

Historical Ramblings

Evolution of Lompoc's Post Office

This information was taken from a comprehensive history of local post offices by Bob Carpenter, which was published in the Summer, 1984 issue of the Lompoc Valley Historical Society's Lompoc Legacy.

The first mail carriers in the Lompoc Valley were certainly the native Chumash, who sent runners from village to village, delivering news of important events. Since there was no written language, the communications were verbally transmitted. When the mission padres arrived, they saw a need to deliver written communications between the missions and the Viceroy in Mexico. The Chumash runners were used to deliver these communications between the semi-monthly trips of soldier couriers who rode horseback between Monterey and Loreto, Mexico. As California entered statehood, the State Senate passed a resolution, adopting post offices and post roads, traversing the state from north to south.

When the Lompoc Temperance Colony was established in 1874, a formal post office was necessary to meet postal requirements. The first mail distribution center was at the Carrillo Adobe ranch house, located at the northwest corner of Locust Avenue and J Street. From 1874 to 1875 the mail arrived via buckboard, which traveled to Gaviota three times a week to collect Lompoc mail. In 1875, Benjamin Franklin Tucker was appointed Lompoc's first official postmaster. From 1875 to 1880, Mr. Tucker depended on private citizens to meet the Wells Fargo Express Mail stage at Guadalupe or La Graciosa, south of Santa Maria, to receive mail for the valley. When Wells Fargo changed its route to pass through Lompoc in 1880, mail was delivered directly into town. The mail continued to arrive by stagecoach until the arrival of the railroad from the north in 1899 and the south in 1901.

The Lompoc Post Office has been located in 10 locations since 1875, when Mr. Tucker became postmaster. For three months in 1875 it was in Orson Peck & Son Hardware Store in the 100 block of South H Street, south of the alley. Later in 1875 it was moved to Frick Bros. Store on the ground floor of the Lompoc Hotel on the southwest corner of Ocean Avenue and I Street. In 1875, the post office again moved to DeMartini's Store at 121 South H Street, next door to Peck's Hardware Store. Benjamin Tucker moved the operation into his home on South I Street, next to the current Chamber of Commerce building in 1876, where it remained until 1885. From 1885 to 1887 it was housed on the first floor of the Hotel Arthur Building on South H Street, the site of the present train store. In 1887, the Lompoc Hotel was once again home to the post office. From 1911 to 1927 it could be found in the Bank of Italy Building at 111 North H Street. From that site, the operation moved to Moore's building at 126 West Ocean Avenue, on the southeast corner of Ocean Avenue and I Street, in 1927, then to a new building built in 1942 by Ernest and Howard Moore at 112 South I Street, which is now Sissy's Uptown Café. Finally, the post office moved to its current location in 1962.

The Lompoc post office was established in March, 1875 as a fourth-class post office, advancing to third-class in 1891. It became a second-class post office in 1915 and first-class in 1942. Until the 1920's, local residences and businesses had no street addresses. Through pressure brought forth by the Chamber of Commerce and local law enforcement, the City Trustees established a uniform house numbering system, paving the way for mail carrier service, which was established in 1930.

Lompoc's post office was only a small part of the local mail delivery system. Other post offices were established at Surf, Arlight, Sudden, Concepcion, Stuart, Santa Rita and later at Camp Cooke. The activation of a post office at Camp Cooke required that a classified branch of the Lompoc Post Office be established to meet its mail requirements. The Camp Cooke post office began operation in 1942, as a branch of the Lompoc office. All of the smaller, regional offices were deactivated as postal delivery service improved. In many cases, maps still carry the place names established by those post offices – the only reminder of local postal history.