

# **JOURNAL OF ALBERTA POSTAL HISTORY**

## **Issue #7**

Edited by Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta T2P 2E7, or [opuntia57@yahoo.ca](mailto:opuntia57@yahoo.ca)  
Published May 2016.

# POSTAL HISTORY OF ALBERTA: HIGHWOOD RIVER DRAINAGE AND THE PORCUPINE HILLS

by Dale Speirs

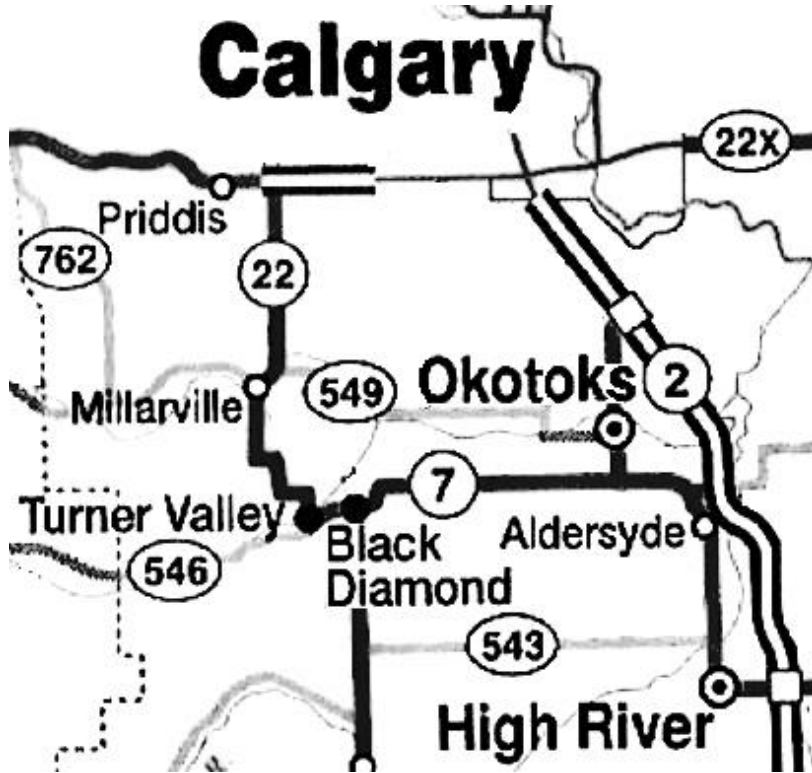
This issue of JAPH deals with the myriad ranch house post offices and a few towns of the southwestern foothills of Alberta. This is roughly defined as that portion of the province between Highway 2 and the British Columbia border, being the drainage basin of the Highwood River and the Porcupine Hills.



## INDEX TO POST OFFICES

Baronet	44	Spring Point	68
Blacktail	53	Tongue Creek	37
Carnforth	69	Willows	53
Cayley	21		
Chimney Rock	50		
Cut Bank	65		
E.P. Ranch	42		
Furman	50		
Granum	58		
Head-Smashed-In	70		
High River	4		
Holding	69		
The Leavings	58		
Loch Sloy	38		
Longview (old, now East Longview)	33		
Longview (new, present-day village)	35		
Lyndon	48		
Meadow Creek	63		
New Oxley	52		
Olsen Creek	68		
Pekisko	40		
Rice	50		
Round Up	66		
Royalties	29		

## HIGH RIVER



The city of High River is located on the Highwood River where the Rocky Mountain foothills make the transition to the prairie. Both the river and the city names are translations of the Siksika tribal name for the area, “spitzee”, meaning “high trees”. This refers to the large cottonwoods which line the banks of the river and are visible for some distance across the prairies. The city is not in a valley but on a floodplain at the same level as the river, which was to cause problems.

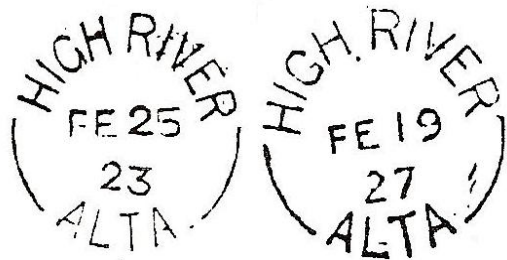
At left is a map of the general area, showing High River in relation to Calgary. High River is today a 20-minute drive south of Calgary on Highway 2, a distance of about 50 kilometres. It is popular with commuters who work in Calgary. The population of High River before the great flood of 2013 was about 12,000 people.



## Pioneer History.

The first settlers were John and Katie Quirk, who emigrated from Ireland and initially ranched in Montana. Because of problems with natives stealing their cattle, they moved their herd north and after a long exhausting trip arrived on the banks of the Highwood River in 1882. At this point, Katie was tired of traveling and famously told her husband "*John, I will go no further*". John accepted her concern and they settled there. They are considered the founders of High River.

The original mail service was via Fort Benton, Montana, through courtesy of the Mounties or with privately-paid couriers. It took weeks under ideal conditions, traveling by oxen team and later by stagecoach along the Macleod Trail, today's Highway 2. After the railroad came through in 1892, mail service was four times daily. In 1955, Highway 2 became a good paved road and transport of the mails switched to trucks. W.J. Bunce opened a stopping house near High River in 1883 at a locality on the river known as The Crossing, where there was a river ford that was useable even during the spring floods. The Siksika tribe had long used this area as a camping ground and today it is within the city of High River. On 1884-02-01, Bunce became the first postmaster of High River [1]. Bunce's stopping house was a three-room sod hut, the middle room of which had a bunk for travelers. During the day when the bed was vacant, it was used as a sorting place for the mails.



W.E.G. (Bill) Holmes took over as postmaster on 1887-07-01 and moved the post office into his store nearby. He sold the store to Joseph Limoges who became the next postmaster on 1889-11-01. In those days, postmasterships were often political patronage appointments. After the 1911 federal election when the government changed hands, Limoges was dismissed a few months later on 1911-12-02. He was briefly replaced by Harry Nelson, a town councillor, but it appears that this didn't stick and Limoges resumed the office on some unknown date not long after and held it until 1934-04-25 when he died [2]. At left are a couple of proof strikes of the split-circle postmarks used during Limoges' tenure.

## Modern Times.



A standalone post office building was constructed in 1931. After an brief interregnum with a placeholder, W.E.M. (Bill Jr) Holmes, son of W.E.G., was appointed and stayed as postmaster until his retirement on 1956-06-22. During his tenure the job became a full-time civil service position.

Samuel J. Best took over from Holmes in 1956 and a new post office was constructed in 1972. Best left just after the new building was completed. The photo at left shows the High River post office in 1988; the woman mailing a letter is the author's mother, the late Betty Speirs. The post office was still in this building as of 2013.

Two brief placeholder postmasters came and went, and then on 1973-10-01, W.J. (Joe) McDonald settled into the job. He took early retirement in 1976 and was succeeded by Douglas F. Day, followed by many others too numerous to mention. By 1982, the High River post office was a major operation, and mail for the entire postal code T0L was sorted here [2]. Below left are Klussendorf machine cancels used to handle the load. Below right are a couple of pictorial postmarks used by the post office. The train postmark was for a railway museum that had just restored a mail car.



On 1990-01-10 the first retail postal outlet (RePO) opened in High River in a 7-Eleven, and operated until early 2013. A couple of its postmarks are shown below left. What was peculiar about this outlet is that it was across the street and just down the block from the main post office [3]. A person could walk from one to the other in thirty seconds. A city as large as High River would have been more usefully served by having the two spread further apart. The photo below right shows the RePO as it looked in January 2012. Notice the Canada Post sign at the righthand side of the building. This RePO closed in 2013 before the great flood. The store itself was flooded to the eaves and remained closed afterward. At the same time, a Shoppers Drug Mart two blocks east of the 7-Eleven opened a RePO which began operating in early 2013 just before the great flood destroyed it.



## **Floods.**

High River was built on a floodplain and its citizens soon learned the meaning of that word. Almost annually the Highwood River flooded the townsite from the 1880s to the 1940s. Over the years an extensive network of levees were built and by the 1940s flooding had been reduced, but even in the 2000s residents still got the occasional nasty surprise. Major floods requiring large-scale evacuations occurred in 2005 and 2013. The 2013 flood throughout southwestern Alberta, which also devastated Calgary, was the largest flood in Alberta since records were first kept. It particularly shocked southern Albertans because it immersed areas that had never before flooded since the Europeans arrived.

Pioneer reports agree that on many occasions the High River mails were shuttled between the train station and the post office via rowboat, a thing normally done with a hand cart. The railroad station and tracks were built on a raised bed of gravel ballast and thus kept operating during the floods without interruption to the mails. The floods were wide in terms of horizontal spread and covered hectares but were seldom more than a metre deep in most places, with the exception of the 2013 flood which covered many houses to their eaves.

## **The Great Flood Of 2013.**

The entire city of High River was flooded on June 21, 2013. In the High River area, 190 mm of rain fell in one day and 250 mm in the headwaters of the Highwood River in the Rocky Mountains nearby. The rain that fell upstream in the mountains drained through the city of High River. The river burst its banks and flowed overland across the city. All 12,000 residents were evacuated, and the postal system shut down for five months. About 100 residents were trapped on the rooftops of their houses and after spending hours sitting in the rain were rescued by Canadian Forces helicopters.

Unlike the old days, mail is now delivered by truck traveling on roads at grade level, so the distribution was interrupted. The staff left as soon as the electricity shut down. There was no postal service whatsoever until June 25. Beginning that day, High River residents were asked to get their mail at Okotoks, 25 kilometres northwest. Okotoks suffered minor flooding from the Sheep River in its Old Town district on the bottomlands. It was not hit as badly or as long because most of that city is up on a plateau, and was able to keep its postal system going.





Residents of High River were allowed back into the town on a limited basis beginning June 29, but the post office remained closed. Delivery to some supermailboxes resumed on July 10 where the land had been drained, but parcels and signature-required mail still had to be picked up at Okotoks [4].

The photo at left shows the Okotoks post office as it was on August 5, basically split into two separate post offices. Three long rows of supermailboxes were placed on the sidewalk to make it easier for High River mail pickups, but with 12,000 victims to look after, the Okotoks emergency service was obviously a stop-gap measure.

On July 14, I drove down to High River to look at the damage. For once, the mass media did not exaggerate the disaster. If anything, it was worse than reported because 90% of the destruction was inside the buildings out of public view. The photo below left shows a general view of the main post office. Behind the camera were an additional three dumpster bins filled with debris from the building. It was in the process of being gutted completely. The parking lot and sidewalk are white not because of camera over-exposure, but because of the thin layer of dried clay mud that covered everything in the city. The photo below right is a close-up of the post office to show the waist-high water stain on the wall. Look closely and you will see the faint horizontal white band marking the high water of the flood.



Below is a photo taken August 15th of the new Shoppers RePO, which was flooded waist-high. Notice the Canada Post sign at left of building. The site is three blocks east and one block south of the main post office on the same ground level. The entire store had to be gutted.





