

Sunny Bank, Our Ancestral Home
By Andrew Patterson (1995)

Chapter 5

Sunny Bank Post Office

During the earliest settlement in the area letters were undoubtedly carried by fishermen and merchants who came during the summer months. Mail service on a regular basis began in 1804 with the establishment of the first Post Office on the entire peninsula, in Douglstown. The service was somewhat irregular. Mail was carried by boat as long as the bay was navigable, and two or three deliveries were made during winter on snowshoes. Letters cost three shillings and no parcels were handled.

The Gaspé Basin Post Office opened Jan. 6, 1837, and in 1839, weekly service was established. Benjamin Patterson of Wakeham carried the mail to and from Port Daniel, which was already linked to the main postal system. Around 1850, deliveries were increased to twice per week to the newly established Perce office. Upon completion of the railway to New Carlisle in 1895, on the south shore of the Gaspé Peninsula, mail began arriving three times a week. Shortly after the arrival of the first train in Gaspé in 1911, it became a daily service.

The “Gaspé Bay South” Post Office opened in the home of J. H. Eden on Jan. 1, 1885. Its name was only changed to Wakeham in 1926. For another 15 years the people of Sunny Bank were forced to make regular trips by boat to pick up the mail, though the distance was somewhat less than earlier. Then on February 14, 1898 the Municipality of York submitted an application for its own post office, to accommodate the fifty resident families. These observations were noted on the application, “The locality herein referred to is on the opposite side of the Bay from the neighboring offices at Gaspé Basin and Gaspé Bay South. Though there is no village, there is a Blueberry Canning Factory and about fifty dwelling houses in the vicinity. The extension of the mail route from Gaspé Basin to Gaspé Bay South around the head of the bay to York is the most favored mode of service as it would be a convenience to people living further from the existing offices and in the interior.”¹

The first request was refused because a post office already existed in Ontario by the name “York”. I was unable to find where the name originated, but a post office, with semi-weekly service, opened on Aug. 1, 1899 under the name “Sunny Bank.” Initially it was in the home of John E. Mullin, about one half mile east of the Mill Brook, in the area later named Brassett.

Mr. Mullin served as post-master for a very short time receiving a salary of \$2.50 per month. The Sunny Bank Post Office then moved to the home of George Patterson, in which I presently reside. George Patterson officially became Post-master on Nov. 1, 1900 and continued in that position until his death in 1920. His daughter, Mrs. Emily Falle, took over and likewise operated the post office until 1938. During her eighteen years of devoted service her salary never exceeded \$17.00 per month, and the contract obliged her to sort and distribute mail seven days a

¹ Passing Years, unpublished work by Raymond Patterson, 1958

week, year around. Her brother, Joseph C. Patterson was the mail carrier, transporting the mail by horse to and from the Gaspé Post Office. Unlike today, the service was as regular as clockwork, and neither rain, snow or sleet prevented the mail from being delivered. Sorting was done as soon as the carrier arrived, and picking up the mail became a social event, with gossip the main attraction.

After 38 years in the same location, the Sunny Bank Post Office was moved next door to the home of Mr. Joseph Patterson. He, with the aid of his wife, undertook both positions, that of Post Master and Mail Carrier. During his later years he moved in with his daughter, Mrs. Iris Miller, moving the post office once more. She assisted him in handling the mail, and continued as Post Mistress for almost a year after his death. When Mrs. Miller resigned in favor of teaching school, the post office moved once again. This time it went to the home of Mrs. Violet Patterson, where it remained for almost two decades. In the late 1940's when Mr. Joseph Patterson could no longer make the daily trip to Gaspé, the job of carrying mail to and from the main office was undertaken by Mr. Lionel Patterson.

On June 10, 1967 Mr. Patterson brought the last mail delivery to the Sunny Bank Post Office. He arrived at the home of Mrs. Patterson shortly before 8 AM, marking the end of a tradition by which Sunny Bankers could set their clocks. Sunny Bank was then united with the rest of York and Wakeham, becoming known as Rural Route #1, and being served by the Gaspé Post Office.

The following is the official list of Post Masters who served in the Sunny Bank Post Office during its almost seven decades of operation.² The lapses between Post Masters can be attributed to the time involved in officially acquiring the title "Post Master." During each interim, the office continued to operate, under the supervision of the successor.

Aug. 1, 1899 - June 4, 1900
Mr. John E. Mullin

Nov. 1, 1900 - Jan. 4, 1920
Mr. George F. Patterson

May 13, 1920 - Jan. 8, 1938
Mrs. Emily (Falle) Patterson

March 8, 1938 - June 15, 1950
Mr. Joseph C. Patterson

Nov. 16, 1950 - March 8, 1951
Mrs. Iris (Miller) Patterson

June 27, 1951 - June 10, 1967
Mrs. Violet (Patterson) Miller

² PAC; Inspectors Reports, Application to the "Post Office Inspector's Office, No. 374, 25 Feb. 1898, RG3, series 6, Vol 402,