

Rural mailman has seen plenty of changes

By MAGGIE HANNAH
Herald staff writer

Nor sleet, nor snow, nor dark of night shall keep the postman from his appointed round, says the old saw about mailmen. However, if you talk to a modern rural mailman things aren't quite what they were in our grandfather's time.

For starters, the mailman no longer has to tackle back roads unless the snowplow has already been over them. And if the storm is too severe he'll probably be told not to go out at all.

Ted Hancock has been the mailman on rural route five Georgetown ever since the

route began from the Georgetown post office and has looked after rural route four as well for about eight years. All told Mr. Hancock has delivered mail 20 years through his own contract but he also used to do the route when his father was sick. His father had the old rural route one out of Glen Williams for 35 years before Mr. Hancock took it over. The Glen Williams post office was closed 10 or 12 years ago.

When he first began doing RR5, he had about 45 customers on it and 10 of them were summer residents. Now there are about 200 families on the route and most of them are

what Mr. Hancock terms "suburbans" who live here and commute to Toronto daily.

FARMS DISAPPEARING

"The farms are disappearing and being taken over by suburbans," he says. "There are only about four farmers left collecting milk and cream cheques on the whole route."

RR4 begins at Wildwood, continues through Glen Williams up the Tenth Line to the Peacock Sideroad (Sideroad) in Erin, across to the Ninth Line and back into Glen Williams. It also takes in the Ballanfad crossroad for a mile each side of the Ninth

Line. The route is about 25 miles in length and is much more troublesome to cover since it is very hilly and very little of it is on paved roads.

RR4 Georgetown begins by Georgetown golf course, follows the 10th line to the town line, and takes in the Fourth and Fifth lines between 17 and 22 Sideroad and has about three-quarters of it paved. He has about 160 families on it.

In order to be a rural mail carrier Mr. Hancock signs a five year contract agreeing to meet his end of the bargain for a set fee. That fee is reviewed annually he says, and adjusted according to the number of new customers on his route, inflation and certain other factors. Unlike most wage negotiations Mr. Hancock says he gets to make no input to the decision as to whether his fee will be raised. If he does get a raise it will be a set sum of so many dollars per year rather than a weekly amount.

NO HOLIDAYS

Rural mailmen get no holidays except government ones. If the Hancocks want a holiday they must find someone to take over the route for Mr. Hancock. He finds it so much bother in terms of training a replacement and finding someone reliable to fall in for him that he just doesn't bother. Now that mail is not delivered Saturdays any more he gets the odd long weekend.

Mr. Hancock clocks in at the Georgetown post office around 6 am and spend the next 2 1/2 hours sorting the mail for both his routes into the correct order. Someone else will have sorted all the mail for his routes but the order won't be given any thought. He takes the mail for both routes at once.

He has Mr. Marchment as a helper and says how much easier it is to have a helper putting the mail in the box and taking out the mail heading for the post office. Without him it would take much longer.

He figures on finishing his routes between noon and one o'clock on normal days but in the winter if the roads are bad or around Christmas when mail is heaviest it may be well after 3 pm before he gets done.

Wednesday and Thursday are usually his heaviest days, he says, because he has to stop at every box in order to deliver the weekly papers. He usually tries to get the circulars out on those days too, since he is required to deliver them and he might as well get them out when he has to stop at every box anyway rather than making two long days of it.

The rural mailman also delivers parcels that can be fitted into the roadside box. If they won't fit he leaves a card so the recipients can go the post office and pick it up. He will bring parcels or registered mail out if he knows there is someone at home. Otherwise his customers will have to arrange some way of getting it delivered.

"So many families both work that no one is home," he says. "But if I know there'll be someone there I'll bring it out for them as a service to my customers."

Even though he has about 300 families on his route, which means he has in the neighborhood of 1,200 names to remember if you figure on an average of four people to a family, he tried hard to remember something about all his customers. Knowing their age, for example, is useful if something such as a pension cheque comes in using initials rather than the first name. If Joe and John Smith both live on his route he finds it useful to know which one is old enough to be a pensioner and which one works for a construction firm in Brampton, for example. It simplifies delivery greatly, he smiles.

Vandalism is a problem he admits, although theft from the boxes is not common. He recalls an incident on RR4 some time ago when someone must have followed behind him since the Family Allowance cheques were taken from the boxes all along one road one day.

