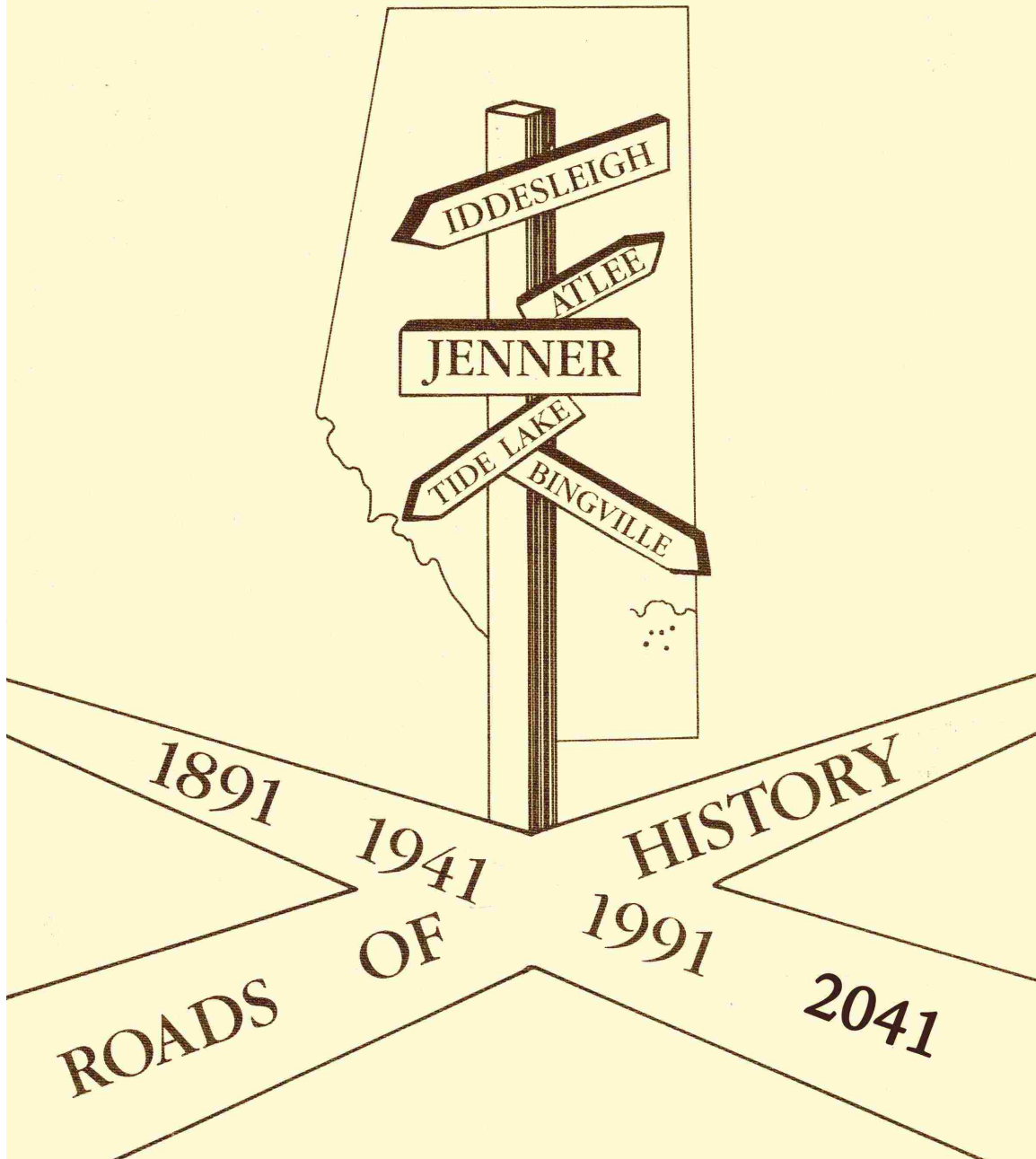


PRAIRIE CRUCIBLE



Crucible

a severe, searching test, or trial

I am a part time postal clerk at the Post Office in Brooks, Alberta. In making this submission to the [Canada Post Strategic Review](#) I hope to provide the Commission with some “in the trenches” insight into rural postal service.

This submission is based on my personal experiences as an R.S.M.C. on Rural Route 3 in south eastern Alberta, on other events that have been related to me by rural residents, and things I learned as part of my present role in the post office which includes receiving customer complaints and enquiries over the phone. I don't know whether Canada Post's actions in our area are representative of its national strategic plan for rural Canada. However the presentation given by Christine Burton on behalf of Rural Secretariat and the Cooperatives Secretariat at [Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada](#) contain statistics that lead me to suspect that RR3 is indeed typical. And as a federal institution it provides hope that there are positive influences that may prevail.

