

# LA POSTA



**Vol. 8, No. 6**

Steamer VICTORIA, veteran of the Alaska trade from 1904 to 1954



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## ALASKA'S STEAMSHIP RPO ROUTES

By Richard W. Helbock

Speaking from a transportation standpoint, Alaska was an island up until the time the Alaska Highway was completed in 1942. Separated from the United States by over a thousand miles of wild British Columbia and Yukon Territory land, the only transportation links were by sea and air. Newcomers to the field of Alaskan postal history are therefore somewhat surprised to encounter a whole series of Alaskan Railway Post Office routes, some of which had termini in the lower 48. The confusion is based in semantics, for even though these mail routes were called "RPOs" they had nothing to do with railroads. They were in fact steamship routes, and up until the 1930's when Alaska was finally linked by air, steamship service transported all the mail between Alaska and the United States.

Alaska's steamship RPO routes and markings have been a popular subject for postal historians through the years. Covers bearing examples of RPO postmarks and ship markings have been ardently collected, and most writers who have treated Alaskan postal history have commented upon the RPO routes at least in passing. The subject is complicated by a number of factors, and for that reason the literature still lacks a definitive study of route development. I wish that I could promise that at long last this article is going to be that definitive study of Alaskan Steamship RPO routes, but sad to say I can not. What is offered here is a synthesis of existing information, a reorganization of facts and a hypothetical framework of route development, which may answer some of the bothersome questions surrounding what has long been known.

Any listing of Railway Post Offices routes which functioned in Alaska, such as that provided in Cavagnol's Postmarked Alaska or the one published in The Alaskan Philatelist in April, 1966, gives the impression of an extremely complex system. The first point to be made in this article therefore, is that far from being as complicated as it seems Alaska's steamship RPO routes consisted of only three major trunk routes, a couple minor trunk routes, and a small collection of feeder routes. The route development theory which follows will be presented along these lines, and the simplicity of the route system will become apparent. A second point which deserves brief consideration before charging ahead is the use of terms. The term "route" as used herein refers to a definite mail run between two terminals. Intermediate stops may or may not be involved. Two types of routes are mentioned. "Closed-pouch" routes are those which carried mail in bulk from terminal to terminal with no route agent or railway postal clerk in attendance. These routes generated no postmarks. A "RPO" route is used herein to describe an operating mail run which was staffed by one or more route agents or railway postal clerks. These routes are all believed to have had cancelling devices for postmarking the mail and cancelling postage stamps.

## PART I: ROUTE DEVELOPMENT: THE COASTAL ROUTES

Two of the three major trunk routes between Alaska and the United States were wholly coastal routes and their development will be considered in this section. The third major trunk, the Yukon mail route, was also partly a coastal route, but its primary focus was the Yukon so it will be considered in the section which follows.

The first contract to carry mail to and from Alaska was let to the operators of the Steamer John L. Stevens by the postmaster of San Francisco. The Post Office Department authorized the San Francisco postmaster on July 31, 1867, to arrange for special service, not to exceed once a week, from San Francisco to Sitka, "Russian America." The first trip under this arrangement was made by the steamer between July 31st and December 28th, 1867. No precise date is available, and further records are lacking.

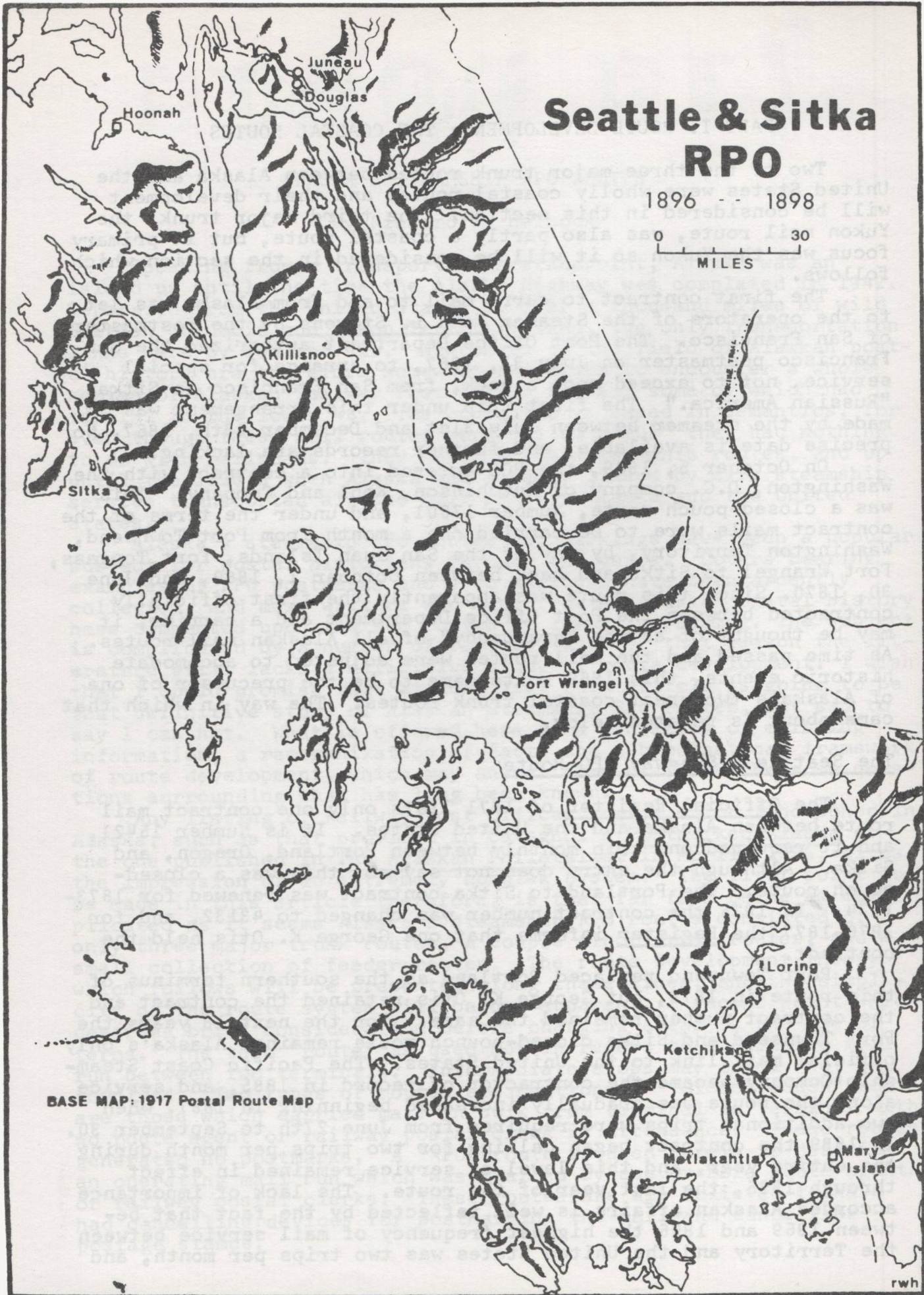
On October 5, 1869, the POD entered into a contract with the Washington, D.C. company of Hutchinson, Kohl and Company. This was a closed-pouch route, Number 17601, and under the terms of the contract mails were to be carried once a month from Port Townsend, Washington Territory, by way of the San Juan Islands, Fort Tongass, Fort Wrangel to Sitka and back between October 1, 1869, and June 30, 1870. Since this route was apparently the first officially contracted between the Post Office Department and a carrier, it may be thought of as the "granddaddy" of all Alaskan mail routes. As time passed and the mail routes were adjusted to accommodate historic events, this 1869 route came to be the precursor of one of Alaska's two great coastal trunk routes. The way in which that came about is related below.

