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POSTAL HISTORY OF THE PICTURE BUTTE - TURIN DISTRICT, ALBERTA

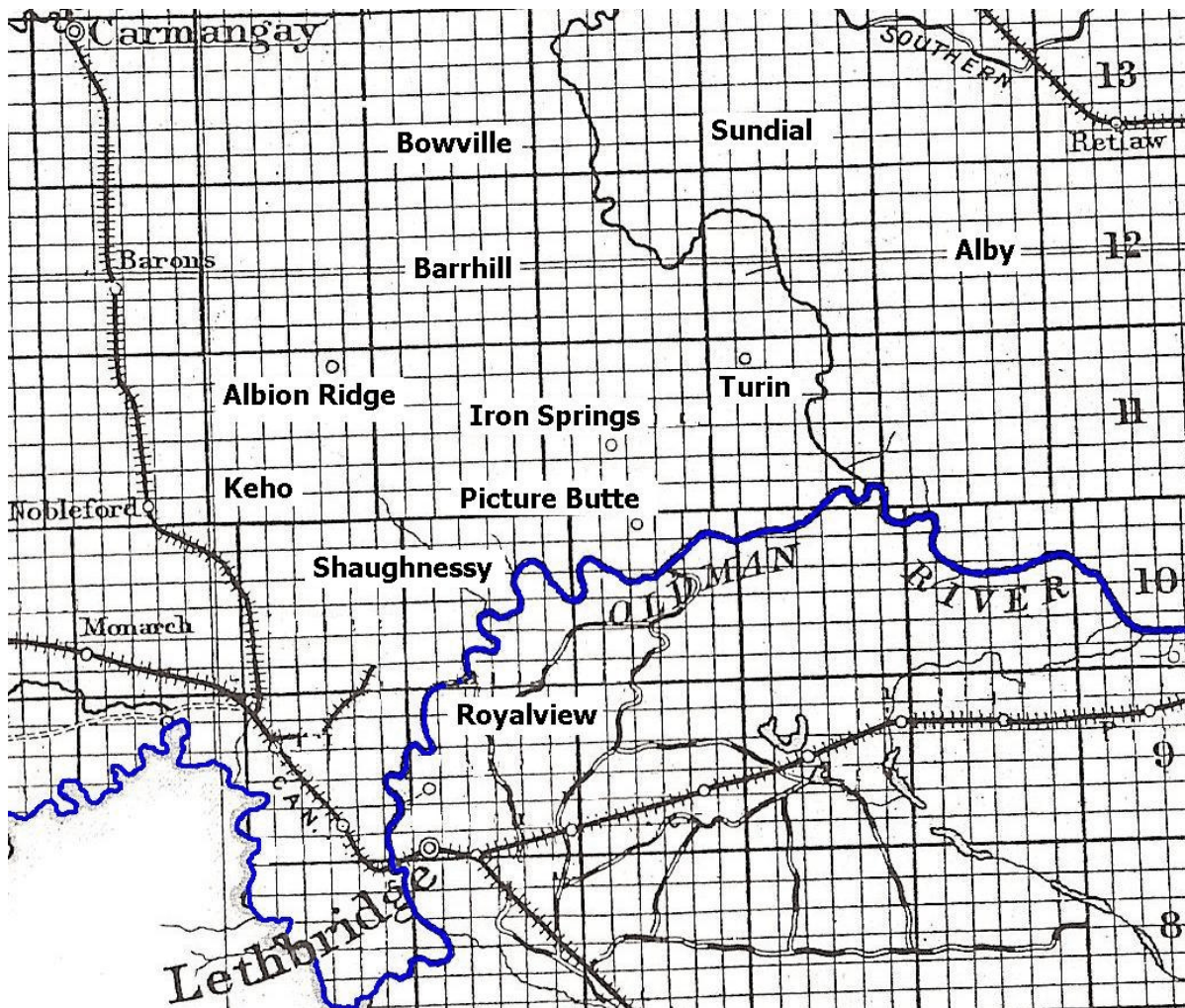
by Dale Speirs

The district north of Lethbridge was, like much of southern Alberta, over-populated during the homesteader era, which occurred during moist climatic times. When the climate reverted to normal droughts and harsh winters, the land could not support the population. Additionally the development of good roads obviated the need for many villages and post offices.

