



Local  
History  
Collection

EARLY POST OFFICES IN PICKERING  
TOWNSHIP

**For** Not To Be Taken  
From the Room  
**reference**

## EARLY POST OFFICES IN PICKERING TOWNSHIP

A PAPER PRESENTED BY MR. MAX ROSENTHAL TO A MEETING  
OF THE TOWNSHIP OF PICKERING HISTORICAL SOCIETY HELD  
4TH JUNE 1965

---

The first settlement in Upper Canada, except for the French one on the Detroit River, was at Niagara, in 1780. At the other end of the colony, from the eastern boundary to the present Brockville, settlement by Loyalists went forward rapidly. In 1787 they petitioned Deputy Postmaster-General of Canada Hugh Finlay, at Quebec City, for post offices in the new districts. Two years later post offices were opened at Cornwall, Matilda (later called Iroquois), Augusta (renamed Prescott after the 1812-14 War), Kingston, Niagara, and Detroit, still held by the British. Kingston was as far west as the regular mail couriers ran. There were occasional mails by bateau on the St. Lawrence and in the "King's ships" on Lake Ontario during the navigation season. There was also one "express" each winter, for military dispatches and the convenience of merchants. Mrs. Simcoe, wife of Upper Canada's first Lieutenant-Governor, describes it as travelling on snowshoes via Oswego and the south shore of Lake Ontario to Niagara, then by way of the north shore of Lake Erie to Detroit. The expedition usually left Montreal in January, and proceeded at about 18 miles a day on a journey of at least three months.

Postage was charged for by the sheet, weight and distance. A single sheet of paper weighing less than a half ounce would be carried up to 60 miles for 4½d, Halifax currency, approximately equal to 4d. sterling. While the dollar was worth 4sh.6d. sterling, in Halifax currency the dollar was divided into 5sh.10d. If the distance was from 60 to 100 miles the rate was 7d., between 100 and 200 miles 9d., and for every 100 miles extra above that 2d. was added. If with this sheet or single letter a piece of paper was enclosed, it was called a double letter, and postage was doubled. A treble letter consisted of more than two sheets, under an ounce. The prepayment of postage was not compulsory, and

very few did so. If the postage was paid when the letter was handed into the post office the postmaster wrote in the amount paid in red, if unpaid, in black ink. Later in addition to the red value the prefix "paid" was introduced. All letters addressed overseas had to have postage prepaid to the port of departure, to the United States paid to the "lines" (frontier). A local city rate of 1d. per single letter also came into use.

By 1797 Simcoe had left Upper Canada, and Peter Russell was its Administrator from York. On September 6 he wrote to the Lieutenant-Governor of Lower Canada, General Robert Prescott:

"I return Your Excellency my thanks for your ready attention to my request respecting the transmission of public letters for this province, and I have no doubt that I shall in future receive them more regularly in consequence. The letters for private individuals had better I think be referred to the consideration of the legislature, which by establishing a small inland provincial postage, and appointing proper posthouses for their being delivered it may secure a more certain delivery to the persons to whom they are addressed, than the present practice of leaving them at the bars of taverns, or on the counters of shopkeepers. I have however to request of Your Excellency to recommend to Mr. Finlay to order a separate bag for York, against the next winter express; and if he has not already determined upon a postmaster for that town, I beg leave to recommend Mr. William Willcocks a merchant there, who offers to undertake the management of the business for his own benefit and that of the community."

A year later Willcocks became postmaster, when York post office was established. It became the nearest post office to Pickering Township, whose survey seems to have been completed, with a few settlers located, before 1796.

Above the bank of Duffin's Creek on the north side of the future Kingston Road had been the location of a pioneer shanty where lived an Irishman called Duffin, who had cleared a few acres, but who lived mainly from fishing and hunting. By

the time Augustus Jones ran the Township boundary lines in 1791 he seems to have disappeared. However, Duffin's Creek not only became the name of the stream, but was for many years the common name of the village which afterwards came into being.

