

Acknowledgments

This account has been adapted by Austin McCallum from a detailed history of postal services prepared for the Ballarat Historical Park Association by Mr. Harry La Roche, a retired District Postal Manager. Mr. La Roche has helped the Association immeasurably since the decision was made to build the Ballarat Post Office of 1854 at Sovereign Hill. His meticulous regard for research detail, his infectious enthusiasm and his contacts with the Australian Post Office, have made it possible to complete the project without compromising a policy of authenticity. His valuable history, of considerable length, includes notes on telegraph and telephone services, postage stamps and franks; handstamps mail handling methods and equipment and other important detail. The manuscript, in the possession of the Association, is available on request.

Thanks of the Association are also due to the following persons: Mr. Fred Foster, District Postal Manager; Mr. D. N. Baker, Post Office Historian — Victoria; Officers of the A.P.O. who willingly advised and assisted, and the Sovereign Hill Post Office sub-committee comprising, Fran. O'Sullivan, Sheila Sutton and Austin McCallum.

12 September, 1972



WALLER & CHESTER, PRINTERS, BALLARAT

BALLARAT POST OFFICES

SINCE THE GOLD DISCOVERY OF

1851



their fortunes on the diggings, but also because administrative staffs were geared to the earlier, less demanding era of the pastoralists. Neither La Trobe nor Hotham, who replaced him in June 1854, understood the human difficulties under which honest but hard-pressed officials like Pain were working. Fortunately, Hotham's replacement, Sir Henry Barkly, possessed tact and administrative skills to oversee the introduction of responsible Government in Victoria. Although the First Parliament of 1856-59 was a disappointing failure, the departments and services, released in part from the often stupid directions and hindrances of the Colonial Office, were at last able to solve local problems in a local environment. Postal services were among the first to gain a reputation of efficiency.

At Ballarat, as in other townships, postal service from the windows was the main cause of congestion. The appointment of a letter carrier brought some relief. In 1857, David Lillingstone became Ballarat's first postman. In the same year, Post Offices were opened at Ballarat East in Main Road; the stores of Evans' Bros., Main Road; O'Conner's, Specimen Hill; Ryan's, Brown Hill, and Jameson's, Caledonian.

The wooden Post Office and Postmaster's residence survived only four years. Local Government arrived with the election of Councils for Ballarat West (1856) and Ballarat East (1857). Institutions, societies and sporting clubs were proliferating. These community builders consolidated local loyalty, residential pride, rivalry, human relations and social status. The day of the rough-necked itinerant digger was past; the alluvial gold was almost worked-out but the deep leads were yielding incredible riches. Mining changed its style and its tempo depended on capital. The companies arrived with machines and a technology which nurtured local industry and demanded a settled workforce — the crucial needs of permanence and growth. Ballarat was now important enough, in the view of the Parliament, for a new Post Office in the solid style of public buildings of the period. Postal business was transferred to a new bluestone building at the north-east corner of Sturt and Lydiard Streets on 10 September, 1858, and like the wooden one it provided a residence for the Postmaster.

A report on the new Post Office in *The Ballarat Times*, 11 September, the day after the opening, was mildly grateful:

"The Ballarat Post Office has now got to the third stage in the gradual development of Victorian Public Buildings. First it was the cloth, then it was of wood, now it is a substantial bluestone, and as it happens, the third building is situated very near the spot where the original Post Office Tent stood."

However, the building immediately came under attack from the public and the newspapers. Its inadequacies and ugliness angered the population. *The Ballarat Star* said it was "so ugly that only a Government Architect could have designed it."

The rough bluestone "monstrosity" was demolished in November, 1859, to make way for a larger, more ornate building. It was rather grudgingly accepted as more appropriate on a site described as "the heart of Golden Ballarat."

Given a chance the 1859-63 Post Office might have stood the test of time; but these were times of rapid change and administrative ostentation. Optimism about the future was demonstrated by the grand facades of public buildings and public men. Although only a Borough, (the City of Ballarat was not proclaimed until 1870) the town was holding a large population — with Ballarat East, more than 40,000 (estimated). A huge quantity of gold was coming from the mines; there was no shortage of capital for investment as new companies were floated; and a pervasive local patriotism developed — (only outsiders called it parochialism). For these reasons Ballarat was financially and politically important to the State of Victoria. As grandeur was the architectural order of these prosperous days, the Government opted to build a Post Office for posterity in recognition of Ballarat's success and with hope for her future.

The magnificent building, still standing today, was begun in 1863 and opened 29 November, 1864. The contractors were Broadbent, Watson & Co. The cost was £4,586/10/0 with fittings installed by Noble for £232/6/0. There have been many internal alterations since 1864, and some external changes, but basically, after a life of 118 years, its appearance is unchanged. Today's Post Office is recognised by the National Trust and the people of Ballarat as a beautiful building which is worthy of preservation. It is a truly permanent monument to the golden days of Ballarat's history and a reminder of the men who served in the Post Offices from the Gold Discovery until today.

BALLARAT POST OFFICES SINCE THE GOLD DISCOVERY OF 1851

"And he wrote . . . and sealed it with the king's ring, and sent letters by posts on horseback, and riders on mules, camels, and young dromedaries."

