

## WHITEHALL'S FIRST POST OFFICE and POSTMASTER, GEORGE OLDS

### WHITEHALL TIMES 1933

A ledger containing the financial record of the first post office in Whitehall is in the possession of Mrs Hattie Beach of this city. The book is highly prized by her because it is in the handwriting of her late father, George H Olds, who was Whitehall's first postmaster and received his appointment on July 17, 1874. That was during General Grant's second administration as president of the nation. The ledger contains a record of government property received from C. C. Crane who was probably the first postmaster in this area and the post office was maintained in his residence on the farm situated in the town of Lincoln on land which now is now included in the Jake Klimek farm. The post office was named 'Hooker' and the list of items delivered by Mr Crane (who was Mrs W E Harlow's grandfather) to Mr Olds consisted of 90 one cent stamps, four 15 cent stamps, 40 ten cent stamps, 21 8 cent stamps and six large envelopes and 200 letter size envelopes. The Hooker post office served the early settlers in this area before the railroad was built.

When Green bay capitalists decided to build a railroad across the state they first planned to build from Blair west through Lakes Coulee across the ridge into Newcomb valley and thence to Arcadia. If that course had been followed the then thriving villages of Old Whitehall and Coral City would have continued to exist, perpetuating the strong rivalry which existed between the two pioneer hamlets. But plans were changed and the right of way was bought on the main Trempealeau Valley and a site established for Whitehall in the fall of 1873. The roadbed and track were completed to Winona and in November T H Earle, son-in-law of Henry Ketchum, for several years president of the railroad, selected the site and built the first residence in the new village which he platted himself. It is the east portion of the present Mayor T O Rice residence. The second house was built by George Olds and was situated on a lot on which stands the Lindstrom building occupied by the Coast-to-Coast store and the Swenson and DeBow barber shop. It was in that building that Mr Olds had the post office. In the following year several business places and many homes were erected in the new town, some businesses moving from Old Whitehall and Coral City. With the coming of the railroad those two gradually declined while Whitehall grew.

It took some time for the federal department to make the post office change but according to the ledger on July 17, 1874, Mr Olds wrote: 'Received my commission as postmaster of Whitehall' and then listed postal supplies received from C C Crane. According to a report blank which evidently had to be sent to Washington at the close of each quarter, the postmaster worked on a commission basis. Mr Olds' compensation for the first quarter from July 17 until Sept. 30 was \$37.53 commission and \$1.20 for box rent, a total of \$441.72. His average compensation for the first three years as postmaster was from \$25 to \$30 per month. In 1877 increased patronage and perhaps more prosperous times reflected in the post office and monthly earnings of the postmaster were approximately \$40.00. It was not until 1883 that commissions and post office box rentals brought his salary up to \$50 a month which was his average compensation until his retirement from the post office at close of April 1889.

The ledger also contained a list of boxholders but it does not go back to the spring of 1874. The first record is dated 1888 and Box No. 1 was rented by the late A W Anderson of Irvin Coulee. There are 115 names on the list which also included many settlers in the rural area. The cost of a box was .15 a quarter. The names all of which are familiar to older citizens, to mention a few were M N Sjuggerud, James F Lowe, H Mortenson, L A McDermott, D Wood, George Quakenbush, John Quakenbush II, E Getts, W H Blodgett, C A Adams, C Everson, D B Wade, A L Sherwood, D S Watson, J Tull, D K Hagestad, A C Knight, A York and Cox, E H Warner, Wallace E Cummings, Mary M Allen, N L Frederickson, O Larson, H C Stratton, William Kremmers, E L Camp, and the Messenger & Times. Incidentally throughout the ledger there is no mention or record of charge or payment for the box rent by the newspaper. It was either customary to provide a free box or else the newspaper was so impoverished that the postmaster contributed the service gratis. Listing a few other names there were Tom Lake, C W Davidson, L H Whitney, J D Southworth, A R Keith and Annie Snow.

There were a few lock boxes available. The renters were Mary Cook, C E Scott, Ed Elstad, J L Knudtson, P A Williams, Florence Snow, A J Allen, T H Earle and Trempealeau County officials. The county officials paid .10 a quarter for their lock boxes.

The ledger also records deposits on money order accounts. U S notes deposited were recorded by serial number, bank notes by denomination and number and also the serial number of pension checks deposited. Pension checks were usually \$11 but a few were for \$14 which apparently were the amounts Civil War veterans received from the federal government.

Blotters were in use back in pioneer days. One was issued by an insurance company naming H D Johnson as agent at Whitehall. Another had the name of E N Trowbridge, agent. An artistically engraved lady's perfume calendar is also preserved advertising fragrant and lasting perfume and published by E W Hoyt & Co of Lowell, Mass.

During the fifteen years that Mr Olds served as postmaster the institution grew considerably. The fact is revealed by the list of post office supplies and equipment turned over by Mr Olds to C E Scott, his predecessor. Stamps, envelopes and other supplies had a total value of 4247.01. There was also enumerable office equipment, including one mail key and chain with No. 86,971, four mail locks, four leather mail sacks and two cloth sacks. When Mr Scott became postmaster he moved the office into his store building situated on the corner directly north of Firpo's Café. Mr Olds, who was one of the pioneer citizens of this community, continued to reside in Whitehall following his retirement from the postmastership. His death occurred at the home of his son-in-law and daughter, Mr and Mrs J B Beach and he is at rest in Lincoln cemetery among scores of other pioneer citizens.