Unless stated otherwise, all post office and postmaster dates are from the Post Offices and Postmasters website of the National Library and Archives of Canada [1].

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This map is adapted from a 1922 map and shows the pioneer post offices.

The small squares are sections, one mile on a side. Homesteaders were entitled to a quarter-section.

Of the post offices discussed in this history, only Turin and Picture Butte were still operational in 2024.

Royalview.



This village was entirely dependent on the Royal Collieries Mine, which began operating in the first decade of the 1900s. The post office Royalview opened on 1909-08-16 with D.L. McPhee as the only postmaster. At left is the proof strike of the first postmark.

At peak population, the post office served 400 people. The mine failed in 1916 and the entire village was quickly abandoned. The buildings were moved to other villages or bought by farmers [3]. The post office closed on 1917-01-31. Nothing remains today.

Albion Ridge.

This area was settled by English homesteaders. When the post office opened, it was given the Roman name for England, which they called Albion [2]. This post office and Keho (mentioned further on) were the first two post offices opened in the district, on 1907-07-15. The Albion Ridge post office was in the farmhouse of Michael and Carmella Lynn. They were upper-class English immigrants totally unsuited as homesteaders [4].



Michael served as the first postmaster until his death on 1909-04-01, although his son Edward (Ted) did most of the work. At left is the proof strike of the first postmark. After his father's death, Ted became the official postmaster until 1915-06-12. The photo below shows the Lynn family [4]. Michael is at left and Ted is second from right.

A neighbour William Campbell Davis briefly took over the post office but on 1918-05-02 the postmastership went back to Ted Lynn. Ted stayed as postmaster until 1932-09-30 when the post office closed permanently. Thereafter mail service was a rural delivery route from the village of Barons to the northwest.

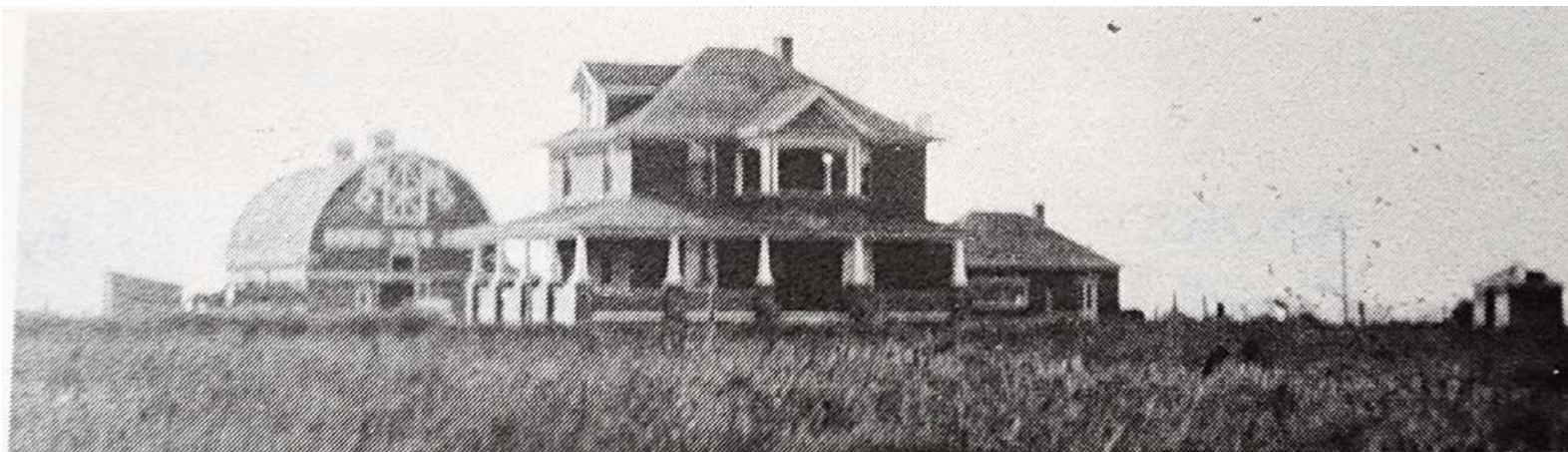


Keho.



