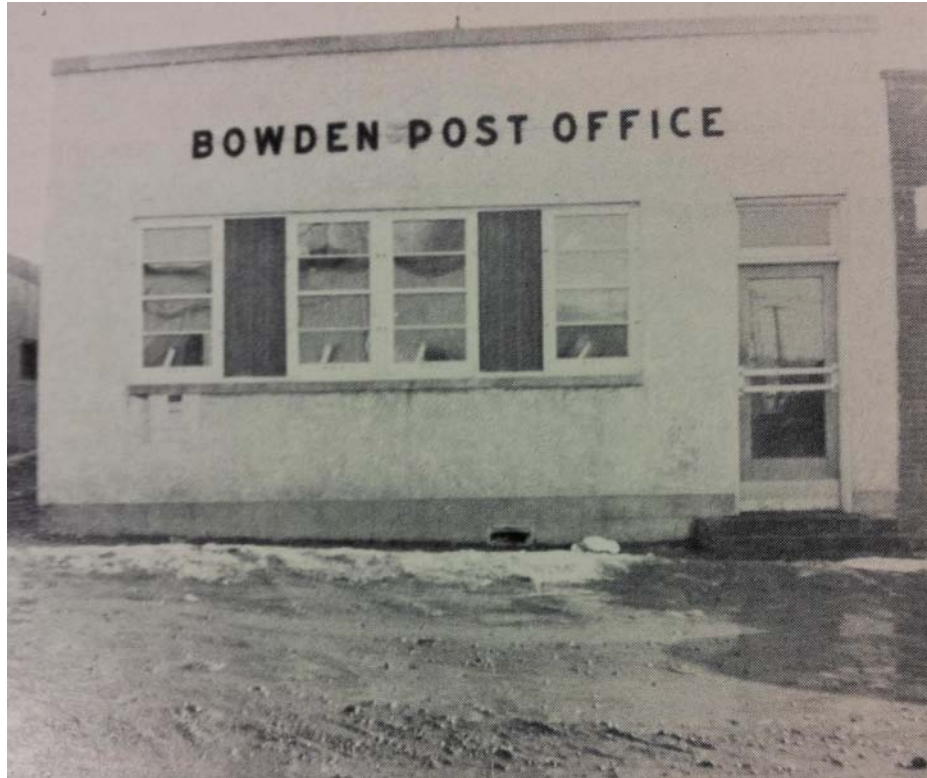
C.K. Johnson opened the Bowden post office on 1892-12-01 but he only stayed a few months on the job. The proof strike of the first postmark is shown at left. Charles Moore took over as postmaster on 1893-04-01 and moved it to his house. He kept it until 1900-02-20, but the village had grown to the point where a home post office was no longer tenable. Harry E. Shenfield then became postmaster, moving the post office into his general store [2].

Born in England, Shenfield emigrated first to Ontario and then homesteaded east of Bowden. He moved into town in 1899 as a shopkeeper and notary public as well as postmaster. His father was the mail courier for both Bowden and the surrounding district.

Shenfield held the postmastership until 1912-05-14, when he was dismissed from office for political reasons. In those days, postmasterships were patronage positions, and the Tories having defeated the Liberals in the 1911 federal election, there was a mass purge of rural postmasters across Canada. The postmaster positions were later removed from patronage lists.



Charles A. Johnston, who obviously voted Conservative, took over and became Bowden's longest-serving postmaster until 1945-08-16. The post office moved into his confectionery store, and was later joined by a telephone exchange. Bowden had two Great Fires, one in 1916 and the other in 1925. Both times the store and post office were reduced to ashes, although the mails were saved. After the second fire, Johnston rebuilt in brick and cinder brick, as indeed did many other merchants who finally realized that wooden buildings shoulder-to-shoulder were just asking for trouble.



Almer (Roy) Johnston took over the post office from his father for a couple of years until Roy's son-in-law Percy Scott became postmaster on 1947-10-01, serving until 1964-01-29. The post office became a civil service position in 1948. Scott also served as Mayor of Bowden during the 1950s and was a hospital trustee.