### The Seattle & Skagway RPO Route

The Official Register of 1871 lists only one contract mail route between Alaska and the United States. It is Number 15421, and it required one trip monthly between Portland, Oregon, and Sitka. Although the entry does not say so, this was a closed-pouch route. The Portland to Sitka contract was renewed for 1873-1874. In 1876 the contract number was changed to 43132, and for 1876-1877 the Register informs that one George K. Otis held the contract.

Port Townsend replaced Portland as the southern terminus of this route in 1878, but George K. Otis retained the contract and the contract number remained the same. For the next 18 years the Port Townsend and Sitka closed-pouch route remained Alaska's only official mail link to the United States. The Pacific Coast Steamship Company became the contractor of record in 1885, and service along the route was gradually increased beginning in 1887, when two additional trips were required from June 27th to September 30. In 1889 the contract began calling for two trips per month during the entire year, and this level of service remained in effect through 1895, the last year of the route. The lack of importance accorded Alaskan affairs is well reflected by the fact that between 1869 and 1896 the highest frequency of mail service between the Territory and the United States was two trips per month, and







that service was only available to the people of southeastern Alaska. As one can well imagine, a considerable amount of mail from Alaskan origins travelled outside the postal service by way of whaling ships, revenue cutters, commercial vessels and so forth to be put in the post at Seattle or San Francisco or Portland.

An account of the contract performance of the Pacific Coast Steamship Company is carried in the 1892 report of Martin Knapp, Interstate Commerce Commissioner under President Harrison. Knapp states [as quoted in Cavagnol, p. 18]:

The mail contract with the Pacific Coast Steamship Company requires stoppage for receipt and delivery of mail by their regular passenger and freight steamers, two each month, at seven ports, viz: Ketchikan, in the Tongass Narrows, Loring, Fort Wrangel, Douglas, Juneau, Killisnoo and Sitka. For this service they are paid the sum of \$18,000 per year. When other trips are made and other places visited by the steamers of the company, mails are also carried and delivered on those trips and those places. By this more uncertain service, several mails have been delivered to Metlakathla, Mary Island, Chilkat and Hoonah, and the mail has been carried weekly instead of semi-monthly to the first named places during the months of June, July and August.

The Port Townsend to Sitka closed pouch route was replaced on June 30, 1896, with Route Number 71090, the Seattle & Sitka RPO route. Pacific Coast Steamship Company continued to hold the contract, which called for two trips per month. This contract was renewed for operations during 1897 and the first half of 1898, but thus far no examples of RPO postmarks from it have come to light.

Reports of the fabulous gold discoveries in the Klondike began reaching the States in 1897, and Alaska suddenly became the center of attention. The new port of Skagway became one of the most popular gateways to the Yukon and the Klondike, and so it is not surprising that the Seattle & Sitka RPO became the Seattle & Skagway RPO with the issuance of Contract Number 78093 effective July 1, 1898. The evolution of this major trunk mail route had thus become complete (Figure 1). The Pacific Coast Steamship Company continued to operate the mail route during its early years, just as the company had operated the route in its earlier configurations. The Seattle & Skagway RPO continued to operate until 1941, with only a brief interruption between 1918 and 1921 when it was converted to a closed pouch route.



Figure 1. Evolution of the Seattle & Skagway RPO Route.



Figure-2. The earliest known SEATTLE & SKAGWAY RPO postmark.  
[Courtesy of Len Persson]

#### The Seattle & Seward and Seward & Unalaska RPO Routes

The North American Commercial Company was awarded Contract Number 78099, which provided for monthly service between April 1 and October 31 from Sitka to Unalaska. The contract began July 1, 1891 (Governor Knapp's Report to the Secretary of Interior) or 1892 (Postal Transportation Service, Eighth Division records) and ran through June 30, 1894. Since the Unalaska (actually OUNALASKA) post office was not established until July 22, 1892 (Samuel Applegate's appointment date), or November 3, 1892 (Official Register), the 1892 would appear more plausible. Be that as it may, the existence of the route is not in question. From Sitka the company steamer ELSIE with Captain Thomas as acting Postal Clerk stopped at Yakutat (post office established August 1, 1892), Nutchek (no post office), Kodiak, Unga (Ounga post office), Humboldt Harbor (no post office) and Belkofsky (post office discontinued Aug. 25, 1891) before reaching Unalaska (see map).

The Sitka and Unalaska route was a railway post office, the first in Alaska, and it is known to have used a postmark reading "SITKA & OUNALASKA/R.P.O." (Figure 3). Only two examples of this postmark are known, and both bear identical date and franking (the earliest known use of a Columbian issue in Alaska). On June 30, 1894, the Sitka & Unalaska route was awarded to Lloyd Tevis, and terms of service remained the same. One year later Leon Sloss, associated with the Alaska Commercial Company, won the contract which at that time was renumbered 78100. Sloss continued to win the contract for each succeeding year through 1898, when the Pacific Steam Whaling Company took over. The last year of the Sitka and Unalaska RPO route was 1899.

