



Medicine Hat Cowboy Life

June 2022

Official Newsletter for Medicine Hat Cowboy Poetry Foundation

Country Stories Book Now Available for Purchase

Country Stories

A collection of stories and poetry by and for seniors
who have lived and worked in rural areas around Medicine Hat



Three Heads are Better Than One
by Gena LaCoste



Medicine Hat Cowboy Poetry Foundation



Last year Medicine Hat Cowboy Poetry Foundation released the book *Stories from Seniors*, an accompaniment to our *Stories from Seniors* video series, posted on our website, MHCowboyLife.com.

This year we have a new video series and a new book of biographies and poetry to go with it. Called *Country Stories*, it contains stories from our new video series, featuring local seniors.

Read about local rural history as told by the people who lived and made that history. You'll learn about pandemics and rattlesnakes, horse races and soldiering. There are stories about barns and all things that go into barns: cattle, horses and kids.

All proceeds from the book help fund Medicine Hat Cowboy Poetry Foundation activities, which includes our annual Cowboy Poetry and Western Music show, which will be on Saturday, October 1 at the Medicine Hat High School theatre. Save the Date! Details to follow.

Secure your copy of *Country Stories* for only \$15 by contacting President, Jen Zollner at MHCPPresident@gmail.com.

SAVE THE DATE

**Medicine Hat Cowboy Poetry and Western Music Show
October 1, 2022 at Medicine Hat High School Theatre**

In this issue: The History of Local Mail

www.MHCowboyLife.com



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From My Perch on the Corral: President's Message



Jen Zollner, President, Medicine Hat
Cowboy Poetry Foundation



When you become a member of Medicine Hat Cowboy Poetry Foundation, you receive this handsome coaster. Memberships are only \$20/year. Contact MHCPPresident@gmail.com

I get the mail and I'm sure you get your mail without giving a thought to how difficult the first mail deliveries in our area were.

I loved going to the little white hip-roofed post office in Schuler, waiting for Mr. Woelfle to sort the mail into all those little cubbies, hoping to see that distinctive airmail envelope, a letter from my Australian pen pal.

I remember my mom shipping her cream with the Goodfellow's service every week and being assured he'll return the empties next mail day. I hadn't given it a thought that it was horses that delivered the first mail. Little did I realize the important role the four-footed horsepower had even when wheels were the mode of transportation. They got many-a mail carrier out of a bind. Now I know how freight delivery evolved alongside the mail service.

The entries of John Schorr and the Goodfellows in the local history books are but a small sample of the hardships endured by early mail deliverers. I was shocked at the experiences they had due to blizzards and snowbanks, rain and atrocious road conditions. Their stories and their 'accidents' are amusing, but only in hindsight. I admire their ingenuity, their determination and their dedication to community service. Their sense of duty and pride in their job is seldom seen today. They deserve our recognition.

Thanks to all the volunteers that have taken the time and energy to capture happenings and gave opportunity for locals to tell their stories in the community history books. I also appreciate the entries folks have submitted. But somehow I feel like much of this history is somewhat buried. I'm hoping this newsletter gives a wider audience to these early pioneers.

The internet was also a fun place to discover little tidbits about mail in general. Finding stories and interesting facts is like mining for gold. I hope you enjoy the nuggets.



No Matter the Road or the Clime The Mail Must Get There on Time

Early Post Offices were Where?

In the early days small post offices were established anywhere there was a demand. It was common to establish it in the corner of the homestead shack or the kitchen or living room of a ranch house. When it was in the home of the Post Master, as the position changed, so did the location. Every hamlet had a general store or grain elevator where a post office could be set up. It served as a social gathering place where men would come for the mail, 'chew the fat' for awhile and catch the neighbourhood news. Post offices have been in lumberyards and there was even one in the livery stable in Schuler at one time. In Bindloss they used the 'bar' of the former Balmoral Hotel as a post office. (It was Hall's Store from 1936-1944). The post office was sometimes combined with a confectionary, gas pumps and/or a public telephone. In 1989 the last one in Seven Persons was located in a garage.



Butler home and post office at Bowell, Alberta

from the Esplanade Archives

Horses Delivered the Mail

Before post offices were established, mail was delivered by horseback by the favour of friends or by the NWMP. Before the railroad, Mounties distributed a lot of mail as a courtesy but also as a reason to visit folks to be sure they were all right and to find out what was going on in the area. Pick up or delivery of mail was not by established routes but more or less by random chance.