The photo below was taken just north of the main post office and shows the railroad track along which the mails were once delivered even through previous floods. The Highwood River is on the other side of the cottonwoods and had subsided back into its regular channel when I took the photo on July 14. The raised track bed is about one metre above the height of the road but this time it did not avail and the river pushed most of the track over on its side, making it look like a snow fence. The rails and bridge over the Highwood River, built in 1892, were subsequently removed by the CPR and the track abandoned, erasing a major part of High River's history.



High River suffered more than Calgary, Okotoks, or other flooded towns because much of it is at or below the level of the Highwood River. The land did not drain naturally and quickly as elsewhere and in many places had to be pumped dry. In early September I saw suburbs still with sheets of water or large pools that were not yet dry and awaiting pumps.

### **The Aftermath.**



On September 8, I re-visited High River. The Shoppers was not yet open. The main post office was still closed but all the supermailboxes that had been in Okotoks were now lined around it, as seen at left. A sign nearby said that signature mail and parcels still had to be picked up in Okotoks.

A refugee camp called Saddlebrook was set up north of High River, in fact on the southern boundary of the hamlet of Aldersyde. The portable trailers contained about 1,200 residents who had no place else to stay. There were no supermailboxes that I could see but the camp had shuttle bus service to High River and those residents with cars could actually drive more quickly to Okotoks. (Large numbers of High River residents lost their cars, which were washed downstream and were beyond repair when salvaged.) On my way back to Calgary, I drove past the Okotoks post office and verified that the supermailboxes previously seen there were the ones that had been relocated. The Okotoks building, however, was still split into two post offices and the signage was unchanged.

There was one street letter box at the ruins of the High River post office, into which I dropped a self-addressed envelope to see where it would be cancelled. Private security guards were everywhere in High River, on patrol along the streets and parking lots since almost all of the buildings were still vacant. As I got out of my car to mail my letter, one such guard started to walk over to me with unalloyed suspicion on his face. I waved my letter in the air to reassure him that I was not a looter, and he stopped where he was. Nonetheless, he watched me closely as I dropped the cover into the street box. The letter arrived in Calgary on September 13 with no postmarks and only an orange barcode upside-down across the top of the envelope. Just for fun, I re-mailed the cover in the same street box on September 21. (No sign of the guard; maybe he was on his coffee break.) It returned to me on September 25 and this time with an Okotoks machine cancel, which is what I had been expecting.

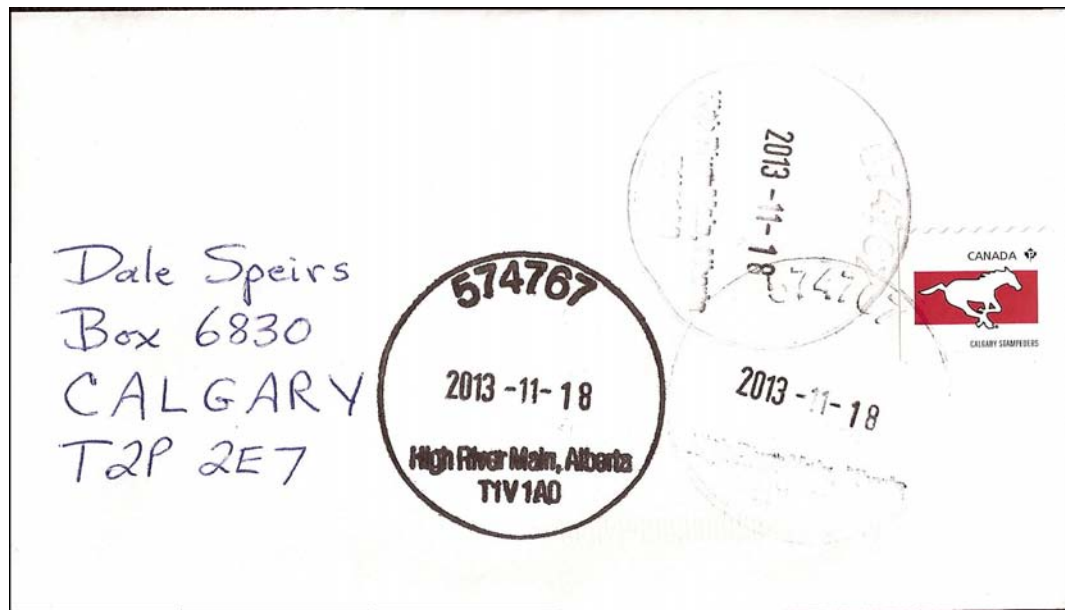
When I checked the Canada Post “Find A Post Office” Website on September 21, the main post office had been deleted from the map, but the Shoppers was listed as being open. I visited High River that day, but the Shoppers was not yet open. There was a temporary trailer parked on site but it only had a pharmacy and nothing else. The pharmacist told me the main store and RePO were not scheduled to re-open until November 28. The main post office building looked the same as it was on September 8 with no visible additional work being done. After the initial gutting and make-safe, work came to a halt.

## The Recovery.

It was five months before full postal services resumed in High River. On November 18, a temporary post office opened in a trailer on Centre Street a few blocks south of the main building. The photo below shows it on opening day. This time the sidewalk and parking lot are white because of snow. It was one of many construction trailers in what had been a vacant railway siding before the railroad was washed away. Various local businesses occupied the other trailers, such as an insurance agency and a credit union. Because the post office sign was facing inward and not visible from the street, I drove back and forth a couple of times before I finally found the post office.



When I entered the temporary office on opening morning, there was a lineup of citizens in the tiny lobby. The clerk was apologizing to a customer that the registration and signature mail facility was not running just yet, and if she didn't want to drive to Okotoks today, then she should come back tomorrow. As I was standing in line, the supervisor came out of his office and we had a pleasant chat. I asked him about the main building and he said that Canada Post had decided to abandon it. They were currently looking for a new location, hopefully a couple of metres higher in altitude. He told me that when he opened up after the flood waters receded, he found the building filled knee-high with mud and gravel, with water stains at waist height.



I made it to the front of the lineup and presented a cover for cancelling. The clerk tried twice with a flood-damaged self-inking canceller salvaged from the main building but only the date showed clearly. The ink pad in the canceller had been washed clean by the flood waters. The supervisor went into his office and came out with a fresh ink pad. After inserting it into the canceller, the clerk tried it on my cover and it worked perfectly, albeit slightly over-inked. The cover is at left and represents the first piece of mail cancelled in High River in five months.

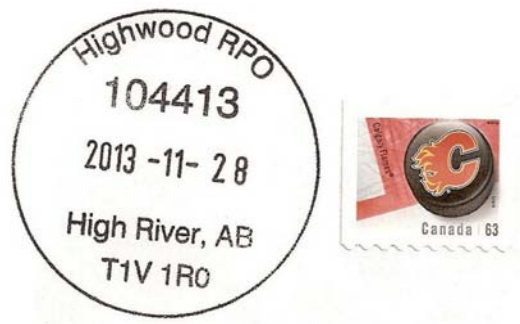


On November 28, I returned to High River one final time, for the grand re-opening of the Shoppers Drug Mart and its RePO. I was the first at the postal counter for a postmark, shown at right. The RePO is named after the river that destroyed it. The clerk told me that the canceller was brand-new. Nothing had been salvaged from the flood, and the postal outlet and its mails had been a total loss.

On my way out of High River both times in November, I stopped at its street letter box (still the only one in the city) and dropped in a self-addressed cover. Both were returned to me with only Calgary spray-on markings, indicating that Calgary had taken over from Okotoks as the sorting plant for High River mail. It made sense because the construction trailer was far too small to sort mail on a large scale, even allowing for the partial depopulation of the city after the flood. I'm sure the Okotoks staff were relieved to see the High River mails being diverted and easing their workload.

### **Return To The Old Ways.**

The main post office building, located a block south of the Highwood River on the same level as the river, was re-opened. Canada Post decided to renovate the post office in the same location despite the known hazard. The photo shows the interior after the building was gutted and redone. It re-opened on 2015-02-16, for regular business.



As to why the return to the same location, the answer appears to be trust in a new system of levees built along the Highwood River after the flood. The photo below shows a brand-new levee on the north side of the post office. The post office is just behind the camera. The railroad track along which the mails were carried in historical days was pulled out by the CPR, who know a lost cause when they see it. At right of the photo is the main highway into High River. Notice the two piles of large white sandbags along the road. Since the levee stops at the road, the sandbags have been pre-positioned in case of another spring flood.



## References.

- 1] Library and Archives Canada (downloaded 2011-11-26) Post offices and postmasters. <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/post-offices>
- 2] Knupp, Lillian Short (1982) LIFE AND LEGENDS: A HISTORY OF THE TOWN OF HIGH RIVER. Published by Sandstone Publishing, Calgary, Alberta. Pages 11, 36 to 38, 85 to 87
- 3] Hughes, Neil (1998) ALBERTA POST OFFICES 1876-1998. Published by the author, Edmonton, Alberta. 179 pages.
- 4] Canada Post Corporation (2013, various press releases from June 25 to October 31) Update on postal service to Albertans affected by flooding. [www.canadapost.ca/cpo/mc/aboutus/news/pr/2013/index.jsf](http://www.canadapost.ca/cpo/mc/aboutus/news/pr/2013/index.jsf)



## CAYLEY

This town was named after Hugh Cayley, publisher of the CALGARY HERALD newspaper at that time, later a member of the Northwest Territories legislature, and then a judge [1]. It was on the railroad and the old route of Highway 2, but a modern bypass has crimped its economic prosperity. The railroad tracks were pulled out many years ago. Its population was about 325 people in 2013. Cayley is only ten minutes drive south of High River on today's paved highways, so its growth faltered. After the great flood of June 2013 that devastated High River, Cayleyites were quick to advertise house lots for sale as being high and dry and unaffected by the flood. Whether this will improve the fortunes of the hamlet remains to be seen, but when I drove by in 2014, there was some new construction underway.

George W. Wickens was the first postmaster, opening the post office in his general store on 1903-09-01. The Wickens family were the founders and first residents of Cayley, and initially lived in a boxcar parked on the railroad siding while a proper store was being built. Since Cayley was on a main line of the railroad, it was a distribution point for the mails into the surrounding countryside. George was involved in a variety of businesses and was elected to local office on the village council and the school board. He sold the store in 1909 to his brother-in-law Fred Scragg, who became the new postmaster on 1909-07-09. At right is the proof strike of his postmark.



The store/post office burned down in 1913 and was replaced on the same spot by a brick building. Fred retired from office and on 1919-02-14 the post office was transferred to G. Wesley Ferris. He and his family lived at the rear of the post office, which also included a telephone exchange and a livery barn.

On 1921-07-08, George M. Shields took over as postmaster and moved it to his grocery store. He gave up the post office on 1929-10-01 as a result of divorcing his first wife, and took up farming nearby. The post office was taken over by the McCrea family. Clarence William (Mac) McCrea was a bank clerk who bought out the Shields' businesses when they divorced. He had originally worked in the bank at Cayley but had been transferred to an Edmonton branch, which he did not like. He was postmaster until his death on 1968-03-31.

McCrea's widow Alta took over the position until 1973-07-01 when she retired [2]. Mrs. P.D. Shier then assumed the postmastership in her house until 1990, at which point the post office closed and re-opened as a postal outlet in a store. The photo below shows Betty Speirs in 1988 at the residential Cayley post office.