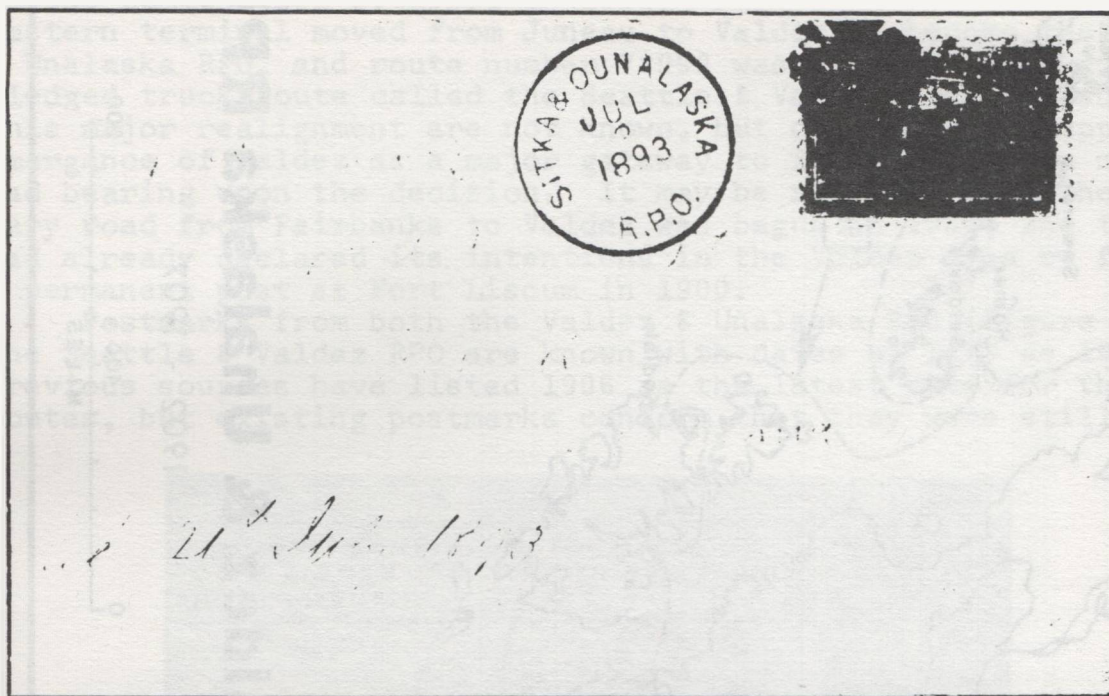


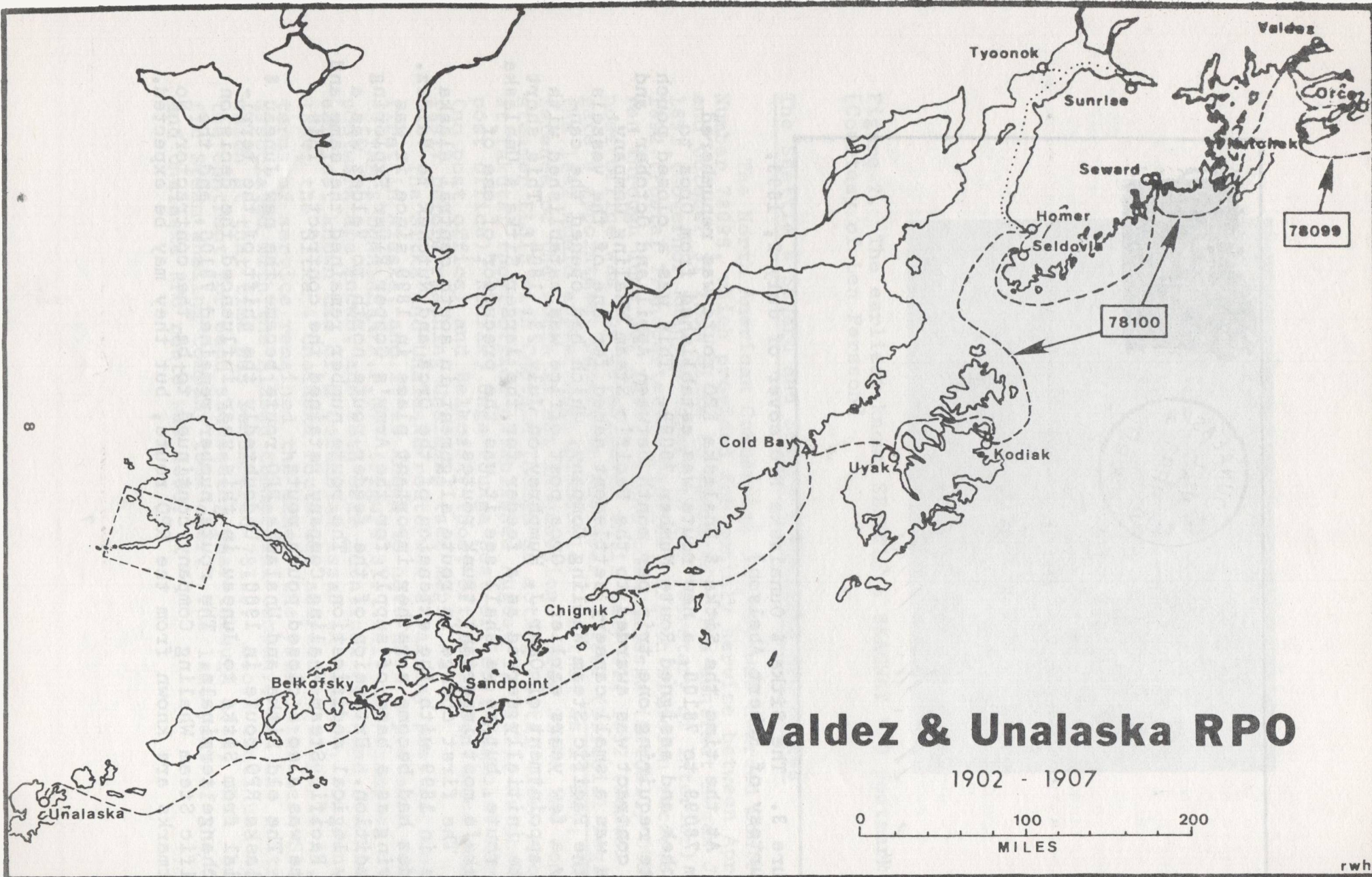
Figure 3. The Sitka & Unalaska RPO cover of July 2, 1893.  
[Courtesy of Robert Abelson]

At the time the Sitka & Unalaska RPO route was renumbered from 78099 to 78100, a new route was established from Orca to Nutchek and assigned Route Number 78099. This was a closed pouch route requiring one trip per month between April and October, and the contract was awarded to the Pacific Steam Whaling Company. Orca was a small cannery settlement named for one of the vessels of the Pacific Steam Whaling Company, which had opened the cannery a few years earlier. Orca post office was established with the appointment of Omar J. Humphrey on July 23, 1894. This short route initially served as a feeder for the larger Sitka & Unalaska RPO route, but as we shall see it was the precursor of one of Alaska's most important trunk routes.

The first change in route alignment in south central Alaska came in 1899 with the extension of the Orca and Nutchek to Valdez. Valdez had become a rather important place in 1899 since it was serving as a base of supply for the Army's Copper River Exploring Expedition. Extension of the feeder route north to Valdez was a very logical modification. The route number remained the same and the Pacific Steam Whaling Company retained the contract. This route was also a closed pouch route.

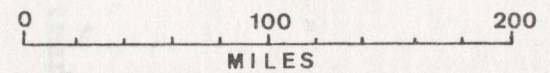
The old Sitka and Unalaska RPO route became the new Juneau & Unalaska RPO route in 1900. Undoubtedly the shift of the territorial from Sitka to Juneau in this year influenced the decision to change terminals. The route number remained 78100, and the Pacific Steam Whaling Company continued to be the contractor. No postmarks are known from the RPO route, but they may be expected.





# Valdez & Unalaska RPO

1902 - 1907



rwh

A major revision of the contract mail routes serving Gulf of Alaska communities occurred in 1902. Route number 78100 saw its eastern terminal moved from Juneau to Valdez to become the Valdez & Unalaska RPO, and route number 78099 was expanded into a full-fledged truck route called the Seattle & Valdez RPO. Reasons for this major realignment are not known, but certainly the apparent emergence of Valdez as a major gateway to interior Alaska must have had bearing upon the decision. It may be recalled that the military road from Fairbanks to Valdez was begun in 1902, and the Army had already declared its intentions in the Valdez area by founding a permanent post at Fort Liscum in 1900.