Old Testament: Esther viii, 10

Foundation

For thousands of years, wherever man has been able to write and read, the posts have made it possible for him to communicate over long distances. People of long ago eagerly anticipated the postman's arrival, just as they do today. At Port Jackson in 1788 the First-fleeters on the day of landing began to write letters home. When the transport Lady Juliana arrived in July, 1790 there were letters for the free men of the new settlement and perhaps for the convicts also.

The records do not show the methods used to handle mail until a notice appears in *The Sydney Gazette*, 10 July, 1803. Regulations for "Passage Boatmen" between Sydney and Parramatta are given, together with authorised charges for various services, among which are included "letters, exclusive of Government Services, each two pence."

Apparently there were no further mail regulations until this notice was published, 25 April, 1809:

"Complaints have been made to the Lieutenant Governor that numerous frauds have been committed by individuals repairing on board ships on their arrival at this port and personating others, by which they have obtained possession of letters and parcels to the great injury of those for whom they were intended.

"The Lieutenant Governor, in order to prevent the practice of such frauds in future, has been pleased to establish an office at which all parcels and letters addressed to the inhabitants of this Colony are to be deposited previous to their distribution, which office shall be under the direction of Mr. Isaac Nichols, assistant to the Naval Officer, who has entered into security for the faithful discharge of trust reposed in him."

This order went on to outline the method of handling the mail by Nichols and indicated the charges he could make for his services. Its effect was to establish the postal service in the Colony of New South Wales with Nichols as Australia's first Postmaster.

Victoria

Victoria was still part of New South Wales when the first post office was opened at Melbourne, 13 April, 1837. John Batman, who two years earlier had found "a place for a village", was appointed to supervise the incoming and outgoing mail carried in ships. Post Offices were opened at Geelong, June 1840, and at Portland, the following November.

At the beginning of 1845 a Post Office was opened at Buninyong which with the coming of the squatters, had become a thriving service township for the pastoral stations to the north and west. There is some evidence that a storekeeper, John Adams, carried mail from Buninyong to the squatters in the region.

James Esmond found gold at Clunes, 29 June, 1851. Thomas Hiscock, the Buninyong blacksmith, also found gold in a gully less than a mile from the township. According to the *Report from the Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the Claims for the Discovery of Gold in Victoria*, 10 March, 1854, the opening of the Ballarat Goldfield followed naturally upon the neighboring discovery of the fields of Clunes and Buninyong.

Ballarat

The lack of adequate postal facilities to meet the resultant influx of gold seekers soon became known to His Honor the Superintendent of the Port Philip District, Charles Joseph La Trobe, who sanctioned the Chief Postmaster's proposal to appoint John Adams as Ballarat's first Postmaster, 1 November, 1851, only two months after Dunlop and Regan found the first gold of the amazingly rich Ballarat East Goldfield. At first the Post Office was conducted from Adams' Store which was located near Magpie Street, a stone's throw from Sovereign Hill, in an area still known as Old Post Office Hill. This was also the site of the first Government Camp on the diggings. The rapidly increasing population prompted the authorities to plan a township. W. S. Urquhart completed the survey west of the Yarrowee, 26 December, 1851. The Township was proclaimed, May, 1852.

The Government Camp moved to a new position on Camp Hill, a spacious area bounded by Sturt, Lydiard and Mair Streets. The Post Office was also removed from Golden Point to a site near the corner of Camp and Sturt Streets. The accommodation provided was a tent and this was later shifted to the south-west corner of Lydiard and Mair Streets. Adams was still recognised as Postmaster, although the custody of the office was delegated to an employee, W. J. Cartwright, who performed his duties in the tent, scathingly referred to by *The Geelong Advertiser* correspondent, Alfred Clarke, as "dark, dirty, and neither rain nor sun proof, and which momentarily threatens disintegration."

By 1853 the demand for better postal facilities was strong enough for the Government to give urgent consideration to vociferous complaints from ill-used customers. On 1 September, 1853, the tent was raised in status from a Country Post Office, which today would be called Non-Official, to an Establishment, today called Official. Charles Herbert Pain, a clerk from the Castlemaine office, was promoted to the position of Ballarat Postmaster at a salary of £250, rising to £300 in 1855. Pain's assistant was Cartwright, who ceased duty, 19 April, 1854. Another man, on strength as tent-keeper, was paid eight shillings a day for his services.

Early in 1854 a plan for a building was prepared by Henry Bowyer Lane, Clerk of Works to the Colonial Architect. Lane wrote on the margin of his plan:

"This design has been made in express accordance with the views of the Inspector of Country Post Offices. If approved by His Excellency, the Lieut. Govn. this building could be erected in the course of two months on the township reserve. Meantime temporary accommodation has been provided for the P.O. on the Camp."

The plan was approved. Work began some time in April; but before then *The Geelong Advertiser* correspondent had a few things to say.

