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POSTAL HISTORY OF THE LAKE MCGREGOR DISTRICT, ALBERTA

by Dale Speirs

This postal history discusses a number of pioneer post office east, north, and south of Lake McGregor, a reservoir in southern Alberta. Most of the post offices on the west side of Lake McGregor were written up in JAPH #8 and #17.

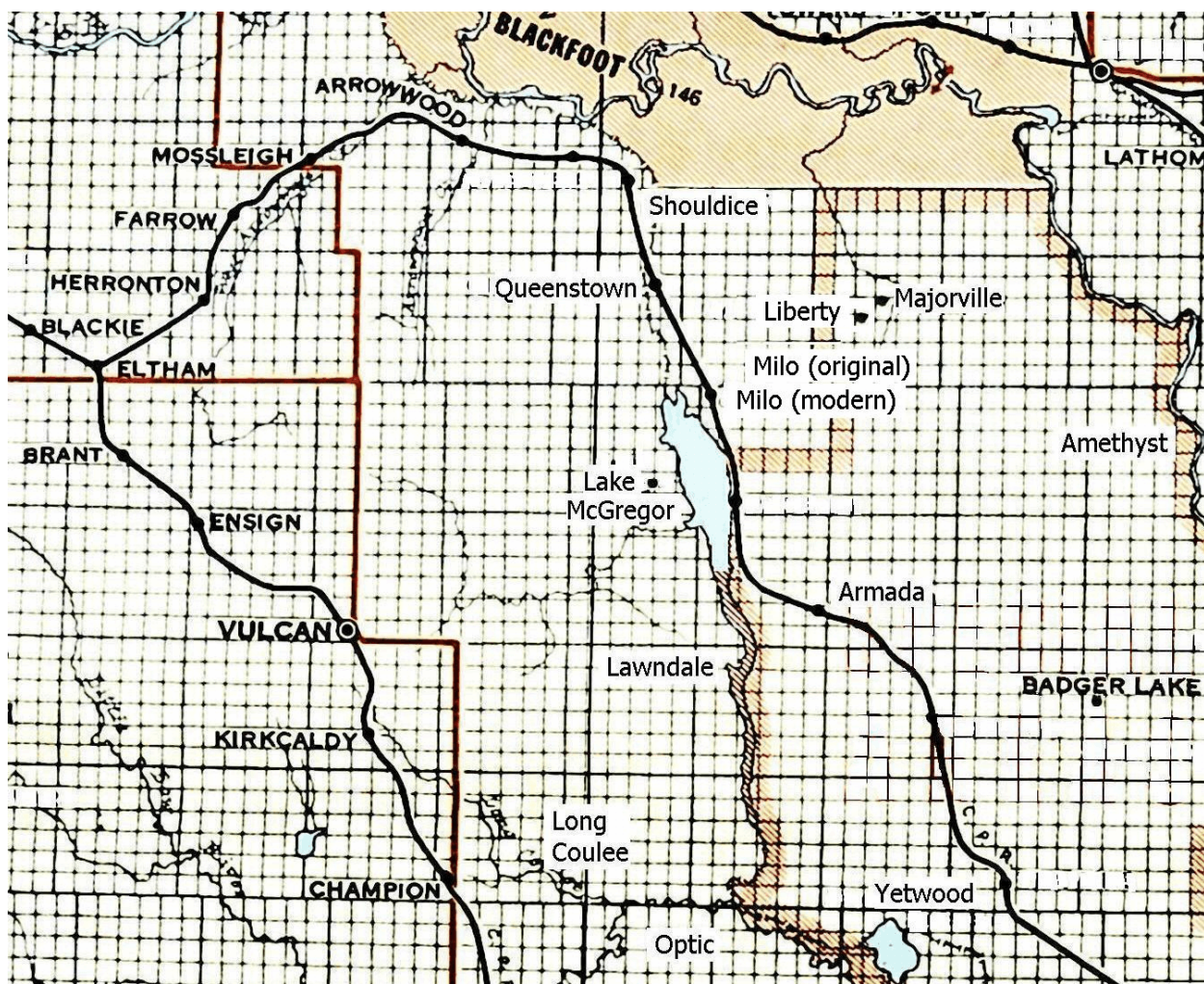
Lake McGregor is a reservoir flooding part of Snake Valley. The water and a post office were both named after James Duncan McGregor, a local rancher and instigator of the reservoir and irrigation scheme named after him [2]. Construction began in 1909 but not until 1921 did the first waters reach the farms. There were numerous delays due to construction problems, World War One, and mismanagement.

