

MAIL SERVICE in Rim country's territorial years

To send a letter today, you must have a complete address, plus zip code and a 37-cent stamp. If any part of the address is incorrect, the letter goes back to the sender. Things were quite different in the early days.

Before 1880, any letter written to the area we now call Payson would have been addressed to John Doe, Green Valley, Arizona, c/o Postmaster, Globe, Arizona. If the letter was written to someone in Pine, it was usually routed through Flagstaff.

It often took several weeks for a letter to arrive at its destination in the Rim country. There was no reg-

ular mail route, nor were there regular mail carriers. The post offices in Flagstaff or Globe would simply get word of a freighter, member of the military, or a traveler

headed toward Green Valley (Payson) and ask him to carry the mail as far as he was going in that direction. The letter might make it to a ranch 20 miles outside of Green Valley, and then the ranch owner delivered the letter when he came to town. At that point it might be left at a saloon, livery stable, miner's camp, or with any person who knew the addressee.

Often letters were not sent through the postal system. The sender simply found someone traveling in the right direction and entrusted the letter to his care. This method might seem slipshod, but the mail usually got delivered. People respected each other's mail, as it was rare.

Magazines and newspapers came through the postal system. Before 1880 this "system" consisted of pack trains or freighters and any publications was considered prime reading if it was less than a year old.

The first post office designated in this area was at Fort Reno, located on the east slope of the Mazatzal Range in Reno Pass, a day's ride from Green Valley. It opened in 1880 with Isaac Prather as postmaster.



The old Myrtle Post Office, established in 1899, was located on Ellison Creek. It burned in the Dude Fire of 1990.

This, of course, was a military post office, but the military also handled private mail. It was easier to keep a soldier fighting Indians if he got a letter from home. Having a post office at Fort Reno shortened the mail delivery time to the Rim country and the Tonto Basin. William D. Prather took the reins as postmaster in 1881, followed by LaFayette P. Nash in 1882. This post office was discontinued in 1883.

The *Arizona Silverbell* proclaimed in its Jan. 19, 1884 issue: "The settlers in the Tonto Basin and along the Verde are agitating the establishment of a mail route between Globe and Flagstaff."

Frank Hise, who had started a store in Green Valley in 1882, was two jumps ahead of the *Arizona Silverbell*. He had written to his friend, Representative Lewis Edwin Payson of Illinois, telling him of the need for a post office in Green Valley. Representative Payson jock-

eyed the bill through the U.S. Congress. On March 3, 1884, Frank Hise became the first postmaster of the Payson Post Office, aptly named after Representative Payson. To avoid the confusion of having mail addressed to the Payson Post Office at Green Valley, Union Park, or Long Valley (early proposed names for Payson), the residents of the community simply opted for the name of Payson.

On April 8, 1884, a post office was established in Pine with Mary D. Fuller as postmaster. Sarah J. McDonald took over on May 17, 1887; Katie C. Miller became postmaster on Nov. 16, 1897 and then James L. Patterson was postmaster starting on Oct. 28, 1903.

Just three miles to the north of Pine, Strawberry also had a post office. LaFayette P. Nash became postmaster in 1886; Sarah Wingfield in 1892; James P. Hopkins in 1894; Strauther R. Lothian in 1903; and

then Lou L. Hopkins in 1904.

A post office was started on Wild Rye Creek Nov. 14, 1884, with Mary E. Boardman as postmaster. She was the mother of Bill and Guy Boardman who later owned the mercantile and operated the post office in Payson. Samuel J. Peters became postmaster on Aug. 10, 1887. He was replaced on Aug. 9, 1890, by Samuel A. "Papa Sam" Haught Jr., a local rancher on Wild Rye. The postmaster's duties were taken over by his wife, Dagmar A. Haught on Sept. 9, 1905. She served in that position until Oct. 30, 1907.

The Myrtle Post Office, located on Ellison Creek was founded in 1899 when Myrtle Pyle, 14-year-old daughter of Elwood and Sarah Pyle, of Bonita Gardens — six miles west of Ellison Creek — wrote a letter to a congressman expressing the need for a post office in that area. The congressman complied with her wishes and the post office was named after her. Alfonso Landry was the first postmaster in 1888; then Henry Haught in 1900; Katie L. Haught in 1902; and Ella Haught in 1910. The post office was discontinued in 1911 and the mail was routed to Pine.

