

The post office: A fixture throughout Watsonville's history

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CORRESPONDENT

AS A COLLECTOR of antique post cards I am often asked about post cards with one cent stamps affixed to them. We think of these stamps as rare when, actually, they were in use for some time and are very common. Following is a list of rates on post card stamps published by the post office:

- 1889 - 1917 - one cent
- 1917 - 1920 - two cents
- 1920 - one cent
- 1952 - two cents
- 1958 - three cents
- 1962 - four cents
- 1968 - five cents
- 1971 - six cents
- 1973 - eight cents
- 1975 - seven cents, then nine cents
- 1978 - ten cents
- 1981 - 12 cents, then 13 cents
- 1985 - 15 cents
- 1988 - 18 cents
- 1991 - 19 cents
- 1995 - 20 cents

Locally, the first post office appeared on Main street (then called Pajaro street) in 1854, just two years after the founding of the small village of Watsonville. Llewellyn Thrift was the first postmaster and there wasn't any delivery to stores or houses - you came to the post office and picked up your mail.

"Every four years by some unaccountable decree of the circulation office of Washington, the mail route for this section becomes involved, gets into a snarl,

and is so mixed that it is impossible to tell what mail facilities will be afforded, whether it be daily, semi-weekly or semi-occasionally. We understand the present stage line will run over the mountain road carrying passengers and Wells Fargo and Co.'s express, while the mail will come, dragging along behind time, via the Cape Horn or San Juan route."

The Pajaronian, 1870

The post office moved around to various locations on Main Street, Peck and East Beach and was kept open for several hours on Sunday to accommodate the large numbers of men who were harvesting.

"The salary of the Watsonville postmaster, H.S. Fletcher, has been increased to \$1,700 per annum. With the holidays coming like a shot out of a gun, Sid says that raise comes in pat."

The Pajaronian, 8/10/1882

Remember when mail was delivered to your home twice a day? Well, back in 1901 when delivery to homes and businesses first started, mail was delivered three times a day and a sealed letter was raised from one cent to two cents. The houses were not numbered which made it difficult (to say the least) for the mail carriers Harry Bridgewater and Clark Hockabout but this problem was soon remedied as numbers were soon supplied. At this time, the population was a little over 4,000 so the delivery area was quite a bit smaller than today with the population standing at 32,000.

"The telephone stamp will soon

be in vogue, the purpose of which is to give the postmaster the privilege of opening any letters bearing such a stamp and read them over the phone to parties to whom they are directed."

The Pajaronian, Nov. 19, 1903

Also in 1903, the post office moved to the new Porter building at Main and Maple and, in 1913, it moved to the first floor of the I.O.O.F. building then located on East Beach across from the plaza. Property was purchased in 1924 near the corner of Union and Trafton and a temporary post office was constructed with money raised by local citizens. Temporary because the government leased the building for ten years, paying enough rent to return the local investment, then it would become the property of the United States Government and they would build a permanent building. But the ten years passed and it wasn't until 1936 that additional property was purchased; the old building torn down and a new post office was constructed. The dedication of the new post office was in May of 1937 when Harry Bridgewater, former mail carrier, was postmaster. The doors swung open to the public in September of that same year.

Changes were made to accommodate the handicapped and to enlarge the lobby, but eventually, more room was needed and so a new post office was constructed across from City Hall and the old building became a branch of Cabrillo College.

"Postage Stamp Gum - Every

time a person licks a United State postage stamp he gets a taste of sweet potato. The gum with which the stamps are backed is made from that succulent vegetable because Uncle Sam's lieutenants consider it the most harmless preparation of the sort. All of the gum used on American postage stamps is mixed by the government at the bureau of engraving and printing where the stamps are made. It is spread on the sheets after the stamps have been printed. The gum, in a liquid form, is forced up through pipes from the basement where it is made. These pipes lead to a series of machines consisting of rollers, between which the sheets of stamps are fed, one at a time. A continuous fine stream of the liquid gum falls upon one of these rollers. The sheet with its wet coating of sweet potato mucilage passes from the rollers into a long horizontal flue filled with hot air. When it emerges at the other end of the flue the gum is dry."

Evening Pajaronian, July 3, 1909

Postmasters at Watsonville post office: 1854 - W.L. Thrift, then Edward martin 1874 - Edward Martin, James Menasco, assistant 1875 - C.O. Cummings 1880 - H.S. Fletcher 1888 - A.B. Hawkins 1892 - B.A. Osborn 1902 - George G. Radcliff 1906 - Thomas Wright 1914 - Ernest Hack 1919 - Harry Bridgewater 1921 - Hugh W. Judd 1933 - Harry Bridgewater 1949 - W.D. Thornton 1953 - Fred Jenkins 1957 - Fred Linneman 1971 - Joe Marsano 1976 - Fred Linneman 1986 - Rudy Benjarano 1993 - Richard Bergman



Harry Bridgewater, postmaster.

Pajaro Valley Historical Assn.