

History Of Our *Mail Service & Post Office*

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Photos courtesy of **LOUIS SILVEIRA,**
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We make regular trips to our post offices, and we send and receive mail almost every day. But, it is easy to take our mail service for granted and we thank our mail delivery men and women... those who work at our post offices and our postmaster. As you read the history of our mail service, you will understand how we got to where we are today! Our times are very different, and our communication systems are very, very different than they were even a few decades back. We now have cell phones, email, text messaging and more! But we still rely on sending letters, cards, packages, and other mail with our postal service!

Let's go back to the 1840s, when you walked or rode a horse to get or send a message to someone. Learn about Major Buckner, James Hall, the Butterworth Express, and Wells Fargo to see how messages were sent in long ago days.

We know that James Hall started the Elk Grove stage stop in what is now Elk Grove Park in 1850. That is where riders brought messages to people during the Gold Days. We know that Major James Buckner started the first post office with the Elk Grove name at his stage stop (on what are now Highway 99 and Elk Grove Boulevard) just a mile from Hall's.

We need to keep in mind that although I refer to them as stage stops, they were called Houses as in Sloughhouse and others.

The Monterey Trail, today's Franklin Boulevard, was our main route from Sutter's Fort to the Mexican capital of California in Monterey. During the rainy months when everything flooded, the riders went to the east to what is now Stockton Road (Highway 99).

Whether they were on the saddle or in coaches or wagons, travelers needed many services when they were on the road. Enterprising merchants established businesses along the main routes so that travelers could have food, a place to sleep, and fresh horses. Messages were left for friends, and news was passed on.

The stage stop folks were also salesmen, bankers, and mailmen, passing the news. Stockton and Jackson roads were major routes to and from the gold mines. These roads had many stage stops conveniently spaced to meet the needs of traveling folks. They were usually a day's ride apart. Seven miles seemed the rule which accounted for stage stops called 7 Mile House and 14 Mile House.

Eventually post offices opened at many of these stops. In addition to Elk Grove, we had these stage stops - Franklin, Slough House, Bridge House, Cosumne, and Union House. Stores and shops expanded and the small towns began to develop and grow.



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Violet Elliott at Iron Jaw Saloon and Post Office



Post Office on Main Street



Moving the Post Office - Anabel Gage photo (1965)

It's been many years since the ponies carried the mail across the mountains and the prairie. Today's Highway 50, as it winds rough Placerville, was the route for the Pony Express that went from Missouri to Sacramento. This way to carry our mail did not last long because the transcontinental railroad ended our need for the Pony Express. Today, instead of our mail being carried by horse and rider, it goes by truck or airplane; and, we use our cell phones and the Internet. But, getting a letter from faraway friends or relatives is just as exciting as it was in our early days; and we get it much faster!

Our first post office wasn't named Elk Grove. It was called Buckner, a name that has disappeared from our Elk Grove history. Major James Buckner built a stage stop at what is now the intersection of Elk Grove Boulevard and Highway 99, a dusty, muddy road. Buckner post office opened in 1853. There was quite a bit of traffic on that road, and it was the major link between the growing towns. Buckner's stage stop was only a mile north of the Elk Grove Stage Stop, built by James Hall in 1850. These were the only two buildings in the area. Major Buckner applied for the post office and established our first operating post office in 1853. The next year in 1854, James Hall opened up a second post office at his stage stop. He called it the Elk Grove Post Office.

After Hall left the area, the Elk Grove post office, which had only been in operation for seven months, was discontinued. Then in 1857, the Buckner post office name was changed to Elk Grove. It appears that Buckner left the area, and the person who bought him out must have liked the Elk Grove name better than Buckner. Perhaps the new owner had great visionary powers and knew that here would be a great city with the name of Elk Grove!

On the busy Stockton Road, the Elk Grove Stage Stop became an important stop between Sacramento and Stockton. Passengers traveled on the Butterworth Express, but Wells Fargo Express carried everything else. They delivered goods, converted gold dust and nuggets into U. S. gold coins; and provided checks and bank drafts to miners, merchants and farmers. They traveled on hundreds of miles of desert, prairie, and mountain roads delivering mail, and they came right here to our Elk Grove! Henry Wells and William Fargo started the Wells Fargo company that we still have with us today!

The year 1868, was a landmark one for both Elk Grove and its post office. The Western Division of the Central Pacific Railroad completed its tracks from Sacramento to Stockton. This was the good news, but the bad news was that the north-south railroad tracks missed the growing town of Elk Grove by a little more than a mile. The town was left stranded west of the railroad.

A railroad depot was built by the new tracks, but there wasn't any way to get to the railroad from our little town Elk Grove. So a road was cut between the properties of Joseph Kerr and his brother, George Harvey Kerr, from the railroad tracks to the little town of Elk Grove. This is the road we know of today as Elk Grove Boulevard,



*"Jolly Postman"
by Norman Rockwell*



Mail slots - from old EG Post Office



Sloughhouse Post Office

Old timers (who were kids in those early days of mail delivery) told of getting candy at Christmas from the mailman, a special touch for little ones by a caring person.

but its first name was Main Street when the new town began to grow by the tracks.

Inside the railroad depot was the new post office and also a store. John D. Cox was the first postmaster at this site. He and his brother operated a store and ran the post office. The town and businesses began to develop by the railroad tracks. The future was the railroad, and it would continue to be for many years.

John Andrews, the Wells Fargo Agent, was the postmaster in 1872. The train delivered the mail to Elk Grove and picked up letters and packets to be taken from area residents to friends and relatives across the country. It was a great improvement over stage carried mail. The trains were fast – and they were regular and the post office operation was remarkably efficient.

Vivian Welch was the first woman to preside at the post office in Elk Grove. She was called a post-mistress in those days. There was excellent rapport between farm folks and their mailman for he was their link to the outside world. Old timers (who were kids in those early days of mail delivery) told of getting candy at Christmas from the mailman, a special touch for little ones by a caring person.

Our other communities also had post offices. Franklin was established in 1856 and Sheldon in 1860. Sloughhouse continues in Rancho Murieta. The Florin post office continues, and the Wilton post office was established in 1914.

Our Pony Express is long gone, but our post office continues to be an integral part of our lives. We have telephones (standard ones and cell phones), FAX machines, voice mail, e-mail, Fed Ex and

UPS, but we still love to go to the mailbox to pick up our mail. The best part is that we don't have to wait six months for our friend or relative to get the message or package we sent.

Today, we are very fortunate to have post offices in close proximity to where we live in the City of Elk Grove and in our surrounding areas of South Sacramento County.

Our Elk Grove post office was in several different buildings in what is now Old Town Elk Grove. It is now on Williamson Drive in Central Elk Grove where it has been since 1986. We also have three postal service buildings in the Laguna area, west of Highway 99.



It has been several decades since mail was delivered right to our doors in new areas of Elk Grove, but we do not have far go to our neighborhood mail box. We thank all our people who work hard to provide our mail services!



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