

MR. DUNN is librarian on the staff of the *Minnesota Historical Society*. He is specially interested in the history of the St. Croix Valley, where he has spent his summers throughout much of his life.

# MAIL *for* PIONEERS

## *Some St. Croix Valley POSTAL PROBLEMS*

JAMES TAYLOR DUNN

THE POST OFFICE at Marine Mills, opened on April 25, 1848, was one of seven established in the Minnesota country before the organization of the territory in April, 1849. Today, in 1959, it is still in operation—one of four that can trace their origins to the preterritorial era. Along with those at Stillwater, St. Paul, and Wabasha, this St. Croix Valley office has been distributing mail to Minnesotans for more than a hundred and ten years.<sup>1</sup>

In 1827, some two decades before mail service was inaugurated at Marine Mills, the first post office in the area that was to become Minnesota was established at Fort Snelling. Previously, mail was received only occasionally at this remote upper Mississippi River post. On January 28, 1826, for example, two lieutenants returned from Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, with mail which, according to Major Lawrence Taliaferro, Indian agent at the fort, was "the first for *Five Months*."<sup>2</sup> Even after a post office was opened at the fort, soldiers and chance travelers arriving from Fort Crawford at Prairie du Chien often brought with them mail addressed to isolated soldiers and settlers on the upper river.

Through the next fourteen years Fort Snelling remained the only post office north of Prairie du Chien. Tidings from the out-

side world reached the fort about once a month. Much depended, however, on the vagaries of weather and the carriers' abilities to make their way through the vast, uninhabited wilderness. Mail from the South and the East reached Minnesota via Louisville in Kentucky, Vincennes in Indiana, St. Louis, and Prairie du Chien. All communications for the upper Mississippi had to be addressed to Fort Snelling, and it was up to the people living along Minnesota's waterways to get their own letters from the military post as best they could.

The amount of mail that reached the sparsely settled northern country was small. It was expensive to send a letter, and few could afford the twenty-five cents charged to transport a single sheet. Most early nineteenth-century letters consisted merely of one piece of paper which was folded, addressed on the reverse side, and sealed with hot wax. In 1845 postage rates

<sup>1</sup> Records of Appointments of Postmasters, 18:232, 256, in Record Group 28, National Archives, Washington, D. C. The post office at Wabasha was established as Nelson's Landing on May 9, 1848. The name was changed on January 22, 1850.

<sup>2</sup> Appointments of Postmasters, 5:73; Taliaferro Journal, January 28, 1826, owned by the Minnesota Historical Society. See also John H. Lowe, "The Post Office on the Minnesota Frontier," an unpublished master's thesis of 1950. The Minnesota Historical Society has a microfilm copy.

dropped to five and ten cents a half ounce, depending on the distance a letter had to travel; and in 1851, when envelopes were becoming popular, postage was again reduced to three and six cents. Fees were usually collected by the receiving postmaster.<sup>3</sup> The postage stamp, first introduced in 1847, did not come into general use in Minnesota until the late 1850s. As rates were reduced, the use of postal service increased, as did the demand for new post offices. At the same time, complaints about infrequent mail deliveries multiplied.

Although service was unreliable and irregular for some decades, post offices were quick to follow the founding of frontier settlements in Minnesota. In addition to Fort Snelling, Stillwater, St. Paul, Marine Mills, and Wabasha, both Kaposia and Point Douglas enjoyed mail service before the territorial era began. At the latter place, located at the junction of the Mis-

sissippi and St. Croix rivers, a post office known as "Lake St. Croix" was established on July 8, 1840. A year and a half later, Philander Prescott, the settlement's first postmaster, informed postal authorities that the "Mail carrier furnished this office only once with the Mail last Quarter." But during the 1840s correspondence usually was received semimonthly along the Mississippi. In 1844 Henry H. Sibley of Mendota learned that, in an attempt to speed up deliveries, a Fort Snelling carrier was exchanging mail sacks at a halfway point with another courier traveling northward from Prairie du Chien.<sup>4</sup> Steamboats came and went only when they could obtain cargoes.

