

History of Rural Route # 3 Out of Pine City

When Benjamin Franklin, the first postmaster, developed the mail-route system used in the United States, it is doubtful he had any idea of what enormous volumes of mail would someday be delivered this way. While the first routes established were limited to the Eastern regions during Franklin's time they followed the pioneers on their western advances. Pioneers were bent on carrying civilization to all parts of the United States. As homes developed behind the frontier, mail routes became a necessity.

Leaders in the field of development of this mail service gave untiring efforts to see it developed in each area as farming regions developed too far from a village to make a daily trip to the village to get the mail. Such a leader as this was George R. Laird.

Mr. Laird lived in Eagon, South Dakota, where he had a mail route. He came to the Pine City area about the year 1900. He built a home north of the former Mark Smith farm in Meadowlawn. This was a long way from town. There was no mail route out of Pine City at this time. Mr. Laird, having been a rural carrier, was eager to have a route to give service to the region where he lived. He set about to obtain this service. It was necessary for Mr. Laird to obtain enough signers to petition the Postal Department at Washington, D. C. to establish the route. Mr. Laird personally visited the pioneers of the area to obtain their signatures as a specified number was required for this petition.

At this time road conditions in the area were not good. The roadways were laid out on section lines but little work had been done to make the roads passable even for the vehicles of that day. Logs were laid in swamp areas to make a foundation for the road bed.

Dirt was hauled over these logs to make a corduroy road so that wagons and carts would not cut into the mud. The best road at this time was the Government road which connected the Twin Cities with Duluth.

The Postal Department, upon inspection of these roads, found conditions favorable for the development of the route. The route was established and Mr. Laird became the first mail carrier to the Meadowlawn region. He left his home in Meadowlawn to move to town so he could report daily at the post office to prepare the mail for his journey around the route.

The route was established to go to Beroun then eastward, then southward to the old Frank Heath farm now occupied by Fred Rose. From this corner it served the people east of here to Meadowlawn, turning southward and then westward to the Government road to cross the river, then on into Pine City. This route was not established to serve all of the people of Meadowlawn as some pioneers were served by a carrier from Hinckley.

Mr. Laird carried the mail on his route with a "span of horses" as he called them. These horses were his pride and joy. They were high spirited and gave Mr. Laird many exciting moments on his route. When his daily trip was made he enjoyed telling the stories about the excitement they had caused him.

Mr. Laird decided to move back to Eagon, South Dakota in 1908. There he became a rural carrier again and retired from his route there. His leaving Pine City left a vacancy on Route #3. This vacancy was filled by the appointment of Walter Stephan as substitute carrier for the route. He was carrier for about a year and a half when Joseph Thiry became regular carrier. Mr. Thiry was carrier on this route for nine years.

During the years Mr. Thiry carried mail the roads were improved. Service for patrons of Route #3 was also improved although some patrons received every other day service. This was considered good service during this period.

Mr. Thiry provided himself with a special cart for mail-carriers. This was designed to provide him with more comfort in riding as it was equipped with special springs. He had the same concern for his horses' comfort as for himself. For them he had a feed bag to provide food on the daily journey. This was fastened like a nose bag. While the horse was walking they would jolt their heads up and down. By this action the food was thrown into the horse's mouth. The horse had to be taught to use this bag.

When Mr. Thiry resigned from his position as carrier in 1917, Peter Resch was appointed temporary carrier for Route #3. In 1918 Mr. Resch was appointed regular carrier. That same year Mr. Resch purchased a 1917 model Ford to carry the mail. This was the first time a car had been used to carry mail on Route #3. This car was used only in the summer and horses were used during the winter.

Mr. Resch was called into the service of the country during World War I in June 1918. During the time of Mr. Resch's leave of absence for war service Maurice Weinberger, John Resch, and Jim Cherrier were substitute carriers. In May of 1919 Mr. Resch returned to his duties as mail carrier.

While Mr. Resch was carrier on Route #3 he saw many changes take place in the region Route #3 served. Roads were developed from horse and buggy trails to graded gravelled roads. Shortly after Mr. Resch's return from war service the part of the route receiving every other day service was changed to provide daily service for these patrons. This lengthened the route considerably.

Later on other changes were made providing better service for all the people of Meadowlawn and Chengwatana.

Much of the land was a wilderness with intermittent farm lands when Mr. Resch first carried mail on this route. Today this area has farm homes equal to the best throughout the state. Prosperous farmers are operating their farms by tractors and all patrons own cars.

With the coming of the general use of the automobile the horse and buggy era was also taken over by the mechanized era. For a period of time it was difficult to know what sort of vehicle to use during the winter. Roads had to be graded up for automobile travel. This made winter driving with horses almost impossible as the wind blew the snow off the roads for many miles. At other places the snow drifted so deeply that a sled or cutter were the only practical vehicle to drive. This was the most difficult period for rural carriers. During these trying winters Mr. Resch encountered so many difficulties that he decided a snowmobile was the answer to this driving problem. This did not prove to be too successful. A snowmobile was too expensive to operate, too time consuming, and breakdowns on the road were too many. It was not only the mail carriers who had difficulties during this period. Farmers also needed better means of travel for winter driving. The county and town boards saw it was necessary to keep the roads open for car travel throughout the winter. This was the greatest help to rural mail carrying.

Mr. Resch was the regular carrier on Route ##3 until 1947 when he was transferred to Route #2. He had been carrier on this route for twenty-eight years. At this time James Engel was appointed carrier to Route #3. He was carrier on this route for five years. Because

of illness in 1951 Mr. Resch was forced to retire from the service after thirty-three years of regular service. This caused another change of carrier for Route #3. Mr. Engel transferred to the vacancy of Route #2. The vacancy of Route #3 was filled by the appointment of John Lindquist. Mr. Lindquist is the present carrier on Route #3.

It is very interesting to know, too, that Mr. Lindquist is a grand nephew of George R. Laird whose hard work was responsible for the establishment of this route to the Meadowlawn area.

Each of these carriers can tell many interesting stories of their experiences on the route. Possibly the most interesting stories would be in the era of the changing from the horse and buggy days to the mechanized era because of the great change in the mode of travel.

For a man who has driven horses on the route for years there is a great respect and love for horses. During the horse and buggy days carriers would tell about the unusual understanding and friendship between the horse and driver. Horses learned to know what boxes received mail regularly. If the carrier walked to relieve the load for the horse or because he could keep warmer by walking the horse would wait for him at a box. Sometimes during blizzards the horse took the responsibility of getting the carrier home. A good horse was the carriers' greatest blessing.

With the use of cars for all year delivery of mail although the roads are kept open for car travel in winter the carriers still encounters difficulties in stormy weather. Stories told by carriers proves the car driving had its problems the same as driving horses. Both require courage to face a Minnesota blizzard,

In the early days the amount of mail to be delivered in the Meadowlawn and Chengwatana regions could be carried on a road cart or a cutter. When parcel post was instituted in 1913 the Christmas mail became so heavy it was necessary to have a larger vehicle to pack the mail into for distribution along the route. Today the volumes of mail require the use of a car at all times. At Christmas the volumes of packages, cards, papers, and letters crowd the carriers cars so there hardly room for the carrier.

This is the story of Route #3 to the present. It is the story of men who were interested to see civilization carried to the outlying regions of our country. It shows the progress of that small community as well as the progress of the whole nation in a period of a little more than fifty years. It relates some of the hardships encountered by these men who served to carry the most used means of communication to their fellowmen of the Meadowlawn and Chengwatana communities.

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