Since then the Cayley postal outlet has operated in a convenience store. Helen Brockway operated it from 1990-08-16 to 1993-04-26, the postmark of which is seen in at left.

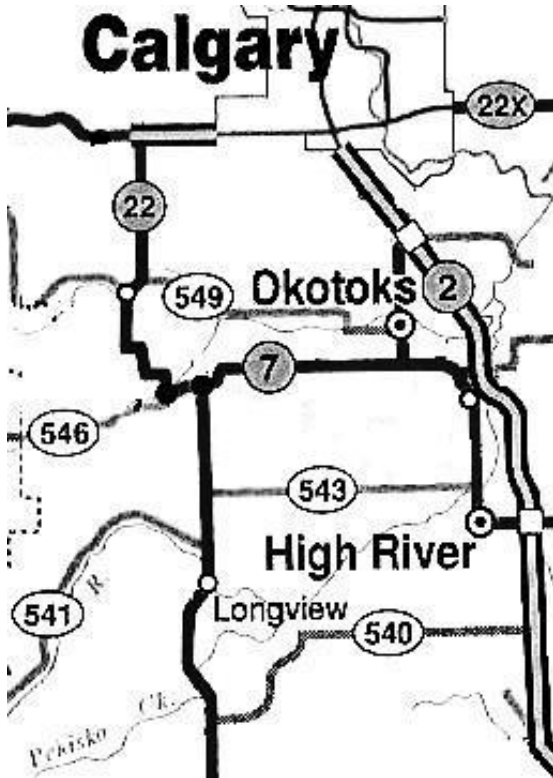
The store was then operated by Lawrence and Peggy Labelle until 1996-09-23, after which records are not available. The postal outlet as of 2013 is seen below.



## **References.**

- 1] Sanders, Harry M. (2003) THE STORY BEHIND ALBERTA NAMES. Published by Red Deer Press, University of Calgary, Alberta. Pages 80, 225 to 226
- 2] various authors (1967) UNDER THE CHINOOK ARCH. Published by Cayley Women's Institute, Alberta. Pages 98 to 99, 177 to 178, 311 to 312

## HIGHWOOD RIVER DRAINAGE BASIN

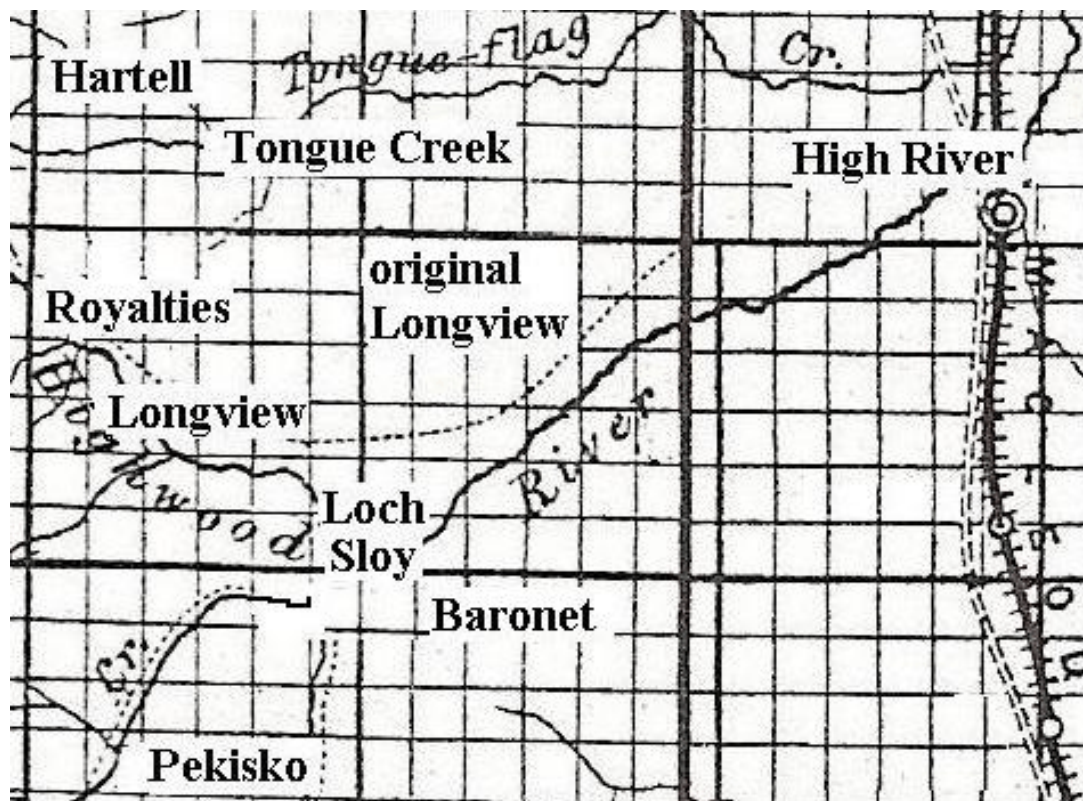


The mountainous part of the drainage basin of the Highwood River is roughly between Highway 2, the main north-south highway in Alberta, and the Rocky Mountains. This district included the E.P. Ranch, the personal property of the Duke of Windsor. Highway 2 marks the edge of the first steppe of the prairies, where rolling hills begin to give way to the flatlands. Along the highway is the city of High River, which grew because it was on the main route between Calgary and the American border, both the highway and the railroad.

On the west side of the district in the foothills were settlements that sprouted during the 1930s petroleum boom, one of which, Royalties, is now extinct and the other, Longview, is a village much reduced from its glory days.

At left is a modern map of the Highwood River area.

Below is a 1922 map of the area, modified to show all the post offices. The small squares are one mile on a side. The railroad line on the right side of the map was the major transportation route for most of the district's history. Highway 2 followed alongside the railway but didn't exist until the 1950s. The E.P. Ranch (not shown) was an irregularly-shaped area between Loch Sloy and Pekisko.







The district was initially settled in the 1880s by homesteaders and ranchers. Small coal mines were developed that supplied the local trade, then lumbering in the foothills to supply the demand for lumber.

A short-lived oil boom started in early 1914 but was almost immediately killed off by World War One. In the late 1920s, drilling resumed but not until an oil well known as Royalties #1 came in big in 1936 did a new boom start. Overnight new towns grew up, but the oil wells were shallow and soon depleted. The drilling technology was primitive in those days, and within a decade the industry collapsed. Today there are many pumpjacks in the fields and a few small processing plants, but the business is nothing like it once was.

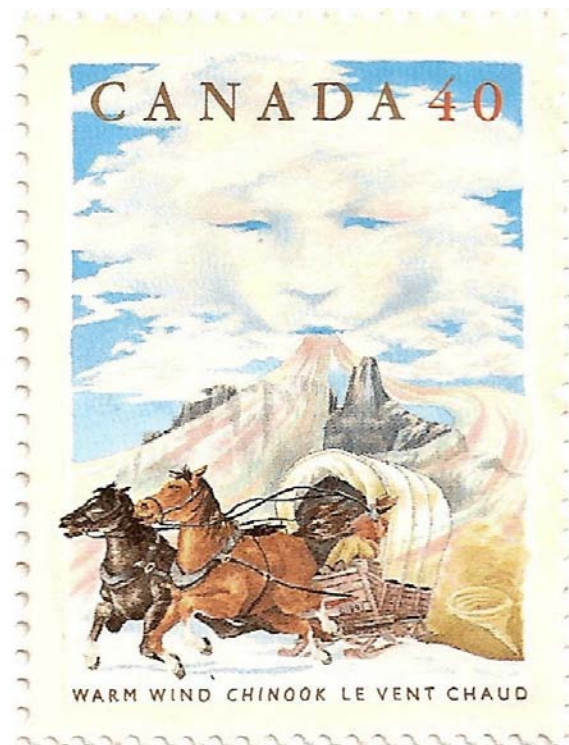
At left is a Millennium stamp issued by Canada depicting a generalized view of the southwestern Alberta foothills, which is also a very good summary of what the landscape looks like in the Highwood River district.

## Chinooks.

The earliest Europeans and settlers in the southwestern Alberta foothills soon discovered the phenomenon of chinook winds. These winter winds come out of British Columbia and heat up as they descend the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains. They can raise the air temperature from -20C to +10C in an hour. Snow on the lower elevations below the mountains is sublimated directly into the air, rather than melting into water puddles first and then evaporating. Chinook winds usually travel at about 30 to 80 km/hr but have been known to reach 150 km/hr. The Highwood River district is in the heart of chinook country.

When the first cattle ranchers settled in southwestern Alberta during the 1880s, they had a streak of years with many chinooks, and discovered they could graze their cattle year-round without having to feed them hay or grain in winter. They were eventually disabused of this lazy man's way of ranching when a hard winter with no chinooks occurred in 1906-07 and half the cattle in the area died of starvation because they couldn't dig through the heavy snowfalls to the grass. Today the ranchers still graze their cattle year-round but all of them keep a stockpile of hay or feed grain not only just in case, but because supplemental winter feeding has been proven to provide better beef.

At right is a Canadian stamp that illustrates a popular folktale of southwestern Alberta. It is about the rancher who was traveling home in his sleigh when a chinook came down from the mountains. He whipped the horses up to full speed and raced for home. All the way the front runners of his sleigh were on snow and the rear runners scraped along dry ground.





## **The 1936 Oil Boom.**

Native tribes and homesteaders had long known of oil and gas seeps in the foothills, but it wasn't until the Royalties #1 well gushed in 1936 that an oil boom triggered the sudden growth of three boomtowns: Little Chicago, Little New York, and Little Philadelphia. All three towns grew up from cow pastures to thousands of residents within a few months. Adjacent to the Royalties #1 oil well, there grew Little Chicago. The drillers in the area were mostly Americans, and because the well was on the edge of a large slough, it reminded them of the Illinois city on the lake. After World War Two, the oil and natural gas dwindled away and so did the town. Today all that remains is a gas processing plant, and the townsite is pasture. By analogy, another oil field a few kilometres south was named Little New York, today called Longview. To the east of it was the original Longview, which was abandoned in 1936 as everyone rushed to get in on the oil business. The name was transferred to the new location.

South of Little New York was Little Philadelphia, hardly more than a suburb. It was quickly swallowed up by the new Longview and had no real independence or a post office. In the mad rush of the oil boom, settlers didn't fuss too much about land titles and just squatted on the land. This caused numerous problems in later years, and between 1961 and 1963 there had to be a lengthy series of legal maneuvers before the village of Longview could be incorporated [4].

## **Royalties.**

Little Chicago grew rapidly and its post office opened a year after Royalties #1 came in. The town name was considered undignified, so the post office was called Royalties, after the discovery well. The word itself refers to payments made to owners of mineral rights for the oil or gas. The Royalties post office opened on 1937-07-26 in a store operated by Percy George (Pete) Leman. He was an English homesteader who operated dray teams in the High River district. The mail distribution point for Royalties was from Okotoks, north of High River, which was strange because it is a further distance away than High River, as seen in the map above.