Postmarks from both the Valdez & Unalaska RPO (Figure 4) and the Seattle & Valdez RPO are known with dates as late as 1907. Previous sources have listed 1906 as the latest date for these routes, but existing postmarks confirm that they were still in op-

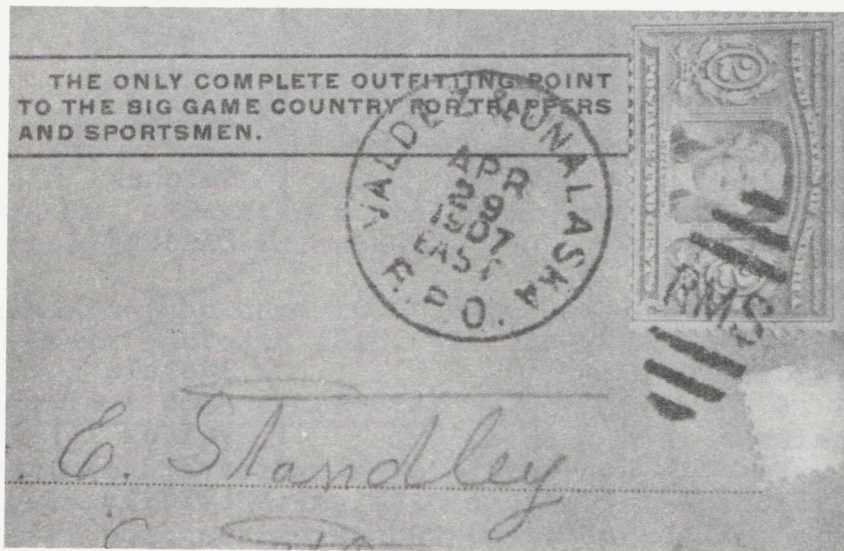


Figure 4. A Valdez & Unalaska RPO postmark of April 29, 1907. [Courtesy of Len Persson]

eration during the spring of 1907. Although not documented, it seems likely that these two routes were closed out in June 1907 when the transfer terminal was moved from Valdez to Seward.

Seward was founded in 1902 by a team of Army surveyors who were there to begin laying out a railroad route to the interior. The railroad, aptly named the Alaska Railroad, was not built until 1915-1923, but it was clear by 1907 that Seward would eventually become the true "Gateway to the Interior." Shifting the RPO route terminal from Valdez to Seward made sense. It may be argued that the move was made rather early, but the basic logic appears reasonable. Thus the Valdez & Unalaska RPO became the Seward & Unalaska RPO in 1907, and the Seattle & Valdez RPO became the Seattle & Seward RPO the same year. This route, as all collectors of Alaskan RPO covers well know, served as a major trunk route until discontinued in 1942. Throughout most of this



long period of service, the contract was held by the Alaska Steamship Company. The evolution of this pair of routes is summarized in Figure 5 below.

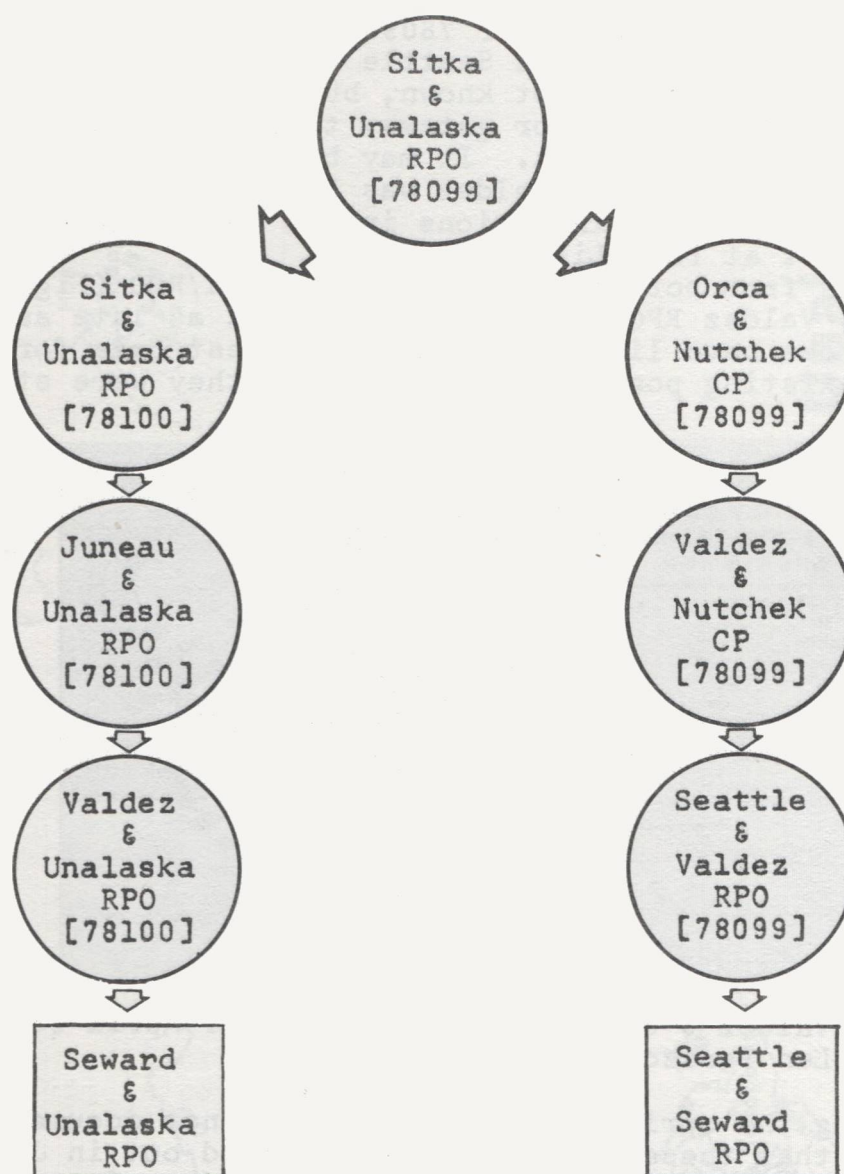


Figure 5. Evolution of the Seattle & Seward and Seward & Unalaska RPO Routes.