The Keho post office was named after an adjacent lake which in turn was named after Daniel Keough. He had been a whiskey trader in the district in the 1870s before the North West Mounted Police arrived and put him out of business [2]. The post office opened on 1907-07-15, the same day as Albion Ridge, which was about 15 km northeast. At left is the proof strike of the first postmark.

William George was the only postmaster during Keho's brief existence until 1911-10-31. The demise of the post office came after George went into custom threshing in a big way in 1911, which took up much of his time. He had ten children, which no doubt also kept him busy. The photo below shows the manorial family home, wherein was kept the post office [4].



Bowville.

The hamlet of Bowville was founded in the Little Bow River district, from whence it took its name. The hamlet was founded on speculation that a railroad would come through it. That never happened, so the settlement withered on the vine. Between 1905 and 1914 the major industry in the district wasn't farming, it was land speculation. After the railroads were built, far away from Bowville, the hamlet and others like it all died [5].

The post office opened on 1907-05-01 with Mrs Gunhild Peterson as the first postmaster. She was a widow who operated a grocery store and the post office in her farmhouse. I have been unable to locate any postmark proof strikes. Mail was originally couriered from Lethbridge. After the railroad went through Carmangay further to the west, the route changed to there [5].

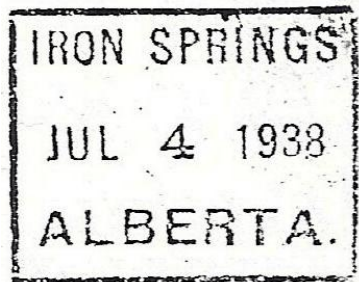
Peterson served until 1909-11-26, the year the land boom collapsed after the railroad bypassed Bowville. J.B. Lukens took over the store and post office until 1910-12-28. Next was Al C. Averill until 1911-10-23, at which time the post office closed for several years. His son Samuel B. Averilol revived the post office on 1915-07-10 but the attempt was futile. The post office closed again on 1915-11-30, this time permanently.

Iron Springs.

The name of this post office was descriptive, referring to nearby springs with iron precipitation [2]. The name should not be confused with an unrelated post office called Iron River, about 300 km northeast of Edmonton. The Iron Springs post office opened on 1908-02-01 with William J. Hunt as the first postmaster. The post office was located in his farmhouse, combined with a small grocery store [6].

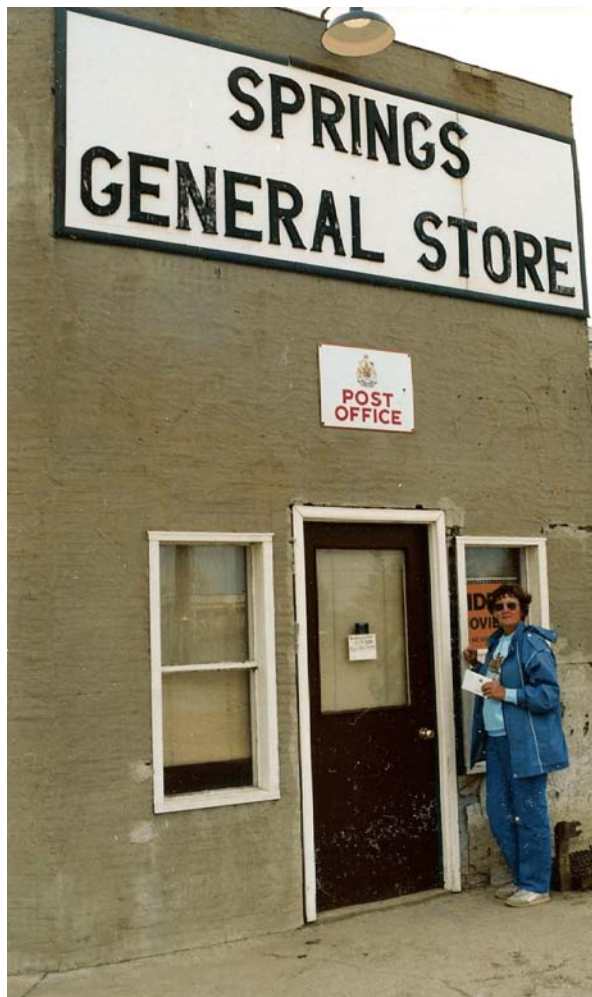
Mail service was once a week from Lethbridge, couriered by Robert J. Fraser. He became the second postmaster on 1910-08-01 and the post office moved to his homestead. He built an addition onto his shack for it and a store. In 1912 he built a standalone structure to handle everything. He gave up the post office on 1916-04-16 and moved about Alberta with his family, looking for better farming.

