JOURNAL OF ALBERTA POSTAL HISTORY

Issue #39

MISSED POST OFFICES: SOUTHERN ALBERTA

by Dale Speirs

As readers of previous issues of JAPH will have noticed, I am publishing the postal history of Alberta on a district by district basis. I use a wide variety of maps dating back to the early 1900s and as many local history books as can be found to compile the histories. Occasionally, however, I miss a post office, usually because it was an obscure farmhouse post office.

Local history books and maps are generally good for listing post offices. However in the earliest days of settlement, a farmhouse post office may have come and gone before the mapmakers were there, and were completely unknown to later settlers, the ones whose descendants compiled the history books. I spot the missing post offices later after publishing on the district they were in. There are no consolidated lists of post offices arranged geographically, as both official and philatelic lists are invariably in alphabetical order.

This issue of JAPH is therefore a cleanup issue. Should I live long enough to write up all the districts in Alberta, which I doubt, then all my histories would be combined into a single book, revised and updated. For now, here is something that will put the information on record.

Unless stated otherwise, all postmaster names and dates are from the Post Offices and Postmasters database on the National Library and Archives website [1].

Index Of Post Offices

Mountain House And Moose Ridge.

In the early 1900s as homesteaders flooded into what is now Alberta, there were no roads, just muddy trails meandering across the countryside. To travel 10 kilometres in a day was good progress, and far less when rain turned the trail into a linear mud hole. As a consequence, most of the rural post offices were in farmhouses. Neighbours came by to collect their letters any time of day. The post office would be a cupboard or rolltop desk with pigeonholes.

Often the postmaster would spread the letters across a table on mail days for friends to sort through and pick out their own. If the post office was lucky the mail courier would come by twice a week. Mail call ws a social occasion. Local residents would arrive hours early and trade gossip while waiting for the courier. If, as often happened, the courier was late, they stayed on with patience.

An example was Mountain House, west of Bowden near Red Lodge Provincial Park. Mail service was originally from Red Lodge [7]. As more homesteaders arrived, a farmhouse post office opened.
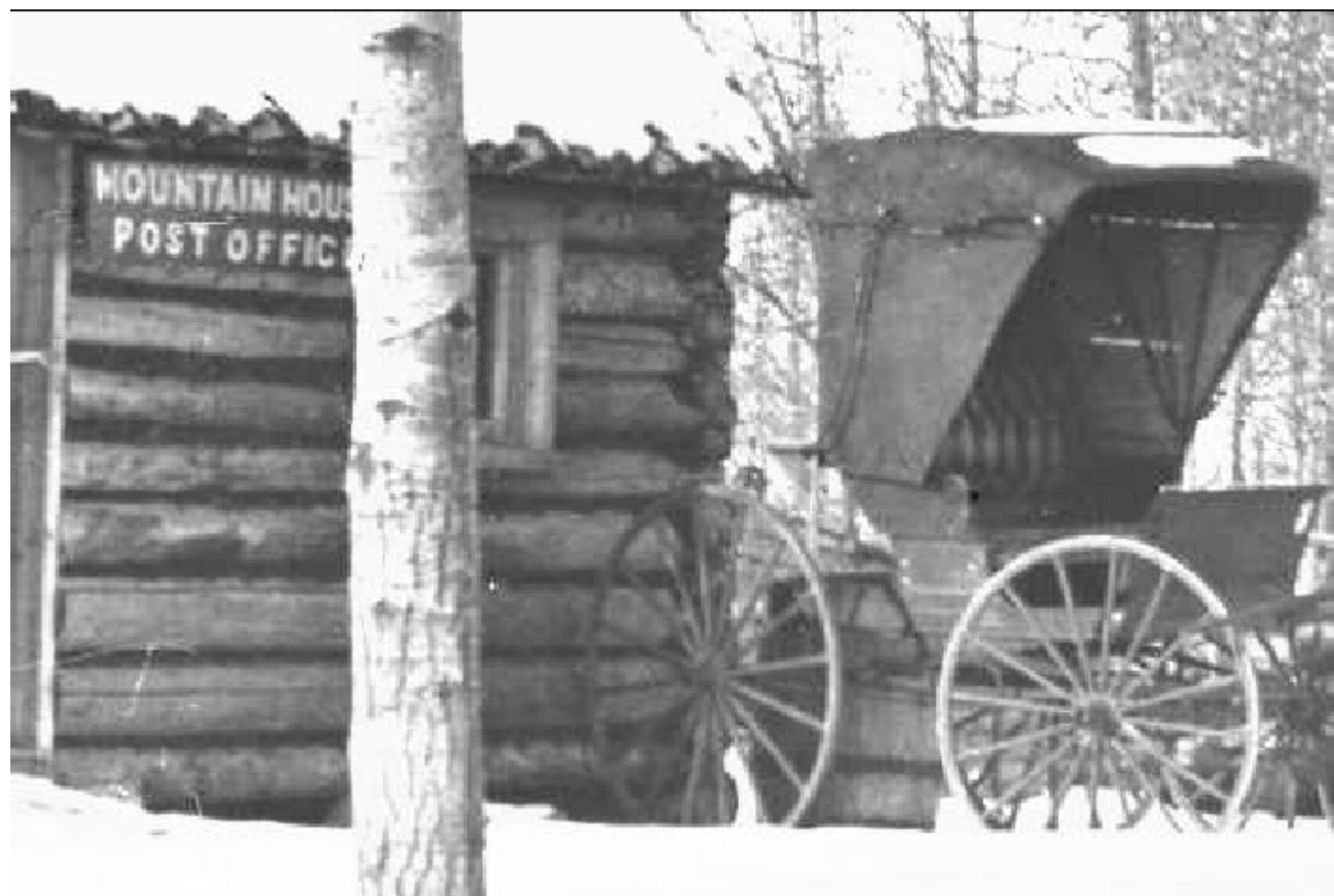
The name later changed to Moose Ridge, as seen below on a 1933 map. Mountain House post office opened on 1905-12-15 with Augustus Caldwell as the first postmaster. The proof books of postmarks do not have any strikes for Mountain House. Caldwell stayed until 1907-10-25 when he resigned and the post office moved to the Laird homestead.