#### The Seattle & Kodiak RPO Route

The Seattle & Kodiak RPO was one two minor trunk routes which operated along the coast from Seattle to Alaskan points. This route was assembled from two closed pouch routes in 1900. The Alaska Commercial Company held contract number 78092, which provided for service from Seattle to Juneau, and Leon Sloss held contract number 78086, which provided monthly service from Juneau to Kodiak. The two routes were combined to form the Seattle & Kodiak RPO route, and service remained at one a month. Ships departed

Seattle on about the 10th of each month, and Juneau on the 15th. Postmarks of this RPO are known, but they are not nearly as common as those of the other trunk routes (Figure 6). The Seattle

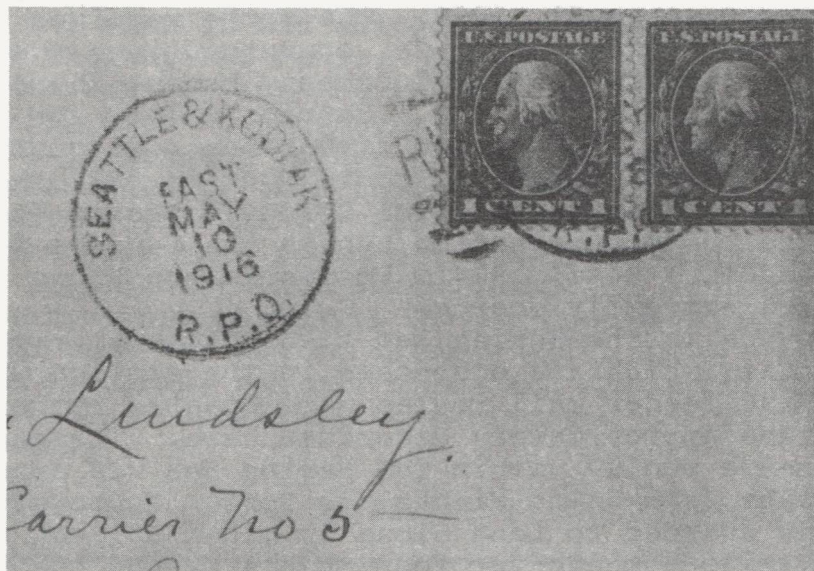


Figure 6. A Seattle & Kodiak RPO postmark of May 10, 1916.  
[Courtesy of Len Persson]

& Kodiak RPO continued to operate until it was converted to a closed pouch route in 1918. It was finally discontinued in 1922.

#### The Seattle & Dyea RPO Route.

Mail route contracts to Alaska and within Alaska increased greatly in number during 1898 and 1899. Most of these were of the closed pouch variety, but one that was not was the Seattle & Dyea RPO route. The West Coast Steam Navigation Company was awarded contract number 78095, which provided for two trips per month between July 1, 1898, and June 30, 1899. This was a trunk route, but it was only in effect for one year. Postal markings from this route are unknown.

#### The Coastal Feeder Routes.

Railway Post Offices routes which provided local service to Alaskan communities not on the major trunk mail routes began to be established early in the 20th century. A few closed pouch routes, similar to the Orca and Nutchek route discussed earlier, operated in Cook Inlet and the Bering Sea prior to 1900, but there were no RPO routes until 1902.

The Cook Inlet saw its first closed pouch mail route awarded in 1899. Called the Seldovia to Tyoonok route, the contract was numbered 78087. The Pacific Steam Whaling Company was granted the initial contract, and was required to make two trips per month between May 1, and October 31, 1899. For 1900 the southern terminal



was changed to Sunrise, becoming in reality an eastern terminal. The contract number remained the same, but this time the contract was awarded to Leon Sloss, who agreed to make one trip per month between April and October 31, 1900. The route remained closed pouch. In 1902 this feeder route was converted into the Sunrise & Homer RPO. The Alaska Commercial Company became the contractor, and the route was renumbered 78076. Service called for two trips per month between April and the end of October. No postmarks are known from the Sunrise & Homer RPO route, but in 1907 the configuration was again altered. This time Seldovia became the southern terminal, and the route designation became the Sunrise & Seldovia RPO. It operated thus until 1914. Postmarks are known from this RPO, but they are extremely scarce.

Feeder service in the Bering Sea tied into the great Yukon River trunk routes, which are discussed in the section which follows. Since these feeder mail routes were coastal rather than riverine, they are appropriately described here. The earliest mail contract route wholly within the Bering Sea was apparently a closed pouch route from Saint Michael to York. Numbered 78082, the contract was awarded to Leon Sloss in mid-1900, and called for four round trips a month for four months during the shipping season. Eighth division records indicate that this mail route became an RPO route in 1902 when the Northern Commercial Company was given the contract. The route number remained the same, but service called for only two round trips per month during shipping. During that same year, there may also have been an RPO route called Kotzebue Sound & Nome. Details are sketchy, and no postmarks are known from either of these routes. In 1903 the Northern Commercial Company was awarded contracts number 78089, 78061, and 78098, which allowed it to operate the Kotzebue Sound & Saint Michael RPO route. The northern terminal of this route was the village of Kotzebue, and the contract provided for seven round trips between June 19th and September 19th. Service continued on this far northern RPO until 1922, but postmarks are quite rare (Figure 7).



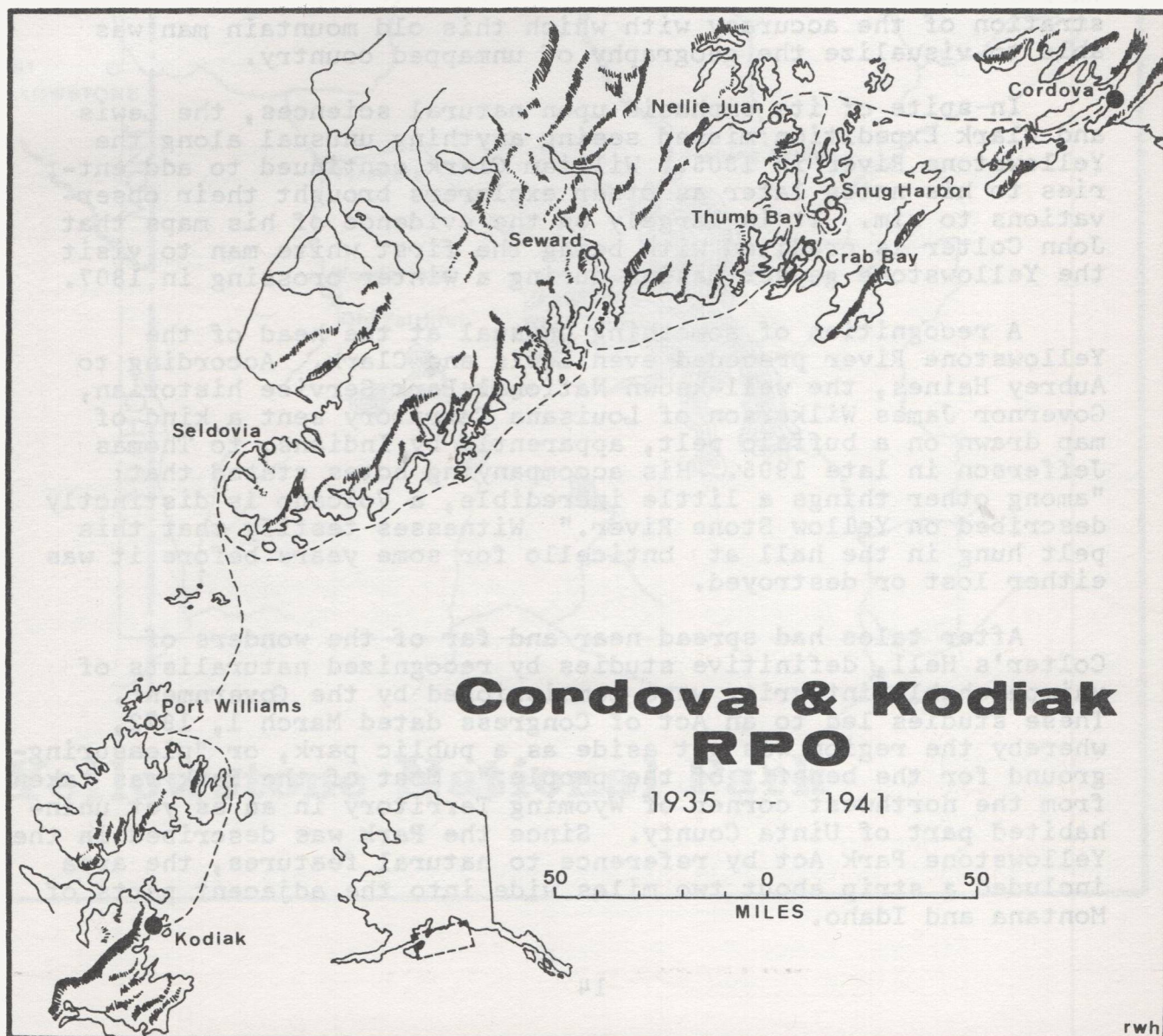
Figure 7. A Kotzebue Sound & St. Michael RPO postmark of 1911.