He sold the store and post office to T.A. and Emma McDonald in 1913 but remained postmaster in name only while Emma actually operated the post office. The reason was that the McDonalds also operated a store in nearby Picture Butte where T.A. was the postmaster. They finally sold their Picture Butte operation and moved to Iron Springs full-time [6].



Emma then became official postmaster of Iron Springs from 1916-12-11 until her death on 1945-01-24. In 1925 the post office was moved from the farmstead to the townsite of Iron Springs. I have not been able to find an earlier proof strike of the postmark but at left is a proof strike from when the post office became a money order office. After Emma's death her daughter-in-law Mrs Letty McDonald was the next postmaster until 1955-02-17.

A brief placeholder came and went before Andrew Alm took over, serving from 1955-04-01 until 1965-08-30. At that time he transferred to a different federal government job with the Ministry of Agriculture. His parents Martin and Elisia were Norwegian immigrants who homesteaded in the district in 1907. Martin was the mail courier from 1918 until 1920, first by horse and buggy, then by Model T Ford. When Andrew resigned as postmaster, his wife Anne served briefly as postmaster.



Frank Susumu Uyeda was the next postmaster beginning 1966-02-03. His family were Japanese immigrants in British Columbia who were relocated to southern Alberta in 1943 during the war.

Canada Post records do not go past Frank's appointment due to privacy laws. However a local history mentioned in 1976 that he had recently retired as postmaster.

His wife Ruth became the next postmaster. She served until the post office was converted on 1991-06-18 into a retail postal outlet [7].

The photo shows the author's mother Betty Speirs at the post office in 1989. The sign was not an error. Although the post office was still called Iron Springs, the store used a simplified version.

In 1991, Wendy Vanden Broeke took over and served until the RePO was closed on 1997-01-03. Thereafter mail service was to group boxes from Picture Butte.

Barrhill.