The map on the next page shows the district in which this post office was located. The history of the surrounding district was published in JAPH #18.

Evarts

Cygnet

RED DEER

Hillsdown

Markerville

Penhold

Pine Lake

Dickson

INNISFAIL

Hill End

Moose Ridge

Kneehill

Red Lodge

Bowden

Horseshoe Lake

S.G.

Pioneer photographer Bob Hoare took a photograph circa 1905 to 1910 of the Mountain House post office [8]. Both shacks are labeled as post offices. I'm guessing the shack on the left was the current post office at the time the photograph was taken because a buggy was backed up to it. The next two pages show close-ups.
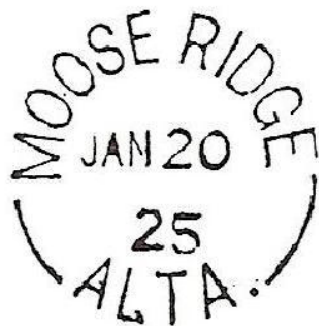
James Alexander Laird homesteaded in the district in 1903. His wife, parents, and two brothers accompanied him. James Laird Sr was the second postmaster for a decade until his death.

On 1918-11-05 his son James Alexander took over. The son had been Secretary-Treasurer of Poplar Grove, now Innisfail. The combination of farming, postal duties, and county administration was too much. He gave up the first two and moved into Innisfail to become a full-time administrator [7].
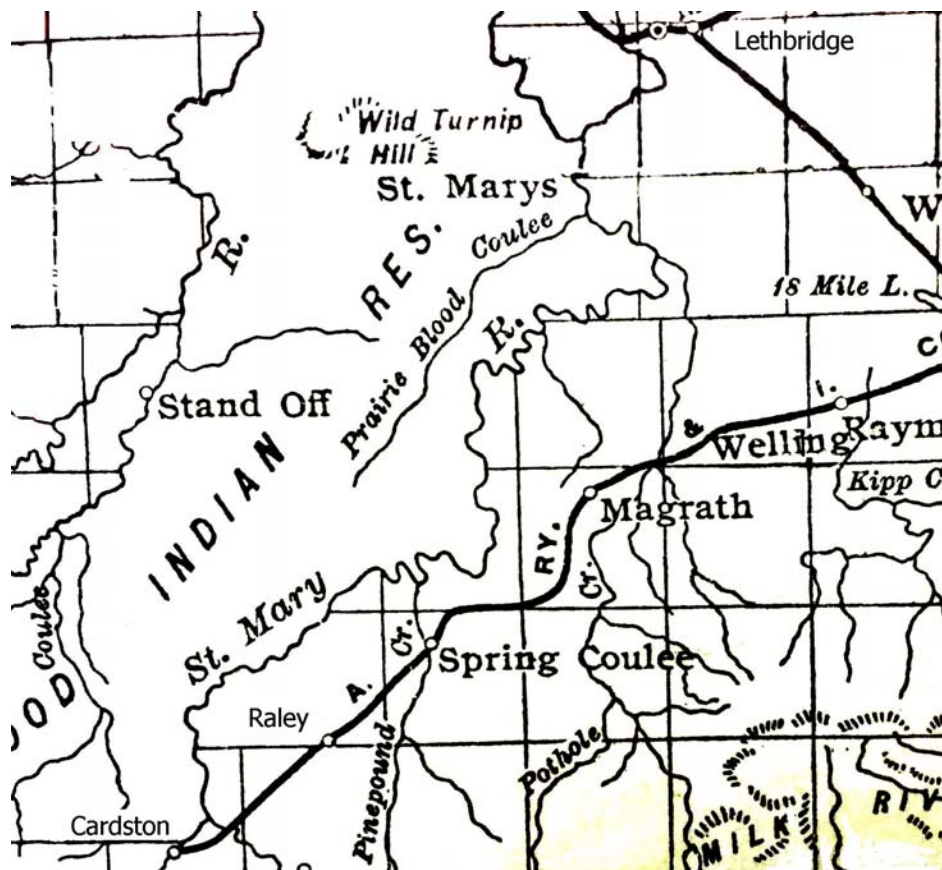
The third and final postmaster from 1919-05-15 was H.W. Grundy. The district had become known as Moose Ridge and on 1925-03-01 he changed the name [6]. The proof strike of the postmark is shown here.

