

Post Office in Montague

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Information about the picture - The mail carriers pictured are identified as, left to right: Francis C. Hiscutt, Thomas Hawks, Sanford H. Watson, J. A. Chisholm, and Judson A. Gunderman. The boy looking out Mr. Chisholm's carriage window is his son "Lex". Standing in the post office entrance are Margaret Vandenberg (later Mrs. Francis Matson), Helen Ripley (later Mrs. Adolph Anderson), and Postmaster Montague W. Ripley. The picture was taken around 1910. This Postoffice buildings was located about where the current Senior Center is now.

Postmasters were usually appointed by the Postmaster General or, if they were to make more than \$1,000 per year, by the President with the consent of the U.S. Senate. U.S. Citizenship was usually required to become a postmaster at all but the smallest of post offices. Prior to 1971, postmasters were also required to live in their post office's delivery area. Women were eligible and were frequently appointed postmasters of small rural post offices, especially starting in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

The Post Office was established about 1867. Ophir R. Goodno was appointed the first postmaster in March 1867, a position he held for almost eight years before being removed. The removal, however, was a consequence of a personal opposition to a prominent local citizen and had nothing to do with his administration as Postmaster. Goodno also had a hardware business in town during this time. The

remainder of his term was covered by Henry B. Strong in March 1875. Henry Becker was then appointed the next Postmaster in November 1875.

It seems that during that time the post office was located in what was described as “a very inferior building” across from the Ferry, Dowling & Co’s office. (The Ferry, Dowling & Co’s office building later became Nesbit’s.) The first Bank was later built where the post office had been.

By 1883, the Post Office was located on Bridge Street (now Dowling Street) in the Ripley Block in the storefront behind what is now Lipka’s drug store. They were there for many years.

Frank Bracelin (in July 1886), Henry J. Shattuck (in June 1889), George M. Dodge (in June 1891), and William Peck (in Feb 1894) were all postmasters during this time.

By 1897 the post office had moved into the Osmun building which was recently constructed just East of the Franklin House hotel. William E. Osmun was postmaster from October 1897 through his reappointment in June 1902. He was followed by Montague W. Ripley in March 1904 through his reappointment in June 1912.

In 1901 the rural free delivery service was inaugurated in Montague. The service originally began on a trial basis in the United States in 1896 to deliver mail directly to farm families. Before RFD, rural residents had to pick up mail themselves at sometimes distant post offices or pay private express companies for delivery. The experimental service proved to be a success, and rural free delivery became a permanent service in 1902. The word “free” was dropped in 1906.

During the experimental years, farmers helped by putting out boxes for the rural carriers – everything from lard pails and syrup cans to old apple, soap, and cigar boxes. Postal officials decided a standardized box would improve service and, in 1901, asked manufacturers to design boxes to the following specifications:

- The box must be made of metal, 6 by 8 by 18 inches, and weather-proof.
- Boxes should be constructed so they can be fastened to a post at a height convenient to the carrier without alighting.
- Keys for customers’ boxes should be easy to use by a carrier with “one gloved hand in the severest weather.”

In 1902 the Post Office Department required customers to have these boxes in order to receive rural free delivery. Boxes could be square, oblong, circular, or semicircular but had to protect mail from rain, snow, and dust.

Rural carriers sold stamps and money orders, registered letters, and, in short, served as traveling Post Offices.

Carriers supplied their own transportation – usually horses and wagons until, in 1929, the Post Office Department noted that improved roads had led to “almost a complete change in rural delivery from horse-drawn vehicles to motor cars.”

In 1901, the Post Office Department operated the largest number of Post Offices in American history, 76,945. The next year, there were 1,000 fewer Post Offices, and the number continued to decline.

In 1907 the salaries of rural free delivery carriers increased to \$840 a year. Currently they were receiving \$720. Salaries for letter carriers will range from \$600 to \$1,100. In cities with a population of less than 25,000, the maximum will be \$900.

In July 1911 it was announced that the rural mail carriers will receive \$1,000 per year for their services.

In September 1911, the Montague Post Office was designated as a Postal Savings Bank. The object of the government postal bank was to give the people who are afraid of the security of banks and trust companies, and who hoard their savings to get their money back into circulation. The postal saving banks were operated under a very strict set of rules and regulation. Whitehall Post Office was also designated as a Postal Savings Bank.