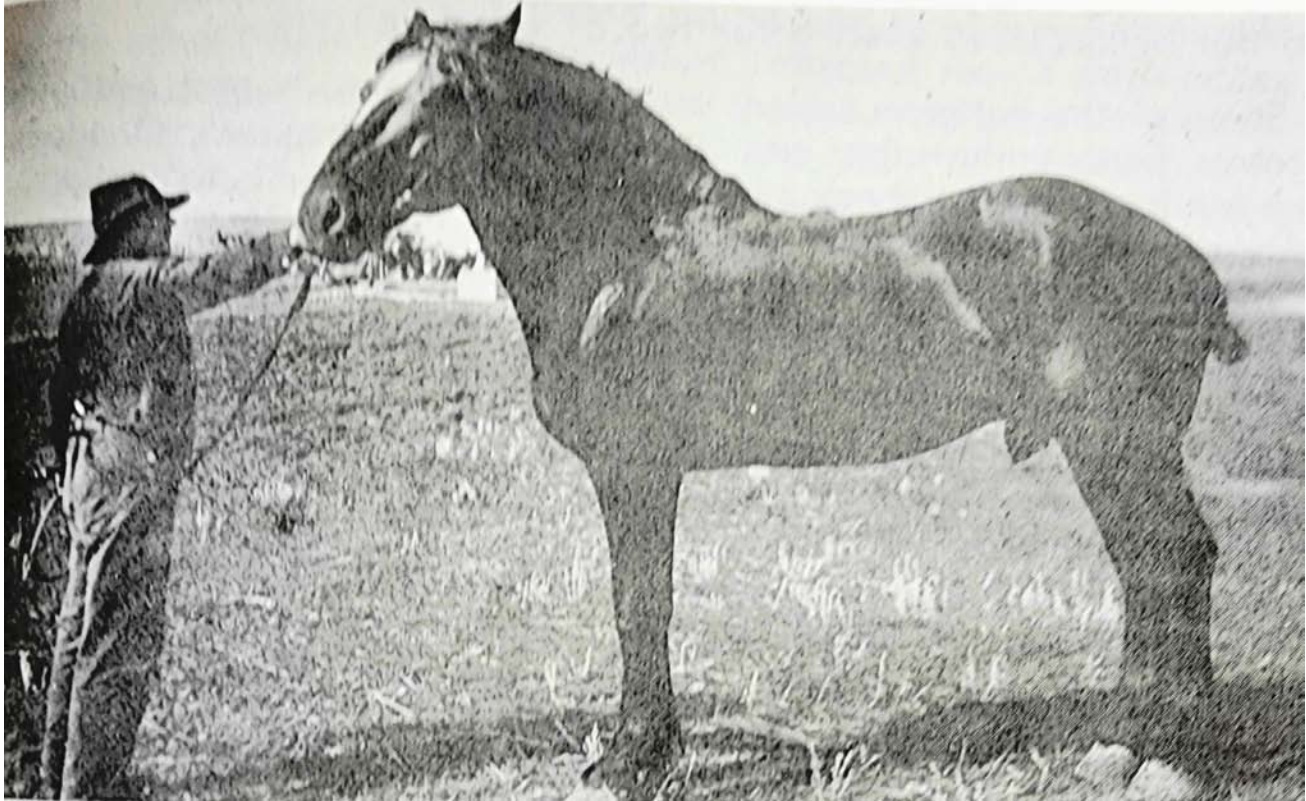


This name was not listed in standard place name references. The origin of the name is unknown. The only postmaster was Isaac Wintori, who kept the post office in his farmhouse. At left is the proof strike of the first and probably only postmark.

The establishment opened on 1908-06-01 and closed permanently on 1916-07-31 when Wintori died while in office.

Turin.

The name was not after the Italian city directly but was the name of a prized Percheron stallion owned by a syndicate of local farmers [2]. The horse is shown here in a photo from a local history book [6].





The Turin post office opened on 1910-11-01 in the farmhouse of the first postmaster Isaac N. Hanson. At left is the proof strike of the first postmark. Isaac died in office on 1915-01-16 and was succeeded by his widow Ida, who served until 1920-07-07. The Hanson family also couriered the mails in the district from 1911 until 1918.

Their daughter Callie and her friend Miss Toots Sinclair did the actual driving, bringing the mail by truck from Lethbridge. The two women both married, one staying on her husband's farm and Callie moving to California. Martin Alm then took over the mail route for the district [6].

William George Arrowsmith was the next postmaster until his death on 1935-12-23. Originally the post office was in his farmhouse but during his tenure it was moved to the townsite proper of Turin. His spinster daughter Frances May Arrowsmith inherited the postmastership and served until 1969-11-19. Mrs Ina Staath became the next postmaster, after which Canada Post records are blank due to privacy laws. As of 1976 a local history book reported her still in the job [6]. Hughes reported that as of 1998 the postmaster was Moira Warnock [7].