The first section (“[The Prairie Crucible](#)”) provides specifics for RR3 that led me to conclude that Canada Post has had one and only one rural strategy for decades - to ‘make progress’ by realizing savings through a reduction in the level of service.

The most visible sign of Canada Post's rural strategy is the ongoing closure of post offices. In instances where Canada Post relies on small business to perform postal services in the form of Retail Post Offices, they have negotiated so strenuously over the years that profit margins are compromised. Then at critical junctures – perhaps precipitated by retirement plans or when rural businesses change hands – there is no resale value in the Canada Post ‘franchise’. And so it closes.

While this strategy of reduction is inexorably playing itself out, one hopes that there is indeed a strategy that preserves the interests of rural Canada. Perhaps there are backroom attempts to nurture forward going relationships or cooperative strategies with large businesses, or with various municipal or provincial levels of government, or other rural service providers with whom synergies could exist. Forms of cooperation that could realize new or improved services for rural residents and businesses.

The second part of my submission envisions [The Future](#). I truly believe that we are on the cusp of being able to deliver a wide range of viable expanded services to rural areas, services that could be a factor in their very survival. If Canada Post somehow develops the will then they are more strategically positioned than anyone to bring a promising future to rural Canada.

Given my perception that Canada Post at best provides grudging support for its rural public service mandate, it is a stretch to choose them to be champions of the rural future. In view of the challenges that loom in front of rural Canada, many more services must be affordably delivered to help them to reshape the dynamics of rural living.

The Prairie Crucible

One day in 2004 at the Recycling Depot in Brooks, Alberta an ornamental plate caught my eye; it was just lying there on top of all the re-cycled glass. I reached in and pulled it out. The inscription on the front read: Iddesleigh Ladies Aid Society 1913-1983. It was in perfect condition.

Rural Route 3 provides mail service to Iddesleigh so I called Mrs. O about the plate. Having run the Post Office and General Store in Iddesleigh, she was a willing and knowledgeable source of assistance for me whenever an unfamiliar name or address cropped up on an envelope or package addressed for Iddesleigh. Incorrect and incomplete addresses are common on rural mail. Mrs. O. also happened to be

(see appendix page 73) which ran the Rainy Hills Pioneer Museum (the name 'Rainy Hills' is typical of the humour of the people in the area; this is one of the driest areas in Alberta). Mrs. O. said that the Iddesleigh Ladies Aid Society (see appendix pg 53&54) was still running and she suggested that I talk to _____, Mrs. B. Mrs. B. was very appreciative and told me that the Society continued to perform helping services like it always had.

She asked where I got the plate and I told her about the re-cycling bin. I could see her memory banks searching for possibilities. Powerful emotions flitted across her face - flashes of hurt, betrayal, disappointment and resolve. The plate's intended final destination seemed all too symbolic of the ongoing fight that one more person had given up on. Watching Mrs. B. I received the impression that it was almost as if someone had thrown Iddesleigh away.

Rural Route 3 (T1R 1E3)

Each morning I did all my sorting at the Brooks Post Office for my rural route run. My first stop was a parcel drop at a retail post office (R.P.O.) at a [grocery store](#) . Parcels that cannot be delivered to a Community Mail Box or to a residence or business receive a card in their Community Mail Box which is redeemed at the R.P.O. Reasons for carding a parcel include: parcels that are too big for the Community Mail Box parcel boxes, or that required a signature (but the customer wasn't home), or the parcel boxes are already full or a customer payment is required. The store's post office hours are from 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. seven days a week for a total of 91 hours per week of service - a real convenience for people compared to the downtown post office counter which is open only 40 hours per week.

After dropping a large load of parcels (at Christmas and after some long weekends there were 2 or 3 van loads) the rest of my trip was usually comparatively light work.

Millicent TOJ 2A0

My next stop was 25 kilometers north at the Community Mail Boxes in Millicent, right across the street from Uncle Tom's Cabin which was a renowned rural general store. It used to have the post office which moved when Uncle Tom's Cabin burned down in 1972, eventually ending up at the Community Center. Uncle Tom's Cabin was rebuilt and progressed to the point that it was recognized as Small Business of the Year for the County of Newell in 1998. epitomized customer service and caring for the interests of the community. remembers more than one occasion at the store when a family picked up groceries from Uncle Tom but money did not change hands.

The Post Office was closed as part of a national rural post office purge. At that time the residents led by held meetings (a big meeting was held at Cessford which was also closed down) and they fought hard to preserve their post offices but protests fell on deaf ears). Today there are three sets of Community Mail Boxes (called Site 1, Site 2 and Site 3) and four small parcel boxes at Millicent.

