

Blind River, Alberta: The Post Office That Never Was

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In his recent article on the Calgary & Edmonton Railway, Rick Parama refers to Blind River as one of the post offices in operation between Calgary and Edmonton in 1891 and later.¹ In a letter to the editor published in this issue, Dale Speirs notes that no post office was named Blind River in Alberta. There did exist a river named “Blindman River” near Red Deer, but there was no post office by that name either.

Dale is correct, but why did Rick mention the post office? [Sadly, Rick passed away last year and cannot answer himself]. He likely referred to Bill Robinson’s Territorial and Alberta post offices books.^{2,3} These have a listing for Blind River, Alberta, reported as open from Jan. 1, 1889 to March 31, 1910. The rarity factor is “U,” indicating that a postmark from Blind River had not been reported. The location is 16-39-27-W4, just northwest of Red Deer near the Blindman and Red Deer Rivers intersection. Yet the Library and Archives Canada database for Post Offices and Postmasters does not have a record of the Blind River, Alberta, post office (there was, however, a Blind River post office in Ontario). There is, therefore, an intriguing mystery.

The mystery goes deeper. Canada’s *Official Postal Guide* for 1889 shows Blind River on the list of Alberta post offices (p. 181). And on p. 18 of the *Official Postal Guide*, the post

office is listed as being located at Sec. 16, Tp. 39, R. 27, W. of the 4th P. Mer. This is the exact location that Bill

Robinson reported.

The *Canada Gazette* for Jan. 5, 1889, reports that the Blind River, Alberta, post office was established on Dec. 1, 1888, with Harold

R. Parke as postmaster. Moreover, a split-circle hammer was produced in January 1889 (see Fig. 1).⁴

All of this suggests that a Blind River post office did indeed exist. There was a location, a postmaster and a hammer. However, a check of postal revenue reports to the Postmaster General indicates that no revenue was ever reported by this office.⁵

The mystery was solved with Tracy Cooper’s help, who consulted his collection of post office circulars. The circulars for Jan. 1889 say that the post office at Blind River, Alberta, was “published in the December circular as having been established, but did not go into operation.” I subsequently found a reference in the *Canada Gazette* for Jan. 19, 1889, that said the same thing.⁶ See Fig. 2.

I have been unable to find documentation explaining why the post office did not



Figure 1: Proof Strike

OFFICES CLOSED.

Beaconsfield.....Selkirk, M.
•Blind River.....Alta.
North River Bridge.....Colchester, N.S.
Table Falls.....Argenteuil, Q.

♦ Published in December Circular as having been established, but did not go into operation.

Figure 2: Excerpt from the *Canada Gazette*, Jan. 19, 1889.

open. However, it may have been connected with the failure of a cooperative settlement scheme. There was some settlement north of the Blindman River in the 1880s, west of its confluence with the Red Deer River. At the time, the river was known locally as "Blind River."⁷In the late 1880s, a cooperative settlement venture, the Alberta Pioneers, was formally organized.⁷It had a council and raised capital. By the spring of 1888, 20 families had enrolled in the venture, hoping to establish a village near the confluence of the Red Deer and Blindman Rivers. The location was apparently chosen because the mother of one of the council members, Walter Waghorn, lived in the area. His mother, Sarah Waghorn, and his brother, William, had settled on the northern half of section 14 (14-39-27-W4).⁸Walter Waghorn headed out to Blind River in 1888, expecting the settlers to follow. However, the government did not approve the group settlement plan, and ultimately, the Alberta Pioneers dissolved. Walter Waghorn, however, stayed in the area and bought his mother's land. A post office named Waghorn, with Walter Waghorn as the first postmaster, was established on Aug. 1, 1891, two miles east of the location of the originally approved Blind River post office. It became Blackfalds in 1902.^{2,9}

References

1. Parama, Rick, "Early Mails on the Edmonton Branch of the Calgary & Edmonton Railway: 1891 To 1905," *PHSC Journal No. 177* (Sept. 2021).
2. Robinson, William G., *A Checklist of Territorial Post Offices including Colonial British Columbia*, Privately printed by William Topping, 1990.
3. Robinson, William G., *Post Offices of Alberta*, Saskatoon Stamp Centre, 1998.
4. Hughes, Paul, ed., *Split Circle Proof Strikes of Western Canada*, Published by Robert A. Lee, 1989.
5. The revenue reports for non-accounting offices are unavailable for the year ending June 1889; however, Blind River, Alta. does not appear on the list of revenue-reporting post offices for all subsequent years.
6. It is still unclear why Robinson reported the post office's closing date of March 31, 1910.
7. Batchelor, Bruce E., *The Agrarian Frontier near Red Deer and Lacombe, Alberta 1882-1914*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Simon Fraser University, 1978.
8. Lacombe Rural History Club, *Wagon Trails to Hard Top: History of Lacombe and Area*, 1972.
9. Speirs, Dale, "Blackfalds," *Journal of Alberta Postal History*, Issue No. 9, 2016.