The rail came through in 1883, bringing mail to the main depots at Maple Creek and Medicine Hat (and probably smaller posts along the rail-line like Irvine and Walsh). Horses hauled the mail on established trails from there to Hatton (called Forres at the time), to the towns and to various scattered post offices in the outlying area. Herman Pede took the mail from Maple Creek to Golden Prairie, Kuest (where the Emanuel Schafer family farm is) and Richmond. It is here that Harold Haskell picked up the mail for Horsham. John Schorr's mail route included six country post offices south-east of Medicine Hat. Amos Goodfellow took mail to the north-east of Medicine Hat. *(Editor's note: My grandmother told me how Mr. Haskell held the letters my grandfather sent her so they couldn't be intercepted by her father. I'm alive because Haskell did that for her!)*



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Pride in Matched Teams

Folks took great pride in their horse teams that pulled a sleigh in winter or buggy/wagon in summer. They were usually well-matched; guys would go for miles if they knew of a horse that matched theirs. John Herter was known for his bay team; they were light horses. Farmers and those who hauled dray also tried to have teams close in color and size. Peter Brusky's workhorses were roans, like identical twins. Sometimes folks would buy horses that weren't good for racing anymore because they were light and fast, perfect for mail carriers that wanted to get there on time. These thoroughbred or thoroughbred-cross were horses farmers also wanted for pleasure (and for friendly races with neighbors).

It was impressive how well-trained the horses would be. They'd automatically go where they were supposed to, no human coaching needed.



Despite a Blinding Blizzard the Mail Was Delivered

Amos Goodfellow cited March 28-30, 1938 as his worst trip. The overnight blizzard was so bad the cars in Medicine Hat were buried so you didn't know where there were. (Cattle were huddled in fence corners and the only way you knew they were there was by the air holes in the snow. Entire herds were lost in that storm.)

On Tuesday morning the Amos mail and freight truck left Medicine Hat for Schuler and Hilda despite the weather. But the snow was getting deeper and the visibility was nil so after having gone ten miles they decided to stay overnight at a farmer's house. Other than having to sleep on the floor, they were treated royally. They headed out Wednesday morning because the storm had let up a bit, but they only went another seven miles before they had to stay overnight again. They knew there was no way they could get to Hilda and be back in Medicine Hat to pick up Friday's mail. So Mr. Goodfellow decided to continue delivering the mail with horses. The freight truck would go back to Medicine Hat to pick up the Friday morning mail.

Thursday morning the freight truck wasn't able to see where to drive and ended up getting stuck in a small slough, plus the gas gauge needle showed near empty. What else to do but walk to Medicine Hat? They arrived at City Cafe, at 2AM, hungry as bears. (They ate two breakfasts.) They'd barely hit the pillow when it was 6:30AM, time to take a team of horses and wagon from the livery stable to pick up the mail and take gas to the freight truck. By the time the horses (and gas) got the truck out, the mail delivery was on its way back from Hilda. They had every assurance Schuler and Hilda would get their Friday's mail on time. It had taken three days to travel the 58 miles from Medicine Hat to Hilda!

A Mail Truck Encounters Spring Road Conditions

Spring run-off had carved a deep channel across the road, and the water was running chest deep. Amos Goodfellow had to lighten the load, so in white knight fashion he carried his passengers across the water on his shoulders. He then managed to get across



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with the truck and on a bent axle, he made it to Hilda. (Rumor has it that one lady passenger "of considerable proportion and weight" needed to cross on her own. When Mr. Goodfellow calmly said this truck sometimes catches fire, she was in a hurry to get to the other side of the flow of spring-thaw.)



Sometimes a Pack Horse Delivered Mail

John Schorr writes of sometimes using a pack horse when nothing else could move after there'd been a blizzard. He'd ride one horse and packed the mail bags on the other horse. These were the times he didn't take much else but the mail. Once however he did take a passenger that wanted a ride to Medicine Hat. Literally a ride, a tense ride on the back of a pack horse that had never been ridden. By the time they got to Medicine Hat both of them were happy. John had a well-broke saddle horse and his passenger got to 'The Hat'.