Over the years, Bowden's well-watered and rich marshy soil had been drained, which encouraged plant nursery and garden seed companies to locate to the area.

They did considerable mail-order business, as a result of which a standalone post office was built in 1952 to handle the increased workload. It is shown at left just after construction was completed.

This post office building had a relatively short life because it was designed for rail transport and walk-in customers. There were no loading docks that trucks could back up to. Mail was brought in from the railway depot in a bag slung over the shoulder and later by hand cart. As Bowden grew, this situation became untenable. The mails switched from rail to trucks in the middle 1950s. The trucks had to be unloaded by handing down mail bags to ground level one by one instead of wheeling them off on pallets to a loading platform. A new post office was opened in 1970, built for trucks and much larger to handle increased box numbers and walk-in customers. The building is shown as it was in 2016 when I photographed it.



After Scott retired in 1964, he was replaced by Robert Cleveland (Cleave) Kearns. Canada Post records cut off in 1970 due to privacy legislation but he was mentioned in a local history as still serving in 1979.

The pictorial postmark refers to the provincial parks west of Bowden. Below is a cut piece from the Kearns tenure.



Red Lodge.

The Red Lodge area is west of Bowden on the banks of the Little Red Deer River and the Red Deer River. This was a favourite hunting ground for the native tribes. The post office opened on 1896-04-01 with Thomas O. Critchley as postmaster, He was a son-in-law of Sir Sanford Fleming. The original post office name proposed was Red Deer Lodge, in reference to the nearby river and aboriginal camp, but this was refused by Ottawa because there was a post office by that name in Montana. The name was therefore simplified to Red Lodge [1].

Critchley moved back east in 1899 and Colin Thomson took over the post office on 1899-08-01, locating it in his house on the Silver Wells Ranch. He changed the name of his ranch to match the post office, and added a small store. He remained postmaster until his death in 1931. The final postmaster was George Doherty, who ran it for a couple of years until the post office closed on 1933-08-15, a victim of good roads. Thereafter the area was served by Bowden Rural Route #1.

Red Lodge is now a popular provincial park, not only for Bowden residents, but drawing weekend campers from a considerable radius in central Alberta.

Nisbet.

The district southeast of Bowden was unnamed until one of its first homesteaders, Martin Nisbet, took action to establish a school in 1904. The building was also used for social occasions on evenings and weekends, and church services on Sunday, so it became the centre of activities for the homesteaders. A post office was opened on 1912-06-01 in a farmhouse, with W.J. Border as the first postmaster. Below is the proof strike of its registration marking. Border also couriered the mail to and from Bowden. He had numerous sideline businesses going, so he gave up the post office that same year on November 4 due to lack of time to run it. The post office remained closed for a year.



C.R. Field re-opened it on 1913-10-10 in his farmhouse. He held the postmastership until 1915-02-06, when he passed it to Perley W. Ward. Mail was collected every Friday at Bowden, and brought back over mud tracks that could hardly be called roads. Ward resigned as postmaster on 1922-10-06 when he and his family moved to Bowden.



The post office then moved back to the Border farm nearby. This time the postmaster was Rachel Border, wife of W.J., the first postmaster. She served until 1943-06-30, when the post office permanently closed. The photo shows her in old age. The area was thereafter served by a rural mail route out of Bowden. Like many other farmhouse post offices, good roads killed it off. The district is today only a fifteen-minute drive from Bowden, as opposed to a half-day's travel one-way in pioneer times.

References.

- 1] Anderson, Roy F. (1979) PIONEER LEGACY: BOWDEN AND DISTRICTS Published by Bowden Chamber of Commerce, Alberta. Pages 7, 12 to 13, 25 to 26, 47 to 49, 279, 339, 419 to 423, 521, 527, 539 to 541
- 2] Library and Archives Canada (downloaded 2014-07-22) Post offices and postmasters. www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/post-offices