Philip Aldrich, Edward Worth, Charles Rouleau, and Henry W. Crosby are among the men who carried mail by canoe or on foot in the St. Croix Valley during the 1840s. The northern terminal of their route was St. Croix Falls, Wisconsin, where, on July 18, 1840, another valley post office was approved and put in operation under the name "Falls of St. Croix." This was changed to St. Croix Falls in 1868. William Holcombe, who later became the first

<sup>3</sup> Pao Hsun Chu, *The Post Office of the United States*, 49-54 (New York, 1932).

<sup>4</sup> Appointments of Postmasters, 12b:778; Prescott to William H. Forbes, April 22, 1842; Hercules L. Dousman to Sibley, November 14, 1844, Sibley Papers, owned by the Minnesota Historical Society.

LETTERS received by a preterritorial pioneer at Marine Mills in 1839, 1841, and 1847



lieutenant governor of Minnesota, was the first postmaster of this Wisconsin community.<sup>5</sup>

The federal government established Minnesota's third post office at Stillwater on January 18, 1846, and Elam Greeley was named postmaster. A few months later another was opened at St. Paul. Over a road which connected the two villages at least as early as 1847, "semi-occasional" mail deliveries reached Stillwater. In the same year what was called a "regular steamboat trade" began between St. Paul and other ports on the Mississippi. It followed the organization of the Galena Packet Company, which was marked by the welcome arrival at St. Paul of the "Argo" with goods and mail.<sup>6</sup> The weekly mail from Prairie du Chien, however, continued to lag, sometimes delayed weeks on end at post offices down the line. "During five months," reported the *Minnesota Pioneer* of St. Paul on April 28, 1849, "the communication between this part of the country and our brethren in the United States has been difficult and unfrequent."

Meanwhile, the need for postal service in the St. Croix Valley resulted in Minnesota's sixth post office. It was established on April 25, 1848, at Marine Mills, a settlement which developed after 1839 around Minnesota's first commercial sawmill. Vermont-born Orange Walker, its first postmaster, was one of the village's founders. His new position, however, hardly affected his work as clerk and manager of the lumber company, since mail arrived only twice a month at the company store, which also housed the post office. He had not been long in office when he began to complain about the lack of mail facilities. On January 15, 1849, for example, he wrote to Sibley, then Minnesota's territorial delegate in Washington, that since the president had reported the post office department "in a sound condition . . . we would be very thankful if they would expend some of the surplus in sending the mail to this section." Walker continued as postmaster until May,

1869, and his compensation for nineteen years of service totaled \$917.57.<sup>7</sup> In 1859 and 1860, while Walker served in the Minnesota legislature, local gunsmith Abram C. Lull took his place at the post office.

FOR A TIME during the late 1840s one postal route from the south was by land from Prairie du Chien into the St. Croix Valley along the east or Wisconsin shore of the river, and Minnesota residents had to cross the stream to pick up their mail. Among those who were inconvenienced were two Stillwater residents, Henry L. Moss and Holcombe, who lived earlier at St. Croix Falls. They pointed out to Sibley that their village and Marine Mills needed direct connections with Prairie du Chien; then, said Moss, "our mail would not lie a week or more in the office at the mouth of St. Croix Lake."<sup>8</sup> Perhaps as a result, direct postal service between Point Douglas at the foot of Lake St. Croix and Marine Mills was inaugurated after a road via Stillwater was opened.<sup>9</sup>

Although practically new, the road on

<sup>5</sup> Appointments of Postmasters, 12b:824; 31:574.

<sup>6</sup> William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 1:224 (St. Paul, 1921); *Weekly Pioneer and Democrat* (St. Paul), October 25, 1858.

<sup>7</sup> Sibley Papers; United States, *Register of Officers and Agents, Civil, Military, and Naval*, 1849-69. Walker's compensation for each year is given in the post office department sections of these annual volumes. The pioneer postmaster lived on at Marine Mills to become one of its leading citizens, and he was described in later years as a "hale, hearty, well-informed old gentleman." *Stillwater Lumberman*, March 16, 1877; *Stillwater Messenger*, August 20, 1887.

<sup>8</sup> Moss to Sibley, November 20, 1848; Holcombe to Sibley, January 9, 1850; petition to the postmaster general, January 4, 1850, Sibley Papers. The latter, sent from Stillwater and signed by thirty-seven local residents, requested that mail service along the St. Croix be improved.

