

EL CAJON POSTAL HISTORY HISTORY

1878 - 1971

Compiled by Hazel Sperry

El Cajon's first post office was opened June 6, 1878 in the lobby of the small five room hotel of Amaziah Lord Knox - with Amaziah Knox serving as El Cajon's first postmaster.

This little overnight rooming house and corral which was El Cajon's first business building was built by Mr. Knox in 1876 on a 10 acre field located at what is now the southwest corner of Main St. and Magnolia Ave. in El Cajon. It was built to accomodate the drivers of the wagon teams which carried the gold ore and supplies between the Julian mines and San Diego. The teamsters had been "overnight" camping near this spot which they referred to as The Corners.

In 1877, greater El Cajon Valley which had been opened for settlement in 1868-69 had a total population of 25 families comprising 90 individuals. This area included the present El Cajon, part of Santee, Lakeside, and as far east as Flinn Springs.

Mr. Knox served as postmaster for ten years (until Dec. 15, 1888). During that entire time the mail had to be brought from San Diego by horse. With the completion of the San Diego, Cuyamaca & Eastern Railway through El Cajon Valley in 1889, the mail was carried by train from San Diego to the El Cajon Heights station (near Marshal and Palm Ave.) From the railroad station, it was delivered to the El Cajon Post Office by horse and buggy. By that time Amaziah Knox was no longer the postmaster, but he continued to operate his hotel and Livery service. The April 8, 1893 Edition of The El Cajon Valley News says, "A.L. Knox has been awarded the contract for carrying the mail between El Cajon Heights and the Village of El Cajon. He gets about \$130.00 per annum for the job.

In small towns, it was quite customary in those early days for the post office to move with the postmaster since the receipts were small and the postmaster seldom accepted the appointment unless he had a place where he could conduct the business and thereby pay the rent, such assit was, to himself.

This seemed to be the case in El Cajon, and for many years El Cajon's Post office moved up and down and across Main Street - from hotel to grocery store, to drug store, back to grocery store, again to drug store, to the general merchandise store, etc., and finally into separate post office quarters. A chronological listing of El Cajon's postmasters and the dates of their appointments appears at the close of this article.

In the very early days, moving the post office was quite a simple maneuver. Mr. J.H. Dodson, who became postmaster in 1895, said that when he moved the post office from a grocery store to a drug store, it took two trips with a wheelbarrow to transfer the whole thing.

From 1878 to 1914 the post office was a 4th Class post office. From 1914 to 1937 it was 3rd Class, and from 1937 to 1945 it was 2nd Class. In 1945 it became a 1st Class post office.

Also, it was in 1945 that the post office moved from its last Main Street location to the northeast corner of Magnolia and Douglas Ave. Then, in 1952 the El Cajon Post Office moved across the street to 240 S. Magnolia where it remained until May 1968 when it moved to 456 N. Magnolia Ave.

This month on November 19, 1971, under the guidance and leadership of Mr. Leroy Stewart, El Cajon Postmaster since Nov. 1966, it is moving into its new 48,825 sq. ft. post office building at 401 W. Lexington Ave. (the southwest corner of Lexington and Van Houten Ave.) - - just about two blocks west and two blocks south of where it began in 1878 in the lobby of the tiny five room Knox Hotel - and where it will continue to serve somewhat the same area as that from which those few widely scattered early ranchers of 1878 came by horse to pick up their mail in the Village of El Cajon. Too, that original little five room hotel building which housed El Cajon's first post office is now standing at 105 E. Lexington Ave. - just three blocks east of the new post office. It was moved to this spot in 1944 by Mr. S.H. Mathews who chose to preserve it and where it has since served as the Mathews home. On May 7, 1967 a bronze plaque designating it as a historic landmark was placed there by the Illa M. Knox Parlor #820, Native Daughters of The Golden West.

The first mail delivery service was called the Star Route which began in about 1908. Mr. DeWitt Clinton Bye took the postal examination and passed and was the first mail carrier on this route here. He served for possibly two years, but quit because it didn't pay enough. He had to furnish his own team and wagon and pay for their keep. The route was 28 miles long. He started out toward Santee as he left the El Cajon Post Office - then went East on Pepper Drive - East over the hill toward La Cresta Grade - then on to the Hillsdale area. Because of a government postal ruling, he had to stay $\frac{1}{2}$ mile away from the Bostonia Post Office when he was delivering in the Bostonia area. The Bostonia Post Office and Bostonia Store had been established on the Bostonia Ranch in the summer of 1894.

R.F.D. service began in El Cajon about 1913. Roy Clark and Carroll Smith were the first two R.F.D. mail carriers here. A photograph taken in 1913 shows Carrol Smith, the R.F.D. postman, with his horse and buggy handing little Eugene Vacher the mail in front of the Vacher ranch at what is now the intersection of Fuerte Drive and Monte Vista Rd. Among the pieces of delivered mail was the daily newspaper. At that time all newspaper deliveries here were made by mail.