James McGregor was dismissed from the project in 1912 due to incompetence. He left the district but landed on his feet in Manitoba, where in 1929 he became Lieutenant Governor of that province.

Unless stated otherwise, all dates and names of postmasters are from reference 1.

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This map shows the pioneer post offices, modified from a 1946 map.

The small squares are sections, a mile on a side. Homesteaders were entitled to a quarter-section.

Milo has the only post office around the lake as of 2025.

Lake McGregor.

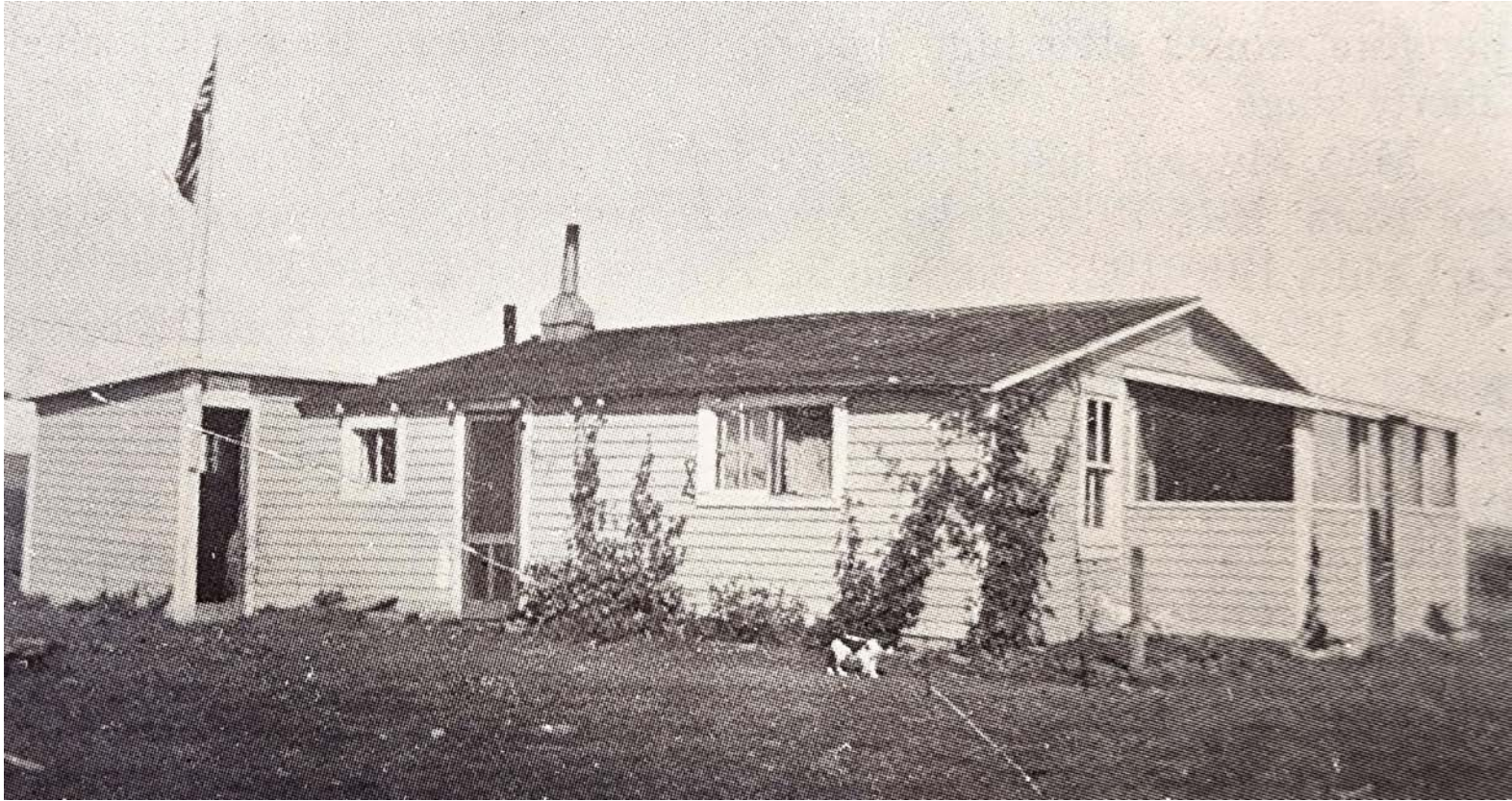


The post office of this name opened on the west side of the reservoir on 1910-01-01 with Edward Synge as the first postmaster. At left is the proof strike of the postmark. Edward's original homestead was on the floor of the Snake Valley and was later flooded by the reservoir. He took over his brother's homestead nearby [3].

Mail service was from Gleichen on the transcontinental railroad north of the Blackfoot Reserve. Lake McGregor was the final stop on the courier's route, who stayed there overnight before making the return trip to Gleichen the next day.

On 1915-11-23, C.J. Northcott took over as postmaster. The post office was in his farmhouse until 1932-11-23 when it permanently closed. A railroad came through Milo in 1924 and the mail route switched to there. By that time the roads had improved and residents found greater convenience getting their mail at Milo. This eventually put an end to the Lake McGregor post office.

The photo on the next page shows the Lake McGregor post office circa 1920 in the Northcott farmhouse [3].



Milo.



Milo is the only remaining post office in the area surrounding Lake McGregor. The post office opened on 1908-03-16 in the farmhouse of Milo Munroe. His photo is shown at left [3]. Below is the proof strike of a later postmark. The proof books don't seem to have the original postmark.