<sup>9</sup> Although some writers claim there was a road from Stillwater to Marine as early as 1841, no evidence that it was then established has been found. The earliest reference seems to be in a record of the Washington County supervisors, October 4, 1847, quoted by George E. Warner and Charles M. Foote in their *History of Washington County*, 330 (Minneapolis, 1881).

A street in Marine,  
1916, showing the  
post office and the store  
in which it  
was located earlier



the Minnesota bank of the stream was rough and almost impassable for wagons in 1849, when E. S. Seymour traveled up the valley and reported that after heavy rains it was even "too miry to travel on horseback." Seymour also tells of seeing one of the semimonthly mails from Stillwater arrive at St. Croix Falls. He was amused by the great excitement it caused as well as by the "exhibition of the genuine democracy of the citizens. The mail matter was emptied out upon a bed, about which all the citizens who were present gathered, and aided in assorting the mail, and selecting their own papers or letters. There seemed to be no distinction between the postmaster and others," he concluded, "as all seemed to be equally engaged in distributing the contents."<sup>10</sup>

Another St. Croix Valley post office was authorized on February 21, 1851—this time at Taylors Falls. The first mail did not reach there, however, until the following April, and it brought only one letter, posted at St. Paul. The second delivery

likewise contained but a single letter, sent from Keokuk, Iowa.<sup>11</sup> In 1851 a new road was built from the capital city of Minnesota via Little Canada and White Bear Lake to Stillwater. Thereafter, a weekly instead of a semimonthly mail delivery from Stillwater to Taylors Falls was instituted.

The future for better communication between St. Croix Valley residents and the outside world appeared bright. Only the poor condition of the road along the river's west bank remained a hindrance. Nathan C. D. Taylor, postmaster at Taylors Falls, urged Sibley to have it improved, then resignedly concluded, "but Suppose we must remain Contented untill we get *big* enough to make a noise."<sup>12</sup> The *St. Anthony Express* of May 14, 1852, reported that scarcely a wagon would venture to travel the road from Stillwater to Marine. North from Marine a narrow way had been cut, "but in the summer," added the newspaper, "it is utterly impassable on account of mire and hills." As late as March 6, 1855, the editor of the *Saint Croix Union* of Stillwater complained that the road was full of water, grass, weeds, stumps, and tree roots. "Jupiter! what a road," he exclaimed. "The goats upon the mountains could not have

<sup>10</sup> E. S. Seymour, *Sketches of Minnesota*, 190, 204 (New York, 1850).

<sup>11</sup> *Appointments of Postmasters*, 19:28; *Taylor's Falls Reporter*, March 1, 1860.

<sup>12</sup> Taylor to Sibley, April 17, 1851, Sibley Papers.



engineered a worse road." Postal service in the St. Croix Valley continued to be poor mainly because of such conditions. Censure of the postal system became especially strong and bitter in the 1850s, for adequate mail service was of primary importance to the early settlers. Holcombe summed up the situation when he wrote to Sibley from Stillwater on March 27, 1852: "Our mails . . . are sadly out of joint."<sup>13</sup>

The young territory of Minnesota, with very little money to spend on highways, had to depend largely on the federal government to tie its settlements together. By 1853 a military road up the west bank of the St. Croix, which eventually would connect Point Douglas with Lake Superior, was completed to twelve miles above Taylors Falls. Great must have been the day in that same year when the first four-horse coach, perhaps carrying mail, reached Marine Mills! In 1854 mail was arriving tri-weekly at Stillwater, coming overland from St. Paul. Occasionally, too, a steamboat would bring it in. Carlisle A. Bromley, a liveryman at Stillwater, was the carrier on the land route, and he also ran a two-horse mail carriage once a week to Taylors Falls via Marine Mills.<sup>14</sup>

THE RESIDENTS of Marine Mills were not so much concerned with the condition of their road as they were about what was happening to their mail in the Stillwater post office under the inept administration of postmaster Harley Curtis.<sup>15</sup> The Marine correspondent for the *Union* voiced this grievance in a letter to the editor published on June 30, 1855: "We wish to hint at a few facts in regard to the present crippled condition of the mail arrangements for this route from your city [Stillwater]. We have a weekly mail. The contractor performs his part well; and then for us to be deprived of our mail, or to receive but a pittance of it, is truly vexatious. We understand the

<sup>13</sup> Sibley Papers.