The major settlements of southeastern Alaska were also tied together by feeder RPO routes. From November 10, 1898, to November 9, 1899, one E. A. Seeley operated mail contract number 78093, which provided for two trips per month between Juneau and Skagway. This was a closed pouch route, but in 1903 it was succeeded by the Skagway & Juneau RPO, which operated with a couple of interruptions until 1930. Juneau & Sitka were linked by an RPO route as early

as 1903. This route proved very durable, and continued to operate until 1946 when it was changed into the three terminal Juneau, Sitka & Skagway RPO route. Service on the Juneau, Sitka & Skagway RPO route was provided by the M.V. ESTEBETH, and on March 31, 1948, the vessel wrecked and burned bringing an end to the RPO route.

Two latter-day feeder RPO routes operated for brief periods in Alaskan waters. The Cordova & Kodiak RPO served a number of small communities in the Gulf of Alaska from 1935 to 1941 (see map). Postmarks from this route are known, and, since it was in operation during a period of increased philatelic interest, not too scarce. Much scarcer are postmarks of the Goodnews Bay & Unalaska RPO which operated from May 1st to October 31st, 1942. This route is believed to have operated, but may have been discontinued as early as June 30th, 1942. No postmarks are reported for this southeastern Bering Sea route.

NEXT: PART II - ROUTE DEVELOPMENT: THE RIVER ROUTES





## THE POST OFFICES OF WYOMING: PART XXI, YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK

By Daniel Y. Meschter & Ruth Dolezal

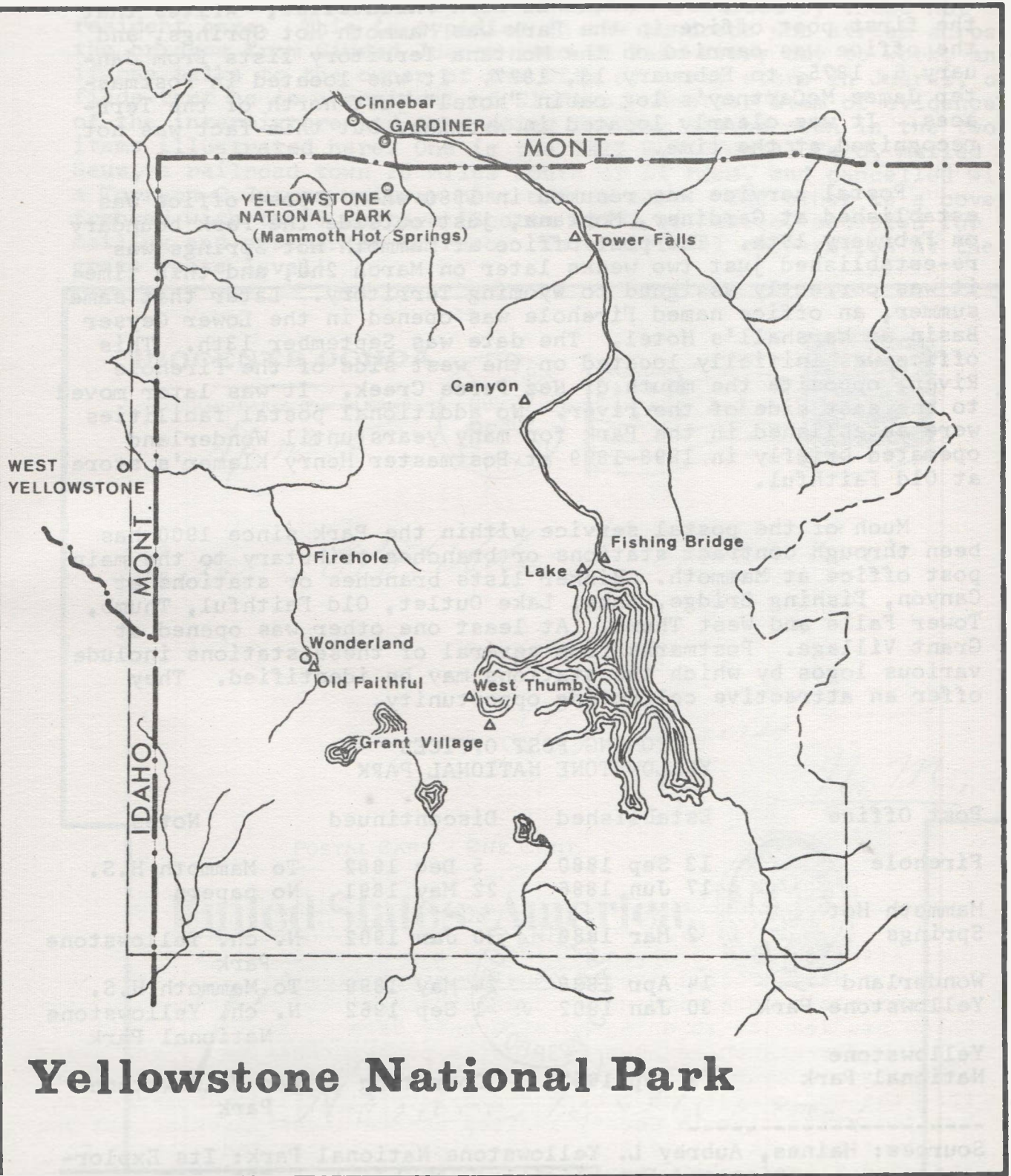
It is difficult to say just a little about Yellowstone National Park. Certainly, the mountain men of the fur-trading era were anything but modest about what they had seen. Led by that talented story-teller, Jim Bridger, the trappers who had seen the Yellowstone country spun wonderful yarns about it with assurance that the truth of their stories would prove stranger than fiction, and was less likely to be believed.

Among the classics is "Old Gabe's" tale about a wonderful petrified forest where: "I'll show ye peetrified trees a-growin' with peetrified birds on 'em a-singin' peetrified songs." Yet, a hydrographic sketch traced out for Father DeSmet by this same story-teller working at Fort Laramie in 1851 was the most accurate map of the Yellowstone drawn up to that time, and a demonstration of the accuracy with which this old mountain man was able to visualize the geography of unmapped country.

