Do You Remember?

By Anne Homan

Livermore's Post Office

Where would we be without our postal system at this time of year? I know that many people like me have stood in long lines at the post office to mail a package. We have bought holiday stamps and have put our cards in a mailbox. And yet, the United States Postal Service, after Walmart the country's second largest employer, operator of the world's largest fleet of vehicles, is at the verge of bankruptcy. It has ended the year with deficits since 2007; last year, it lost $8.5 billion. Many helpful suggestions have been made—five-day delivery, closing half of the mail processing facilities, closing some post offices. To imagine Livermore without its post office is difficult.

Livermore's first post office was the Livermore Ranch post office, with Robert Livermore as postmaster. It operated from some time before its official confirmation on 28 July 1851 until the area was changed from Contra Costa County to Alameda County in 1853.

The federal government established a U.S. Post Office in Livermore on 7 July 1870; the first postmaster was Robert W. Graham, who had a store in Laddsville, the oldest section of Livermore near the intersection of Old First Street and Junction Avenue. Trains carried the mail to and from Livermore. Part of the postmaster's duty was to pick up incoming mail from the train and deliver outgoing mail after canceling the stamps by writing the date in longhand across them. Rubber stamps were not in use yet. For a brief time the post office was called Nottingham, but it soon became Livermore. The practice was for the post office to be inside a general store, which was to the advantage of the storekeeper of course because people coming to collect their mail were likely to purchase store items. One of the current methods of the U.S. Postal Service for saving money is to create "village" post offices, locating them in business like groceries or gas stations—obviously, not a new concept in Livermore. Local newspapers published lists alerting people who had not come by the store to pick up their mail.

The second postmaster was Henry Goetzen, who also had a store in Laddsville; it burned in the Laddsville fire of 1871. The third was Andrew J. McLeod, store owner in Livermore on Mill Square, whose tenure lasted 10 years. The post office was in front of his general store, with 175 private boxes. Mail came once a week. Dr. Louis H. Cutler, owner of the drugstore at K and First, kept the post office in the back of his establishment from April 1881 to October 1885. Post office patrons could come through the drugstore's First Street entrance, or through either of two entrances on K Street, one for gentlemen and one for ladies. George Beck took over postal duties from Cutler and moved the post office to his general store on First Street.

In 1894 D.J. Murphy opened a post office on the north side of First Street almost opposite J Street, next to the Wells Fargo office. This building served as town post office for 20 years. When Thomas E. Knox was appointed postmaster in 1903, he decided to remodel the premises. "Livermore is at last to have a post office which will be thoroughly up-to-date in its furnishings," commented the *Herald*. "The fittings and lock boxes in use up to this time have been a disgrace to the town. The fault does not lie with the incumbents as each in turn was compelled to purchase the fixtures of the office from his predecessor and naturally felt reluctant to expend money on office furniture when he realized his tenure of office was limited." Parcel post service began in 1912.

The first rural route was begun on 1 September 1911. George Beck & Sons offered government-approved rural delivery boxes of heavy galvanized iron for sale with name stenciling free of charge. Rural mail carrier George K. Taylor traveled 18 miles by horse and buggy on his route; by 1916 he was covering 30 miles by automobile. Ninety rural families were served with free mail delivery three times a week in 1917. When Taylor retired in July 1932 after nearly 21 years of service, his route encompassed 47 miles. His obituary in the *Herald* said, "Not only had he carried out the duties of his office, but. . . he put a personal touch in the service which has made him a friend of all he served."

Under the aegis of Michael G. Callaghan, postmaster from 1916 to 1933, a brick post office was built at the southeast corner of South J and Second Streets, with the main entrance on J Street. Its bricks painted beige, this building is still standing and has held several businesses since the post office left, including the Sears catalog store and Helen's Blossom Shop. Today, it houses the Mindful Moments Pilates Studio, Anita's Salon, and Livermore Valley Florist.

Finally, Livermore received approval for a federal building in 1937. Eight sites were considered, and the one at Second Street and South Livermore Avenue was chosen. City mail delivery began on 1 July 1939 with twice-a-day service to local homes and businesses; the first mail carriers were Roy Richey and F.W. Whaley. At the same time, ten collection boxes were positioned around the city. The cost of mailing a letter rose from one to two cents to pay for the delivery. The United States Post Office on South Livermore Avenue that serves the city today was dedicated on 2 March 1940.

(Readers can reach me at *am50homan@yahoo.com*.)