In February 1915, Francis C. Hiscutt resigned his post as carrier on Route No. 1. As a token of his long service, he was presented with a gold headed cane. Hiscutt had served continuously since the RFD service was established in Montague in 1901. Francis Matson was appointed by the post office department in Washington to replace Hiscutt.

George D. Mason became postmaster in June 1916 and continued until his resignation at the end of 1947, after 31 years of service. A reception in the high school auditorium was held in his honor.

In July 1918, after more than 20 years at the same location, the post office moved across Ferry Street into the Kison building, a building that later became home to Hunt's Hardware.

The PO moved again in September 1931 to the corner space on the main floor of the Masonic Building (former White Lake Inn) on the corner of Water and Dowling.

In 1943, Fred Sweet and Earle Thompson were named rural carriers. They trained alongside Don Friday and Charles Ohrenberger, who were substitutes for W. C. Ford, who retired, and Francis Matson, who passed away.

In 1945, the Montague Post Office advanced to second class status, due to the volume of mail it was handling. The status change meant that the local staff is under civil service authority and that strict limitation of working hours must be observed.

Wilfred T. Thoma was appointed acting postmaster in February 1948, following the resignation of George Mason. Thoma was followed by Earle R. Thompson as Postmaster in June 1949, a position he held until his retirement in November 1963. Those who worked in the office during the time included: Ellamae Dahl, Arthur Stevens, Mrs. Leone Thoma, and Fred Sweet and William Degan, rural carriers.

With the lease on the space in the Masonic building due to expire in October 1951, the post office needed to find new headquarters. Also, the current space was only 1,000 square feet and the requirements were 1,800.

In September 1950, Walter Hunt began construction on a new Post Office building. The single story building with a basement measured 40 x 70 feet and allowed for 2,100 feet of floorspace. At the same time that the Post Office building was being built, the Bank and Professional building were also being

built. The construction of these buildings was in the area where the former Osmun block was once built back in 1897.

While the residents and businesses in Whitehall enjoyed the convenience of mail being delivered direct to them in October 1954, Montague had to wait a little longer.

In October 1959, Saturday delivery of mail began.

After Earle Thompson's retirement, Herbert Wayne Lynch was appointed as Postmaster in November 1963. He was reappointed in April 1964.

In February 1968, Post offices in this area of Michigan needed post office workers to fill vacancies to fill substitute clerk and carrier jobs. The starting pay was \$2.80 per hour. Regular increases raise this to \$3.60 per hour. Other benefits include career nature, job security, on the job training, low-cost health and life insurance, sick pay, vacation pay and retirement plans.

Following Lynch's retirement, Keith A. VanderWerp became Officer-in-Charge (OIC) in February 1985 and James D. Lorenz was appointed Postmaster in August 1985.

After 33 years with the postal service, Postmaster Jim Lorenz retired. He started his postal career by taking a part time job as a substitute clerk in 1965. During his time with the postal service, the zip code was first tested (in 1965) and two years later became regular use. When he started there were just 2 rural routes and now there were 4. There were about 850 customers per route and that number has doubled.

Kathleen L. Sanford became OIC in December 1998 and was appointed Postmaster in February 1999.

After being on a replacement list since 1988, plans for a new post office were finally beginning to become a reality. In February 2000, the Post Office moved from 8751 Ferry Street to a temporary location at 8603 Water Street, near Church Street, right around the corner from the City Market (now the location of the current City Hall).

The design of the new Post Office came from the U.S. Postal Service standard plans. The new building could be ready in 18 months. In June 2000, the site for the new building was selected - next to Montague Foods, between Water and the Supermarket.

In May 2001, the building of the new Post Office was put on hold by the U.S. Postal Service. Due to extreme financial problems, hundreds of construction projects nationwide and 45 sites in Michigan were stopped.

By 2005 the new Post Office building was constructed in the area where the former Park Theatre has been located.

Additional Postmasters and Officers-in-Charge (OIC) include: Anna Sanchez (OIC) January 2014; Ed Downs (OIC) July 2014; Lori Maycroft (OIC) September 2014; Tamara Wade (OIC) July 2015; Vita Trystad (OIC) November 2015; Michael Wilson (OIC) July 2016; Timothy S. Mulder (OIC) January 2017; Vicky Trejo (OIC) March 2017. Timothy S. Mulder was appointed Postmaster in April 2017. Vita Trystad (OIC) June 2017; and Troy M. Rhodes, appointed Postmaster in June 2018.