When the community used to have a post office a typical customer address would be:

John Q. Public
Box 13
Millicent, Alberta
T0J 2A0

Their new Community Mail Box address is different - something like:

John Q. Public
Site 2 Box 12
Millicent, Alberta
T0J 2A0

Sadly this new address format is not accommodated by the [Canada Post website](#). We all know that the internet is becoming a big part of our lives. A useful thing that you can do online is to conduct [postal code](#) searches. If you live in a city you will find this very useful. You can input an exact urban address and the postal code will be provided. There is also an area on the same page called [Rural search](#). Unfortunately the website does not accommodate the Community Mail Box address format. That is, it does not provide for Site numbers and their corresponding Box numbers. This adds unnecessarily to existing confusion about rural addresses when Community Mail Boxes are being used.

[Canada Post](#) wants to be part of the online revolution. You can obtain a lot of useful information online about [services and pricing](#) before you go to the post office. And some customers are empowered to help themselves. For example anyone who wants to send a mailer can plan their distribution of [Unaddressed Admail](#) (also called Householders) by selecting the specific combination of areas and types of customers (residence, business, farm, apartment) to whom they want to send a householder.

The Unaddressed Admail module points the way for us to have a look at a Canada Post database for rural T0J postal code areas:

If you start at the [Householder Counts and Maps](#) site and click on [Householder Accounts and Maps](#) at the bottom right then follow the links ([Current Householder Count Data](#) then [Consumers Choice](#) then [Alberta Rural Counts](#), the list of rural Alberta areas comes up).

If you go down to T0J 2A0 the mix of Millicent customers is shown. This information area says that Millicent is still an 'RPO' which stands for Retail Post Office. And it says that Cessford (T0J 0P0) is a 'PO' even though its post office closed in 1988 and now has only Community Mail Boxes. Similarly Wardlow (T0J 3M0) closed in 1995 and Patricia in 2005.

It bothers me that all those "R.P.O.'s" and "P.O.'s" are listed in the T0J postal code as if they are still open. I know that there is no Post Office in Cessford, and there are no Retail Post Offices in Millicent, Idlesleigh, Patricia or Wardlow. And those are just the ones that I know about personally.

I hope that this site is not being relied upon to produce all those statistics about the number of post offices.

Regardless, the inability to use the online postal code system for Millicent and the presence of inaccurate information in the Alberta Rural Counts is an indication of Canada Post's current lack of commitment to its rural postal services.

Patricia T0J 2K0

Ten kilometers east of Millicent is Patricia. The Dinosaur Country Store had a Retail Post Office until 2005. The Patricia bag service (a bulk mail drop) wasn't part of RR3 even though I drove right by the store on my way to Idlesleigh and Jenner; rather Canada Post duplicated costs by hiring a contractor at significant incremental expense to deliver the bag service to Patricia in a separate vehicle. This inflated the cost to Canada Post of maintaining the Patricia operation. Therefore the 'savings' showed themselves to be larger than they could have been when the R.P.O. was closed.

The Dinosaur Country Store at Patricia is important to the area – it provides valuable services for tourists and for its locals. And Dinosaur Country Store is 16 kilometers on the only road to and from Dinosaur Park which is one of only 34 UNESCO World Heritage sites in the world. Besides carrying typical general store products, they carry tourist oriented items and they are the only fuel stop within 40 kilometers of the park. The Patricia Post Office closed in 2005 over a compensation dispute with Canada Post.

To add insult to injury for Patricia, shortly after the post office closed someone stole the Dinosaur – no minor feat considering it was about twelve feet high. Maybe there's a bit of coincidental imagery in the community's concurrent loss of two of its long term landmarks.

When the post office closed Canada Post decided not to use the Brooks Retail Post Office at the grocery store in Brooks for Patricia parcels – rather they decided that Patricia customers would have to go to the main post office in Brooks even though it offers

significantly reduced service hours. Patricia citizens were used to picking up parcels at the Dinosaur Store day and night seven days a week. Canada Post could have at least maintain *that* level of service which would have been so easy to offer. Patricia customers now have to make a 45 kilometer round trip to get their parcels.

On the upside, a new and bigger Dinosaur will be constructed this fall at the expense of the [Royal Tyrrell Museum](#) (Drumheller) who do recognize the strategic importance of the Dinosaur Country Store as a convenience for tourists.

Iddesleigh T0J 1T0

Thirty three kilometers past Patricia is Iddesleigh whose post office closed in the 80's. Iddesleigh is a sparsely populated area located between two large unpopulated areas. To the northwest lies Dinosaur Park. To the southeast lies the Suffield Bloc, a vast military reserve used primarily by British Army Training Unit Suffield as well as Canadian Forces Base Suffield and Defence Research Establishment Suffield. These lands were expropriated by the federal government in 1941. Although their respective contributions to our history and to our safety are above question, the loss of population in these two formerly populated areas was a double whammy to the Iddesleigh/Jenner retail sector. It would be nice to think that when a small community makes a sacrifice in the provincial or national interest that an effort is made to reciprocate over time.