A few kilometres from the Munroe homestead was a small hamlet now vanished but remembered as Old Milo. On 1916-06-17 the post office moved to this townsite with Anthony Wilson Ivers as the new postmaster. He kept the post office in a general store where it remained for many years [3]. The photo below shows the general store and post office during the Ivers tenure. They had the centre and left part of the building; the bank was an unrelated operation. Hanging over the centre of the porch was a post office sign, illegible in this photo [3]



On 1918-07-16 the store and post office were bought by James Stewart, who became the next postmaster. Earl J. Mills then bought the operation and became postmaster on 1920-05-22. Following on was Nyle Milton St Peter, who served from 1921-10-20 until 1925-03-09. A railroad came through in 1924 several kilometres south of Old Milo, and went around the north end of Lake McGregor.

Old Milo was abandoned and the inhabitants moved their buildings to a siding where the new and present-day Milo was established. W. Frank Harvey was the first postmaster of the new Milo for a few months until he moved to British Columbia. The post office was taken over on 1926-02-27 by William Ross Douglas, who moved it into his drug store. He sold out on 1928-12-21 and was succeeded by Carman William Watt.

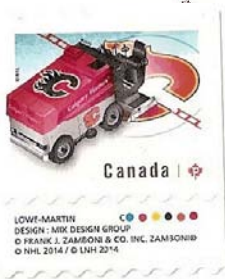
Watt died in office on 1945-05-27, after which his widow Irene served until 1948-07-31. She re-married and her second husband Carl Ludvig Johnson became postmaster until he retired on 1970-06-01. During his tenure, mail service by rail was discontinued in 1953. Thereafter mail came by truck from Vulcan.