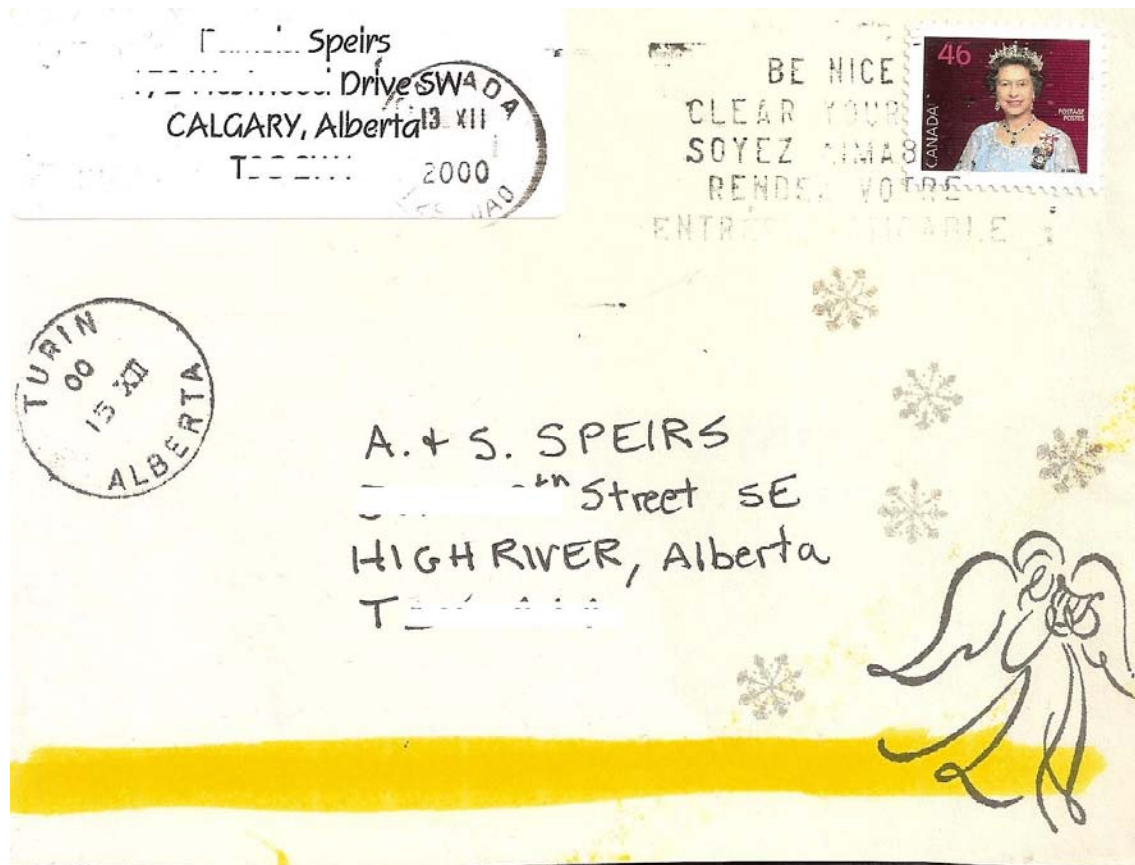
Turin had a pictorial postmark showing the erstwhile stallion as seen here.



Betty Speirs at the Turin post office in 1989. According to Google Street View the post office was still in that building in 2012.



A curiosity from the Speirs files of a letter mailed from Calgary to High River a short distance south on Highway 2. Instead the cover was mis-sent to Turin far down in the southeast. Most likely the letter fell into the wrong tray at Calgary and was caught by the Turin staff.



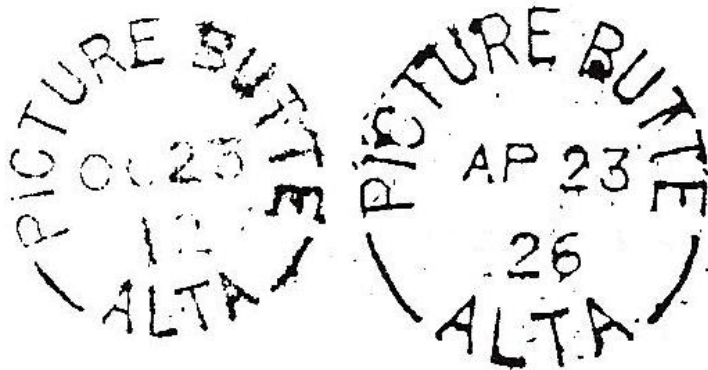
Picture Butte.

The name was descriptive of a local hill which was subsequently mined for gravel and eradicated [2]. There is now a large reservoir on the north side of the village which ensured its prosperity. The post office opened on 1912-10-01 with T.A. McDonald as the first postmaster. He resigned on 1916-12-20 to move to Iron Springs.

The post office moved to the farmhouse of Percy Hunt, who served as postmaster until 1919-07-07. From there the post office moved to the farm of E.J. Larter, who also had a small store. There was a terrible tragedy in 1923 when a fire destroyed the barn, all the horses and seed grain, and, worst of all, killed Larter's 13-year-old son [6]. Understandably Larter gave up the post office on 1923-06-25.

At that time Picture Butte was in the middle of nowhere with minimal population, so the post office was closed. In 1926 a railroad was built between Lethbridge and Turin. A townsite called Picture Butte, as opposed to just being a place name, was platted and the settlement quickly prospered [6].

The post office re-opened on 1926-04-15 with John Wesley Koepke as postmaster. He and his family had several other businesses in the village. John resigned on 1952-05-27 and his wife Gladys took over as postmaster. She served until 1969-10-24. During her tenure a standalone post office was built in 1965. Below are the proof strike postmarks from both incarnations of the post office.