Address problems are all too common in Iddesleigh according to Mrs. S who told me a few days ago that "it certainly has not been fixed; it's worse than ever. We have mail going missing and utility companies are phoning mad".

There appears to be several contributing factors in addition to the Site/Box formatting issue: the Iddesleigh postal code T0J 1T0 was inadvertently left off the CD that Canada Post gives to large companies. A few years earlier they were told that "their postal code was being given to Innisfail" and they should start using T1R 1E3 (perhaps these are related). So there are two postal codes in use for the area.

This may be how problems arise: John Q. Public would tell the big company over the phone that his mailing address is:

John Q. Public
Site 2 Box 12
Iddesleigh, Alberta
T0J 1T0

The company would already have linked their mailing database to the Canada Post address and postal code database.

It would accept John Q. Public's name alright but then it wouldn't accommodate the Site/Box format. So the company would try something that the computer would accept. Often they would put "Box 212" into the post office box slot because the computer would at least accept that.

Then for some big companies when they input 'Iddesleigh' or the Iddesleigh postal code nothing would come up.

That is when they would be stalled and John Q. Public would call the post office who advised him to use the RR3 postal code which is T1R 1E3. So John Q. Public would call the company back and give them the postal code. The big company would input it and they would see that it would not accept the match of Iddesleigh, Alberta and T1R 1E3. But they saw that what it *would* accept was Brooks, Alberta and T1R 1E3.

So John Q. Public's address became:

John Q. Public
Box 212
Brooks, Alberta
T1R 1E3

And of course whoever had the *real* Box 212 at the Brooks post office would start getting John Q. Public's mail from the big company. Or it could go to Millicent because they shared the T1R 1E3 postal code.

Mrs. S says she can't even order blank cheques with the cute little rose in the corner. The Credit Union can print plain blank cheques for her but she likes the personal touch. So when the Credit Union places an order with the company that prints customized cheque blanks for them the customized cheques might arrive but the address would have been arbitrarily changed (probably to satisfy some address formatting requirement that comes from interfacing with the Canada Post database). Mrs. S went through this three times without success and became very nervous that the wrong person would get their hands on her cheques. Her Airmiles gift certificates disappeared and after the company verified that the certificates had not been used by someone else they finally issued new ones with the correct address. She would like to order more magazines but they are even more unreliable. For example, despite many efforts to change it her "Martha Stewart Living" comes with 'Brooks' on it". Some Iddesleigh residents resort to using 'General Delivery' as their address.

Jenner T0J 1W0

And finally, ten more kilometers to my last stop, Jenner, which has a small post office serving about eighty families. I performed a 'bag service' for Jenner, dropping off the mail which the postmaster sorted into the customer boxes. There is a 'paperback library' in the lobby area provided and maintained by the [Marigold Library System](#). This is an encouraging example of the kind of willpower that Libraries demonstrate in providing services to rural Alberta.

It *is* encouraging that Canada Post continues to give libraries a preferential parcel rate that makes it possible for library books to be delivered to customer mailboxes in rural areas. And that our Members of Parliament can communicate inexpensively via the mail. The fact that libraries are actually willing to pay Canada Post for the privilege of distributing their free books speaks powerfully about how they walk the walk in pursuing their public service commitment.

Transportation



Some of the staff at the Jenner Hotel would occasionally ask for a lift into Brooks. First they would pre-arrange their return trip then hit me up for a ride as I arrived at the Jenner Post Office. A surprising number of rural people don't have their own private transportation. 'Necessities' tend to go by the wayside when one lives in a marginalized environment. Although there are a few people in Jenner on bicycle just like the old days (see appendix pages 93 & 94).

One of my 'hitchhikers' gave me a book called the "Prairie Crucible", an 830 page volume that documented the area history and families. As I sifted through the "Prairie Crucible" I was impressed how they pulled together to get things done! Over the years various farm organizations (see appendix pgs. 64 & 65), an assortment of Co-ops (see appendix pgs. 67, 82 & 83) and of course the Idlesleigh Ladies Aid Society (see appendix pgs. 53 & 54) organized themselves to create local services that would otherwise not exist, and to help those in need. Since 1913 "their work has been one of service to one and all, with the help of everyone in the community" and "treats for the children were supplied by the AID before the consolidation of the schools. They took on the upkeep of the Rainy Hills cemetery (see Appendix pg.53): they provided significant and ongoing support to worthy causes such as the Calgary Children's Hospital, the Red

Cross and others. Once the Ladies Aid even bought a school and had it brought it to Iddesleigh. It took them seven years to get it there but they did it. Now *that* is willpower.