John Schorr's horses used during a blizzard in March, 1940 to deliver between Medicine Hat and Eagle Butte -from the Esplanade Archives

Stopovers on Mail Routes were Planned

First mail carriers used horse and buggy in summer and a cutter of sorts in winter. They'd make arrangements to have 'stopovers' at farms along the way, sometimes to eat and sleep if the route took two or three days. It was also for the horses to eat and rest.





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From his pick-up and delivery in Medicine Hat, Amos Goodfellow Sr. had a full change of horses along the route: at his farm at Vale and at Bob Beckers or John Ellik's at Rose Glen. He also used the livery service owned by John Connors at Schuler and the one at Hilda owned by Mr. Flaig. In 1938-1941 Goodfellows had as many as 18 horses and 20 passengers stay at the Becker farm. There were many emergencies in which unscheduled stopovers were made at other farms along the way. He told of the time his truck got stuck in a snow bank and he took out the clutch by trying to get moving. He and his stranded passengers (and the mail) had no choice but walk to the nearest farm.

John Schorr had a 110 mile, twice a week mail route. He had a covered sleigh and teams of horses were stationed at three different places: one at home, one at Ranchville, and one between Eagle Butte and Little Plume. He would change to a fresh team every so many miles.

They could always count on fabulous food (and hospitality). The cooks along the way usually served full course meals to the famished guys. At one place they always looked forward to her specialty, a generous helping of rhubarb pie. But this time she had sweetened the tart rhubarb with...salt. Oh well, it just seasoned their fun and was the topic for good-natured teasing.



Mail Routes

Mail service was the lifeline for many remote towns and villages when mail and other essential goods were transported from larger centres. Mail was brought from Maple Creek on what was known as the Big Stick Trail, now Highway 21. It wasn't just mail that was hauled to Golden Prairie and Fox Valley. Horse teams and later mail trucks also hauled freight of all sorts. John Herter picked up the mail at Golden Prairie and delivered it to country post offices from 1930-1956. During the early years Emil Phaff delivered the mail from Hatton north to various post offices, sometimes as far north as Burstall. For 21 years John Schorr delivered mail to six country post offices southeast of Medicine Hat: Rosebeg, Wisdom, Ranchville, Eagle Butte, Little Plume and Woolchester. The Goodfellows served the communities of Bowmantown, Vale, Rose Glen, Schuler and Hilda for 40 years.

Many small (often family run) operations got their start hauling mail and freight. Some of those carriers were Premier Cartage that served Brooks and Ingenthron Transport that served communities such as Leader, Fox Valley, Golden Prairie, Richmond and others located in SW Saskatchewan. Lens Transport/Subway Freightline also offered service in those areas.



A 1915 postmark. Coleridge was later named Dunmore.



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Another John Schorr Story

Mr. Schorr had many interesting experiences on his twice weekly mail route that started in 1942. This happened when everything was new. The year was new (early January) and he was trying out his new covered sleigh. His cargo consisted of two lady passengers, a farmer, supplies of groceries and of course, the mailbags. To save miles he always went cross-corner, and when this incident happened he was cutting through a lease. As they were bouncing over the rough and crusty snowbanks, the sleigh rolled over and onto the door. The sleigh only had one door but he did have a hinged windshield in front. He struggled out from what was on top of him (two ladies) and climbed out through the windshield. After him, out crawled the ladies.

But where was Nester? He had fallen asleep in the back and was covered over with snow. When Mr. Schorr dug him out, Nester wasn't stressed. The groceries were strewn around and a package of coffee had broken open. When he smelled the aroma of coffee he thought he was at home in his mother's kitchen.

Road Conditions Changed Over Time

In years past it was sheer grit and determination that got the mail through. Many times road travel was all but impassible. At first roads were merely prairie trails made by horse and wagon. Before there were fences, folks could go around mud holes, snow banks or steeper hills. The cold and deep snow of winter had it's own challenges, but difficulties also came when it rained during the summer or with spring break-up. Fences began to hem-in road allowances and the roads were merely dirt roads in which the vegetation had been scraped clean, so rain would

result in slush, ruts and pot holes. Gumbo mud on sections of road balled up and caked everything to a halt. It was hard to see where to drive during blizzard conditions, but when the storm abated and deep snow leveled the vast countryside, it might only be fence posts tops that served as a compass. For years the municipalities didn't plow the roads in winter. Nowadays we take roads for granted, ones that are built-up and widened with ditches to catch the snow. They're graveled or even paved or oiled and are frequently graded, repaired and snow-plowed. We appreciate the modern roads more when we realize the adverse road conditions (and the stormy weather) early carriers had to cope with.