Hugh Finlay was succeeded at Quebec as Deputy Postmaster-General in 1800 by George Heriot. Heriot wrote to British Undersecretary of State Freeling on March 6, "His Excellency General Hunter has proposed to me the establishment of a regular post by land from Montreal to York; with this view people are employed in working from the Bay of Quinte to that place a road." In the winter of 1800-01 monthly couriers began to cover the route from Kingston to Niagara during the winter, a development made possible by the opening of the Danforth Road from Kingston to Ancaster. This was only a bridle path through the wilderness, enough only for a courier to traverse on foot.

William Allan became postmaster of York in 1807, holding the post until 1828. On January 4, 1809, in the York Gazette, he announced that the mail from Quebec would be dispatched for Upper Canada in the first week of each month during the winter, and might be expected to arrive in York 16 to 18 days later. Westward from Kingston the route was usually covered by an Indian courier.

The first considerable influx of settlers to Pickering Township dates from around 1810. Timothy Rogers, a native of Vermont, located a company of Quakers south and east of Pickering village. Among his varied activities was the establishment of a mill, probably the first there, in 1807. In 1810 a fortnightly service was arranged between Montreal and Kingston, the following year continuing to Niagara via York.

In 1815-16 a weekly service was inaugurated between Montreal and Niagara. Stages carried the mail from Montreal to Kingston, it was then taken by sail or on horseback to Niagara. There were only eight post offices in Upper Canada in 1815.

Important developments occurred in 1816. George Heriot was replaced by Daniel Sutherland, the postmaster of Montreal, as Deputy Postmaster-General. The opening of the Kingston Road to York in the autumn enabled a more extensive service than possible on the Danforth Road.

The first post office in the county, opened in 1823, was Whitby, but at Hamer's Corners,  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles east of the later centre of Whitby. It was run in connection with a general store kept by John and William Warren. It was the only store and the only post office between York and Port Hope. When it was proposed to establish a post office at Duffin's Creek, the Whitby postmaster protested on the grounds that he could do all the postal business for the surrounding townships and have plenty of time to spare.

By 1827 there were 65 post offices in Upper Canada. To these the mail was usually taken once or twice a week, by stage-coach along the "front", by courier to the outlying "back" townships. Letters with postmarks up to this time are hard to find, as much mail was carried privately, because of the high rates of postage, or lack of official service. Even when sent through the public mails, postmasters often applied or wrote no markings on the front, unless prepaid, when they might write the amount paid at most, often omitting to put in the name of the post office and the date.

In 1827 Daniel Sutherland was replaced by Thomas Stayner as Deputy Postmaster-General, at Quebec. In 1828 William Allan was replaced by J.S.Howard as postmaster at York.

With the fuller settlement of Pickering Township and the gaining importance of the Kingston Road, the village of Duffin's Creek began to take form. The first recorded event in its history is the opening of the post office in 1829, with Francis Leys as postmaster. The post office was called Pickering after the township, right from the beginning. Leys was a Scotsman who had come out some years earlier, and was one of the

most prominent figures in the township for a quarter of a century. His house was half a mile east of the present village centre.

On January 14, 1834 Acting-Deputy Postmaster-General J. Thomson wrote from Quebec to York postmaster Howard: "Having received intimation from Mr. Francis Leys P.M. at Pickering of his intention to resign on 5th April next, will you be so good as to say whether you are acquainted with anyone residing at that place whom you can recommend as his successor." Leys must have changed his mind, because he was to remain as postmaster of Pickering into the next decade.

Back in 1831 William Lyon MacKenzie had written in his newspaper and to Deputy Postmaster-General Stayner about the necessity for more post offices in the back country away from the Lake. Writing from Quebec on October 11 of that year Stayner discussed with York postmaster Howard which new post offices should be opened. He concluded: "I shall write to Leys for information respecting the proposed offices in his Rear, but am aware that postmasters in trade do not wish to see post offices multiplied in the neighbourhood." It was not until five years later that the first post offices away from the Front of the county were established, at Brougham, ~~Wood~~<sup>Ux</sup>bridge, Brock (later Sunderland), and Beaverton.

