

## The Romance of Rural Mail

The delivery of mail to our boxes along the concessions is a fact which we take very much for granted. If mail is not delivered promptly, it is only because of a statutory holiday, or some other very good reason. Long ago, the process of sending and receiving letters, by local residents, was a much more complicated affair, and often delayed by bad weather.

In the early days of Minto Township, there were numerous post offices, located in homes on the concession roads. On Lot 5, Concession 7, of Minto Township, on the sixth line, there is a farm owned and occupied by Robert Sinclair and his family. In the 1880's, this house was chosen for a post office, in order to have more convenient postal facilities for the residents of the community. Many names for the post office were suggested, but a suitable one could not be found. Finally, the

neighbours asked Mr. McCready, the postmaster at Harriston, to help them. Since he was very well liked, the men agreed to abide by his preference. He chose the name "Glenlee" after his old home in Scotland. Mail for this post office was carried by coach from Elora to Cotswold, and then delivered to the Sinclair home, where the community folk came and got it. The history of Glenlee was not recorded, but elderly neighbours, and the Sinclair family have corroborated the story. Evidence of the post office may still be seen there, for the small waiting room, and the door through which the mail was given out, are still a part of the house. About 1912, the post office was located in Mr. Colin Davidson's home for a short time.

On the eighth line of Minto Township, there was also a country post office in those days. Mr. John Bracken was a man who loved to read, and keep up with the

times. He thought the line should have a post office, and applied to the government for permission to have one in his log home, on Lot 2, Concession 8. Mr. Bracken also had a difficult time, picking out a name for his post office, but finally chose to call it "Melgund." There seems to be no particular reason why he preferred the name, but it is of British origin, like a great many of our Canadian names. Mr. Bracken also obtained the contract for hauling the mail to and from his home.

Thanks to a book of registered letters, and bits of information which Mr. Bracken kept and wrote down, we are able to have some idea of the dates and times of this post office. The book is still preserved, as a precious keepsake, but a daughter, Miss Ida Bracken. This lady also recalls some of the hardships, and happy events of those days.

Melgund post office was started

in 1893. Mail for this community was drawn from Minto Station, located on the C.N.R. (Canadian National Railroad), about two miles west of the Bracken home.

This small building has been a familiar landmark to many of the older residents of the area. It was only removed about two years ago, and taken to Palmerston.

This business of hauling the mail to and from the Station was quite interesting. Not more than three times a week, Mr. Bracken took a bag of mail up the road to meet the train at Minto Station.

This was a job which had to be done at a certain time each week. It was taken by horse and wagon in summer, or horse and sleigh, during the winter months. As the train approached the station, the mail bag which was to be sent, was held on a post beside the track, and picked up, as the train moved on its way. The sack of mail for the

Melgund post office was thrown off, from one of the passing railway cars. Of course, in winter, bad weather often contributed to bad roads, and the train being late. Sometimes Mr. Bracken had to stay overnight with a neighbour who lived near the railroad, because the train had been delayed by snow.

After the mail was taken back to Melgund, it was sorted, and placed in its proper cubby holes, in a special room. People had to come into the Bracken home to get their mail, and the family really looked forward to this time. It meant a friendly visit, for the neighbours nearly always stayed and discussed mutual problems, and events of the day. The post office was located in this house for four years, and then it was taken over by Mr. John McMillan. He lived in the house where the Bracken family now resides, and retained the post office until 1903. On January 1, 1904, it

is recorded that the Brackens once more became responsible for the handling of the local mail. In 1912, they purchased the McMillan farm, and received government permission to move the post office to that location. It was continued until about 1913, and the sign "Melgund" may still be seen on one of the outer buildings. Some members of the Bracken family still reside on this farm.

The government decided these small rural post offices were too expensive to maintain, and they also wanted a rural mail route to be established through the country. This plan finally came into existence, and the mail was brought out, east from Harriston to the sixth line of Minto Township. It was taken along this road, and then on the town line north for a short way, and finally west along the eighth line. The mail carrier delivered his mail on this route, and thence

back to Harriston. Older residents of the community have told us that this was the first rural mail delivery in Minto Township. A Mr. Alex Martin of Mount Forest was the member of Parliament for the district at this time. He was one of the men who helped lay out the route for this first rural mail delivery, about 1913. Gradually, the mail was delivered, on more and more concessions, until the county people had complete service.

However, a great deal of credit goes to the men like Mr. Sinclair and Mr. Bracken, who maintained the first post offices in their homes. They performed an important service to the residents of the community, and formed another important link in the pioneer history of Minto Township, in Wellington County.

By Mrs. Harry Reynolds  
R.R. 3 Harriston, Ontario  
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First Prize