Some area families made the ultimate sacrifice for their country as their boys went to war and never came back.

A Renowned Customer

When I took over Rural Route 3 the first advice I was given was: “Watch out for in Iddesleigh”. The took over the family farm near Iddesleigh in 1961, the same year they were married. Their Community Mail Box is located right in Iddesleigh, ten kilometers from their farm. From the day that the Iddesleigh post office closed, Canada Post has been the bane of existence, and she has been very vocal about it for many years. Her calls to the Brooks Post Office are dreaded.

 is particularly passionate about the Western Producer which is supposed to arrive on Wednesdays. liked to make a weekly trip to Iddesleigh on Wednesdays so that she could have her Western Producer at the soonest possible moment. To the chagrin of everyone at the Brooks Post Office her precious weekly newspaper would occasionally be a few days late or it would mysteriously not arrive at all. And we would certainly hear about it if had driven all the way to Iddesleigh and back without the Western Producer in hand. It was even more frustrating for her if her R.S.M.C. was delayed for some reason and the mail arrived shortly after had made a wasted round trip. In mind everything was Canada Post’s fault, and more specifically the fault of the Post Office in Brooks. We at the Post Office knew that there were valid explanations: sometimes random bundles of Western Producers arrived in Brooks after Wednesday, and sometimes a copy or two would not have a label on them at all. Was one of them copy we would wonder? We tried to remember to check with her R.S.M.C. because like no other customer in the vast area covered by Brooks Post Office name and reputation were known to every staff person.

 Their R.S.M.C. always knew about these times because the Supreme mailbox would overflow. The volumes of mail received by rural customers is astounding, particularly the amount of admail, and it would take only a week or so for the box to be filled. When this happened the R.S.M.C. was supposed to bundle it and take it to the Jenner post office, leaving a card telling to pick up the mail at the Jenner Post Office. However in order to save the inconvenience of the additional trip, the R.S.M.C. would use one of the Parcel Slots for the overflow of Supreme mail; although actual parcels took precedence which would bump mail to Jenner. If a parcel has to be picked up in Jenner then it has to be done during the limited hours that the Post Office is staffed - only 24 hours per week. And you can’t phone there because the post office doesn’t have a phone. During our interminable conversations with over the phone, she would tell us at length how inconvenient this was as well.

Heaven forbid if Jenner Post Office ever closes. Jenner is 78 kilometers away from Brooks and the only other option, Ralston, is just as far. What an impact its closure would have on the area! And on the Brooks Post Office staff. Then she will have almost an hour to plan what she is going to tell us when she visits us at the post office in person!

Rural Post Office Service

There was a time when [Post Offices were part and parcel](#) (pg. 25-7) of the prairie scene. The federal government's commitment to its pioneers through the post office was indeed significant. If there were people, then there was a post office. It is interesting how political attitudes change.

The Future

Now let's flash forward to August, 2041. Everything that follows is based on existing technologies that will soon be affordable and practical in the commercial world and that will be intrinsic to the receipt, processing and distribution of goods, information and services

The stretch is not that such technological advances will not come to pass – they are inevitable - but can you imagine a Canada Post that somehow develops the will to implement modern technologies to pioneer expanded services for rural Canada? Canada Post with its vast distribution network is uniquely positioned to pioneer rural initiatives.

For the purposes of my story I have assumed that Canada Post has agreed to collaborate with an assortment of proactive rural champions in delivering expanded services.

There are exciting initiatives being brought forward in Alberta : the [Virtual Learning & Business Centre](#) has far reaching aspirations to empower rural Alberta through technology. The [Eastern Irrigation District](#) has for years pursued a path of bringing high speed internet to a huge area; [County of Newell](#) and the [City of Brooks](#) are collaborating on a regional water system. And the Libraries have demonstrated effective sharing and enhanced efficiencies through cooperative Systems.

Encouraging words come from [Agriculture and Agri-food Canada \(Rural and Cooperatives Secretariats\)](#) : “The assurance of continued access to the services of Canada Post to some 6 million Canadians living in rural Canada is a critical factor to building competitive and viable rural communities”.

And not least, many local businesses work hard to separate themselves from their competition through superior service.

Rural Alberta 2041

On a farm just north of Iddesleigh _____ hears the ‘Hockey Night in Canada’ refrain emanating from the next room. That familiar sound means that the R.S.M.C. has just deposited ‘mail’ for _____ at the [LADIES’ AID](#) at Iddesleigh (a number of years ago the [Virtual Learning & Business Centre](#) acquired the rights from CTV to use the song as a notification ring tone for its Rural Information System).