In 1832 Henry Howell emigrated from Ireland and settled on lot 15 Concession 5, carrying on sawmilling and mercantile business in the following years on Spring Creek. Elder George Barclay came from Scotland in 1816 to lot 16 concession 6, and devoted much of his time to religious work. It was he who became postmaster in 1836 when Brougham post office, named after Lord Brougham, was established, not Nicholas Howell, as the standard histories state. The 1837 Quebec Almanac lists Reverend George Barclay as postmaster of Brougham.

His oldest son took a rather active part in the 1837 Rebellion, so it is not surprising that he was then replaced as

postmaster. It was then that Nicholas Howell became postmaster of Brougham, at Howell's Hollow. Around 1850 Richard ~~Turn~~<sup>Tann</sup> became postmaster, and Brougham post office moved to his farm a quarter of a mile north of the corners. After him it was always kept at general stores at the corner of the present Highway 7 and the Brock Road. The first store had been opened there in 1835 by William Bentley, and the place was known for a time as Bentley's Corners but Brougham replaced it with the removal of the post office to that corner.

Even before there was a Claremont, the stone building at the south west angle of the 9th concession line and the Brock Road already stood there. Erected in 1847 on the farm of John Hamilton, shortly afterwards Thomas Noble, an Irishman, rented the store and began selling to the settlers. The place began to be called Noble's Corner. John C. Michell had already since 1844 conducted a business on the east side of the Brock Road, about half a mile south.

About 1850 the community decided that it could no longer do without postal service, and they began to look for a name for the new post office that was to be. Suggestions were not lacking, one of the most striking being Salubrious. One suggested by William H. Michell met with most favor. Some years earlier his uncle, Mr. Watkins, who at that time had owned the Hamilton farm, erected a house on it which, remembering a little village either near London or in France, according to different accounts, he had named Claremont Cottage. Michell's suggestion was that the name Claremont be given to the new post office and embryo village. It was so named, and Thomas Noble became in 1851 the first postmaster of Claremont.

In 1851 the Post Office Department came completely under Canadian control, postage stamps were introduced, and there began a tremendous expansion of the number of post offices, as

postal rates were drastically lowered.

At the time when the nucleus of Greenwood began to form on the 6th concession, in lots 11 and 12, it was known as Norwood, but by the time it got a post office it had become Greenwood, derived from the Greens, its most prominent businessmen. In 1840 an Englishman named Matthew Cockerline constructed a mill on Duffin's Creek there. Frederick Green purchased it in 1843 and built additions. In 1847 the Howells of Howell's Hollow erected another mill in Greenwood, but Green became the proprietor of both mills.

When a daily mail was established from Whitby to Brooklin and across to Brougham, a post office was opened in 1852 at Greenwood, probably kept in the original store, a long, low frame building on the south west corner.

In the early days of staging along the Kingston Road the east hill above the Rouge River crossing became one of the stations where the horses were changed, and as such attained prominence. A sawmill was established on the west bank of the river, and on the high ground on the east side two hotels, while at a general store kept by R. Playter in 1852 Emmanuel Playter became the first postmaster of Rouge Hill.

At Frenchman's Bay, as the products of the mills and farms became greater, docks were built at the north end, and in 1843 work was begun on deepening the channel into Lake Ontario so that larger ships could use it. With the growth of shipping and dock facilities, Dunbarton came into being on the Kingston Road. William Dunbar had settled there in 1831. John Parker came to Dunbarton in 1851 and opened the first general store. In 1852 he was appointed its first postmaster.

Joseph Monkhouse came from England in 1849 and began storekeeping on the north boundary road of Pickering Township in lot 29 the following year. In 1853 Altona post office opened there, with him as postmaster.