3 April, 1854.

"Postal facilities to 20,000 diggers are supposed to be amply provided by a tattered tent, open at both ends. A dirty canvass drop scene, with two slits in it, interposes between the sanctity of Post Office mysteries and the blue-shirted crowds outside. The process of sorting is carried on as best it may, and letters and papers are placed on an iron stretcher where the parcels lie exposed until the owner calls, covered with dust, unless carried away by the whirlwind and scattered over the flat. When the mail bags arrive at the Ballarat Post Office, the Ballarat Postmaster General's operations bear a striking resemblance to the performance of Toby the Learned Pig, he — not the Pig, but the Postmaster, having the letters strewn in a circle on the ground, from which he is called to select as ordered. If we call the Postmaster Toby, it will simplify the affair.

"Imagine then, Toby to be the "Man of Letters" grumbling under excessive and ill-paid labour, unassisted in a Government pig-sty, under the auspices of Victoria Regina, duly Lionised and Unicorned. A noisy, anxious, pushing crowd elbow their ways up to the slit in the canvass drop and shout for all the Browns, with or without the alphabetical prefixes, from A to Z and plain "misters" and "missuses" besides — then the Smiths and Smythes come on, followed by the numerous Joneses, and tribes of others in vast array, and all the time, Toby is gyrating like a weather cock, his hands plying fast as an electric telegraph, handing a letter to one, a paper to another and his head shaking negatives to unsuccessful applicants at the same time

"Toby the Pig is well-housed, but the Ballarat Postmaster, under Royal patronage, sinks to bunk as little cared-for as any aborigine, and lies wrapped in newspapers, with a bundle of letters as a pillow and a mail-bag for a night-cap, after closing the Ballarat Government Post Office with a skewer, and wakes, that is, if he sleeps at all, to witness his canvass curtains rent asunder, and papers and letters blown out of their envelopes or sodden into illegibility and pulp by a heavy shower passing through the canvass roof and conferring a shower bath gratis."

After that condemnatory effusion *The Advertiser*, 17 April, reported with unusual decorum:

"It was noted that the new Post Office at the corner of Lydiard and Mair Streets was progressing slowly because of bad weather. It was expected that the new building would be occupied about 10 June."

And then briefly on 1 June:

"The old Post Office tent would make a splendid bonfire to greet the arrival of Sir C. Hotham."

At last, after three years of improvisation, the Ballarat Township had a respectable Post Office. In 1856, S. T. Gill, on one of his regular visits, made a drawing of the west side of Lydiard Street showing the Post Office in the foreground and looking up the road to Bath's Hotel. The drawing was subsequently engraved by J. Tingle and in 1857 it was published in *Victoria Illustrated* together with 45 drawings by Gill of "the streets, suburbs, rivers, etc., in and about Melbourne and Geelong, including the principal Goldfields — Ballarat, Creswick Creek, Castlemaine, Bendigo, etc."

A study of Lane's plan and elevation, along with Gill's drawing, shows that the goldfield's artist faithfully depicted an important early public building and Sovereign Hill architect, Ewan Jones, and builder, Jeff Taylor, have been as faithful to history as Gill. The Post Office at Sovereign Hill is a replica of an historically significant building. It is intended that its functions will be as near as possible to those of the period when its hard-pressed staff tried to cope with the demands of an impatient, high-spirited, and at times, rebellious population. The Eureka Affair was less than six months away from the time of the Post Office opening; the diggers who had recourse to postal services were disgruntled, ill-tempered and loudly complaining.

Pain's letters, mainly of complaint, to Alexander McCrae, the Postmaster General, were delightfully human. His persistence with pleas for additional staff were ultimately successful. He worked day and night; he paid an assistant out of his own pocket; he threatened to close the office "not from any unwillingness, but from sheer exhaustion"; and on 28 May, the Inspector of Country Post Offices, C. H. Watts, joined him in complaint:

"For the last three days I have seen the office perpetually surrounded by crowds of applicants, — all complaining of the delay they sustained, yet all satisfied with the zealous and civil alacrity exhibited by Mr. Pain and Mr. Scott, — the whole establishment. On Sunday, both these gentlemen were sacrilegiously engaged in sorting for Monday's delivery, the newspapers, which with an adequate staff would have been delivered on Saturday."

The congregation of irate diggers on Friday nights was beyond the control of the police on duty — usually two. *The Ballarat Times and Southern Cross*, first published 4 March, 1854, the Township's first paper actually published in Ballarat, reported "brawling and fisticuffs, bloody heads and serious injuries" and demanded more police to control the crowd on Friday nights. McCrae was blamed for not providing more staff. Actually McCrae was asking Governor Hotham for increased salaries for Pain and his staff, and for an extra clerk as well. Hotham, on 11 October, replied through Moore, the Assistant Colonial Secretary, that two clerks ought to be enough when the postal staff in England's large cities did not consist of more.

On one occasion the distressed Pain reported that while he was writing, the pressure of the crowd outside was increasing to frightening proportions. "Although I personally applied for the aid of the police, my request could not be complied with, no men being at liberty . . . for the service required; the front of the building was in considerable danger, and one of the windows broken."

Ballarat was not the only place with acute staff and service problems. The amazing influx of gold-seekers from Great Britain had caused chaos. Public services were disrupted not only because public servants and officials left their posts to seek