The cost of transportation is extraordinary in 2041; the phenomenon has forced rural Canada to change lots of old habits, most of which are related to finding ways to circumvent the need to travel. Virtual Learning & Business Centre has facilitated new services which bring timely information, and affordable goods and services, within proximity of the family farm. Years ago Provincial Government initiatives brought the [Alberta Supernet](#) to rural Alberta, empowering pioneers such as [EIDNET](#), who have built an ambitious wireless network that now links with the Supernet and delivers ‘the last mile’ to even the most remote areas.

On the goods and services side, local and national suppliers are able to affordably offer their wares and services at the LADIES’ AID (Automated Information Depot), which rely on pragmatic, mutually beneficial business relationships with logistics companies and Rural Cooperatives like LADIES’ AID in Iddesleigh and Uncle Tom’s E-Cabin in Millicent. As fast as Rural Cooperatives form to establish them, co-ops like the completely automated LADIES’ AID in Iddesleigh are springing up all over rural Alberta. Some refer to these completely automated service centers as super-vending machines.

_____ sits at her computer desk for a minute and views a summary of everything that has arrived for her in Iddesleigh. She sees that her digital copy of the Western Producer is in. Some years ago _____ switched from the relatively pricy paper version to the online version which is free; old habits die hard, but that birthday gift of a [Kindle](#) complete with a Western Producer subscription provided the impetus for change.

_____ always knows exactly what is in her box without having to go to Iddesleigh so she only makes the trip when it is worthwhile. And if there are no large packages to be picked up she will employ her bicycle or a horse, weather permitting.

_____ sees that the following items are waiting for _____ to pick up at LADIES’ AID:

1. A personal letter from her daughter (probably a Hallmark birthday card).
2. Two books, a magazine, a movie and an electronic version of [Walden](#) from the [Marigold Library System](#).
3. Online versions of the [Prairie Post](#), [the Adviser](#), and [the Country Bargainer](#).

_____ used to receive this ‘admail’ for free in hard copy but she has switched to the online versions because she receives a small credit on her LADIES’ AID account for viewing each of these rural distributions online. The advertisers know that rural folk are a lucrative market and they pass on part of their printing cost savings as customer credits.

4. A parcel with customs and handling charges of \$8.25. It's the replacement sump pump which due to its large size has to be stored in one of the large compartments at LADIES' AID. has been tracking the sump pump since she ordered it online a few weeks ago; as she watched its progress on her computer she saw that it quickly moved from the supplier warehouse to the U.S./Canadian border where it got hung up in customs for a week; it finally arrived yesterday. Her LADIES' AID account is being billed a daily fee of \$2 until she picks it up (the larger parcel compartments command a daily fee).
5. Several bills via the [epost](#) service. will download those at Iddesleigh because they too include mailers that will give her small credits.
6. The [online grocery order](#) from Marketplace Co-op in Brooks. sees that there are two compartments holding her groceries – one has dry goods and the other has frozen goods. She will also pick up some dairy items that are stocked in the Dairy and Deli section at LADIES' AID. The frozen goods compartment is rented by the hour so she doesn't want to waste much time getting to Iddesleigh. She must remember to bring her cooler to keep things safe until she gets them home.
7. A prescription from Brooks Medi-Plus Pharmacy. The computer notes that before she is allowed to retrieve it she is required to phone the pharmacist who wishes to discuss a few details with about using the medication.
8. The Western Producer

immediately phones the pharmacy and has a discussion with the pharmacist while they are both viewing the Prescription details on their respective computers. She informs of certain procedures that must be followed and is satisfied that understands. Just before their call ends the pharmacist releases the order from the LADIES' AID compartment by clicking on the appropriate box. sees on her computer that the restriction on the order has been released.

In 2008 it cost about five dollars in fuel to visit the Community Mail Box. In 2041 that cost is thirty-five dollars. It would be great to have one of those new efficient little cars but they just don't hold up to the rural gravel roads so that isn't an option. That's why horses, bicycles and green powered scooters have re-appeared on the rural landscape. It has been an incredible challenge to maintain roads to the standards of the early 21st century.

The [Trans-Canada Trail](#) has finally been embraced by rural Albertans because now they use the Trail for their own purposes. Indeed the Trans Canada Trail has become one of the [National Parks of Canada](#). It is billed as the longest, narrowest National Park in the world. Fortunately for Iddesleigh the Trail is nearby due to the proximity of Dinosaur Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Trail goes right through Iddesleigh because of the excellent Rainy Hills Pioneer Museum.

Because of the large load she will be bringing back from LADIES' AID, will need to drive today.

