

THE ALPINE POST OFFICE—YESTERDAY AND TODAY

On September 11, 2008, an article appeared in the *Union-Tribune* announcing the selection of Kitty Van Winkle as the new postmaster for Alpine. Kitty, a fifteen year Postal Service employee, began as a clerk at the Dulzura post office and also worked in El Cajon. She was a supervisor at the El Cajon and Santee post offices from 1996 to 2000, then filled in for vacant postmaster positions at the Alpine, Jamul and Ramona post offices. The article states, “The Alpine post office has 11 rural carrier routes with more than 6,200 deliveries. The post office has 26 employees.” This is interesting information which made me pause to reflect on Alpine mail deliveries when the settlement was developing. I turned to Bea LaForce’s *Alpine, History of a Mountain Settlement*, to find information about the evolution of the post office in Alpine. Bea’s findings follow.

Alpine mail service began November 11, 1865 with Henry J. Whitney as the first postmaster. Mr. Whitney was the proprietor of The Store at the time and, following frontier patterns, mail for the earliest pioneers was left at The Store.

For many years there was no separate post office building. The mail, in a canvas sack, was dropped on the store counter for the storekeeper-postmaster to distribute to people when they came to pick it up. According to the recollections of Percy Foss, mail came by stage coach from Lakeside once a week, then twice a week for some years and finally Alpine received daily service. Several early residents report that the mail did not bear an Alpine postmark for years—the very earliest mail was addressed to the individual, San Diego County, California. Ranch names also were used as addresses. The Foss’ address, for instance, was Tule Springs, San Diego County, California.

When the population of Alpine expanded to 30 – 35 families, the store set aside a back corner with a counter and one wall of pigeon holes open on both ends that served as post office boxes.

In his memories of the past, Neil Galloway wrote of the period around 1909: “This stage also carried the mail from Lakeside to Alpine and Descanso. It was a Star Route. The people that lived along the way on the road that the stage took each had two good stout canvas sacks. We fastened them to a post with an arm out with the wire spring clothes pins. Sometimes a strong wind blew them down, but not often. We had one sack home and the other in the Lakeside Post Office. They stopped and watered the horses at Flinn Springs and again at my place. They had to draw the water up with a bucket and a rope.”

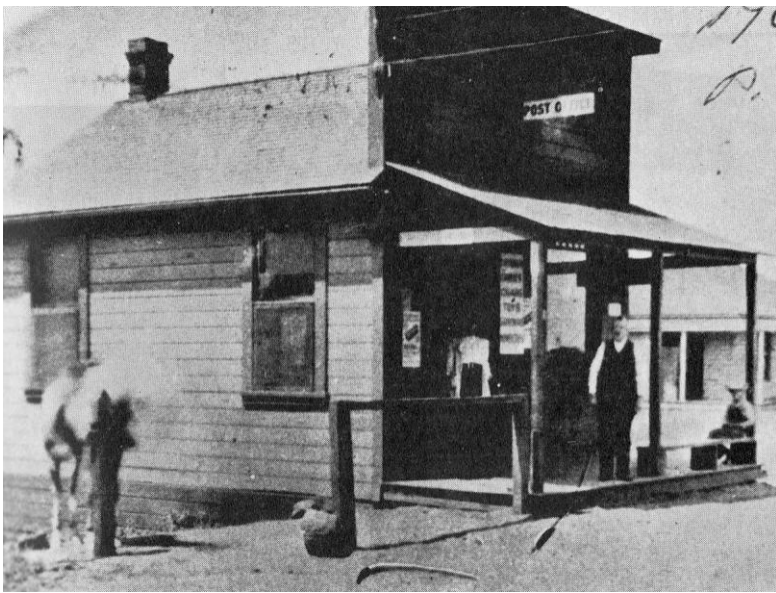
Bea wrote, “During the days of the four-horse mail, Postal Inspectors did not inspire trust and affection in the rural districts where rugged independence was tantamount to survival. A story is told of the second Postmaster, 1891-1903, Charles F. Emery, which illustrates the spirit that settled these hills. Mr. Emery was known to keep a little whiskey in the store for use as a medicine should the need arise. But since the Post Office was also under the same roof, in keeping the whiskey, Mr. Emery was breaking Postal regulations which sternly forbade “spirits” on the premises. Someone reported Mr. Emery’s whiskey and a U. S. Postal Inspector, entrained to El Cajon, dashed out from there with a team of livery stable horses, through Galloway Valley, then the main route. Nick Anderson, husband of Alice, daughter of Sophronia Nichols, lived on the valley ranch at that time. Neil tells how he heard it from Mr. Anderson: ‘He asked Nick how to get to Alpine and said that he was a Postal Inspector. Now Nick Anderson was quite religious, but he knew about the jug of medical whiskey, so he sent the Inspector up South Grade Road, the long way ‘round, and Nick got on a horse and went the short way, Arnold Road, and warned Mr. Emery of the coming of the Inspector.’ Not a drop of whiskey was found in the store.”

Many other local residents served as postmaster as Alpine grew. Among them were Timothy Albee, Edwin Snow, John B. Wilkinson, Jr., Harold L. Flegal, Maude Hilton, Alice Simmons, Dorothy C. Hall, Philip Hall and Haaken Magnussen. Mrs. Simmons recalled that during her tenure it was necessary to

enlarge quarters for mail service, so a room was added to the east end of the store and outfitted as a post office. This, Alpine's first separate post office building, was used until 1953 when Forrest Hohanshelt built a building on Arnold Way and it was leased by the Post Office Department. In the early 1970's Mr. Magnussen reported that Alpine had three rural routes with as many carriers and an office staff of seven. He estimated that 1,100 families were being served and five hundred post office boxes served the village—and the boxes now had doors with combination locks.

The current post office building was dedicated in 1975 and was much welcomed by the community. The site is where the first home in the village—the home of the Whitney family—once stood. We take the services provided by the postal employees for granted as we pick up the mail each day—they are always there to serve us. How fortunate we are compared to the early pioneers in our community and how times have changed!

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Alpine's old post office.