The photo below shows Royalties a year or so after its founding. Leman was in office until his death on 1953-09-14, by which time Royalties was a shadow of itself, down to hamlet status. He was succeeded by his postal clerk Mary Tovee. She only stayed as postmaster for about five months, and then got a better position at the High River post office.



The next four postmasters were all wives of the owners of the general store, as it changed hands while the hamlet dwindled. In order of succession they were Mary French, Helene Johnson, Thelma Brown, and Josephine Feddema. Brown held the job from 1958-07-01 to 1963-07-23, when, as a widow, she moved to Calgary where she worked in sub-post offices, first at the Zellers store in the North Hill Shopping Centre and later one in the Hudson Bay Company store downtown into the late 1970s.

The Royalties post office closed on 1969-06-27, with Josephine Feddema as the last postmaster [5]. The final type of postmark for Royalties is seen below. The townsite has now completely vanished and reverted to pasture, with only a roadside marker to record its existence. The gas processing plant remains and still uses the Little Chicago name.

The photo on the next page, taken by the author in 2011 shows the townsite as it now is. The pasture in the foreground is where the village once was.





## The Original Longview.

The postal history of Longview may be somewhat confusing because there were two different places of that name. The original location of Longview was a ranch house post office on the homestead of Samuel Robinson McBee. He was an American who came up to the district in 1904. When the post office opened on 1908-07-01, the name Longview was chosen because of the view of the mountains to the west. The first mail courier in the region, before and after the post office was opened, was Thomas Long, whose name was a coincidence. Some folk etymologies say the post office was named after him but it isn't so [4]. At right is the proof strike of the first postmark.



A.R. Allen homesteaded in the area and bought a general store at Longview in 1910. He took over the post office from McBee on 1913-07-18 and held it until he sold the store in 1919 to Samuel Thompson. The latter became postmaster on 1919-08-15 until 1928-09-18. Thompson mentioned that one of the prominent ranchers in the area, Guy Weadick, got his mail at the Longview post office, and was notorious as a fast talker who made it difficult for Thompson to get a word in edgewise. Weadick is an important name in southern Alberta history. Besides being a large ranch owner, he and his wife Flo were star rodeo performers, and in 1912 he was one of the founding fathers of the Calgary Stampede rodeo, the world's largest rodeo.

Thompson sold the store to John Stewart Scott who became postmaster on 1935-01-31. He was there only briefly until 1936-08-21. The final postmaster was Robert Henson, until the store and post office were abandoned on 1937-07-07 as everyone moved to Little New York where the money was. The location of the original Longview is entirely rural today, and is now known as East Longview. The only evidence that a village was ever there is a community hall still in use. The photo on the next page was taken on New Year's Day 2012 after a chinook and is looking west to the Rockies from the original site. One can easily see how the name originated.





## **New Longview.**

There was a gap of nearly nine months between the time the old Longview post office closed and the new one opened, although the residents still got mail by rural couriers or via the Royalties post office. Guy Weadick led a citizens' committee to successfully argue with postal officials in Ottawa to transfer the name Longview from the old location, rather than using Little New York as the post office name [5]. When the new Longview post office opened on 1938-03-16, the first postmaster was John Ancock, who had been postmaster a few miles north in the now-extinct village of Hartell. He succumbed to oil fever, gave up the Hartell postmastership, and moved south to Longview. After the oil boom died, he and his family moved to Washington State in 1945 and never returned.

At the original Longview post office site, annual gross revenues of the post office were in the \$170 range plus or minus from Fiscal Year (ending in March) 1932 and slowly declined down to about \$100 by Fiscal 1938. For the following fiscal year at the new location, gross revenue soared to \$3,181.73 in one giant leap. It fluctuated in the \$3,000 to \$4,000 range until Fiscal 1945, when it slowly began declining down into the \$2,000 range as the oil business declined [12]. By this time the Great Depression was over and prosperity returned to the ranching district.

Welby Henry Barkley took over the post office from Ancock on 1945-09-26 and held it until 1951-01-31, then his wife Marion until late 1955. Their assistant clerk was Gertrude Dorothy Parker, who became postmaster on 1955-11-23. I don't have dates of successors but along the way the post office moved into the village hall.

The village is at the southern entrance to Kananaskis Provincial Park in the Rocky Mountains, and has summer tourist trade as well as agriculture and oilfield servicing. The residents are proud of their connection to the mountains and the pictorial postmark advertising it is shown at left. On the next page is the post office in 2011, by which time the population of Longview was about 350 people.







## **English Corner.**

About halfway between the new Longview and Pekisko was a large cluster of mailboxes serviced twice a week from High River by a mail courier. The location was known as English Corner because the surrounding homesteaders were all from Britain, but it was never a settlement of any kind nor did it have a post office. The mail was expected at 14h00 on delivery days but this was hypothetical because the courier was often delayed by bad roads. Local settlers would gather at the mail boxes, not only to get their mail but to hand over outgoing mail. The gatherings were a popular social occasion and often a fair-sized crowd would develop and gossip while waiting [6]. I could not relocate it but given how the area has depopulated this is not surprising.

## **Tongue Creek.**

The creek after which the post office was named was originally called Tongue-flag Creek, translated from the Siksika name. A hunter from their tribe killed a bison but could not carry all the meat, so to mark the spot he raised a pole made from a tree branch. Since one tree branch looks much the same as the next, he hung the carcass tongue on top so his fellow tribesmen could identify it when they went to get the rest of the meat [10].

This was a ranch house post office, not a settlement. Walter Wilde McIntosh opened the post office on 1905-06-05 at his ranch north of the original Longview. The ranch straddled the creek, hence the name. He was from Toronto, and homesteaded in 1886 on Tongue Creek [11]. He sold out on 1910-06-19, and after a brief placeholder came and went, the postmastership went to George H. McKee from 1911-01-02 to 1913-03-04. Neil MacKay then took over the ranch and post office from 1913-06-03 to 1915-08-03. The final postmaster was William Warcup from 1915-12-15 to 1918-10-31. At that time the post office permanently closed and since then the mail has been delivered via a rural mail route.

## Loch Sloy.



This isolated general store/post office opened on 1908-08-01 with Hugh MacFarlane as postmaster, and was named after a lake in his native Scotland. At left is the proof strike of its postmark. Loch Sloy was never a village, just a place name. The MacFarlanes lived above the store, which originally was a log cabin with one room on each floor. They sold the store and terminated their postmastership on 1911-09-29.

Alex Riddell took over as postmaster until 1915-08-21. In 1912, he moved the store/post office into a large building, so large that after the post office closed years later, the building was subsequently used as a dance hall and community hall. Harry H. Baines was the third and final postmaster until 1918-03-31 when the post office permanently closed. No one being left at Loch Sloy, he moved his store to Pekisko [7].

The photo on the next page, taken by me on New Year's Day 2012 after a chinook, looks west across the area where the Loch Sloy post office once was. Only one ranch house remains. In the distance is the Highwood Range of the Rocky Mountains.

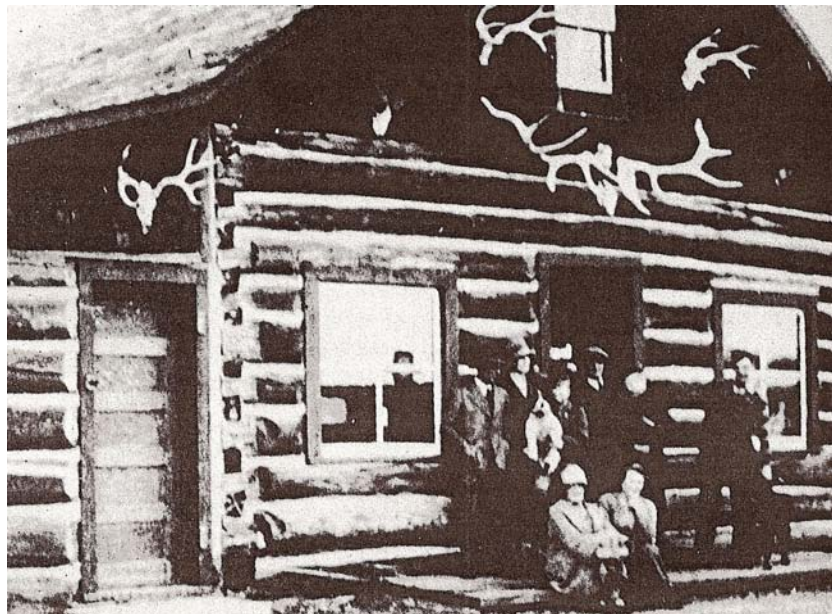


## Pekisko.



The name of this locality is from the Siksika language and means “rolling hills”. The post office was one of the earliest in southwestern Alberta, opening on 1886-08-01 with Mary Stimson as postmaster. It was near Stimson Creek, named after her husband Fred. At left is the proof strike of the first postmark. Stimson stayed until 1902-02-01, when Ella Miller took over until 1919-05-24.

Neils Olsen then accepted the job, which coincided with worldwide attention being focused on the hamlet because Prince Edward (later the Duke of Windsor) had just bought a ranch there. He died in office on 1925-03-11, and was followed by two short-term replacements. Mary Baines, now a widow, took the job on 1927-08-15 and stayed to 1944-11-23 before retiring. At right is a photo from sometime in the 1920s showing the Pekisko store and post office [8]. The Baines had come from Loch Sloy with their store in 1918, but Harry died in 1924 and thus was never postmaster at the second location. Mary was succeeded by her son Alfred who held the title until 1956-09-25 when he moved to High River [7].



John Cornelius (Jack) Green then took over from the Baines family until 1962-01-22. He was often away for weeks at a time, leaving the store and post office closed. Given how few people were left, this probably wasn't as serious as it might seem. The final postmaster was Joseph William Bowman until the post office permanently closed on 1967-09-18. Bowman bought out Green and restocked the shelves, running the store for a few years more but selling out in 1970 to ex-rodeo champion Tom Bews [8]. Mail service is now through High River Rural Route #2, and Pekisko is today only a place name with a few ranch houses. Below is a view of Pekisko (the clump of trees at centre) on New Year's Day 2012, looking east.





## The E.P. Ranch.

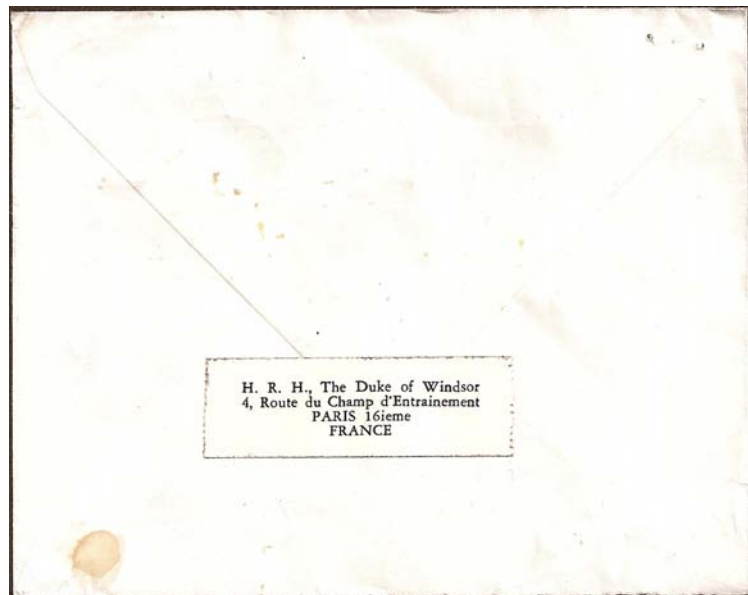
In 1919, the Duke of Windsor, at that time HRH Prince Edward, made a Royal Tour across Canada. Passing through southern Alberta, he spent a few days relaxing in the ranching district west of High River. He enjoyed the area so much that in September of that year, he bought a ranch located near Pekisko. The ranch was renamed the E.P. Ranch, the initials standing for Edward Princeps. This was the sole piece of property the Duke owned in his personal name, rather than as state property or of the House of Windsor. Below are the only stamps the British Post Office have ever issued in honour of an Alberta rancher.