Tackling Difficult Travel

Before improved roads, winter mail delivery was by horse and sleigh. There were winters when outlying areas could only be reached by horse and sleigh. But sleighs had a tendency to tip over.

Amos Goodfellow was one of the first to make outside runners on his sleighs. As well he and his crew travelled in pairs, there to help each other when need be. Two horses were put on the mail/passenger sleigh, adapted of course with outer runners. Four horses pulled the other outfit, a freight sleigh, a flat deck about seven or eight feet wide and about 12 feet long. It too had runners along the outside so it wouldn't upset.

Schorr and Goodfellow realized there was more than mail to carry as there was always someone who wanted a ride to Medicine Hat or someone who wanted to come out. There was produce to send in such

Medicine Hat Cowboy Life is the official newsletter of the Medicine Hat Cowboy Poetry Foundation, (a registered Society in the Province of Alberta), published four times per year by Shelley Goldbeck, DTM, Vice President and Webmaster of MHCP. Our mandate is to preserve, promote and celebrate cowboy traditions and country living. If you wish to submit articles or information of interest to our readers, please email MHCPPresident@gmail.com subject: Newsletter.



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as eggs and cream etc. and likewise, supplies to be brought out. John Schorr built a covered sleigh in 1943 to shelter himself and those who accompanied him. One time he had three passengers and the temperature was 30 degrees below zero when the horses got bogged down in the deep snow. By struggling to get out, the pole broke. One of the passengers was left holding the reins and keeping the lady passenger company while Mr. Schorr and the other male passenger walked to a neighbor for materials to make temporary repairs. Everyone was cold that day.

The help of willing neighbors along the way was the solution to many-a-problem. This is just one example of horses getting stuck and having to be shoveled out. Just as often a great deal of shoveling was needed to get vehicles unstuck. Also trucks would upset while making their run. The unit would have to be unloaded, up righted (usually by the nearest farmer with a team of horses, a tractor or another truck) and then reloaded.

To plow snow Ame designed a V-blade in front of the truck; it worked until the snow got too deep. One year he hired a cat dozer to clear snow from the road. Schorr bought a four-wheel drive truck. Both Goodfellow and Schorr used a Bombardier. Schorr also had a Ford tractor with tracks on the back and skis in front. The winter of 1950-51 turned out to be an exceptionally rough winter and only tracked vehicles were capable of negotiating the roads. But it could only be used where the snow was heavy. Therefore the mail needed to be handled yet another time; it was picked up in the city and relayed to the snowmobile.

When it rained during the summer they'd have to plow mud all the way. Chains would need to be put on the tires, but the chains would tear and a stop had to be made to repair them enroute. There were stretches of road with boggy gumbo soil and that were a challenge.

In 40 years the Goodfellows (Amos and his sons Ed and Ame) never missed a trip. John Schorr had the same kind of record in his 21 years of service. Their stamina and resourcefulness was proven over and over. One way or another they always managed to deliver the mail, freight and passengers on schedule. *What a spectacle in the area this 'vehicle' would have been in the 1950's!*



Hauling Mail was Serious Business

To get a mail service contract, the person signing the contract needed to be bonded. As well it was required that two other people be bonded by a Justice of Peace, just in case. For instance, in 1934 Amos Goodfellow Sr. and his two sons, Ed and Amos Jr. (Amy) were sworn in.

Mail carriers (who were also freight handlers) were very conscientious about keeping the mail safe; they considered it almost sacred. It was government property, Her Majesty's mail and they would protect it with their life. A neighbor of Floyd Brusky's folks used to tell the boys, "You don't touch that. It's government property; keep your hands off!" He, like other folks that handled the 'precious' mail, was very strict about anything like that. I can only imagine what a quandary it was for them when their sleigh upset or when they needed to leave the outfit, walk for help or stay overnight.