Mrs Myrtle J. Milliken was the next postmaster. At this point the Canada Post records cut off due to privacy laws. She served until 1992 according to a local history [4]. The photo on the next page shows the post office in 1989. The woman standing by the door is the author's mother Betty Speirs.



The post office was then converted into a retail postal outlet in the A.G. General Store, with Jamie Robertson as postal manager [4]. The outlet changed hands and locations several times before moving into the Village Office in the summer of 2010. Below are a variety of postmarks from the modern era.





I took this photo on 2018-07-31 when I visited Milo.



Yetwood.



The origin of this name is unknown. The post office opened on 1910-04-15 with Mrs Annie Armstrong as the first postmaster. Local histories do not mention a husband, so she was either divorced or widowed. She homesteaded in the district in 1908 with two boys and two girls.

Her children were grown at the time or nearly so because her son Laurie took up a homestead at Amethyst. Annie kept the post office in a country store she operated on her homestead [5]. At left is the proof strike of the first postmark.

Robert Stevens took over on 1912-09-15 and was the final postmaster. On 1918-09-15 the post office closed permanently. A railroad came through nearby to the east and mail service shifted to the tracks.

Amethyst.



This post office was on the far corner of the district but was related to Yetwood. The name origin is unknown. The geology of southern Alberta is entirely sedimentary, whereas amethyst is found only in igneous rocks. The post office was opened on 1914-09-01 by Mrs Annie Armstrong, formerly of Yetwood. The proof strike of the first postmark is shown at left.

Annie had moved in 1912 from Yetwood to be with her son Laurie on his homestead. As with Yetwood, Annie kept the post office in a country store on the homestead [5]. She gave up the postmastership on 1918-05-06 and moved to Lomond. The Amethyst post office was briefly operated by a placeholder named A. Parent until it closed on 1919-07-07.

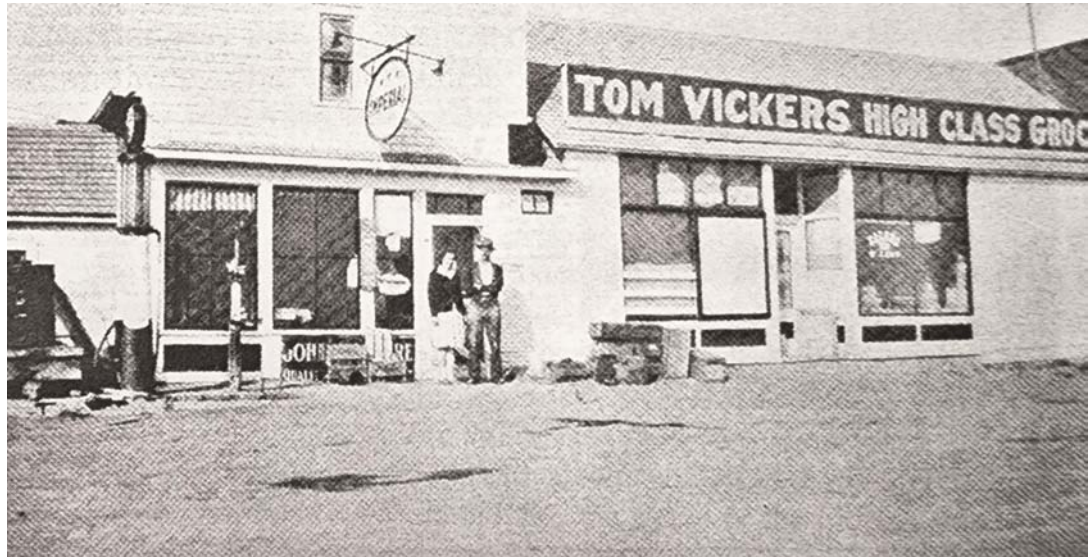
The post office re-opened on 1923-02-01 with homesteader Frank L. Hill as postmaster. About then the great drought that afflicted the Canadian prairies began. The post office permanently closed on 1925-01-31. The Hill family and many other local residents abandoned the land [5].

Armada.