At almost the same time, the Pekisko postmastership changed hands. Neils Olsen took over and found himself with a famous customer. High River had an airstrip. During the 1920s the mail would be flown by the High River post office not to the big cities of Calgary or Lethbridge as one might expect, but to the E.P. Ranch. The pilot would buzz the pasture nearest the ranch house to alert the inhabitants and chase away any cows or horses, then land to deliver and pick up the mails [2]. This service was not offered to any other ranchers but then again none of them were heirs to the throne. As this was closed-bag mail, there were no special markings, airmail or otherwise.

In late 1950s the ranch suffered from mismanagement by British directors who thought they could run it better from a distance than the local cowboys. The ranch began losing serious money, and the Duke put it up for sale in early 1961, through his solicitor E.B. Nowers of Calgary.

The ranch was sold in 1962 to a neighbouring rancher [9]. Below left is a cover mailed by the Duke of Windsor to Nowers, from the Duke's Paris residence to Calgary. Below right is the reverse side of the cover with the Duke's address label. The notation by Nowers on the front of the cover indicates that the contents were about the valuation of the E.P. Ranch.



## Baronet.



This ranch house post office opened on 1909-01-01 with Elza Creel Sanders as the postmaster. The proof strike of the first postmark is shown at left. There were pioneer settlers named Baronet further south in the Pincher Creek area, so it seems probable the name came from there. It is unlikely that it would have been named after some British nobleman since Sanders was an American. He originally homesteaded where the post office was, and later took up carpentering throughout the district. He also operated a small grist mill on the homestead. His brother-in-law Mark Lounsbury was the mail courier, bringing it out from High River [7]. Sanders resigned the post office on 1912-12-24 and Stanley R. Bulford took over until the post office permanently closed on 1913-04-23. Nothing remains.

## References.

- 1] Library and Archives Canada (downloaded 2011-11-26) Post offices and postmasters. <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/post-offices>
- 2] Knupp, Lillian Short (1982) LIFE AND LEGENDS: A HISTORY OF THE TOWN OF HIGH RIVER. Published by Sandstone Publishing, Calgary, Alberta. Pages 11, 36 to 38, 85 to 87
- 3] Hughes, Neil (1998) ALBERTA POST OFFICES 1876-1998. Published by the author, Edmonton, Alberta. 179 pages.
- 4] various authors (1973) TALES AND TRAILS. Published by East Longview Historical Society, Alberta. Pages 7 to 23, 170, 249 to 250, 329, 336, 348 to 354, 365, 371, 400
- 5] Harris, J.M. (editor) (1979) IN THE LIGHT OF THE FLARES. Published by Sheep River Historical Society. Pages 116, 123, 326-327

- 6] Sheppard, Bert (1971) SPITZEE DAYS. Published by McAra Presses, Calgary. Page 222
- 7] various authors (1967) UNDER THE CHINOOK ARCH. Published by Cayley Women's Institute, Alberta. Pages 98 to 99, 177 to 178, 311 to 312, 325
- 8] Fryer, Harold (1982) GHOST TOWNS OF SOUTHERN ALBERTA: VOLUME 2. Published by Heritage House Publishing, Surrey, British Columbia. Pages 56 to 57
- 9] Evans, Simon M. (1993) PRINCE CHARMING GOES WEST. Published by University of Calgary Press. Pages 1 to 2, 24 to 25, 34, 194
- 10] Karamitsanis, Aphrodite (1992) PLACE NAMES OF ALBERTA: VOL. 2. SOUTHERN ALBERTA. Published by University of Calgary Press, Alberta. Page 121
- 11] various authors (1960) LEAVES FROM THE MEDICINE TREE. Published by High River Pioneers' and Old Timers Association, Alberta. Pages 238
- 12] Canadian Post Office (1932 to 1948) ANNUAL REPORT OF THE POSTMASTER GENERAL. Appendices C and D.

## THE PORCUPINE HILLS

The colonization of the Rocky Mountain foothills in its southwestern corner began in the late 1800s but didn't really get going until a north-south railroad was built by the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) in 1892 along the east side of the foothills. One range of foothills are the Porcupine Hills, which were discovered to be good grazing for ranchers. The photo below, taken in 2013, shows a typical view of the interior



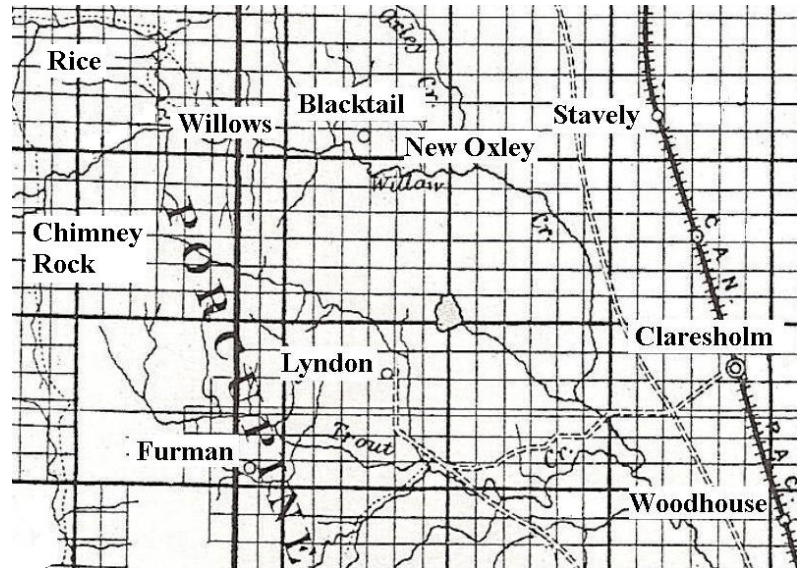
of the hills, which are given over entirely to cattle ranches. The eastern side of the hills where the land is flatter is cultivated for canola and hay.

The ranches have consolidated over the past century, as a result of which the number of families living in the hills has fallen considerably. Combined with good roads that made for easy access to the towns of nearby towns of Stavely and Claresholm on the rail line (and later the main highway), this eliminated the need for ranch house post offices, and there are no postal facilities in the hills anymore.





At left is a modern map of the area in relation to Calgary. The railroad came along the eastern side of the hills along the line where the land makes a transition between the hills and the prairies. Three settlements grew up along the railroad that had post offices, and there were several ranch house post offices in the hills. Below is a map of all the pioneer post offices. The small squares on the map are one mile on each side. Woodhouse still exists as a hamlet but no longer has a post office. In the 1950s, Highway 2 was built alongside the railroad and is now the major north-south route in Alberta. The railroad tracks were lifted in recent decades after freight transport went to semi-trailer trucks and residents began driving cars instead of taking the passenger train.



## Lyndon.

Charles Augustus Lyndon was an Irishman who had served in the British Navy during the Crimean War, then later immigrated to Salt Lake City, Utah. While there, he married a Kentucky widow named Margaret Erwin who had three sons by her previous marriage, and by Charles had another son William Augustus. In search of better opportunities and to escape the Mormon War, they migrated north. At Fort Macleod the local Mounties advised them that the Porcupine Hills were a good place to homestead. In 1881, they established the Lyndon Ranch in the northern hills, along a creek of the same name, and prospered over the years. After the railroad came through Claresholm, there was a surge in settlers, and the population grew enough to justify a ranch house post office in the hills.



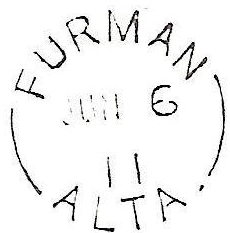
The Lyndon post office opened on 1893-07-01 with Charles as postmaster. At left is the proof strike of the first postmark. Charles couriered the mail from Claresholm once a week on Friday and the other settlers came into his ranch to get their letters. The Lyndons bought a phonograph in 1899 and neighbours waiting to pick up their mail would be entertained by what was at the time cutting-edge technology. Square dances were occasionally held on mail days and lasted to the next sunrise. Normally Charles used a buggy but when the creeks were in spring flood or the snow was heavy he would switch to a pack horse. There would be one horse on each side of the creek, hobbled so the one not in use wouldn't go far, and the mails would be rowed across in a boat. Charles also collected the mail for the Furman ranch house post office when it opened in 1911 further into the hills. Furman's only postmaster Fred Burton would meet him at the Lyndon ranch and take it onward. In later years, Burton took over the entire mail route [1, 3].

Charles died in 1903 shortly after retiring. His son William inherited the ranch and on 1903-10-01 became the postmaster. The ranch continued to expand as William bought out neighbours, which helped sow the seeds of the post office's demise by slowly depopulating the area. William is listed in a 1903 directory of stamp collectors [4]. The gross revenues of Lyndon post office do not show that he was selling any unusual sums of postage that might be attributed to philatelists, at least not enough to be detectable [5].

William died in 1938 and his widow Clara took over on 1938-05-25. In her advanced age by 1944, she moved to Calgary that year, although the ranch stayed in the family until 1966. Without her, the post office closed on 1944-03-31, not just because of her absence but also due to limited usefulness. By that time, depopulation and good roads had taken their toll and ranch house post offices everywhere were being phased out. The ranch has changed hands a few times since but is still operating under a different family. Below is a photo I took in 2013 at the front gate to the ranch, showing Lyndon Creek winding its way through the hills.