Postes Canada Post

BOX RENT RECEIPT REÇU DE LOYER DE CASE

Picture Butte

NAME OF POST OFFICE - NOM DU BUREAU DE POSTE

RECEIVED FROM:
REÇU DE

Helen L. Lussick

the sum noted hereon covering box rent—
la somme indiquée ci-contre pour le loyer de case.

RENEWAL RENOUVELLEMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	FIRST RENTAL PREMIÈRE LOCATION	
---------------------------	-------------------------------------	-----------------------------------	--

B. M. Knappe

POSTMASTER - MAÎTRE DE POSTE

C.A. 31

OFFICE No.
N° du BUREAU

8772

Date

Date

Sept 2

1965

Receipt

Reçu

No. 217

Box No.

N° de la case

461

From

Du

Sept 1

1965

To

Au

Aug 31

1966

Rate per Annum

Prix par année \$

2.00

Rent—Loyer

\$

2.00

Keys—Cleps

\$

TOTAL

\$

2.00

E.J. Shaw was appointed the next postmaster, after which Canada Post records cut off due to privacy laws. The photo shows Betty Speirs at the post office in 1989. Google Street View from 2016 shows the post office in the same building with little visible change.



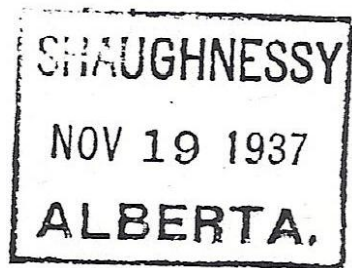
Hughes listed three more postmasters before the post office was converted to a postal outlet. On 1991-06-17 a retail postal outlet opened with John MacLaughlan in charge. On 1997-12-01 the RePO passed to Bert's Foods [7]. Sometime shortly thereafter control went back to Canada Post. The postmarks below demonstrate that Canada Post was running the post office by at least the Millennium.



Shaughnessy.

This post office was surprising late in being established. The impetus was a coal mine founded in 1927 by C.S. Donaldson. One of the company directors was Lord Shaughnessy of England, after whom the village was named. The original name proposed for the post office was Donalda after Donaldson but there was already another Alberta village by that name [6].

The post office opened on 1929-10-15 with William Robert Hardy as the first postmaster. He served until 1931-09-29, after which two brief placeholders came and went. William Earl became postmaster on 1932-11-19 and served until 1940-08-08 when he was granted military leave. His wife Janet briefly filled in for him.



I haven't found earlier proof strikes for the post office but the Money Order Office Number postmark strike at left was in the proof books.

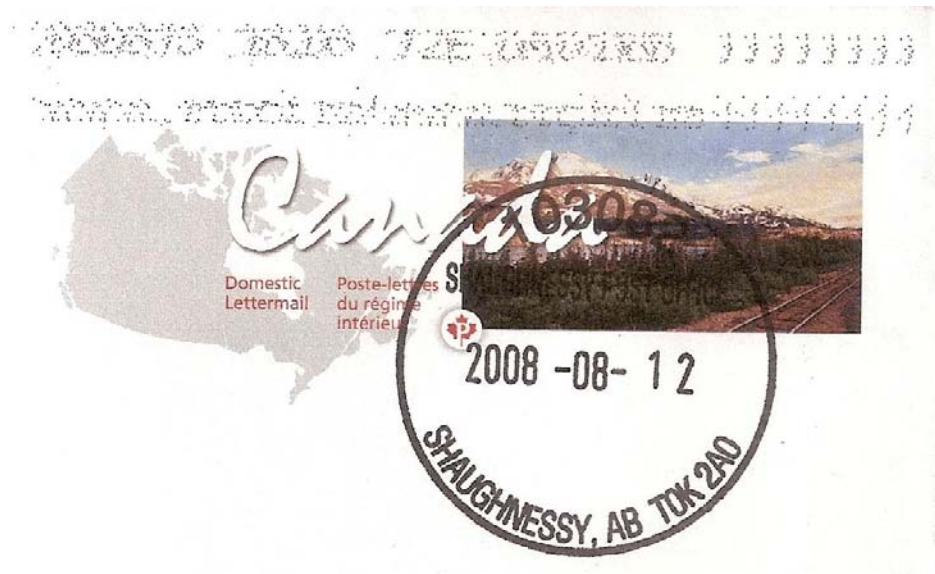
Miss Violet Dawson then took over as postmaster from 1940-11-08 until 1946-05-01 when William returned and reclaimed his job. He served until 1960-05-25 when he retired.