In spite of its emphasis upon natural sciences, the Lewis and Clark Expedition missed seeing anything unusual along the Yellowstone River in 1805. William Clark continued to add entries to his notes later as other explorers brought their observations to him. It is largely on the evidence of his maps that John Colter is credited with being the first white man to visit the Yellowstone geyser basins during a winter crossing in 1807.

A recognition of something unusual at the head of the Yellowstone River preceded even Lewis and Clark. According to Aubrey Haines, the well-known National Park Service historian, Governor James Wilkerson of Louisiana Territory sent a kind of map drawn on a buffalo pelt, apparently by Indians, to Thomas Jefferson in late 1805. His accompanying notes stated that: "among other things a little incredible, a Volcano is distinctly described on Yellow Stone River." Witnesses testify that this pelt hung in the hall at Monticello for some years before it was either lost or destroyed.

After tales had spread near and far of the wonders of Colter's Hell, definitive studies by recognized naturalists of unimpeachable integrity were commissioned by the Government. These studies led to an Act of Congress dated March 1, 1872, whereby the region was set aside as a public park, or "pleasuring-ground for the benefit of the people." Most of the Park was taken from the northwest corner of Wyoming Territory in an as yet uninhabited part of Uinta County. Since the Park was described in the Yellowstone Park Act by reference to natural features, the area included a strip about two miles wide into the adjacent parts of Montana and Idaho.





Elmer Binker, the "National Park Philatelist," writes that the first post office in the Park was Mammoth Hot Springs, and the office was carried on the Montana Territory lists from January 6, 1875, to February 13, 1877. It was located in Postmaster James McCartney's log cabin "hotel" just north of the Terraces. It was clearly located in Wyoming, but this fact was not recognized at the time.

Postal service was resumed in 1880 when a post office was established at Gardiner, Montana, just outside the Park boundary on February 19th. The post office at Mammoth Hot Springs was re-established just two weeks later on March 2nd, and this time it was correctly assigned to Wyoming Territory. Later that same summer, an office named Firehole was opened in the Lower Geyser Basin at Marshall's Hotel. The date was September 13th. This office was initially located on the west side of the Firehole River, opposite the mouth of Nez Perce Creek. It was later moved to the east side of the river. No additional postal facilities were established in the Park for many years until Wonderland operated briefly in 1898-1899 at Postmaster Henry Klamer's store at Old Faithful.

Much of the postal service within the Park since 1900 has been through contract stations or branches tributary to the main post office at Mammoth. Binker lists branches or stations at Canyon, Fishing Bridge, Lake, Lake Outlet, Old Faithful, Thumb, Tower Falls and West Thumb. At least one other was opened at Grant Village. Postmarks from several of these stations include various logos by which the stations may be identified. They offer an attractive collecting opportunity.

#### WYOMING POST OFFICES YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK

Post Office	Established	Discontinued	Notes
Firehole	13 Sep 1880	5 Dec 1882	To Mammoth H.S.
	17 Jun 1886	22 May 1891	No papers
Mammoth Hot Springs	2 Mar 1880	30 Jan 1902	N. ch. Yellowstone Park
Wonderland	14 Apr 1898	24 May 1899	To Mammoth H.S.
Yellowstone Park	30 Jan 1902	1 Sep 1962	N. ch. Yellowstone National Park
Yellowstone National Park	1 Sep 1962	Operating	Was Yellowstone Park

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Sources: Haines, Aubrey L. Yellowstone National Park: Its Exploration and Establishment. Washington, GPO, 1974.

Binker, Elmer J. "National Park Philatelist," Western Stamp Collector, 1971.

"THINGS ARE NOT ALWAYS WHAT THEY SEEM" DEPARTMENT - Tom Todsen

Along the border between Mexico and the United States, there is a "laissez faire" attitude which leads to a blending of the cultures to a much greater extent than is realized by those not resident here. This is typified in the hundreds who stream across the bridges from Ciudad Juarez into El Paso every day to work, and, if one talks to the owner of the City of Paris store in Juarez, one finds that he is a resident of El Paso. Another item of evidence of the intermixture and easy going feeling may be seen in the two items illustrated here. One is the UX12 U.S. Postal Card, mailed in Sauz, a railroad town 20 miles south of El Paso, and cancelled with a Torreon-C. Juarez railway post office mark. The other is a cover franked with the 5 centavo [Scotts #297] of Mexico, accepted for mailing and postmarked El Paso. International cooperation at the grass roots level!

INOCENTE OCHOA.

CIUDAD JUAREZ, (Paso del Norte.)

*Ap. no. 15*



*Srita. Clotilde Y. Amador*

*Las Cruces*

*N. M.*

POSTAL CARD - ONE CENT.

United States of America.



THIS SIDE IS FOR THE ADDRESS ONLY.

*T*

*Horace B. Stevens*

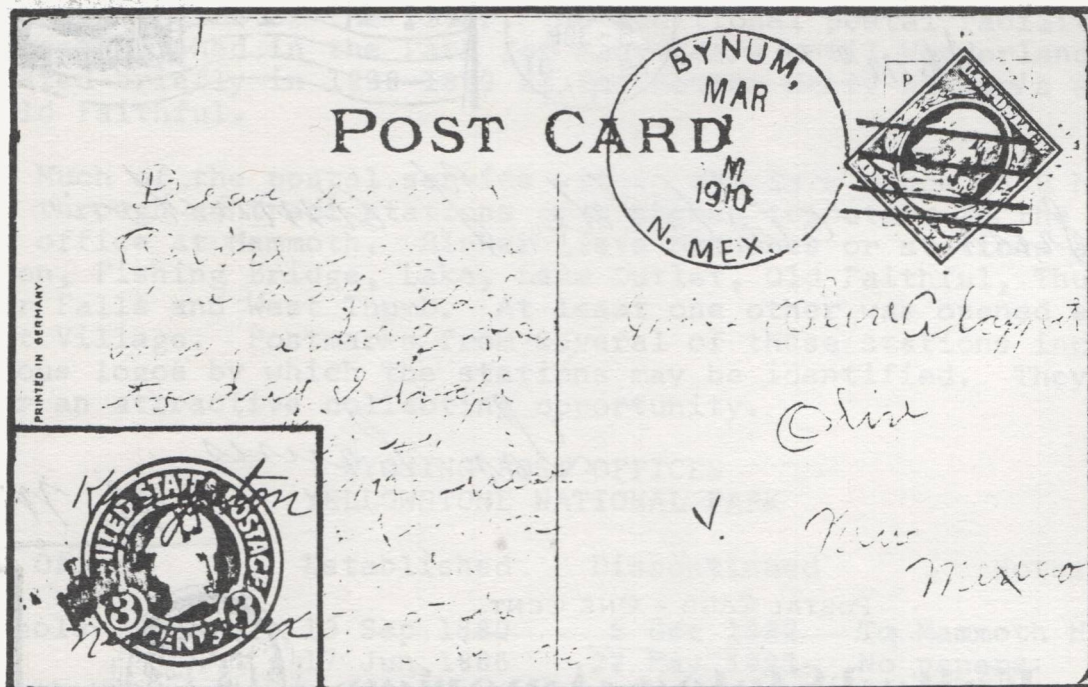
*El Paso*



## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

From Charles Nettleship we have a couple of questions about two New Mexico covers. Anyone with suggestions or information is requested to contact Charles at 5525 N. Via Entrada, Tucson, AZ 85718.