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Freight Hauled Came in Many Shapes and Sizes

(people often paid in goods of all sorts because they had no cash)

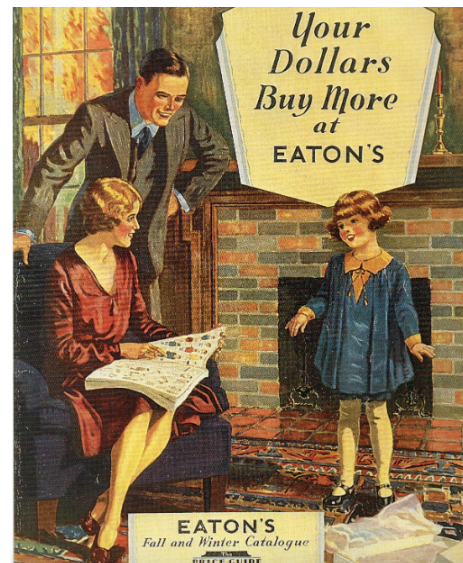
- cream to the Purity or Crystal Dairy in Medicine Hat or the Maple Creek Creamery.
- eggs were a common commodity to be delivered
- it wasn't unusual to deliver dressed animals
- baby chicks came by mail
- Amy Brusky's parents from Richmond sent raw chickens to relatives in Vancouver
- a humorous request was to buy a 25th Anniversary gift and deliver it
- a desperate seamstress received a spool of matching thread to finish her project
- groceries were sometimes bought for and brought to residences
- a common heavy freight item was coal



Farm wives in the district depended on having their twice weekly cream delivered to the dairy in town and the empties returned.



Mail cart used to carry mails to and from the train station.



What was in Early Mail Deliveries?

- letters from family, especially precious were ones from 'the Old Country' often written in their mother tongue
- parcels from Eaton's and Simpson's catalog included items like long-johns, hankies, stockings and garter belts,
- dress and embroidery patterns were ordered from the Free Press Weekly
- another common newspaper Amy looked forward to was the Western Producer



In John Schorr's words:

"One time I had a lady passenger named Lillian. After changing to a fresh team of horses we were off to a flying start...always taking short cuts to save time...Just as we crossed the creek, the sleigh rolled over. After setting it up, Lillian seemed a little concerned.

I asked, 'Did you get hurt?'

'No,' she said, 'but I'm pregnant. Let's hope it doesn't upset again.'

Well, we slowed down the pace, even though we had a fresh team raring to go. "It's better to have the mail a little late and have everything else turn out alright, which it did, fortunately."

National Postal Worker's Day, July 1st

-it celebrates and recognizes postal workers and the hard work they put in to ensure your mail and deliveries get to you smoothly and on time. (Thus the term 'snail mail'?)

Modern Carrier Delivers Mail on Horseback

For the past four years Taylor Newman has been a carrier for Canada Post in Saskatoon. Her dad trails behind carrying the parcels and carrots for Jay, her horse. The horseback delivery is a throwback to the past when the company relied on horse-drawn wagons.

Postal Service in Seven Persons

Can you believe that in 1902 it was self-service? A mail bag was left dangling from a post and residents helped themselves. When railway section workers settled around the siding, Seven Persons was starting to form.

On April Fool's Day in 1903 the post office went to G.H. Lusk's house. By 1914 it was moved to Charlie Robb's General Store.



Modern day letter carrier, Taylor Newman.

Photo courtesy Star/Phoenix

Present Day Rural Postal Service

Over the years smaller post offices closed. Like many post offices, Seven Persons went through several different post masters and several locations before it closed in 1989. There is a retail postal outlet in each community where you can buy stamps or pick up parcels, etc. For example the postal franchise is at Premium Sausage in Seven Persons and it's at Hilda for the Schuler/Hilda district. Presently mail is delivered Monday through Friday to a cluster sheltered outdoor mailboxes in various communities.

In 2019 rural residents in the area received a Physical Address, a 911 location which is now the address needed to receive mail. Folks use the same mailbox they previously had, but they no longer use the former box number as their address.

Mail Wasn't the Only Service of Early Postmasters

Postal Clerk Postmasters also serve as postal clerks. An example is Thomas McDonald who served in Seven Persons from 1916 to 1950 (34 years). His wife Jenny was the postal clerk. The mail order business was at its



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height in the era between the two World Wars. McDonald met several trains a day for the mail, most of which was parcels for homesteaders ordering from the Eaton's, Simpson's and other catalogues. Every order they sent was paid for by a postal money order, so McDonald had a good business on the side.

Public Scribes

There was a need to read and write letters for the illiterate in the area. The McDonalds at Seven Persons provided that service as well as the mail. Some immigrants and "Canadian-borns" were just learning English or could speak it, but had trouble writing it.

Registrar

From the Schuler post office from 1916 to 1932 Tim Schuler's sister, Evelyn served as the registrar of births and deaths in the district. She also worked with census taking.