<sup>14</sup> 33 Congress, 1 session, *House Executive Documents*, no. 1, p. 28 (serial 712); *Saint Croix Union* (Stillwater), December 15, 1855; Bromley to W. H. Dundas, February 27, 1854, Post Office Department, Contract Office, Letters Received. The gist of the latter letter is given on card 10923 in a calendar of federal records made for the Minnesota Historical Society and other Midwest institutions by Newton D. Merness in the 1920s. The contract office letters have since been destroyed. Oliver W. Holmes of the National Archives to the author, April 23, 1959.

<sup>15</sup> For more on Curtis as postmaster, see Holcombe to Sibley, January 9, 1850, Sibley Papers. Material is also included in the Gold T. Curtis Papers, owned by the author.

THE hotel in which the Marine Mills post office was housed from 1885 to 1887



cause to be lack of mail bags. There is but one leather bag on this route, and every week there is matter enough to fill two or three sacks besides. . . . There is a screw loose somewhere. The proper person should take steps to have a sufficient number of leather bags supplied to hold all the mail matter that is ready and waiting to go each week. . . . We ought to have a semi-weekly mail. The mail coaches run tri-weekly crowded with passengers. This dilatoriness is such that it affects the community at large; but more particularly the publishers of newspapers. For instance: under the present loose arrangement the 'Saint Croix Union' is as long getting twelve miles as the 'New York Times' is in coming from the metropolis of our country to the remotest north-western frontier."

Most of the complaints of the 1850s were aimed at those who contracted to carry mails. Many were sadly and shamefully neglecting their duty. "The irregularity of our . . . mail," editorialized the *Union* on November 3, 1854, "has become a matter of so frequent an occurrence that we can thank our stars that it is *no worse*." The postmaster at Dubuque, Iowa, perhaps had the right explanation when he asserted that in the entire Northwest there was no effective postal supervision. The Galena boats did not make connections with the trains; on the land route, mail piled up in post offices because it was left behind when there were passengers to carry. Schedules, too, were changed to meet the carriers' convenience.<sup>16</sup> Since communications from the East were still "as angel's visits—few and far between," the *Union* on March 6, 1855, proposed that "we declare ourselves independent . . . make a China wall around the Territory, let the world wag, raise

beans and corn, and live 'unspotted from the world.'"

As already noted, however, the people of Marine Mills defended the contractor on their route. "His skirts are clear," a *Union* correspondent said in the March 20, 1855, issue, since he reached the village regularly every Tuesday, always bringing the mail bags when there were any to bring. "Who is to blame?" was therefore an apt question. "Have they blind Postmasters somewhere on the route along the Mississippi? . . . Postmasters ought to be required to know how to read plain writing, have good eyes, and subscribe for one or more newspapers, in order to remove temptation to detain and read other peoples."

Poor service was not always attributed to laxness on the part of Mississippi River postmasters. On December 15, 1856, a petition signed by 133 residents of Taylors Falls requested the federal government to oust postmaster Porter E. Walker, brother of Orange Walker, because he did not give "general satisfaction" to the public. Walker, it seems, was also the local schoolteacher, and "during school hours," as the petition put it, "the most busy part of the day, the office remains closed to the great annoyance and inconvenience of many citizens having business" there.<sup>17</sup>

BY 1858, the year Minnesota was admitted to the Union, the valley's mail situation had been little improved. On the route up the west bank of the St. Croix from Point Douglas to Taylors Falls, three more post offices had been established—at Lakeland and Milton Mills in 1854, and at the proposed village of Vasa in 1857. The name of Milton Mills was changed to Afton in 1857. Vasa, a little north of present-day Otisville and a few miles above Marine, never materialized, and its name was removed from the list of authorized post offices in 1860. On the east bank of the St. Croix, a post office at Osceola Mills, Wisconsin, had been authorized on January 21, 1854.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Charles Corkery to G. W. Jones, May 2, 1855; to Horatio King, November 14, 1856, Mereness Calendar, cards 11157, 11276.