Seeing vandals make a mess of a brand new box when customers have just taken the trouble to put up a new one

really disgusts him. He says 16 boxes were stolen on one of his routes in March and were never recovered. About three weeks ago vandals went around sticking a shotgun in the front of the boxes and blowing the end out of them. Such stupidity really provokes him because it is disheartening to customers who are trying to keep their boxes in good repair.

People who pile snow in front of their mailbox when they clear out their driveway or leave their garbage in front of it to be picked up are among his pet peeves. He is not required to get out of his vehicle and go to the box in order to make his deliveries. The box must be accessible from the vehicle and if something is piled in front of it, of course, this may not be so.

SHIP CREAM

Mr. Hancock used to ship cream when he first began delivering mail. The closing down of local creameries set him looking around for a different source of income and now farming is only a secondary thing with him. He raises best cattle, pigs, and rabbits and has a few goats and hens and a pair of guinea fowl around for a hobby.

Mr. Hancock lives in the house he was born in. He and his wife have an eight-year-old son. He has five step-children are on their own.

Requirements have changed since his father began delivering mail with a horse and buggy 53 years ago. Mr. Hancock remembers when he had to carry boards to get over flooded culverts in Erin in the spring of the year. He also used to shovel his way from line to line if the plows weren't

out yet. But not any more. He was told to stay home the day of the big storm in April.

His worst weather story, however, centres around the blizzard in January 1977. He was up in Erin when that storm struck and he had no choice except to keep coming towards home since the roads behind him were all hills. He did fine until he got near Bishops at the north end of the Glen and came across a truck stuck right in the middle of the road. As soon as he stopped he

couldn't get out. He says he shovelled for about three hours and it took another three hours to thaw out when he got home. In the end he had to send for Wheelers to haul him out. The real problem was that he couldn't leave the mail so he had to stay with it.

He is allowed to use his own discretion about going on bad roads but he has promised himself he'll never go out in another blizzard like that no matter how much mail he has to deliver.



Ted Hancock has been delivering mail to R.R.5, Georgetown for 20 years and to R.R.4 for at least eight years. The box he is holding is the one his father used when he began doing R.R.1, Glen Williams 55 years ago. In those days a whole week's mail could be packed into the box at once if something happened to prevent delivery. The pouch on the front held mail to be brought back to the post office. (Herald photo by Maggie Hannah)

Acton co-operative nursery moves yet another step closer

By JOHN BOTTOMLEY
Herald special

A co-operative nursery in Acton took a big step closer to becoming a reality as 16 women got together at the Acton library Thursday to work towards its opening day. They are looking for a place to hold the nursery and fund raising activities are being planned.

The group is looking for a suitable location in Acton.

The co-op is planning a non-profit school under the auspices of the ministry of community and social services. One qualified early childhood education teacher will be needed, but much of the work will be done by parents. Pat Thornton, from the Hornby Co-op nursery, aids the teachers and plans lessons while parents are administrators, painting new tables, raising funds and doing other work.

PART OWNERS

Each parent is part owner of the nursery. Parent involvement is essential and the group has worked out a fee schedule to encourage it. Participating parents, who will work two mornings a month, will have a lower registration fee than non-participating parents.

Minimum age for accept-

ance into the nursery is three years, and it was pointed out the youngsters should be fully toilet trained.

Current plans call for the nursery to be open three days a week, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Parents will have the option of sending their children two or three times a week, but the nursery will need at least 15 children per day to be viable.

Costs per month were estimated at \$420 per month. A Speyside nursery is being considered as well, and estimated average rent for the two nur-

series was \$150 per month. Insurance will cost \$20 per month and equipment maintenance \$10 per month.

TEMPORARY BOARD

A temporary board of directors and three temporary committees were formed at this week's meeting. All will exist until the school opens, when new committees and a board of directors will be elected.

The current board consists of Gwen Johnson, chairman, Nancy Cook, secretary, Sharon Quick, treasurer and Betty Ann Kidd.

Mrs. Kidd is also acting as

chairman of the fund raising committee. Joining her are Mary Ann McGrath, Jane Haggitt, Sheryl Wedemire and Lee Febel.

The publicity committee is made up of Karen Archibald, chairwoman, Trevelyn Lautel, Pat O'Meara, Carolyn Trenton and Gwen Johnson.

Equipment committee members are Odile Thomson, chairwoman, Genny Forbes, Betty Quinn, Linda Richmond and Barb Wall.

For anyone wishing further information about the nursery call 853-1225.

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