Abraham Brown, a Quaker, came from New England in the opening years of the 19th century. He was the first postmaster of Brown's Corners, at the corner of the 4th concession road and the 2nd sideroad, changed to Audley in 1856.

In 1855 was opened Kinsale post office, with John Fairless running it, at the south west corner of what is now Highway 7 and the 2nd sideroad. In 1858 was established Balsam, at the south east corner of the 9th concession road and the 4th sideroad, Robert Dodds being postmaster, with general merchant Robert Phippen assistant postmaster.

At Whitevale, on the 5th concession road, the first mill on the West Branch of Duffin's Creek, was built by John Major in the 1820's, so the early community was called Majorville. Later it owed so much of its development to Truman P. White that it took Whitevale as its postal name. The village really began in 1855, when Donald McPhee opened the first store and White built a grist mill. Thomas Burton, proprietor of the Major Hotel, became the first postmaster of Whitevale around 1860, McPhee in 1863.

In 1861 general merchant Isaac Turner opened Bangor post office at the south west corner of the present Highway 7 and sideroad 28. Bangor moved a half mile east to the north west corner of the 26th sideroad in 1869, when John Percy became postmaster. Too close to Green River and Brougham, it closed in 1871. It was the only post office in Pickering Township which did not last until the introduction of rural mail delivery.

Atha post office was opened at the 8th concession road and the 28th sideroad in 1863, and with each postmaster was on a different side of that corner. In 1865 Port Union post office came into being where the west boundary road is crossed by the railway near the Lake, with track foreman Henry L. Pullen and other railwaymen as early postmasters.

The first businessman in Green River was Benjamin Doten, who in 1847 established a wagon and blacksmith shop there.

in 1857 William Barnes built a sawmill, adding a factory in 1870. Edward and John Smith in the early 1870's purchased the sawmill. They built a store on the north side of what is now Highway 7, west of the West Branch of Duffin's Creek, and were instrumental in securing the opening of a post office there in 1869. The name Green River was chosen at a meeting called by them to choose a fitting designation.

James McCreight settled in 1834 just north of the corner of the 3rd concession road and the 30th sideroad, which was to become Cherrywood, named at his suggestion after the village he came from. Its post office was opened in 1872.

Three quarters of a mile east of Dunbarton along the Kingston Road was Liverpool Market, named in the days when it was hoped that Frenchman's Bay would one day rival the great English seaport. In 1876 Liverpool Market post office was established at its corner with the 22nd sideroad.

With its opening, all but two of the post offices established in Pickering Township before the coming of rural mail delivery had been established. When in 1884 Ross Johnston wrote in the Whitby Chronicle under the pseudonym "the Traveller" about his journey through the county, he mentioned some of them. From Kinsale he wrote on December 17: "Mr. B. Wetherall is the accomodating postmaster, and a good deal of his time is consumed in attending to the duties of his office, for which he receives between 30 and 40 dollars. Is it not a grand thing that the office is not elective. What a pull there would be between contending parties, and what spoil would fall into the hands of the victor."

The same month he wrote from Greenwood: "I learned to my surprise, from Mr. Burton (postmaster at Green River) that he receives from the government, in return for his services, the sum of \$24.00 a year. What a miserable pittance for the important work done. Why, it is hardly enough for the shop-room, bearing other considerations out of the question. True, the duties of the office are only light, but the position is one of much responsibility, and requires constant attention, and great

care, and should surely be rewarded with something approaching a fair remuneration. I learn on enquiry at other post offices, that Mr. Burton's case is not an isolated one."

In 1891 Brock Road post office was opened at the south-east corner of that road and the 4th concession road. In 1905 North Claremont post office was established where the railway crosses the Brock Road north of Claremont village.

After 1910 rural mail delivery was introduced, and farmers no longer had to come to the post offices to pick up and send mail. As a result many of the smaller rural post offices were closed, yet some, like Balsam, still exist.

elsewhere; sometimes the postmaster is very dull in attending to people; have been obliged to wait 15 or 20 minutes.