<sup>17</sup> The petition is in the W. H. C. Folsom Papers, owned by the Minnesota Historical Society.

<sup>18</sup> Appointments of Postmasters, 19:28, 21:198, 18:282.

By 1858 mail was being delivered regularly at St. Paul, but only after a special agent had been appointed to travel up and down the route along the Mississippi River to see that the carriers fulfilled their contracts, according to the *Daily Minnesotian* of St. Paul for February 26, 1858. The paper pointed out that this supervision gave the contractors no chance "to impose on the people as they formerly did." When mail reached St. Paul punctually, the St. Croix Valley and all Minnesota benefited. There was a daily mail and stage service between St. Paul and Stillwater, and sometimes three deliveries a week reached the post offices north of the St. Croix River's chief lumbering town. The *Stillwater Messenger* of July 27, 1858, reported that the Marine road, however, was still in a "scandalous" condition.

Statehood brought no immediate solution to the St. Croix Valley postal problems. Complaints about the irregularity of mail continued to come from those who lived along the river. The *Messenger's* editor, on September 21, 1858, accused the post office department of "progressing backward" in its routing of mail into Stillwater. "Instead of sending our mails direct from the junction of the Mississippi and St. Croix—a distance of thirty miles traversed by daily steamers," said the newspaper, "our mail matter is sent to St. Paul, making a circuit of some sixty miles. . . . Will not some friend send the Post Master General a pocket atlas of this . . . country?"

AN ATTEMPT to improve the service early in 1859, when the steamer "Equator" made a few trips with mail from Stillwater, failed as the result of a disastrous storm on Lake St. Croix which completely wrecked the boat.<sup>19</sup> Captain Isaac Gray's little sternwheeler, the "H. S. Allen," described as the "Regular St. Croix River U. S. Mail Packet," established service between Prescott and Taylors Falls in 1860. But the residents of the latter village decried the results, which brought them only two de-

liveries a week. "We doubt if any other portion of the State," said the *Taylor's Falls Reporter* of October 10, 1861, "is so poorly supplied with mail facilities as the St. Croix Valley."

Another steamer, Captain Oscar Knapp's "Enterprise," joined the "H. S. Allen" in 1862, and on alternate days the two packets busily hissed up and down river, delivering correspondence to villages along the route between the mouth of the St. Croix and Taylors Falls. During summer months the river towns received mail daily by boat, as well as over the regular land route north from Stillwater. But in winter deliveries reverted to a three-a-week schedule at Marine Mills and Taylors Falls. For a number of winters after 1862 the frozen river proved a good highway for both passenger and mail stages, far preferable to the rough and sometimes snowless land route. Thin ice, however, caused an occasional accident. For example, in March, 1881, the mail coach broke through about two miles above Stillwater. The horses were pulled out unharmed, but the mail bags were soaked and badly damaged.<sup>20</sup>

The summers of 1863 and 1864, which were marked by extremely low water, were difficult for all steamboats on both the St. Croix and the Mississippi. Captain Knapp complained that a good size pickerel, lying crosswise in the channel, interrupted navigation, and that his boat could no longer jump over the sand bars. On October 1, 1864, the Taylors Falls editor spoke for the residents of Marine Mills and all other upriver villages when he commented on the effects of a major log jam: "We, denizens of this Upper Valley are now . . . most effectually blockaded, completely shut off from any passenger communication with the outer world, save by the daily means of egress and ingress from our hermitage, in the one horse conveyance which carries our U. S. M[ail]."

<sup>19</sup> *Messenger*, May 31, 1859.

<sup>20</sup> *Minneapolis Tribune*, March 18, 1881.



THE "G. B. Knapp," the last mail boat on the St. Croix

In July, 1866, mail service via steamer was discontinued and triweekly delivery by four-horse stage substituted. Valley residents, however, persuaded Congressman Ignatius Donnelly in Washington to have boats reinstated for three days a week; they were to alternate with mail coach trips by land. No evidence showing that this plan was put into operation has been found. Nor do the valley newspapers record another mail boat on the St. Croix until 1871, when the "Wyman X" functioned for a short time after a stage line discontinued service because the road bordering the river was in such poor condition. As the stage driver said: "This road is not passable, not even jackass-able."<sup>21</sup>