## **Furman.**

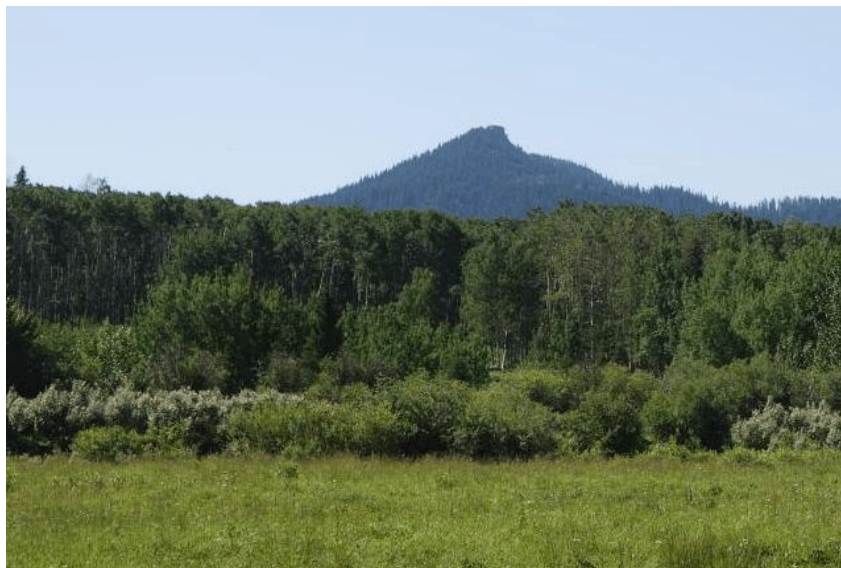


Frederick Alfred Burton was an Ontario farm boy who worked on various southwest Alberta cattle ranches before taking up a homestead in the northern Porcupine Hills. The Furman post office was on his ranch and took its name from his wife Minnie's maiden name. It operated from 1911-06-01 until 1944-03-31, with Burton as the only postmaster. At left is the proof strike of the post office. Over the years, Burton bought out most of his neighbours one by one, thus depopulating the area. One of the neighbours he bought out had a better house than his, so he and his family moved to it, taking the post office with them. The post office closed for the same reasons as Lyndon and on the same date. There were simply too few ranches left to justify a post office, so a rural mail route was established instead. In 1951, Burton died of advanced years [1].

## **Rice And Chimney Rock.**

The ranch house post offices of Rice and Chimney Rock were in an area originally called Happy Valley. The name died out because of constant feuding over land titles and claims between leased-land ranchers, squatters, and homesteaders. Between 1906 and 1916, so many legal writs were issued between the three factions that lawsuits constituted the second-largest industry in the area after livestock grazing. The North West Mounted Police, as the Mounties were then known, were frequent visitors to the area in order to serve statements of claim or eviction orders. By 1916, the combatants had either worn themselves out or sold their land and left for friendlier pastures [6].

Rice post office was named after William Henry Rice, an Ontario man who in 1892 was the first to homestead in the area, although he soon left [7]. The only postmaster was Andrew C. Cleaver, who operated the post office from 1913-10-01 until 1916-03-25. He raised horses, not cattle. Even for the hills this was a remote post office with few inhabitants. The gross revenue peaked at \$15.49 the second year and went down from there [5]. The mail route was from Pekisko, a now-extinct ranch house post office well north of the Porcupine Hills. Cleaver was one of the litigants in the valley, and in 1916 he gave up, sold the ranch, closed the post office, and moved to a new ranch far away on the Highwood River. He later retired to the town of High River [6].



obviously must have been born in the territorial district [8]. (The wild rose is the floral emblem of Alberta and is abundant throughout the province.) The post office reported \$31 in gross revenue during its short lifespan [5].

The consolidation of ranches in the mis-named Happy Valley was, like elsewhere in the Porcupine Hills, mainly due to economic and social factors, but had the added factor of the title disputes speeding up the process. One can speculate that had the feuding not happened, the ranch house post offices of Rice and Chimney Rock would have survived to about the same time as Furman or Lyndon.

Chimney Rock post office was southwest of Rice and further still back into the hills. It is the name of a prominent hill capped by a vertical column of rock, and was a navigational landmark for those traveling in the area since it can be seen for some distance rising above surrounding hills. Here is a telephoto shot I took in 2013 from as close as I could get. Unfortunately it is now deep inside a ranch that is posted property and not accessible to the public.

The post office of Chimney Rock lasted less than a year, from 1908-12-01 until 1909-11-21. Below is the proof strike of the postmark. Frederick B. Axtell was the only postmaster and operated it out of his ranch house. He was originally from Montana but little is known of him other than his wife was named Alberta Rose, who





## New Oxley.

This area was first settled and known as The Leavings, so-called because oxen freight teams traveling along the eastern edge of the Porcupine Hills would stop at Willow Creek to water and camp overnight. From there, they would leave for either Calgary or Fort Macleod, depending on which direction they were going. There were two different fords on Willow Creek called The Leavings, both of which had post offices named after them and which may cause confusion among postmark collectors. The Leavings was not so much as specific point of the oxen trail but rather a general location along the creek. The southern version of The Leavings post office changed its name to Granum and still operates today.

At the northern end of The Leavings, the Oxley Ranch established its headquarters in 1881. It was named after Oxley Manor, Wolverhampton, England, the original home of one of the ranch co-owners, Alexander Staveley Hill (who preferred his middle name) [9]. In 1884, the ranch headquarters were relocated further north. That same year, a post office was opened on 1884-02-01 under the name of The Leavings. Exactly three months later it was renamed New Oxley to make its location more precise. John R. Craig was the first postmaster and served until 1891-03-05 when he left the area. He was one of the original partners in the Oxley Ranch with Staveley Hill and others, and acted as the ranch manager. The ranch was always on shaky financial ground and there was a falling-out between the partners in 1891 that led to Craig's departure. He moved south to the Meadow Creek area of the southeastern Porcupine Hills, where he ranched on his own [1].

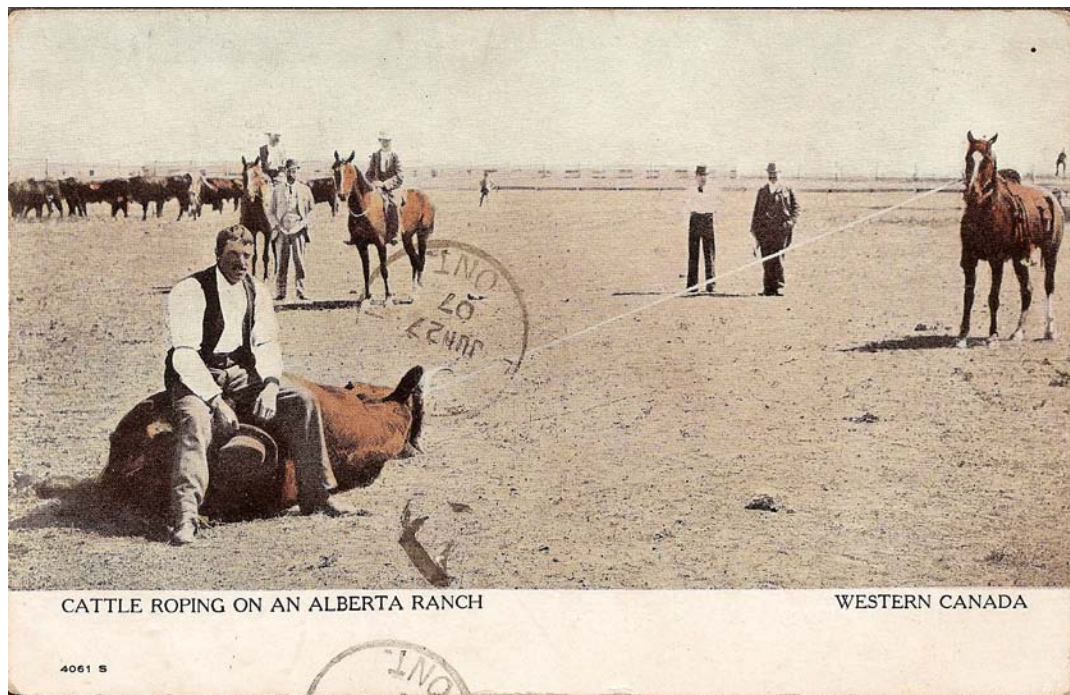
H. Stanley Pinhorne, a nephew of Staveley Hill, took over as ranch manager and postmaster until his death on 1892-10-01. The final postmaster was Frederick William Elliott, who served until 1916-06-30 when the post office permanently closed. At right is a photograph of him. Ranchers in the area bought each other out and there are few separate operations today. Depopulation, with an assist from good roads, finished off this ranch house post office.



## Willows and Blacktail.

West of New Oxley on the northern tip of the Porcupine Hills is the Willow Creek area, so named because shrub willows grow abundantly along the banks of creeks and in sloughs. A post office named Willows opened on 1903-09-05 on the ranch of Duncan S. McIntosh, who

was its only postmaster. He was an Ontario man who came out west in 1886 and worked as a cowboy for his uncle on the 44 Ranch in the Porcupine Hills. He was considered the best cowboy in the hills and was elected by his peers as captain of the annual roundup in the days of the open range, when everyone's cattle grazed together in giant herds and were only segregated at the autumn roundup.



At left is a real-photo postcard of McIntosh sitting on top of a steer after roping it down. The Willows post office operated in McIntosh's house until 1911-03-31, when

he sold his ranch and accepted a position as a superintendent at Banff National Park. He later moved to Calgary as a livestock dealer and in 1953 finished his days [6].



After McIntosh left the Porcupine Hills, there were no postal services at the north end of the hills until another Willows post office opened further east on 1912-07-01 in the ranch house of Thomas R.C. Boulton. He was an Englishman who came to Canada in 1897 and worked on various ranches. In 1909, he bought a ranch along Willow Creek. The mail route was via Staveland. The post office opened under the name Willows, but on 1913-03-01 changed its name to Blacktail. The name was after the deer known today as mule deer, which are very common in Alberta. The name “blacktail deer” is now restricted by zoologists to a closely related subspecies found along the Pacific coast and mountains, while present-day Albertans refer to their subspecies as mule deer because of their big ears. At left is a proof strike of the Blacktail postmark. During this era, the number of ranches dwindled as they bought each other out.

Boulton held the postmastership until 1936 when he was the victim of a hit-and-run accident, dying in hospital on December 27 of that year. His widow Clara took over the post office until 1939-12-31 when she remarried and moved to Calgary [2, 9]. The post office then permanently closed as there weren't enough people left to justify it continuing. Postmark collectors should note that there is a difference between the two Willows post offices. There was also a Willow Creek post office near Drumheller but that was in a different geographical area and was not on the same creek in the Porcupine Hills.

## Conclusions.

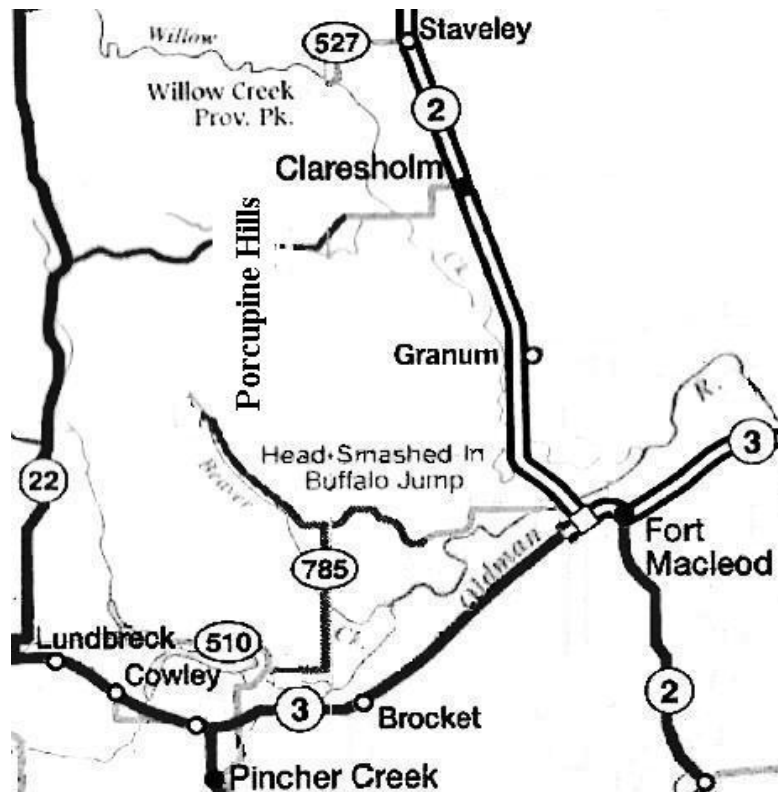
In reading through the local histories of the area, it was obvious that the ranch house postmasters were themselves mainly responsible for the death of their own post offices. Good roads certainly played a part, but it is notable how much land was consolidated into a few large ranches as families sold out and the remaining ranchers took the opportunity to expand. A ranch can only support one family, so most of the children reaching adulthood must find their lives elsewhere, usually in town. Ranching is the least intensive type of agriculture and thus needs the least amount of labour, enabling the remaining families to expand their ranches without requiring too much more work. This, more so than

good roads, depopulated the Porcupine Hills, and left the ranch house post offices with little more than one or two families to use them. The good roads then enabled rural mail delivery and the end result was inevitable.