The general consensus was that the name of this post office was from the Spanish word for fleet. No one knows why the name was chosen for a hamlet out on the dusty flatlands. The post office opened on 1915-01-01 in the country store of the first postmaster E.E. (Bert) Saunders. The proof strike of the first postmark is shown at left.

Saunders sold out to William Edward Howell, who became postmaster on 1918-01-25 and served until 1949-08-25. Until the railroad came through in 1924 the mail was couriered from Vulcan. The post office was moved to another store which Howell bought from Tom Vickers in the nearby village of Travers and hauled to Armada. Howell never bothered to change the sign on the building, so the post office was in the Tom Vickers store for many years [5].



After Howell retired, his son Harvey took over as postmaster until 1956-08-27. Harvey later sold out to the Marks family. Mrs Grace Pauline Marks was the next postmaster for a short period until 1957-12-24. Her niece Doreen Elnora Marks Sparkes the held the postmastership until 1959-04-21. In turn, her niece-in-law Mrs Marjorie Irene Marks was the final postmaster until the store closed permanently on 1959-07-15. A combination of good roads and the end of passenger trains finished off the hamlet of Armada.

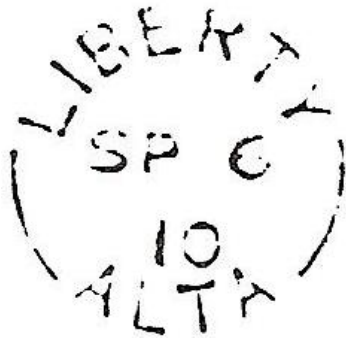
Liberty / Major / Majorville

This post office opened on 1910-08-15 under the name of Liberty. The first postmaster was William J. Burns, who kept the post office on his homestead. A problem arose with mail being mis-directed to Liberty, Saskatchewan, so the name was changed on 1911-08-01 to Major. Burns resigned on 1911-11-26 and left the district [3].

Daniel H. Shaw was the next postmaster and moved the post office to his homestead. He had served in the Boer War and demobilized with the rank of Major, hence the new name of the post office. Unfortunately there was once again a problem with mail routing because Saskatchewan also had a village called Major. On 1915-05-01 the post office name became Majorville, which finally solved the problem [3].

Shaw served until 1918-01-21, was briefly replaced, then returned as postmaster on 1919-12-01. The post office moved to his general store in the village in 1926. He resigned as postmaster on 1928-06-06. He sold the store and post office to the Huskins family [3].

Below are proof strikes of the three postmarks of this post office during this period.





Mrs Anne C. Huskins served as postmaster until 1931-12-17 when the Huskins sold out to Narum family. The photo at left shows her standing in front of the store and post office, with her grandson on the horse.

Mrs Florence Ethel Narum served as postmaster until 1935-11-26. Between the Great Depression and the drought, the Narum family couldn't make a go of the store and left the district.

Lee Milton Francis became the next store owner and postmaster. He did most of his business in Relief Vouchers, a type of government scrip. He managed to hang on as postmaster until 1966-04-07. He did well enough to build a new store and post office across the street from the old building [3]. The photo below shows the store and post office as they were in 1958.



The Hodgson family then bought the store and post office and Mrs Florence Edna Hodgson became the final postmaster. Canada Post shut down the post office on 1970-06-30 and thereafter mail service was from Milo. The store remained open for several years but without the draw of mail service had to eventually close [3].

Queenstown.

The Queenstown post office opened on 1908-01-01 in the homestead of William Brown. The name was that of the surrounding district, which had been named a few years earlier by a land surveyor after his home town in Ireland, today known as Cobb [2]. Mail service was initially by stage coach from Gleichen, which was on the transcontinental railroad.

On 1910-07-02 the post office moved to the homestead of Peter Soli. He resigned as postmaster on 1914-08-25 and a brief placeholder came and went. The position went back to Soli until 1923-02-19. From there the post office moved again and Mrs Nellie Kingsmith served as postmaster until 1925-07-27.