By mid-1869, twenty-nine-year-old Samuel Judd had succeeded his great-uncle, Orange Walker, as postmaster at Marine Mills.<sup>22</sup> Judd was a partner in the then prosperous lumber and mercantile firm of

Walker, Judd and Veazie, the former Marine Lumber Company, and he continued his uncle's practice of conducting the federal service in the company's store. "Jolly Sam," as the *Polk County Press* of Osceola called him, remained postmaster until early in 1885, the same year the lumber company went into receivership. Judd's store accounts list postage stamps, which he sold along with butter, oil, hoop skirts, and canary birdseed.<sup>23</sup>

The year 1873 saw the end of the Taylors Falls mail run. Daily deliveries were established between Stillwater and Marine Mills, and henceforth Taylors Falls received its communications via Wyoming, which was served by a railroad. In 1875 a lone steamboat was again in the mail-carrying business. The popular paddle wheeler, "G. B. Knapp," looking "as gay as a girl in a calico dress with a white apron" and with "U.S. MAIL" painted in large letters on its bulkheads, ran upriver daily from Stillwater. It had been used briefly in a similar capacity in June, 1866. George C. McNeal, a Marine liveryman who held the mail contract, found it more profitable to carry both mail sacks and passengers by boat

<sup>21</sup> *Messenger*, June 13, July 25, August 5, 1866; *Reporter*, April 7, 1871.

<sup>22</sup> *United States Register of Officers*, 1869, p. 490.

<sup>23</sup> The Walker, Judd and Veazie account books, 1849-1904, are owned by the Minnesota Historical Society.



rather than team. This arrangement, however, ended when McNeal disposed of his contract late in 1875.<sup>24</sup> The venerable "G. B. Knapp," for many years familiar to St. Croix River residents, was the last of that stream's mail boats.

A major route change was made early in 1876, when the mail was taken over a new post road through Marine Mills, across the St. Croix by ferry, and via Farmington Center, Wisconsin, to Osceola and St. Croix Falls.<sup>25</sup> Throughout this period, and until the mid-1880s, four stage lines were running through Marine. Abraham Johnson, a prominent local farmer, lumberman, and livery stable owner who is still remembered in the valley as "Abe," was a long-time contractor on the mail route north out of Stillwater.

THE END of the difficult and unpredictable "star routes"—as those not served by railroads were known—was at hand.<sup>26</sup> When the Stillwater branch of the Lake Superior and Mississippi Railroad began carrying mail in 1871, the St. Paul to Stillwater star route was discontinued and mail service by stage ended. But sixteen years were to pass before the iron horse came to Marine Mills. On December 5, 1887, after the Minneapolis to Turtle Lake, Wisconsin, section of the Minneapolis, St. Paul and Sault Ste. Marie Railroad, popularly known as the Soo Line, was opened, the star route

through Marine was discontinued and the railroad began transporting all mail. That spelled an end to direct postal connections between Stillwater and Marine; thereafter all correspondence between those villages had to go via St. Paul. "The discontinuance is an outrage," said the *Messenger* on December 3, 1887. "Now it takes only two hours to send a letter to Marine [from Stillwater], whereas when the stage service is taken off it will take two days."

Just before the transportation change-over, fire struck the Marine Mills post office. After Charles Westergren, a local druggist, photographer, and hotelkeeper, became postmaster in 1885, he moved the federal service into his drug shop in the Marine House, one of Minnesota's best-known hostelries. On the night of November 28, 1887, the hotel was totally destroyed by fire. Westergren, true to his trust, saved all the government property, but salvaged little else.<sup>27</sup>

