

### MILLARVILLE GENERAL STORE/POST OFFICE HISTORY

The present Millarville General Store was built in 1989 after a fire destroyed the original store that was built by Norman Pegler in 1926.



To fully understand the whole story, we need to go back to the late 1800's when Malcolm Millar and his wife Helen (Shaw) had the first store and trading post in this area.

The post office address was to be "Millarville" and he was postmaster until 1911. According to the Canada Post historical archives, Millar failed an audit by the postal inspectors, and in 1911 was prosecuted by the Canadian Post Office in court for creative accounting in his post office. As a postmaster, he received stamps at a discount,

and many companies in those days received sheets of stamps as payment because they had so much mail. Millar the postmaster paid the Canadian Post Office for the stamps at a discount, and then Millar the store keeper used the stamps at full face value to pay his debts. After Millar was evicted as postmaster, the post office revenues suddenly dropped to a number more in keeping with the small size of the business. In 1911 W.H. King built a store on the hillside above his ranch and there was a room for the Millarville post office in the back of the building. The third home for the Millarville post office is situated on the present site of the Millarville General Store, and it was moved there in 1941.

Early records show that Mr. J. Dickey was the first mail carrier until 1895, when Mr. R. Gillespie took over the route. At first there was just mail delivery once a week, but in 1908 it increased to twice a week. Around this time, another post office was started by Forward and Walton in their store at Kew, southwest of Millarville. At first the mail came from Calgary but in 1924 the route became Rural Route 1 Midnapore, serving all residents from Midnapore to the Kew area, including the three post offices of Priddis, Millarville and Kew. In the thirties mail delivery increased to three times per week. The Kew post office closed in 1955 and it wasn't until 1968 that Rural Route 1 Millarville was created with service four times a week.

In 1944 Mr. Pegler sold the store to Jappy Douglass (grandson of Malcolm Millar). This was the time of the big oil boom and it brought many new residents to the area and the store reaped some of the benefits. Mr. Douglass built on a coffee shop and moved the McFarland Lumber Yard Office from High River and attached it to the store. In 1956 the next owners were Mr. and Mrs. Carl Orthner, who only stayed for two years and then sold to Clark Jacobson. Mr. Jacobson owned the store for less than a year as he decided that store keeping just wasn't for him. At this time, Nora Andrews ran the post office for both the Orthner's and Jacobson's.



In April of 1959, Arlie Laycraft and his son Ron bought the store and Arlie's wife Veryl became the postmaster and held this position for fifteen years. During this time, Arlie and Ron built up the stock and spent a lot of time and money on insulating, painting, improving, landscaping, etc. When RR1 Millarville was created in 1968, Clark Jacobson was the mail carrier for several years, with help from his wife Pat. Also in 1968, Ron decided to go to university and Arlie bought his share of the store and he and Veryl carried on with part time help.

In 1974, Nick and Janet Cooke from Okotoks purchased the store and Nick was postmaster for four years. They had a family of two girls, and made many changes which included adding living quarters to the back of the store. In 1978 the Cooke's sold to Karen and John Clarke of Calgary and Karen became the new postmaster.

Arlie and Veryl still hauled the rural route mail, a job they started when Clark Jacobson retired in 1974. The next owners were Rick and Pam Shindruk and they stayed until 1982 when Brian and Wendy Kinsman purchased the store. They raised their two children in the Millarville community, and Brian also started Millarville Power Products which is now known as Equipment Express.

December 22, 1988 was a very sad day as the store caught fire from a mail bag deposited too close to a heater, and the entire store and living quarters burned to the ground. No one was hurt but the Kinsman's lost their home and their livelihood. With wonderful support from the community and the determination to get back on their feet, Brian and Wendy rebuilt the store and living quarters and the store opened again in 1989. The day after the fire the post office was set up temporarily at the Arctic Cat Shack at Millarville Motors and there was no disruption in mail service.

Pearl Laycraft (Ron's wife) was the mail carrier at that time and she delivered the mail for fifteen years until 1995. Everyone called her "Pearl the mail girl" and when she retired people decorated their mail boxes with balloons and streamers and she had a wonderful send off. While Brian and Wendy owned the store, they became an agency for the Alberta Treasury Branch, now known as ATB Financial. Wendy was the last postmaster in Millarville, as Canada Post changed it to a franchise.

In January 1993, Mike and Lesley Patterson bought the store and later that year the Alberta government started a program for small community stores to be able to sell beer, wine and liquor if they were a certain distance from any town liquor store. It was not long after, that the government decided to privatise liquor stores altogether.

Bob Gray, from Turner Valley took over the mail route from Pearl and soon Cheryl Clarke joined him as the route had become larger with more people moving into the area. For some time, the rural route carriers had been

contracted by Canada Post, but in the early 2000's they became employees of Canada Post. Cheryl took over from Bob in 2003 and the next year Wendy Nelson and Cheryl shared the rural route duties and Wendy is our main rural route gal today. When Cheryl retired a couple of years ago, Tracey Rigon worked with Wendy for a while.

The Patterson's raised their three children in the community and after twenty-two years they sold the store in April, 2015 to Hamid Narsingani and his son-in-law Irfanali Moledina. Hamid and his wife Nazima operated the store and post office. They added the lottery and Hallmark cards to the other products the store has to offer. In mid 2020, Tim Baby leased the store and post office and is putting his own personal "stamp" on it.

Times have changed since 1926 when it cost 2 cents to mail a letter in Canada and a loaf of bread only cost 10 cents. Back then the mail was hauled with horse and wagon, or by sleigh in the winter. Even when the automobile came along, it could only be used in dry weather as the roads were mere dirt tracks, no gravel and no bridges over the creeks. There used to be gas pumps at the store, but they were removed in the late seventies.

A lot has changed over the years, but the store and post office have been a constant, and we are very fortunate to have this hub in our community.