Half way to Iddesleigh picks up her neighbour's hired hand, . He is quite a sight riding walking along in his dirty straw cowboy hat with an [electronic cigarette](#) hanging out of his mouth and a bag of empties slung over one shoulder. "Got mail at Iddesleigh?" asked . "Not sure – my cell phone is broken. Will check when we get there. I'm just cashin' in my empties, pickin' up a few groceries, and gettin' a new cell phone". knew that 'a few groceries' probably meant coffee and cream and nicotine cartridges. Commonly used grocery items can be purchased at LADIES' AID.

Twenty minutes later they arrive at Iddesleigh in the old pickup truck. Years ago Community Mail Boxes were outside, a miserable proposition at best on cold, windy days. LADIES' AID is a secure, [energy efficient](#) facility attached to the Rainy Hills Pioneer Exhibits museum. The Iddesleigh LADIES' AID Co-op pays the museum a monthly stipend which helps it meet costs. This is a typical arrangement in hundreds of Alberta communities that gives the local economy a piece of the commercial action and provides local incentive to ensure its success.

and her neighbour pass their LADIES' AID Smart cards through the external slot and the entrance door opens (some particular fellows demand that 'LADDIES' AID' appear on their cards). Upon their entry a rousing rendition of "Happy Birthday" resonates through the room; is at first caught off guard and then seeing the look on face he realizes that it's her birthday and he happily joins in. is quite honoured that has actually removed the electronic cigarette from his mouth to sing Happy Birthday. can't help but smile. While this is happening the admail that has signed up for, plus the bills and [Walden](#), her movie and magazine are all discreetly downloading to her LADIES' AID smart card (it is ironic that in 2041 the [Marigold Library System](#) R.S.M.C. often delivers everything *except* physical library materials. Back in 2008 they delivered *only* library materials to the rural public libraries and schools. Today their product is mostly digitized, but they continue to fund themselves by being a trusted aggregator of rural delivery services for a host of companies including Canada Post).

knows that in accordance with their arrangements with the publishers, the Kindle is programmed to delete [Walden](#) from its memory after the three week free rental period has elapsed.

When gets home she will insert her smart card in its slot in the computer and it will automatically upload the new information to her computer, her Kindle etc.

goes straight to her mail box on the south wall and opens her private box with a key. sorts through her mail and finds the smart cards for the sump pump, the groceries and her prescription. She goes to the north wall and passes the card by the various public storage compartments. The card 'finds' her compartment containing the sump pump (and of course the theme song from Hockey Night in Canada belts triumphantly throughout the room). The compartment door opens and satisfies herself that the package is in good shape and that the charges are correct. removes the sump pump from the compartment and throws it in the back of the pickup (the information system uses a

combination of [nanosensors](#) and [R.F.I.D.](#) technology which are linked with logistics/administrative software. When it detected that the package was being removed; it automatically charged the Supreme LADIES' AID account for the customs and handling fees and for the use of the large compartment. It also sent an immediate notification to the supplier that their package had been picked up).

At the end of the month will pay her LADIES' AID account using epost.

thinks back to the annoying times when she had to go all the way to Jenner during limited hours to pick up her parcels and mail bundles. The sump pump would never have fit in the old parcel boxes at the Community Mail Box sites. She appreciates the timely receipt of notification at home as her packages and mail arrive – and most of all - knowing exactly what has arrived and how it is being stored at the LADIES' AID. She is empowered like never before to maximize services while minimizing costs.

Meanwhile has finished returning his [empties](#) and his LADDIES' AID account has been credited. He feels a hunger pang and heads toward the Deli and Dairy compartment. He opens the doors and a draft of cool air emanates from the temperature controlled room. Advancements in solar power and geothermal technology have enabled many capabilities such as cold storage that were previously too expensive.

looks over the selection of sandwiches. He chooses a loaded pastrami sandwich from the Brooks Hotel. It has an imminent expiry date on it, but he will save a couple of bucks for choosing this almost stale-dated product.

[Food safety isn't a big problem anymore](#) – technology enables hundreds of tiny nanosensors to reside in virtually every food product. The sensors are designed to monitor and detect every known virus, bacteria or toxin and to give status updates wirelessly to in-house information systems. is just happy to stretch his money for the Saturday poker game.

needs a National Xpresspost envelope to send a volley of advice – along with the very cow paddy that almost caused her to fall off her bike on the Trans-Canada Trail - to “those dimwits in Ottawa”. She could do a better job of maintaining the Trail herself with a snow shovel.