A placeholder came and went before John McDougall Lawther took the post office into his store on 1926-12-04. He had two sons John Jr and Alfred. On 1927-01-05 he passed the postmastership to John Jr, who in turn handed over to Alfred on 1928-07-10.

Alfred died in office on 1946-11-06. At left is a proof strike of the postmark during his tenure. His widow Elma Marie did the job until 1947-04-31 when Edward George Kingsmith, grandson of John Sr, became postmaster. He resigned on 1949-06-08 at which time a steady turnover of postmasters began.

Queenstown was in a long slow decline due to drought and good roads taking business elsewhere. Between 1949 and 1959 there were six postmasters, all in general stores that could not generate enough cash flow.

The final postmaster was Mrs Myrtle Jane Lothian, later Mrs Milliken. The post office closed on 1970-06-30, the same day as the Majorville post office. Milliken then became postmaster of Milo the next day, which was where all the business had been going. The village of Queenstown was abandoned. A few years later the County of Vulcan burned and bulldozed almost all of the buildings. The 1911 census showed 666 residents of Queenstown. The 2007 census reported 8 people left.

Shouldice.



This post office was named after pioneer homesteader James Shouldice [2]. A railroad extending from the southeast arrived at the townsite in 1925 and a hamlet grew up by the siding. The post office opened on 1925-03-16 in the hardware store of John W. McRae. He was listed as the official postmaster but local histories state that his wife Peggy actually operated the post office [6]. At left is the proof strike of the first postmark.

John resigned as postmaster on 1931-09-29 and became a full-time grain agent. Donald Yuill was the next postmaster, who operated the post office from his house until 1935-04-11 when he too became a grain agent, for a different company than McRae. Mrs Emily Amelia Smith served as the next postmaster until 1938-10-11, keeping the post office in her house until illness forced her to give up her position [6].

Mrs Agnes Synnovia Palmer then took over. The Palmers had bought the Yuill house, so the post office moved back there until 1945-03-29. Charles Wilburn Thompson was the next postmaster, who moved the post office into his general store. He sold both operations to Clarence Arthur Wismer, who stayed as postmaster until 1955-04-31 when the store and post office were bought by Henry Wiebe.

Henry was briefly postmaster but on 1956-08-31 his wife Marie took over the position. She served until 1964-11-06 when the operation was sold to the Jones family. Mrs Darlene Carolina Jones was the postmaster until 1967-09-05. Her daughter-in-law Mrs Laura Jones was the final postmaster until the post office was permanently closed on 1970-02-09.

Laura's mother was Mrs Emily Smith, who had been postmaster from 1935 to 1938. The mails thereafter came from Medicine Hat. Good roads and drought depopulated the land and reduced the need for a post office.

Lawndale.

The source of this name is unknown. Charles Fitzpatrick was the only postmaster, serving from 1915-05-01 until 1919-01-09. He kept the post office in his country store on his homestead [7]. No proof strikes of the postmarks were available. Mail service thereafter was from Reid Hill on the northwest corner of Lake McGregor.

Optic.



The name source is unknown for this post office. Local histories do not list the name of the only postmaster M. Parks. Postal records indicate he served from 1908-09-01 until his death on 1910-12-19. The location was his homestead. The proof strike of the postmark is at left.

Long Coulee.



The post office name is descriptive of the countryside. The first postmaster was Robert Tyler from 1909-07-01 until 1912-03-14. He kept the post office in his homestead house. The proof strike of the first postmark is shown at left. On the adjacent quarter-section was the Therriault coal mine, which undoubtedly helped boost postal revenues.

The post office then moved to the home of N. Chris Jensen until 1913-12-30, also very near to the coal mine. The final postmaster was Jack H. Scott, although his wife, first name not recorded in local histories, actually operated the post office in their house [8].

Their quarter-section was adjacent to the coal mine. On 1923-03-09 the post office closed permanently, killed by good roads. The mine continued to operate for another two decades before coal was replaced by natural gas for buildings and diesel for railways.

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