Mountain Post Office celebrates 100 years of serving the community

Mrs. Lillian Van Allen remembers the days when the price of sending a first class letter was just 4 cents, the Christmas mail was delivered by horse and cutter, and a postal strike was unheard of.

The Mountain Post office is celebrating its Centennial, and Mrs. Van Allen along with husband Clair were responsible for making sure the mail got through for 35 of those 100 years.

Mountain's first version of Canada Post opened its doors in 1883, almost 40 years after the one in neighboring South Mountain began operations.

Mountain's first postmaster was a man by the name of Reuban Shaver, Clair Van Allen's grandfather. Mr. Shaver began his ambitious project in the cramped quarters of a general store belonging to son-in-law, Samuel Van Allen.

The store, located on Main St., was tucked away in one end of the Van Allen residence. It was a small, narrow room of the house, with shelves on the east wall. In the middle of the shop stood a candy showcase fully stocked, with counter down the centre.

In the closed quarters, there was little more than enough room to walk between the counter and the west wall. The post office was tucked away in the rear.

In 1898, Reuban Shaver retired, and son-in-law Samuel Van Allen took over the operation of the post office.

Their was no home delivery at the Mail was sorted into various pidgeon holes and residents would come in to pick it up themselves. Rural route delivery wasn't started until 1910, when three mailmen were hired to serve RR1, RR2, and RR3. The Van Allen's kept up the

business in the awkward conditions until 1936, when the building was expanded. A new residence was added to the east side of the house, and the Van Allen family rooms converted to add more room to the store.

A new entrance on the west side of the building gave people easier access to the post office on days when the store closed early. An apartment was also built for Clair and Lillian Van Allen on the second floor.

Mr Van Allen passed away in 1939. His son Allen and daughter-in-law Elsie took over the general store, while son Clair took over as third generation postmaster.

Clair Van Allen and Lillian operated the post office on the same daily routine.

Mail would come into the store by the Toronto-Smith Falls-Montreal train four times a day. As well, a bag from South Mountain, and two from Hallville would also have to be sorted.

The first load would come in at around 8 a.m. There were no automatic sorting machines, everything was divided by hand into either local mail, registered , RR1, RR 2, or RR 3. Three mailmen would come into help the Van Allen's at this task. An average of 7 bags, each weighing about 50 lbs would come into the office every day for sorting.

The mail would be ready for delivery around 9:30 a.m. The mailmen would then take to,

Clair and Lillian Van Allen in early 1970's.

Post office in the days of Samuel Van Allen.

either cars in summer, or if there was snow on the ground a horse and cutter would get the mail through.

As today, the three would not only deliver, but would also take rural mail back into town. All you had to do was leave it in your box.

Back in the fourties, Eatons and Sears catalogue orders were also popular. Cash would be left right inside the order and the Van Allen's would take care of the request back at the post office.

There were no salaries back then. The Postmaster was paid on the number of stamps he sold to customers, and the number of letters he handled through the course of the day. It was what was known as a direct revenue operation.

In 1948, Clair Van Allen bought a house two doors down from the post office on the corner with the adjacent street. A house and tin shed were converted into a residence, a new general store, and a post office. He wanted to start the business because Allen and Elsie were moving to Kemptville. The old post office location became McNeill's general store in 1949

It was pretty much the same old routine at the post office over the years. There were however, a few changes along the way.

The three routes were later converted into two, with RR2 and RR3 being combined.

Train service to the area stopped on April 24, 1960. By then, the Smith Falls route was no longer serving Mountain. Instead, mail came directly by bus from Brockville.

Things were not always quiet at the office either. In December of 1960, the Post Office was the scene of an attempted robbery by a man toting a

sawed-off shot gun. The robber entered the store, hoisted the gun over the counter and demanded cash.

At first, the Van Allens thought it was a joke. But when Clair Van Allen realized the robber was serious, he grabbed a childrens saucer toboggan lying around for home delivery, and rushed the thief.

The robber became panicked and ran out the door, firing a shot into the roof, and one out the door before jumping into a get-away car.

Mr. Van Allen received a commendation from the Postmaster General for his bravery.
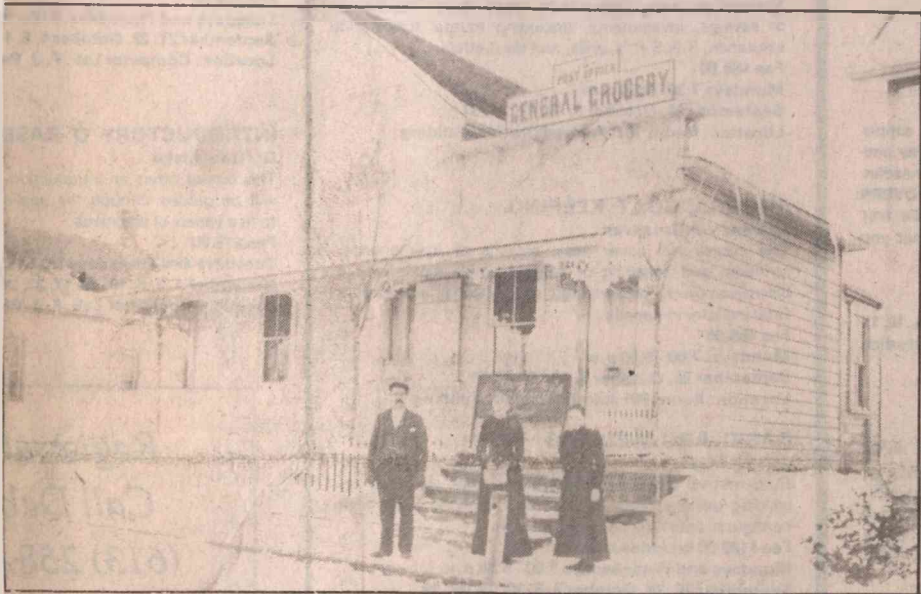
Clair Van Allen retired in 1969, and passed over the post office operations to Lillian. Mrs. Van Allen carried on the postmaster tradition until her retirement about 5 years later.

In 1973, Ken McDiarmid became the first postmaster not of the Van Allen line. He had purchased the McNeill store from original owner Harry McNeill in 1970, and moved the post office back to its original location. It was at this time that the union came into the Mountain office.

In 1975, a fire gutted the building. The McDiarmid's bought the old school on the Mountain turn-off near the railroad tracks and began converting it into another store. They then leased the old Van Allen store to operate the post-office until their new store was ready later on that year.

Ken McDiarmid carried on as postmaster until his death in 1977, when his wife and present postmaster took on the job.

Today, the Mountain post office services approximately 540 people, and still maintains its two rural routes.

Trains played a large part in the early days of mail delivery. The

first train to serve Mountain began in 1887 with a second following in 1910. Both trains were eventually discontinued, the first in 1951. The last train stopped at the Mountain post office on April 24, 1960.

Today the Mountain post office services approximately 540 people and has two rural routes.

Throughout the years it has remained as a centre of the community, as Marjorie will attest.

"Two gentlemen come in here every morning," she said. "They live on rural routes but they come in to find out what has been happening. It's their morning out."

Mountain post office

POST CARD
CARTE POSTALE

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