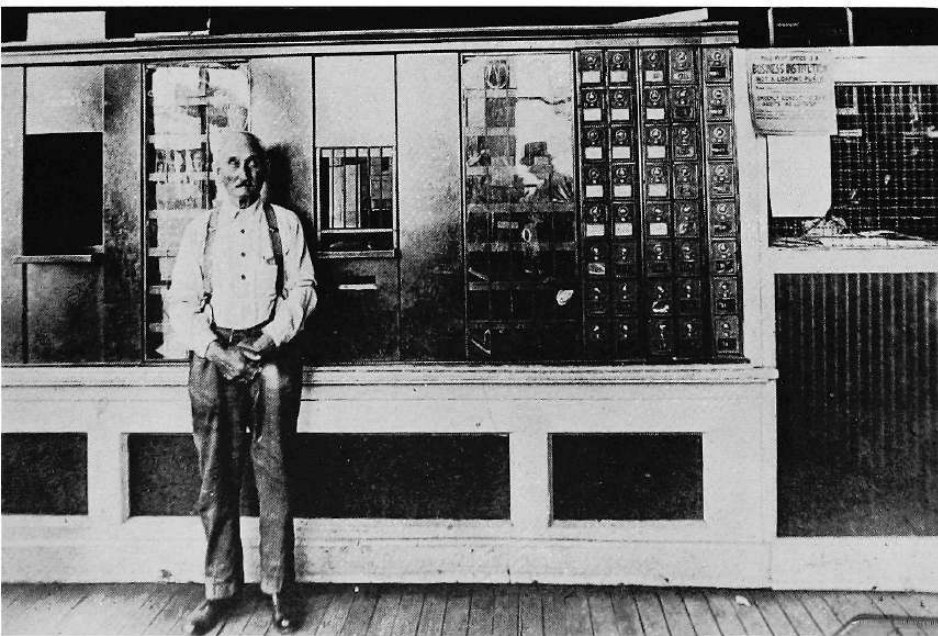
After the coming of the railroad, the story of the Marine Mills post office is a record mainly of postmasters and office locations. Swen Magnuson, who was appointed postmaster by President Cleveland

<sup>24</sup> *Reporter*, May 9, 1868; *Lumberman*, June 11, 1875.

<sup>25</sup> *Polk County Press* (Osceola), May 13, 1876.

<sup>26</sup> Authorities at Washington marked all mail routes not served by a railroad with a star or asterisk.

<sup>27</sup> *Polk County Press*, December 4, 1886; *Messenger*, December 3, 1887.



INTERIOR of the  
Marine-on-St. Croix  
post office, 1928

THE village  
post office at  
Marine-on-St. Croix  
in 1929



in 1893, moved the office equipment into Henry Olson's store annex, where, in addition to his postal activities, he sold drugs and patent medicines. From 1896 to 1900 Olson himself conducted the post office in his general merchandise mart. Bearded John A. Sjostrand sorted and handed out the mail in his shoe, saddle, and stationery shop from 1900 to 1910. He also directed mail deliveries into the rural areas, for during his term of office rural free delivery was inaugurated at Marine. The new service began there on February 1, 1901, less than two years after the postmaster general of the United States had declared that "the experimental stage" was passed. Mag-

nuson returned to his old job in 1910, and he was the first to operate the post office in its own building, unencumbered by patent medicines, shoes, hoop skirts, and birdseed.<sup>28</sup>

By 1916, when Carl Arthur Ecklund was named postmaster, the lumbering era had ended in the St. Croix Valley. Flour milling likewise was no longer important to the economy of Marine Mills, though Joseph Gable continued to grind grain in the old Gaskill flour and gristmill established in 1856. Many residents felt that the name was no longer appropriate. As a result, on March 23, 1917, it was officially changed to Marine-on-St. Croix.<sup>29</sup>

Throughout the community's history, from 1848 to the present, only ten men have held the position of postmaster by virtue of permanent appointment; four others served temporarily in an acting capacity. Perhaps this record is unusual for Minnesota. In general, however, the Marine post office is typical of third-class offices which developed in the early settlements along the waterways of eastern Minnesota.

<sup>28</sup> *Messenger*, July 15, 1893; July 18, 1896; May 2, 1910; *Reporter*, July 7, 1900.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Mr. Ecklund, Marine-on-St. Croix, July 4, 1958; *Appointments of Postmasters*, 84:437.

THE PICTURES on pages 209 and 215 are from photographs taken by the author's father, J. W. G. Dunn; that reproduced on page 214 is owned by Mr. C. A. Ecklund of Marine-on-St. Croix; and that on page 213 is from the John Runk collection. The letters pictured on page 207 are in the Burkleo Papers owned by the Minnesota Historical Society.



Copyright of **Minnesota History** is the property of the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, or email articles, however, for individual use.

To request permission for educational or commercial use, [contact us](#).