Grundy retired on 1934-06-30 and the post office permanently closed. By then good roads had done away with most farmhouse post offices. Moose Ridge post office was replaced by Rural Route #3 out of Innisfail [1]. What was once a full day's travel there and back became a 15-minute drive.

Raley.

The origin of the name Raley is not mentioned in standard historical sources but a local website indicated this railroad siding was named after C. Raley of nearby Lethbridge [2].

This was a junction of two spur lines which serviced several grain elevators beginning in 1905. Today the location is a short distance south of the Saint Mary Reservoir.

The map is modified from a 1919 map. The squares are townships, which are six miles on a side.

Earl Franklin Church and family arrived in the district in 1909. The following spring, on 1910-03-01, a post office was opened with Earl as the first postmaster. Mail service was by rail from Lethbridge [1]. At left is the proof strike of the first postmark.

Initially the Church family and post office occupied a granary until a house was completed in October 1910. The post office then moved into a kitchen cupboard of the house where it remained during the Church tenure. The family later moved to Lethbridge to seek better schooling for their children, although they held on to the farm [3].

Henry J. Flock became the next postmaster on 1918-03-01 and the post office moved into his farmhouse. As with the Churches, the Flocks later moved to Lethbridge for their children. They sold their farm to a Hutterite colony. The post office therefore moved to the farm of Calvin Clarence Crawford and his wife Hattie Belle [3]. She took over as postmaster from 1926-04-01 until her death on 1938-08-17.

Her husband succeeded her until the post office was closed on 1948-06-30. By that time, good roads had eliminated the need for the post office, as both Cardston and Lethbridge were now short drives away. Mail service thereafter was a rural route from Lethbridge.
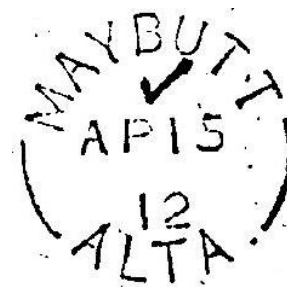
Maybutt.

I am embarrassed to say I don't know how I missed the post office of Maybutt when I wrote the postal history of Stirling in JAPH #28. The two are only a couple of kilometres apart, within walking distance.

The Stirling post office got its mail via a rail junction at Maybutt, which I documented in that postal history. At the same time Maybutt also had its own post office, which I somehow overlooked. The Google satellite map shows the two settlements circa 2024.

Maybutt was originally called New Town, as compared with Old Town Stirling. When the post office was opened, the name was changed to honour May Butt. She was the wife of W. Fisher [4]. They were the first homesteaders of the townsite.

The Maybutt post office opened on 1912-04-01 in the general store of Samuel Feeber. He served as the first postmaster until 1920-06-15, when he sold the store in order to concentrate on his nearby homestead. His portrait is at left [5]. Below is the proof strike of the first postmark.

The store was bought by Clifford Harrison Loder but the post office moved to the general store of Manley L. Miller. He served as postmaster until his death on 1929-11-18, after which his widow Annie took over. On 1930-10-08 she resigned and moved out of town to live with her daughter. Before going, she dissolved the store operations, sold the fixtures, and moved the building elsewhere.

That being the case, C.H. Loder took on the postmastership and moved the post office into his store. He served until 1939-08-18 when the store and post office again changed hands. The new owner was Gilbert Nicholson Wells. He was granted military leave from 1942 to 1944, during which time his wife Reta Kathleen was acting postmaster. Gilbert returned to the postmastership on 1944-06-01 and served until 1958-03-08 when he sold the store.

Gerald Keith Pushor was the next store owner and postmaster. He handed over to his brother Howard Eugene Pushor, who was postmaster until 1963-01-12 when the post office closed permanently. Stirling took over the postal system and Maybutt is essentially a suburb.

References.

1] National Library and Archives of Canada   (downloaded 2024-04-17)   Post offices and post masters .
https://library-archive.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] anonymous (downloaded 2024-04-23) RALEY, ALBERTA   www.stubblejumperphotography.com

3]   various authors (1978) CHIEF MOUNTAIN COUNTRY: VOLUME 1   Published by Cardston and District Historical Society, Alberta. Pages 74 to 75, 283 to 284, 298, 310

4] Karamitsamis, Aphrodite (1992) PLACE NAMES OF ALBERTA. VOLUME 2: SOUTHERN ALBERTA Published by University of Calgary Press.   Page 78

5] various authors (1981) STIRLING: ITS STORY AND PEOPLE Published by Stirling Sunset Society, Stirling, Alberta. Pages 189 to 190, 381 to 382, 557 to 558

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

7] various authors (1973) CANDLELIGHT YEARS Published by Innisfail and District Historical Society. Page 215

8] Photo courtesy of Bowden Pioneer Museum, provided by Dale Lenting on 2023-02-16.