Justice of Peace

When John Connor took over the post office in Schuler in 1933, he also served as the district's Justice of Peace.

During the War Years

John Schorr tells how mail service was affected by World War II, 1939-1945. Certain commodities were rationed (sugar, tea, jam, coffee as well as gasoline). Each family got a book of coupons according to the size of the family. It was a challenge for Mr. Schorr to keep the rations and orders straight, especially with folks trading. An example was those with a sweet tooth were trading sugar for butter or vice versa.

Also mail carriers had priority in being able to buy a vehicle. Even so he had to wait quite a while for his ordered truck to arrive.

The Library Corral: The Medicine Hat Public Library

The Medicine Hat Public Library serves as a community hub, providing equitable and convenient access to books, media, information, and programs that help to educate, enrich, entertain, and inform. Anyone can use the library and its resources. <https://mhpl.shortgrass.ca>

Gully Farm, A Story of Homesteading on the Canadian Prairies, by Mary Hiemstra

Mary is a six-year-old telling the compelling story of her experiences and those of her family as first year pioneer farmers. Her narrative recreates their life: the tensions and mixed emotions, their hope for the future and why they left their England home. The reader feels for them as they struggle to survive, as they face life-and-death dangers and when they experience numbing day to day loneliness. Her vivid descriptions of the prairie back then helps us realize how much agriculture has changed it.

Memories of An Old Prairie Rancher by Thomas Wood, a local author

Mr. Wood's book is full of stories, each with a title that can tickle your curiosity, some several pages long and some a paragraph or two. In 1911 he homesteaded eight miles northwest of Walsh, not that far from Irvine. For 75 years he had been collecting amusing incidents and happenings around him before self-publishing them.

Empire of Dust, Settling and Abandoning the Prairie Dry Belt by David C. Jones

This is carefully documented local history, first the promotion of farming and settlers despite reports it's too dry for agriculture. It's the hopes and dreams in the lightning expansion, then the resultant tragedy and untold sorrow due to drought in the SW Saskatchewan and SE Alberta area he named the "empire of dust".



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The Dependable Goodfellow Transport Service

Amos Goodfellow Sr. and his two sons (Ed and Amos Jr./Amy) were bonded to contract mail hauling in 1934. The sons came to be a major part of Amos Sr.'s thriving business and eventually their operation was bought by his brother-in-law, John Knox and nephew, Dale Knox (They kept the name Ame's Transfer). In the more than 40 years of operation, they never missed a day even though the roads and the weather were the worst imaginable. The Goodfellows always gave credit to the folks along the route without which they would probably have missed many-a-trip.

When the weather made it impossible to use trucks, the Goodfellow boys resorted to horse drawn sleighs to keep up the mail, freight and passenger service. There were winters when the only way to reach outlying points was by horses and sleighs. .

There were many tales of the long, weary trips. In time the roads were improved and many country post offices were phased out, leaving only Schuler and Hilda. By now the main roads have been paved; it's only an hour's drive to Medicine Hat where it once had taken a full day (or longer) to make the same trip.

Communities around Medicine Hat have their own stories about their small freight carriers. Brooks had Premier Cartage; Ingenthron Transport served communities such as Leader, Fox Valley, Golden Prairie and Richmond. Len's Transport/Subway Freightline offered service to areas north of Medicine Hat and into southwestern Saskatchewan.

The stories the Goodfellows and John Schorr shared in local history books help us appreciate the devoted and sacrificial efforts of all early mail and freight carriers.

A MAILMAN'S PLEDGE TO AMOS GOODFELLOW

As we sit my the fireside
Listening to the radio,
The wind is strongly blowing,
We see the drifting snow.
At present we are snowbound,
As many years now passed
We wondered how the mail got through,
That was a back breaking task.

We all depend on Ame's Transfer
Which hauls the freight and mail,
From Medicine Hat to Hilda
Over a fifty-nine mile trail.
Our sympathy often went to Ame
And also to his men,
We knew if they could not get through
There's no one else who can.

The amount of snow they shoveled
Through drifts four to five feet deep,
At times it took a day and night
Without a wink of sleep.
Now Ame has got a snowmobile,
Has no more snow to buck,
He travels o'er the top of it,
We wish him the best of luck.

-written by A. C. Coebourgh in 1951
Bowmantown, Alberta