John Dickie, sworn, stated that he had been a clerk in Mr. Logan's store for two years; he left on account of wages and also because he desired to spend some time at study; he had a personal knowledge of the management of the post-office during that time; Mr. Logan was disobliging to people who did not deal with him; have heard people say they would have to buy a little there or they would not get their mail; I have seen Mr. Logan open a letter which he said he opened by mistake; the invoice was addressed to Wm. Hodgson; he afterwards put the letter in the stove, said he would get another invoice and told me to say nothing about it; the newspapers were frequently left over night and mailed in the morning, when they had arrived in time for the evening mail; this was about Christmas of last year; it occurred several nights; he knew the public were dissatisfied; I would not trust him myself; business men have told him they were dissatisfied with the way in which the office was managed.

Cross-examined: I believe the newspapers were delayed in order to injure the business; he (Mr. L.) did all he could to decrease the circulation of the paper.

J. R. Hoover, sworn, stated that his greatest complaint was in reference to delays with the newspaper, as described by previous witness. Subscribers had written about the delays; Mr. Logan had opened a letter intended for him about four years ago; it was addressed to the leader of the Methodist choir; Mr. Logan had been leader about seven months previous to the time of opening the letter; Mr. Logan admitted that he had knowingly opened the letter and had wronged me; Mrs. Whitney had asked him not to disturb her and he had promised he would not; delays had occurred in the delivery of letters to the parties addressed; a man who had worked for him got a letter from the office on the 1st of November last which had arrived on the 19th of October; his name was Albert Banyard; he lost his situation through the delay; the post-office stamp was on it—19th October; the people complained of the delay in getting the mail in the morning.

Mr. Logan explained that when the mail from the west was late it was impossible for him to get up town and back again between the two trains.

J. T. Brownridge, sworn, stated that he had not been used properly by Mr. Logan; some of my letters have gone astray; he had been charged double rates for letters which it was claimed were overweight, when they were not; this had occurred frequently; at one time I sent four or five letters for registration, and Mr. Logan would not give me receipts; I demanded them in writing; he said he had something else to do besides writing out receipts.

E. Wright stated that he did most of his post-office business in sending letters at the station; he considered that his business had been pried into by the assistant postmaster; my mail has been sent to others and I have got other's; Mrs. Whitney is my friend, and I do not wish to take the office from her; I have no confidence in the deputy postmaster; my mail has been tampered with; Mrs. Logan had told me she could open any letter that was not sealed with wax; she explained how it could be done, by steaming it over the candle.

Mr. T. Peart and C. Dale also gave evidence.

John Cuthbert, sworn, stated that he had received a parcel addressed to a party in

his care and had it four or five days; after receiving a postal card to have it forwarded to the party had sent it to the office; they wanted to charge 21c. postage, but I objected, and when it was weighed the right charge was only 6c. postage; I have not full confidence in Mr. Logan; I think a postmaster should be kind and courteous; I am not ashamed of being a Conservative, and am not like you (to Mr. Logan).

E. Cornell stated that he had often been kept waiting for his mail.

Angus McKay stated that his post-office business had been conducted satisfactorily; I think there are about two dozen who are dissatisfied; he thought the trouble originally arose from politics.

Robert Miller—My post-office business has been conducted satisfactorily to myself; have no complaint; I know there is a feeling against Mr. Logan, but do not know the particulars.

Mr. John Wright also stated that his post-office business was satisfactorily performed.

Mr. John Gordon—As far as I am concerned I have no complaint; as far as I have heard people talk they are in favor of a change.

This concluded the evidence, and the Inspector asked all those in the room who had complete confidence in Mr. Logan to stand up. Eight stood up and forty-two remained seated.

The Inspector then said that he would report the matter to the Postmaster-General at once, and he would take whatever action was necessary.