## References.

- 1] various authors (1974) WHERE THE WHEATLANDS MEET THE RANGE Published by Claresholm History Book Club, Alberta. Pages 5 to 21, 179 to 189, 207, 220 to 229, 340 to 343, 367, 434, 485 to 489
- 2] Library and Archives Canada (downloaded 2013-09-09) Post offices and postmasters. [www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/post-offices](http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/post-offices)
- 3] Hawk, Patricia (1999) Lyndon Ranch, Alberta. ALBERTA HISTORY 48(1):10-13
- 4] Scrimgeour, Gray (2013) Philately in western Canada: The Prairies. Part 2. CANADIAN PHILATELIST 64(2):102-106
- 5] Canadian Post Office (1893 to 1944) Report of the Postmaster General. SESSIONAL PAPERS OF THE DOMINION OF CANADA, Appendices C and D
- 6] various authors (1975) MOSQUITO CREEK ROUNDUP. Published by Nanton and District Historical Society, pages 33, 41 to 42, 96 to 99
- 7] Karamitsanis, Aphrodite (2000) PLACE NAMES OF ALBERTA. VOL. 1. MOUNTAINS, MOUNTAIN PARKS, AND FOOTHILLS. Published by University of Calgary Press.
- 8] Thomas, Barbara (2000-05-30) Frederick Axtell in Alberta (Rose) Thomas. <http://genforum.genealogy.com/axtell/messages/101.html>
- 9] various authors (1976) THE BUTTE STANDS GUARD. Published by Stavely Historical Book Society, Alberta. Pages 15, 65, 163 to 165, 287, 349 to 351, 414 to 415

## SOUTHEASTERN PORCUPINE HILLS

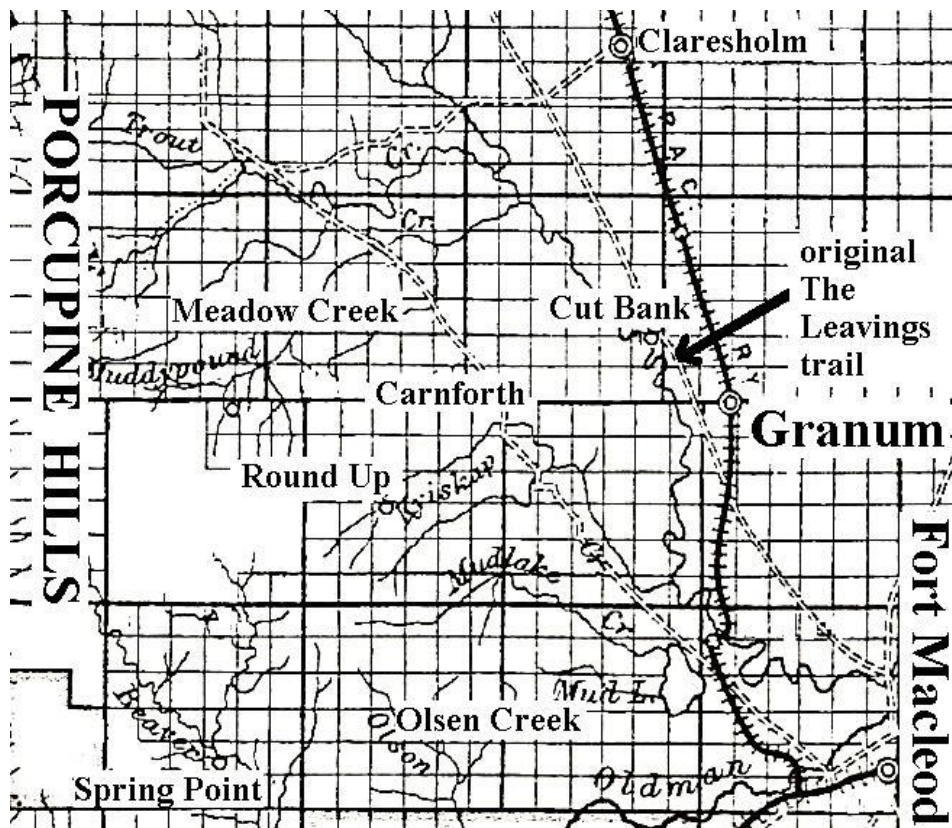


Although this area had settlers by the middle-late 1800s, it wasn't until the railroad arrived in 1892 that homesteaders started to arrive in large numbers. Now the area is a mixture of irrigation farming, ranching, and the tourist trade. Other than Granum, all the other post offices were in ranch houses, and no other villages grew up in the area. The major attraction of the area today is the Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, a provincial park with a world-class museum and designation as a United Nations cultural site.

The map at left shows the southern end of the Porcupine Hills in our modern day. Granum, straight east of the hills, is and was the only settlement, a small village.



Below is a 1922 map modified by me to show all the pioneer post offices of the district between the railroad and the Porcupine Hills. The small squares are a mile on each side. The double-dash lines are the original oxen freight and cattle drive trails. A combination of good roads and expanded ranches killed off all the ranch house post offices.



## **The Leavings-Granum.**

The village of Granum is on the east side of Highway 2, the main north-south highway of Alberta which runs from the American border through Calgary and up to Edmonton. The highway runs parallel to the CPR north-south mainline railroad which was completed in 1892. The tracks in this area have been removed in modern times as shipping went to trucks.

The original name of the place was The Leavings. In the late 1800s before the railway arrived, the main supply route for Alberta was from Fort Benton, Montana, along the edge of the eastern slopes of the Porcupine Hills up to Fort Calgary (as it then was). In the map on the previous page, the arrow points to this trail. Anyone sending mail from southern Alberta had to obtain American stamps or rely on someone else to pay the postage for them when the letters reached Fort Benton. Oxen freight teams going north from Fort Macleod to Fort Calgary stopped at Willow Creek en route. The teams would be unyoked to water and feed, and the place became a transfer point for freight going to residents in the area. Mail was also carried and despatched by favour. The name arose because the teamsters referred to it as the leaving place where the freight teams would leave for Fort Calgary after the stopover. Most of the area between Highway 2 and the edge of the Porcupine Hills is now cultivated fields, and any trace of the trails have long been eradicated at ground level. I drove around the grid roads in the area but could not locate any remains of the old trail.

When the CPR railroad came through in 1893, a nearby siding took the name and a village grew up [1]. The post office opened on 1904-08-01 in Hans Ellison's general store but soon moved into its own building. It was called The Leavings, but on 1907-10-01 changed its name to Granum as wheat growing became widespread in the district to the east of the railroad. "granum" is the Latin word for grain. Postmark collectors should note that there was a previous The Leavings post office west of Claresholm in the northeastern Porcupine Hills which opened under that name in 1894 but after three months changed its name to New Oxley. If the postmark date is 1894, then it is not the same one as the 1904 post office that became Granum. Claresholm and Granum citizens contested with each other over the right to the name "The Leavings", a contest which has not entirely faded away even today.



The first postmaster of The Leavings (now Granum) was J. Frederick McDougall, who served until 1906-01-02. At left is the proof strike of its first postmark under its first name. Below is a photo of McDougall setting out to pick up the mails, with his young son beside him in the buggy. Fred and his wife Isabella arrived in 1902 from Manitoba as homesteaders. They initially stayed on the ranch of her uncle George Fraser, who was the first postmaster of Round Up (about which more below). He had two partners, the brothers Robert and John Baird. Robert was the second postmaster of Round Up and John married a McDougall daughter in later years. When the post office opened in The Leavings, the McDougalls moved into the village and lived in an annex of the post office building. They were rapidly expanding the size of their ranch during this time, so Fred gave up the postmastership to concentrate on cattle.

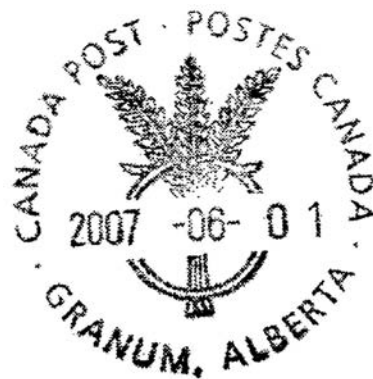


There were three postmasters in the next two years, during which time the post office changed its name to Granum. Percy Alfred Smith took over on 1908-05-29 as postmaster. He was the longest serving postmaster, retiring on 1951-07-18. During his tenure the post office became a civil service position in 1948. Smith was an Englishman who had arrived in 1907 and established a general store, in a corner of which was the post office. There was no home delivery of mail but he knew everyone in the village and their lives. If a letter arrived which he thought was urgent, particularly during the war years, he would hand deliver it to the house. The post office moved twice to different buildings during his time.

Smith was succeeded by Harry George Perkins, who served until 1964-11-15. He was born and raised in nearby Fort Macleod and married a Granum woman named Mary Eileen Lang. After a variety of jobs and locations, they returned to Granum. Harry worked as a handyman in addition to the postmastership. Eileen was the postal clerk and telephone operator. During Perkins's tenure, mail delivery changed on 1955-04-24 from rail to highway truck. The railway had been superseded by Highway 2, which by this time had become faster and easier for freight hauling.

The next postmaster was William Roderick Cameron. He had been the local grain elevator agent but the dust had affected his health and his doctor told him to get into a safer line of work. He was the successful candidate out of eleven applicants to replace the retiring Perkins. Cameron served until 1968-03-30 when he was promoted to postmaster of Turner Valley, southwest of Calgary. After some brief turnovers in the position, Thomas R. Blair became the next postmaster on 1972-12-28. He was a farm boy who had worked a variety of jobs before getting the postmastership. His wife Linda worked as the postal clerk.

Postal records cut off after Blair due to privacy laws but the post office continues as it did as of 2014. Below left is the old CDS cancel still being used in 1988 and below right the pictorial cancel depicting some stems of wheat.



The photo on the next page was taken in 1988 and shows the author's mother, the late Betty Speirs, at the Granum post office. As of 2015, the post office is still in that building and looked much the same.







