

# Loyalty, hard work were postmaster's guides

By CANDACE ATKINS

Mary Parker is no longer under the tyranny of her alarm clock — after 32 years with the United States Postal Service, she has retired.

When she started as an "indefinite substitute clerk" in the Soquel Post Office in 1951, she had no intention of making a career in the postal service, but it "just happened that way," she said.

After four years in the Soquel office, she was named acting postmaster (there is no such thing as postmistress in official post office terminology) when the postmaster retired. She was ineligible for a permanent appointment, she said, because she did not live in Soquel. That regulation was later dropped, but has recently been reinstated.

She later moved to the Capitola Post Office as acting postmaster. It was located in the present Craft Gallery building.

President Dwight Eisenhower, in 1959, appointed Mrs. Parker to postmaster of Capitola Post Office. It was a permanent appointment, and Mrs. Parker, who lived in Capitola, fulfilled the residency requirement.

"They were all political appointments at that time," she said. "Today, we have a merit system. With me, it was just fate."

Female executives were scarce in those days, and Mrs. Parker said her

reason for accepting a good job was so she could better provide for her two school age children.

"I wanted to work. I needed to work," she said. "I had to raise two kids."

She credits her son and daughter's "two loving grandparents" who lived in the same neighborhood for giving her children a family home after school and during school vacations.

"No, I didn't feel guilty about having to work," said Mrs. Parker. "It was for them (children), and we all knew it. Things didn't get complicated with kids in those days."

Like most working mothers, Mrs. Parker said the hardest part of her career was leaving her children when they were sick.

"If it weren't for their grandparents, I never would have made it," she said. "In those days, you went to work if you wanted to keep that job, because there were 10 others waiting in line for it. Many times, I went to work when I didn't feel that good myself. You had sick leave, but you didn't use it much. You just didn't call in sick."

Mrs. Parker said those early days served as good training throughout her career. She considers herself well disciplined, professional and dependable. In no way does she feel inferior to male postmasters and says she would put her staff "up to any of the

other stations at any time.

"I have always had an involved feeling with my job. There must be a dedication and a loyalty to the Postal Service," she said.

There have always been more male postmasters than female, she said, and historically, women were given small districts, since the postmaster salary in a small office was not enough for a man. She was still not intimidated, though, and said, "I always felt equal to them — I never felt different. I was just one of the boys."

Although she felt equal, she was careful, she said,

to remember she was a lady. She feels good grooming, proper dress and manners are as important as efficiency.

When she started with the Post Office, stamps were three cents, and patrons could buy a postcard for a penny. In 1958, when she started as acting postmaster in Capitola, there were 1,200 residents. Today, there are 10,400. Five employees took care of the counter business and two postal routes. Today, there are 21 on the Capitola Post Office staff, and it takes seven routes to serve the city. Outgoing mail is

now sent to San Jose for processing. Post Office employees last year, processed 6,113,000 pieces of incoming mail to Capitola residences and businesses. In 1983, Mrs. Parker said she expects postage sales will hit the \$1 million mark.

For today, that \$1 million worth of postage is no longer uppermost in Mrs. Parker's mind. She is packing up her belongings and will move to her new home in Idaho, where she will live close to her daughter's family.

"I love to garden," she said with a smile, "Basically, I'm a country girl."



Photo by Kurt Ellison

Mary Parker is going back to being 'just a country girl.'