The first post office in Gisela was opened in 1889 at the home of Fredrick Stanton, with Mr. Stanton serving as postmaster. His wife was the local school teacher who gave Gisela its name. The Stantons moved to Concho, Ariz. in 1894, so the post office there was discontinued. Then on June 29, 1898, Emer Cole took on the duties of postmaster in Gisela. Again it was discontinued, this time in 1899 when the Coles moved on. The mail was routed through Payson until 1902.

John Holder, who is credited with starting more post offices in Arizona than any other person, built a general store and post office in Gisela and officially became postmaster there on Dec. 22, 1902. The post office was discontinued on July 31, 1906 when Holder left Gisela and the mail was routed to Payson.

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BACK TRACKIN'

by Jayne Peace
and Jinx Pyle

Payson was exchange point for mail stages

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This caused much inconvenience for the residents of Gisela, so on Sept. 18, 1906, Ellen J. Neal took the reins as postmaster in Gisela. Her daughter, Birdie Hale, assisted her in her postal duties. The Gisela post office closed for the last time on Aug. 31, 1911 and the mail has been routed through the Payson post office since that time.

By 1890, a regular mail service had been established in both Payson and Pine and mail was delivered twice a week to both post offices. Some of the early mail carriers who carried the Rim country mail on horseback were: A. J. Franklin, Tuffy Peach, Joe Gibson, Orin Childers and Fletcher Beard. Fletcher Beard carried mail from Payson to the Myrtle Post Office on Ellison Creek which served the ranches located high up under the Mogollon Rim. Duke Hale, John McCormick, and John Booth carried the mail from Payson to Gisela, then on to Pleasant Valley by pack-horse or pack-mule. Duke Hale said he dreaded to see the new Sears and Roebuck catalogs arrive. He had to take extra mules to pack them because everyone got one. He said they read the new catalog and used the old one for toilet paper.

As the automobile came into use, the old military roads were improved and horseback delivery of the mail became largely a thing of the past by 1921. A few of the early stage drivers were Charlie See, Julian Journigan, and Grady Harrison. Later Beryl Livingood drove the mail stage between Payson and Globe and carried many travelers.

By 1921, mail service had been extended through Payson to Cottonwood with stops at Pine and Camp Verde. Payson became the exchange point for mail stages running from Cottonwood to Payson

and from Globe to Cottonwood.

By 1930, the mail was hauled under contract by stages that also hauled light freight, passengers, and even handled special orders from rural residents.

Most early postmasters received very little compensation for their work in the small post offices. The post offices were largely located in homes or in a corner of a country store. People realized the importance of mail and were dedicated in handling it.

Payson's territorial postmasters following Frank Hise were: Ada Bowers in 1885; J. Henry Thompson in 1887; Minnie Thompson in 1888; George W. Bonacker in 1890; Edward J. Bonacker in 1894; James W. Boardman in 1899; and William H. Hilligass in 1908. The post office had one of the two safes in the entire community. Since there was no bank in Payson at that time, large sums of money were often left with the postmaster who was truly trusted by the residents.

Look for books by Jayne Peace and Jinx Pyle, owners of Git A Rope! Publishing, Inc., "Looking Through the Smoke," "Blue Fox," "History of Gisela," "Mountain Cowboys," and the newly released "Rodeo 101, History of the Payson Rodeo," at Jackalope Books and Sue Malinski's Art and Antique Corral. If you want a numbered Rodeo 101 Collector's Edition book, call Git A Rope! Publishing at (928) 474-0380, Sue Malinski at (928) 472-4677, or Lorraine Cling at (928) 479-2347. It sells for \$100. The soft cover sells for \$25. Rodeo 101 includes the early history of Payson, as well as the history of the Payson Rodeo, which is older than any rodeo in the world. It has 375 photos of pioneers, rodeo cowboys and cowgirls and rodeo queens.