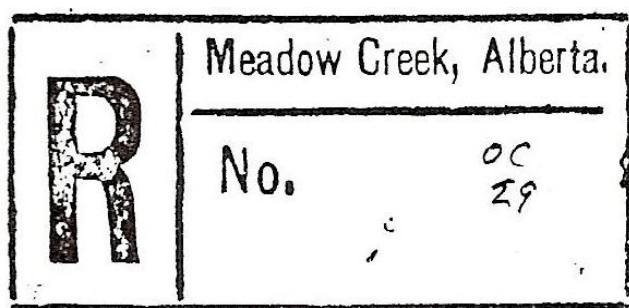
## **Meadow Creek.**

Meadow Creek post office opened on 1895-09-01 and was the first post office in the southeastern Porcupine Hills. It was a ranch house post office which had its mail distributed to it from Claresholm, since The Leavings (Granum) post office wouldn't open for a decade yet. The photo below was taken in 2013 from Meadow Creek Road, looking west to the ranch in the far distance and the Porcupine Hills. The terrain looks similar for the other post offices mentioned below.



E. Sloper Duck was the first postmaster, having come out west the year before with his brother James. They homesteaded on Meadow Creek but Sloper tired of rural life and took his family back to Chicago, giving up the postmastership on 1901-02-11. James took over as postmaster, moving the post office to his ranch, where he stayed until 1911-03-21. His wife's health began to fail so they moved to Calgary where she died the following year. The ranch was sold to J.L. (Larry) Cotter, who also took over the post office and served until 1916-12-28 as postmaster. Cotter had a varied career prior, and had been a constable in the North West Mounted Police. After serving in the Yukon gold rush, he was posted to the Fort Macleod district. Taking his discharge in 1904, he rode for the Waldron Ranch on the west side of the Porcupine Hills before buying the Duck homestead on the east side. The Cotters eventually moved into Claresholm [2].

There was a brief interlude when a temporary postmaster came and went before Aubrey C. Watson became postmaster on 1918-01-06 and served until 1929-02-18. He was an Englishman who had worked on various ranches before taking up a spread at Meadow Creek. Besides the postmastership, he had the mail haulage contract to Claresholm and often took paying passengers along. He was succeeded by Mrs. Christina McIntosh as postmaster, whose husband hauled the mails to and from their ranch. Below is the proof strike of the registration postmark during her time in office. She resigned on 1932-10-14 and the mails henceforth went to the Carnforth post office. The Meadow Creek post office officially closed on 1933-02-28 but that was the administrative date back in Ottawa, and the actual closing was four months earlier [3].



## Cut Bank.

Cut Bank was the second post office to open in the area. The name refers to the steep banks of Willow Creek. This was a ranch house post office in the home of Fred Garrow, and he was the only postmaster during the lifespan of the post office from 1902-05-01 until 1912-04-30. It was very near the original location of The Leavings during the ox-team freighter days. Because it was so close to the railroad and what became Granum, a good road quickly finished it off. Ranchers further west into the Porcupine Hills continued to be served by the Meadow Creek post office [1].



When I went looking for the location in 2013, I was astonished to find it was marked by a roadside sign, as seen at left. In all my travels around Alberta, this is the only place I have seen where a ranch house post office was commemorated specifically as a post office. Some other ranch house post office locations had signs marking the district as a whole, but not specifically just the post office.

On the righthand side of the photo in the middle distance can be seen one of the small cliffs or cut banks of Willow Creek. The creek has carved itself deep down into the glacial sediments and is not visible at the low angle of the photo, but there are many such cut banks in the area.

## Round Up.

The Round Up post office opened on 1903-06-01 with George J. Fraser as the postmaster. He was an Ontario man who had first gone to British Columbia where he met the Baird brothers. The three of them bought a ranch on the southeast corner of the Porcupine Hills which was renamed Round Up. Fraser bought out the brothers in 1903 at the time he became postmaster, but the Bairs continued to ranch nearby.

Robert Baird was the mail contractor for the life of the post office. Below is an undated photo of him about to leave the ranch with a bag of mail at his side. Originally he brought the mail in from Fort Macleod but switched his route to The Leavings/Granum when that post office opened.



ROUND  
RSP 25  
14  
ALTA

On 1904-11-19, the post office moved to Robert Baird's ranch and he was the final postmaster. At first he kept the post office in a corner of his kitchen but later moved it into his garage. At left is a proof strike of a postmark used during his tenure as postmaster. The post office closed permanently on 1920-04-30 as good roads made it redundant [1]. Below is a view taken in 2013 looking west across the ranch to the Porcupine Hills. (The main herd of cattle were just outside the photo to the left. Being wild rangeland cattle, they all objected to my presence and scattered in every direction.)



### **Spring Point.**

This ranch house post office was on the very southeastern tip of the Porcupine Hills, and got its name from the abundant springs issuing from the rocks [4]. It opened with John M. Bratton as the first postmaster from 1904-09-01 until 1909-11-10. He was succeeded by Joseph M. Allison, who unfortunately died suddenly in 1910. Theodore M. Brown then moved the post office to his ranch on 1910-05-27 and held the position until 1946-09-24. William Reed Walker was the final postmaster until 1950-02-28 when the post office closed permanently.

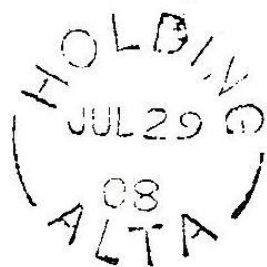
Although technically within the Porcupine Hills, the mail route was to Pincher Station to the south (not to be confused with its rival Pincher Creek). Spring Point was on Beaver Creek, which flowed south into the Oldman River, so the lay of the land made it easier to travel north-south than east-west. As roads improved, the mail route switched to Fort Macleod to the east.

### **Olsen Creek.**

The history of this area has mostly vanished into the mists of time. The creek is believed to be named after an early settler, who was not a registered homesteader and didn't stay long. The name is frequently mis-spelled in local histories as Olson, but the official documents all show Olsen [3, 4]. This ranch house post office only ever had one postmaster, C.W.E. Gardiner, who opened it on 1905-05-01. It closed on 1917-12-28, although the official closing date in Ottawa wasn't until 1918-03-31. The mail route was the same as for nearby Spring Point.



## Holding-Carnforth.



This post office opened on 1908-07-01 on the ranch of William J. Holding and took his name. The postmark proof strike is shown at left. He served as postmaster until 1912-05-03. Either he had second thoughts about being an egotist or else his neighbours pressured him, so during his tenure the name changed.

The post office became Carnforth on 1910-06-01, after the town in Lancashire, England, where Holding was from [2]. The new postmark's proof strike is seen at right.



Holding liked to write poetry and churned out doggerel by the ream. One such poem “The Mutt” lists all the debtors in the southeastern Porcupine Hills area, himself included, and says of Granum postmaster Percy Smith:

*“Say brothers, have the autumn leaves of duns betrayed your trail,  
And Percy jocular behaved when handing out the mail?  
Did he appraise those letters right and guess their curt portends,  
And grin with knowing sly remark “Your yearly dividends?” “*

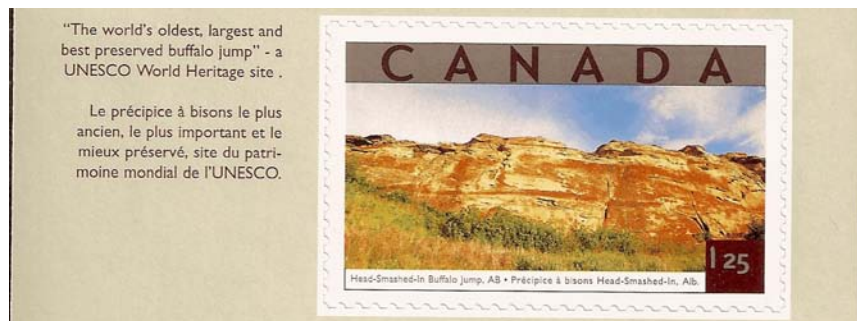
Edward King, not a poet, then took over the Carnforth post office and moved it to his ranch. He sold out in 1917 and took his family to Minnesota. The post office moved to the ranch of Walter Morris, he becoming postmaster on 1917-09-30. He served until 1932-08-17. The final postmaster was David Francis, who served briefly until 1933-09-30. By then good roads had eliminated the need for the post office to be on a ranch.

## Head-Smashed-In.

The feature tourist attraction of the southeastern Porcupine Hills is Head-Smashed-In Provincial Park, an ancient bison kill site used by the native tribes for 5,000 years. The tribes would herd bison along the top of the plateau, then stampede the animals off the cliff and butcher themselves a year's supply of beef and hides. The name comes from an aboriginal story about how one hunter was careless and was still standing under the cliff when the herd came thundering over. The Piikani name for the site is Iitsi'paksikihkinihkootsiwa, which translates as "Where He Got His Head Smashed In" [5].

No permanent settlement or ranch house post office ever existed at Head-Smashed-In. Today there is a large world-class museum at the south end of the cliff, through which one ascends to the top and then outside to walk along the cliff edge. All the docents are members of the Piikani tribe, whose Reserve is a short drive south of the site. The guide who showed me about the museum had quite a sense of humour and remarked that he was glad he could buy beef in a supermarket instead of having to spend days chasing and butchering bison with stone-flake knives. The road to the park goes past it to Spring Point and Olsen Creek, so the mail of those ranch house post offices would have gone by there.

There is no postal service at the museum today, but if they do open an outlet it will be a very collectible postmark! Head-Smashed-In has not yet attracted any settlement development and is a large museum standing alone in a rural area where the employees drive back to the Piikani Reserve at the end of the day, and tourists only stop for a few hours before heading back to Highway 2. Canada Post has issued three stamps depicting the site. The 2002 stamp below shows a front view of the cliff.



The second stamp, from 2014, shows a view along the top of the cliff, looking south towards the museum roof, with the Waterton mountains in the far distance. The design was also issued as a postal card.





Someone at the Toronto headquarters liked Head-Smashed-In so much that the 2014 design was re-issued in January 2016 in the smaller definitive size at the Permanent rate. The image at left is from the lower-left corner of the booklet of ten landscapes (which included other views elsewhere in Canada).

## References.

- 1] various authors (1977) LEAVINGS BY TRAIL, GRANUM BY RAIL Published by the Granum History Book Committee, Alberta. Pages 10 to 11, 137 to 139, 170, 183, 200, 276, 311 to 315, 339, 376 to 377, 403, 444 to 445.
- 2] various authors (1974) WHERE THE WHEATLANDS MEET THE RANGE Published by Claresholm History Book Club, Alberta. Pages 205 to 206, 225, 292, 355, 486
- 3] Library and Archives Canada (downloaded 2013-04-03) 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] Karamitsanis, Aphrodite (1992) PLACE NAMES OF ALBERTA. VOLUME 2: SOUTHERN ALBERTA Published by University of Calgary Press, Alberta. Page 90.
- 5] Pard, Bernadette (1985) THE PEIGAN: A NATION IN TRANSITION Published by Plains Publishing, Edmonton, Alberta. Page 35