

Camino Post Office History

“The Camino Post Office, named for the Spanish word for road, was established on June 22, 1904. The community, seven miles to the east of Placerville, was at one time known as Seven Mile House, although there was no post office by that name. The Camino Post Office, which is still in operation, is listed as being four miles east of Smith Flat and two miles west of Fyffe (believed to be Sportsman’s Hall, although the distance is incorrect). The postmaster for Camino was Margaret S. Hoff.”¹

Post Offices of El Dorado County

“Prior to both the Gold Rush and the Ceding of California to the United States by Mexico in early 1848, the mail system in California consisted of numerous “unofficial” post offices and a simple, but efficient, military mail delivery system. Following these two events, the Postmaster General of the United States realized the immediate need for an efficient system of government operated post offices in California and sent a special agent to establish them, wherever the agent might feel they were needed.

Special Agent William Van Voorhees was the first of these men and was instructed to proceed to California (San Francisco) and establish post offices at San Diego, San Pedro, Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and Monterey enroute...

For some unknown reason, on June 15, 1849 the Postmaster General replaced Van Voorhees with another special agent, R.T.P Allen. Like Van Voorhees, he carried on the job of establishing the postal system in California, all the time attempting to overcome what it turned out was a list of serious problems faced by his predecessor. First of all, the post offices were ordered to pay expenses out of receipts, which often didn’t work and the salaries offered postmasters and clerks was less than that earned by unskilled laborer. Secondly, transportation for the mail was hard to find and, when found, very expensive. All in all, the process of establishing post offices and appointing postmasters was not the simple job the special agents thought it would be.

As an example, when the need for a new post office was established by the special agent, he would authorize it and try to find a postmaster, who, if he was successful, often turned out to be the owner of a business in the same building where the post office would be located-someone who knew the advantage of having the entire population of the area passing through his or her business to get the mail. The postmaster would be appointed and assume office, however, this was just the start of a long process. The agent would then request confirmation the post office and postmaster from the Postmaster General in Washington D.C. That, including getting the message there and back by ship, could take many months or even longer, depending upon the route the message took and the amount of bureaucratic red tape involved. Because the population of a California community could grow and decline in just a few months a new post office could easily be established and discontinued before it was even officially open. Worse yet, postmasters were political appointees and, depending how the fickle winds of politics in the nation’s capitol blew, the newly appointed postmaster might find that after nearly a year of working at the job, he or she was not confirmed at all and some else was. Needless to say, this did not make the special agent’s job any easier. Fortunately, in 1853 the Postmaster General had this changed so that a Post Office did not open and an appointed Postmaster did not take office until confirmed. However, as in most bureaucracies, the former practice continued for some time thereafter.

In El Dorado County alone there were, at one time or another, over 100 post offices with some 120 different names ranging through the alphabet from Alabaster to Zodok. Some had a very short life and some, like Coloma, the first post office in El Dorado County, continue to this day. Then there are a few, like Job's Store, Lake Bigler, and Macksville, that apparently never even existed at all, although mentioned in history books from the period. Because of this confusing information, these are often referred to as phantom post offices. Other post offices, like Cedarville, El Dorado Ranch, and El Dorado Mills, actually existed but have an uncertain location. These are often referred to as ghost post offices.

Because of a majority of the early population of El Dorado County was made up of miners-a transient group if there ever was one-many post offices were established and then, moved, discontinued (closed) and even reestablished, all in a very short period of time. If someone found gold in a different place over the mountain or up or down the river, the whole town might move overnight to the new location, always believing that there they would finally strike it rich. In order to serve the miners, the local post office often just picked up and moved with them. If there was an existing post office at the new location, the two were combined. If none existed, the relocated post office simply reopened, sometimes not. In fact, occasionally the name changed even when the post office didn't move. "²

¹ Post Offices of El Dorado County, 2002, Doug Nobel. Page 7.

² Post Offices of El Dorado County, 2002, Doug Nobel. Page 3-5.