

## FROM SHELTON JENNINGS

### The Henly Post Office

(This is a written extension of an extemporaneous presentation which I gave at the Henly Homecoming in 2006)

The Henly post office was established in 1881 by M. L. Reed and was located in his store. Subsequent postmasters included William A. McCarty, O. T. Anderson and Overton H. Oldham. In 1922 (apparently), John M. Ross bought the store from Mr Oldham and became postmaster.

Mr Ross, who was my grandfather and here after will be referred to as Grandpa or Grandpa Ross, had been postmaster of Mount Sharp. The post office there was in his home; this was a common practice in small rural settlements in those days.

What I have to say will be based on my memories of the post office in the 1930's; we lived with Grandpa in a house adjacent to the store.

The post office itself occupied a corner near the front entrance of the store. There were mail boxes which

are now displayed at the Henley Baptist Church.

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They were not accessed with keys as is today's practice. People simply asked for their mail; no problem with that since Grandpa knew everybody who got mail there.

The mail was brought from Austin by the mail carrier who probably was on contract to the Post Office Department (<sup>predecessor of</sup> ~~name of what is now~~ the US Postal Service) and not an actual employee of the Department. Of these carriers, I remember Mr. Boring who was from Austin. Much later, of course, Earl Parsley and then his son, Robert Earl, was the carrier. Leaving Austin with the mail, he delivered mail to post offices in Cedar Valley, Dripping Springs, Mount Gainer and Henley. From the Henley post office, he proceeded, putting mail in mail boxes along the road, to Mr Kelly's store, near the Blanco County line. Then back to Henley, Dripping Springs, and Austin. He also had a paper route; that is, he delivered the Austin American to subscribers along the way. And he was not

averse to giving ~~and~~ rides to people he knew on occasion.

Grandpa Ross was extremely conscientious in the handling of mail, making extreme efforts to see that people got their mail. There was little of any usage of sending letters to the "dead letter" office or of returning mail to the sender.

In those days, people ordered baby chicks from hatcheries who mailed the chicks in cardboard boxes. When they came to the post office, Grandpa made every effort to see that they were picked up quickly to reduce the chances of chicks dying before they reached their final destination.

In those days, letter postage was 3 cents, post cards one cent. And people used post cards for ~~not~~ real communication. There was very little junk mail. There was a lot of ordering from catalogues, especially Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward, as well as some lesser mail order companies, for example, National Bellas Hess.

In the post office, there was a safe (with a combination lock on a knob), in which stamps, forms, money, etc, was kept at night. Only post office money; the money for the store was concealed in a bin containing pinto beans. One night the store and post office were burglarized. The burglars attempted to beat the knob off the safe, but were scared away when my father, Lewis Jennings, hearing the noise, but not knowing from where it came, went out into the yard in an attempt to find the cause of the noise. Since it stopped, he didn't explore further but went back inside the house. The next morning when Grandpa went to open the store, he discovered the front door open and the safe resting on its side on a large bag of beans. They had not been able to get the safe open and very little was missing from the store. The burglars were never caught.

Finally, Grandpa gave up the postmastership and was succeeded by his daughter, Pauline Jennings, who had been his assistant. Later postmasters were Hilger Haywood and Ruth Gravenor.

Ross Shelton Jennings