

Post Office

As the centre for the surrounding farm area, Utopia has been important as the location of the Post Office which first opened in 1870. The original Post Office was located only one house north of the present day Post Office.

The first Post Office in Utopia was in the home now owned by Mr. Art McCann. The building was well kept and the grounds were an asset to the hamlet. At that time Mrs. Connors was the postmaster.

A few years later, the post office moved to the Utopia Store. The store was then operated by Mr. & Mrs. John Cross.

After Manuel Bell had retired from the grist mill, he looked after the Post Office. It was only some years later when Manuel and his wife passed on. By this time, Harold Bell had returned from Overseas and he began to carry the mail. Next, Manuel Bell's son, Ralph, took over the mail from Harold.

The train service in the early days was very important to the residents of Utopia. Built in 1853, the Ontario, Simcoe and Huron Railway, like most early railway companies, changed names and ownerships regularly. "In 1858, the nicknamed "Oats, Straw and Hay Railway", became known as the Northern Railway of Canada. In 1888, it amalgamated with and became the Grand Trunk Railway (G.T.R.). In 1922, the bankrupt G.T.R. became part of the Canadian National Railways system (a Crown Corporation)."¹⁶

"The early morning train to Barrie left at 7:20 a.m., returning at 11:30 a.m. and again going to Barrie at 5:10 p.m., returning at 8:30 p.m. Most folks would go to town at least once a week to shop. If you had doctor or dental appointments, you would stay all day, otherwise return at noon to get dinner for the men. In those days, it was an absolute no-no to expect men to get dinner on their own."

"The mail came by train at 11:30 a.m. and 5:10 p.m. There was a stand at the Canadian National Railway Crossing, equipped with a steel arm extending out to meet a similar arm on the side of the mail car, on which the mail bag could be picked up and the incoming mail bag thrown off." (Mrs. Ruby McCann)

R.R.#1 came into operation in 1913. Utopia was a stop station, and the mails were passed on and off. A second route, R.R.#2, was added

in 1928 to serve the north part of Essa and part of the Grenfel area of Vespra Township.

In the early years, practically all farms subscribed to a daily paper, The Toronto Globe, and The Mail and Empire. The Empire arrived during noon hour and was then read, as people took time out of a busy day. They were then ready to discuss events, according to their political thinking, as they sat on the farm verandahs at night to enjoy a well earned rest.

On April 14, 1975, the residents experienced the closing of the Utopia Post Office. The Postmasters who served Utopia throughout the years were as follows: Mr. Simpson, Mrs. Connor, Mrs. John Cross, Mr. Manuel Bell, Mr. Ralph Bell, and Mrs. Ruby McCann.

For a few months following the official closing of Utopia Post Office, the mail was sorted in Barrie. However, this was not acceptable to some residents who hated to see the cherished name of "Utopia" removed from their rural area. One of these, Mr. Tom Smith, after considerable effort and with the co-operation of Mr. Ross Milne, M.P., was successful in having the position of Postmaster advertised, with the result that the office was again opened on January 19, 1976, with Mrs. Lois Geddes as Postmistress.