She inserts her card into the appropriate well-labeled slot and removes one of each size of Xpresspost envelopes. Once again the R.F.I. D. system detects her purchases and debits her account accordingly. selects the smallest envelope that will hold the cow paddy and she puts the others back. The system detects the return of some items and credits her account on the fly. It also matches I.D. on the envelope for future tracking.

 picks up some stamps. They too have nano-sized R.F.I. D. chips embedded in them so that those receiving mail from will be notified via the Canada Post information system that a letter from is in their mail box (in the same way that knew that a letter had arrived today from her daughter).

had a bit of an accident recently and his old cell phone is resting in peace at the bottom of an outdoor biffy. Bummer. He passes his card through the slot for the compartment labeled 'Cactus Phone Booth' and it opens. looks through the selection and sees that the cheapest one is a refurbished model called the Cactus Re-Pete. Luckily it fits nicely into his old phone holster and he decides to buy it. He powers it up and a few seconds later his Re-Pete rings; it's the Cactus Phone Center in Brooks. Customer service already knew that was looking at phones – their rural information management saw him insert his smart card, then the supplier screen showed in near real time which model he had withdrawn from the Cactus Phone Booth in Iddesleigh (if doesn't made a purchase today he will start receiving admail from Cactus which would have given him credits on his LADDIES' AID account). The Cactus Phone Center confirms that indeed wants to buy the phone and they quickly port his phone number to the Re-Pete. His LADDIES' AID account is billed and the Cactus Phone Booth inventory management system notes that another Re-Pete needs to be shipped to Iddesleigh.

Meanwhile goes to the General Store Section on the west wall and browses through a few compartments with their ever changing displays: smart cellular phones, Hallmark greeting cards, electronic cigarette products, and many more. The greeting card collection never ceases to amaze ; years ago she decided that she trusted LADIES' AID to link her "important occasions" personal profile with the Rural Information System which enables suppliers including Hallmark to customize their small displays. The compartment displays items that they anticipate will match local personal shopping profiles according to their predicted buying preferences and timetables. So the R.S.M.C. is a lot busier at Iddesleigh these days – despite a small decline in population over the years it is now a full time job seven days a week to cover the old part time Canada Post Rural Route because of all the additional services that are available.

passes her card by the grocery section and the doors open to her compartments. She removes the frozen items, inspecting each one as she transfers them to her cooler. Everything seems fine. The freezer compartment senses that it is now empty and the refrigeration unit stops running.

Meanwhile has gone to another section and is looking at the 'Garths in Brooks' electronic cigarette compartment. The increasing price of cigarettes has forced into using the electronic version. They aren't bad and they're cheap and unlike the real version, they are legal in public places.

Meanwhile at Uncle Tom's Co-op in Millicent a local hears the sound of a truck approaching at high speed. It slides to a halt and someone passes their card through the slot. The door bursts open.
"Hi J.Q." says her neighbour. "How's things?"
"Can't talk right now" says J.Q. "The son got himself trapped under a baler just down the road – it might be bad."
"Quite a time to visit the Post Office!"

“I’m just grabbing the interactive wireless video camera so that EMT and Central Medical Services can see what’s going on; they are on their way from Brooks but that’ll take another twenty minutes.”

“At least the key people will all have seen what they’re going to be dealing with.”

“ is on the way with his picker truck. I’ll send him some video too.”

J.Q. flashes his card in the video camera slot. The information system posts to J.Q.’s LADIES’ AID account the time that rental of the camera started. J.Q. has come and gone in less than a minute.

This application is used not only to serve human emergencies, but to ‘bring’ veterinarians in far away places to farm animals, to connect centralized operations offices with field personnel via interactive audio and video, it provides real time multi-media to disaster services centers, and of course helps to deal with accidents and emergencies.

By far the greatest use of the service is to connect distance learning centers with isolated rural students. This powerful technology has been advancing for years. The [ATCO Tyrrell Learning Center](#) at the Royal Tyrrell Museum began to use videoconferencing as an educational tool back in 2008.

Surging fuel prices led to severe limitations in the use of the school bus. But thanks to videoconferencing technology home schooling is doing very well. Those who have the means are set up at home through the EIDNET. Students can also meet weekly at facilities like Uncle Tom’s Co-op (for which the School Board pays rent) to interact with the best teachers in the land are now virtually connected with area students. Traveling distance learning facilitators are in attendance on a regular basis. And Uncle Tom’s Co-op ensures that the education programs are completely inclusive regardless of social status.

When gets home she will call the Post Office in Brooks and give them a blast about the volume level of the sound system at the Iddesleigh LADIES’ AID. Can’t they turn it up a bit? Some things will never change...

Conclusion

“A Letter from the West” by J.T. Horricks (see appendix page 96, 97 & 98) was written during the second world war. Its concluding statement applies more than ever today:

“The present society of the Prairie, like Topsy in Uncle Tom’s Cabin, just grewed. The real society, not yet born, needs to be created, and can be, out of our common vision and collective effort.”



Time marches on!

Iddesleigh Ladies' Aid Society



Let's prepare for the future

1913 – present

pgs. 53 & 54