It was at Christmas time in 1940 that the El Cajon Post Office received an electric cancelling machine.

There was no city mail delivery in El Cajon until 1943. At that time Postmaster Jackson C. Roether was able to establish three routes to cover the city, Bostonia, and several other areas in the vicinity. Route 1 covered Bostonia and the north side of Main St. Route 2 covered the business area and several side streets. Route 3 covered most of the area south of Main St. from Pierce St. on the west to S. Second St. on the east.

Population growth became more rapid in the years to follow and new routes and more employes had to be added. By 1966 El Cajon had 55 mail delivery areas. Only three of these were foot routes. The others were all motorized. At that time there were 68,000 to 70,000 people in the 60 sq. mile El Cajon mailing area.

In 1957-58, two contract postal stations were added. A contract station in Fletcher Hills was added in 1957 and one in Suncrest-La Cresta in 1958.

In 1958, the Bostonia Post Office which had been established in 1894 was discontinued and it became a Branch of the El Cajon Post Office.

It is interesting to note that in 1918 the charge for a post office box at the El Cajon Post Office was 20 cents per quarter year. In 1971, the post office rent is \$2.70 per quarter.

In 1914 the contract with the U.S. Government for the El Cajon Post Office was as follows:

"For rent - per annum - \$180.00

For light and fuel - per annum - \$24.00 - and with the agreement that the rents will not be increased for the term of 4 years beginning Jan. 1, 1914."

For our new 1971 El Cajon Post Office, the lease agreement is for \$116,870.00 rent each year for a 20 year period with additional options.

An old record shows that in 1917, based on gross receipts for the year 1916, the El Cajon postmaster's salary was fixed at the sum of \$1100.00 per annum. Before the year 1940 the salaries of postmasters in El Cajon were never more than about \$3.00 per day. Then in July 1940 the salary for the El Cajon postmaster was set at \$2400.00 per year.

The number of postal employees has constantly grown. In 1940 there was the postmaster and 5 employees. In 1943 there were 9 employees. In 1952 there were 20 - 25 postal workers. In 1960 employees numbered 103. In 1966 there were 144 postal workers, and in 1967 there were 173. In 1968 there were 177 employees.

This month, November 1971, there are 201 employees serving in our El Cajon Postal System - Serving El Cajon with a city population of about 54,000 and a large rural area surrounding it - Serving for our United States Postal System which has so faithfully and efficiently served us down through the years with the challenging motto - "Neither rain, nor snow, nor heat, nor gloom of night shall stay these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds."

May we, the recipients of this dedicated and efficient service, salute all of you of the United States Postal System!

God bless you all ! and God bless America!

BOSTONIA POST OFFICE

List of Postmasters and Dates of Appointments

1. Joseph Donald ----- June 15, 1894.
2. David G. Gordon ----- Sept. 23, 1898.
3. Charles O. Graves ----- Jan. 12, 1903.
4. Nellie O. Bishop (Postmistress) ----- June 24, 1904.
5. Unofficial records indicate that Raymond W. Hofflund purchased the Bostonia Store in 1904, and was appointed postmaster on
Jan. 11, 1905.

Mr. & Mrs. W. Murray Wright came to Bostonia in 1913 and purchased the Bostonia Store.

6. W. Murray Wright appointed postmaster ----- Jan. 23, 1914.

Murray Wright operated the post office as a 4th class post Office until July 1, 1944 at which time it was made a 3rd class post office

Mr. Wright retired as postmaster on Dec. 31, 1950.

7. Mrs. Minta R. Goodwin appointed postmistress --- Dec. 31, 1950.
8. Mrs. Ella Curran appointed postmistress ----- Nov. 30, 1951.
9. J. George Ponchak appointed acting postmaster on March 31, 1953, and officially appointed postmaster by Pres. Eisenhower on Mar. 17, 1955.

On July 17, 1954 the Bostonia Post Office moved out of the Bostonia Store into separate quarters across the street on the south side of Broadway.

On August 1, 1958 the Bostonia Post Office was officially discontinued and became a branch of the El Cajon Post Office.

On April 23, 1960 the Bostonia Station of the El Cajon Post Office moved from its Broadway location to its newly erected building at 1062 N. Second Street.

Excerpts From Early El Cajon Valley Newspapers Reveal The Following:

Valley News - May 12, 1894 - "A petition has been circulated to establish a post office at the Boston Ranch to be called New Boston"

June 30, 1894 - "Joseph Donald has received his appointment as postmaster. The new office is called Bostonia."

July 28, 1894 - "Bostonia Store and Post Office will be open and ready for business about August 1."

Aug. 4, 1894 - "There are now four post offices in the valley - El Cajon, Santee, Bostonia, and Lakeside."