His successor was Ittalo Joseph Ruaben, who in turn was succeeded on 1969-08-06 by his wife Helen. At this point Canada Post records cut off due to privacy laws. However, Hughes noted that she served until 1991-08-21 when the post office was converted into a RePO [7]. On the next two pages are photos of Betty Speirs at the Shaughnessy post office in 1989.





Hughes listed three RePO managers who came and went at yearly or so intervals up to 1998, when his book was published. Sometime after 2014 the Shaughnessy RePO closed permanently. Google Street View showed the RePO was in the Tickety Boo Convenience Store during the 2000s until 2014. There was a gap in Street View photos until 2023, by which time the RePO was gone.



Sundial.

The name refers to a Blackfoot medicine wheel on a hill, which had a rock cairn with stone lines radiating out [2]. The post office opened on 1908-03-16 with Christian Knutson Engen as the first postmaster. He and his family were Norwegian immigrants who operated a store and post office on the their homestead [8]. He resigned as postmaster on 1913-08-18 because his commercial interests shifted to nearby Enchant.

I couldn't find the proof strike of the first postmark. By good fortune I own a homemade leather postcard with the Sundial postmark from a few months after the post office opened, shown on the next page.

Alexander Thornburn then took over as postmaster, moving the post office to his farmhouse. On 1916-12-04, the post office closed permanently. Mail service thereafter was via Iron Springs.



Alby / Deering.

The usual place name compilations do not mention this post office. The only postmaster was John Reason, who with his family homesteaded in 1905. The post office was in a small crossroads store on the Reason farmstead [8]. It operated from 1912-03-01 until 1918-01-05. The post office name was changed from Alby to Deering on 1914-08-01.

Local history books do not list any pioneers named Alby or Deering. The Reason family came from North Dakota where there is a village called Deering, and the surname Alby is still found in the state. However this is purely conjecture. Most post offices that change names do so with new postmasters, so why Reason changed the name is something that will never be known.

Proof strikes of the two postmarks are shown below.



References.

- 1] National Library and Archives of Canada (downloaded 2024-07-29) Post offices and post masters.
<https://library-archives.canada.ca/eng/collection/research-help/postalheritage/pages/post-offices-postmasters-canada.aspx>
(In the search field, type RG3, then the name of the post office. RG3 is the database of post offices and postmasters. Without it, you will receive a large number of citations unrelated to post offices.)
- 2] Karamitsamis, Aphrodite (1992) PLACE NAMES OF ALBERTA. VOLUME 2: SOUTHERN ALBERTA Published by University of Calgary Press. Pages 2, 62, 65, 95 to 96, 110 to 111, 117, 122
- 3] various authors (1988) SUNNYSIDE AREA Published by Sunnyside Area Historical Society, Lethbridge, Alberta. Pages 1 to 3
- 4] various authors (1976) SONS OF WIND AND SOIL Published by Nobleford-Monarch History Book Club, Nobleford, Alberta. Pages 181, 205, 270
- 5] Voisey, Paul (1988) VULCAN: THE MAKING OF A PRAIRIE COMMUNITY Published by University of Toronto Press, Ontario. Pages 54 to 57
- 6] various authors (1976) COYOTE FLATS HISTORICAL REVIEW Published by Coyote Flats Historical Society, Lethbridge, Alberta.
VOLUME 1: Pages 19, 30, 35, 45, 51 to 52, 56, 81 to 82, 106, 155, 220, 275 to 284, 333 to 337
VOLUME 2: Pages 281 to 284, 289 to 290
- 7] Hughes, Neil (1998) ALBERTA POST OFFICES 1876-1998. Privately published by the author, Edmonton, Alberta
- 8] Various authors (2001) DRYBELT PIONEERS, second edition. Published by The Book Committee, Enchant, Alberta. Pages 165 to 166, 527, 904 to 906