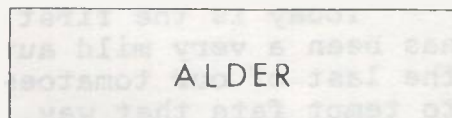
Question #1: This concerns a BYNUM, N.M. postcard postmarked 1 Marc 1910 (illustrated below). This card is in the collection of the Western Postal History Museum and was acquired at auction a few years ago in a New Mexico Philatelic Association auction. In New Mexico Place Names, T. M. Pearce states : "BYNAM (Chaves) First postmaster, John F. Bynam, 1907-10; mail to Olive." (P. 22) That is the entire entry. From this is it safe to assume that the POD furnished a postmarker with incorrect spelling, as was so frequently the case, or is there some other reason for the incongruity?



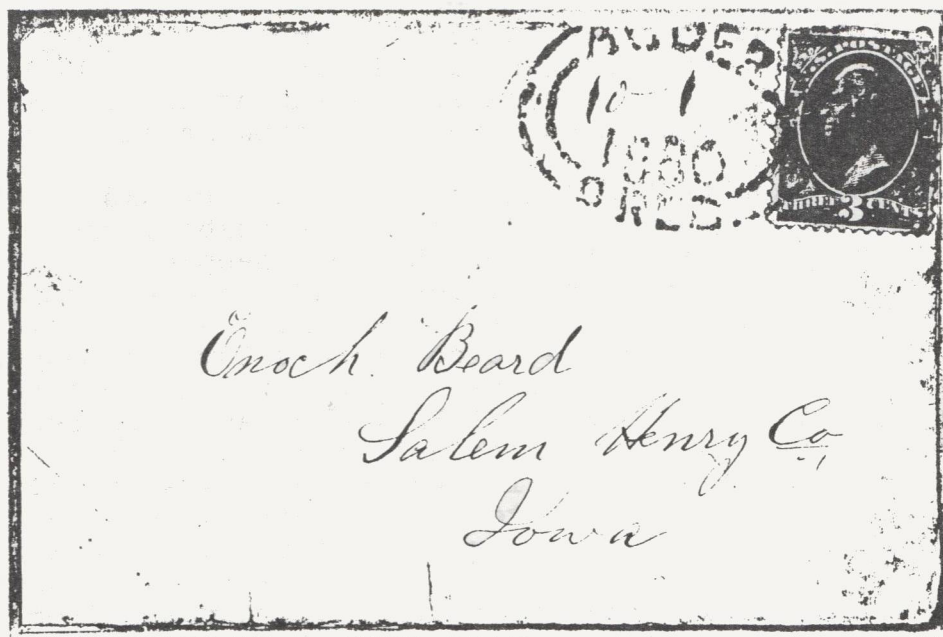
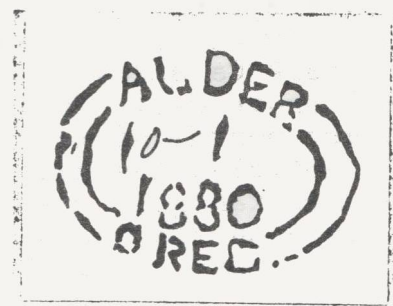
Question #2: This concern a KINGSTON, N.M. cover which was a gift to the Western Postal History Museum. Illustrated above, the postmark consists of a manuscript "KINGSTON/NEW MEX" and the date line, which has been stamped in red with only "Mar 2" legible. This cover was accompanied by a note which reads, "This is a provisional cancellation used at Kingston, N. Mex. for a very short time when the Post Office located in the Victoria (?) Hotel was burned out. I believe the date is Mar 2, 1935(?) on the envelope. Kingston was a silver camp in the 1880's." All right, who has the answers to those question marks, and is able to set the record straight?



ALBUM PAGE



This double oval Alder postmark of 1880 was apparently locally made. The strike indicates a rather crude device which has the year date as an integral part of the design, but employs a manuscript notation for month and date.



Alder was one of the first communities founded in the Wallowa Valley of eastern Oregon. The name of the post office came from the mountain alder trees which grew nearby. Established April 5, 1878, the office was in existence for only 12 years, as more fortunately situated communities became the centers of trade and commerce in the Wallowa Valley.



## EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Today is the first full day of winter -- December 22nd. It has been a very mild autumn here in southern New Mexico; we picked the last of our tomatoes just three weeks ago. Probably ought not to tempt fate that way. January may be a real bear. Subscriptions to Volume 9 are now coming in, and the whole volume looks to be shaping up into our best yet. We will complete Dan Meschter's exhaustive listing of Wyoming county post offices with a revised piece on Albany County and an extra length feature on the pre-territorial offices. Charles Whittlesey reports work in progress on Hood River, Gilliam and Wheeler counties in the 19th Century Oregon Postmark Catalog. Dan Meschter has a series on Utah post offices well under way. Frank Norris reports the next installment of Mohave Desert postal history is well along. I will complete the Alaskan RPO article, the postmark typology and perhaps some more work on the Alaskan gold rush postal history. Gordon Bleuler is working up a piece on the postal history of Mesilla, New Mexico, during the Confederacy. We'll have more New Mexico county listings. And beginning in the next issue, a new series by Edith Doane which will be a marvelous expansion of our knowledge of early 20th century postmark from the Western United States. Now that sounds like quite a lot, but there is still much, much more that can be done. If we ever reach that golden plateau where we find too much material for our present format, we'll simply expand the format. Won't you please consider joining our small but growing list of authors?

As you know LA POSTA has always had very small printing runs. We are currently running 170 copies per number, and all but about 10-15 are being mailed to you. Several people who have recently joined us are seeking back numbers, and there are just none on hand here from before Volume 6. After volume 6 a few copies of most numbers remain, but there are no complete volumes on hand. Even the first two numbers of the current volume (8) are out of print. If some of you SUSTAINING SUBSCRIBERS, who have been receiving two copies per issue wish to sell duplicate copies of back numbers, I will put you in touch with interested buyers among our new subscribers. Just drop me a note telling me which issues you would like to dispose of, and I'll send you the name of someone who is seeking the issues you have. Similarly, if you are a new subscriber and have unsuccessfully tried to obtain back numbers from me, write again telling me what you are looking for, and I'll send you the name of someone who might be able to help. Frankly, I don't know how this is going to work out, or even if there are those among you who have back numbers to sell, but I'm willing to give it a try if there is any interest on your part.

It is hard for me to believe that this number brings to a close the eighth volume of LA POSTA. That's eight years, folks! I've been involved in this venture for over one-fifth of my life now. Absolutely incredible. Plans are in the early stages to make Volume 9, Number 2 [Whole number 50] an extra-special issue. Any suggestions? May I take this opportunity to wish you a very happy 1978! RICHARD W. HELBOCK. 1635 MARIPOSA DR., LAS CRUCES, NM 88001

