

Then & Now - Princeton Post Offices

A Talk Given by Josiah D. Gregory Before the Princeton Club in 1915

Images and addresses, in parenthesis, were added by William "Bud" Brooks in 2022 to enhance the readers understanding.

"Your Committee asked me to speak of some of my remembrances of the earlier days of Princeton, and I have gathered a few facts and incidents that have come to my mind and knowledge that may not be familiar to all present. When our ancestors came to these hills, the man on horseback with his wife and child on the pillion behind them, they found the land heavily timbered. This they cut and burned to make an opening on which to place their cabin. The ancestor who built on the Gregory Farm (13 Gregory Hill Rd.) said the spot was so closely set with trees that wherever he stood and stretched out his arms he would reach a tree with each hand.

They had few conveniences and lived a simple life. They got along with out many things, which to us seem quite necessary. If their fire on hearth did not keep over night in the morning, the boy was sent to the neighbors to borrow and bring home the live coals or the lighted candle in the old tin lantern. If you people should be deprived of the little friction match, which you all have in your pocket I am sure, you would find it inconvenient. If they wished to send a message to friends in Weston from which town many of our early settlers came, they would be obliged to send a special messenger on horseback. Not until 53 years after the town's incorporation was the Post Office established here, and I thought perhaps a little of its history might be of interest to you.

Benjamin Franklin was appointed Postmaster of Philadelphia in 1737 and made Postmaster General of the Colonies in 1753 by the King. It was he, who startled the people by proposing stage wagon to carry mail between Philadelphia and Boston; starting from each city Monday and reaching their destination Saturday eve.

After the Revolution in 1769 the United States established a Post Office department and that year 75 offices were opened. Worcester was our nearest office until 1812. The Diary of Elizabeth Fuller, the daughter of Minister Fuller (minster of the Congregational Church), written in 1790-92, mentions "Father has gone to Worcester for the paper." In 1812 Samuel Stevenson, who had married a sister of Charles Russell and probably lived on the old Russell place (28 Merriam Rd.), where Mrs. Richardson now lives, was appointed postmaster. There was a two-story building north of this house, situated about 40 feet away, which was built for a store (no longer exists). Stevenson seems to have been the storekeeper with Charles Russell, a young man of 19, as assistant P.M. This was on the main road through town leading from Lancaster to Barre, up the hill past Mr. Hobbs, Charles Thompson (207 Thompson Rd.), and Roper's Mill (Old Colony Rd.). Mr. Stevenson resigned and Mr. Russell was made Postmaster in

1817. The increase of his business and the need of a public hall led him to build in 1820 the brick building at the corner, now called The Mansion House (Birthday Cake House) at 19 Merriam Rd. It was built for a store and Masonic Hall. A lodge of Masons was established here in 1812 - 1826, as they had been obliged to meet in private homes up until then.

This reminds me of a story told by Wilkes Davis, who was born and lived in the house that used to stand back of the elm trees this side of Dr. Stimson shop (4 Goodnow Rd.). A Mr. Cheeney, I believe it was, who owned the place previous to Mr. Davis father, was a member of the lodge and rented a chamber for their meetings.

When they went into the room one evening a

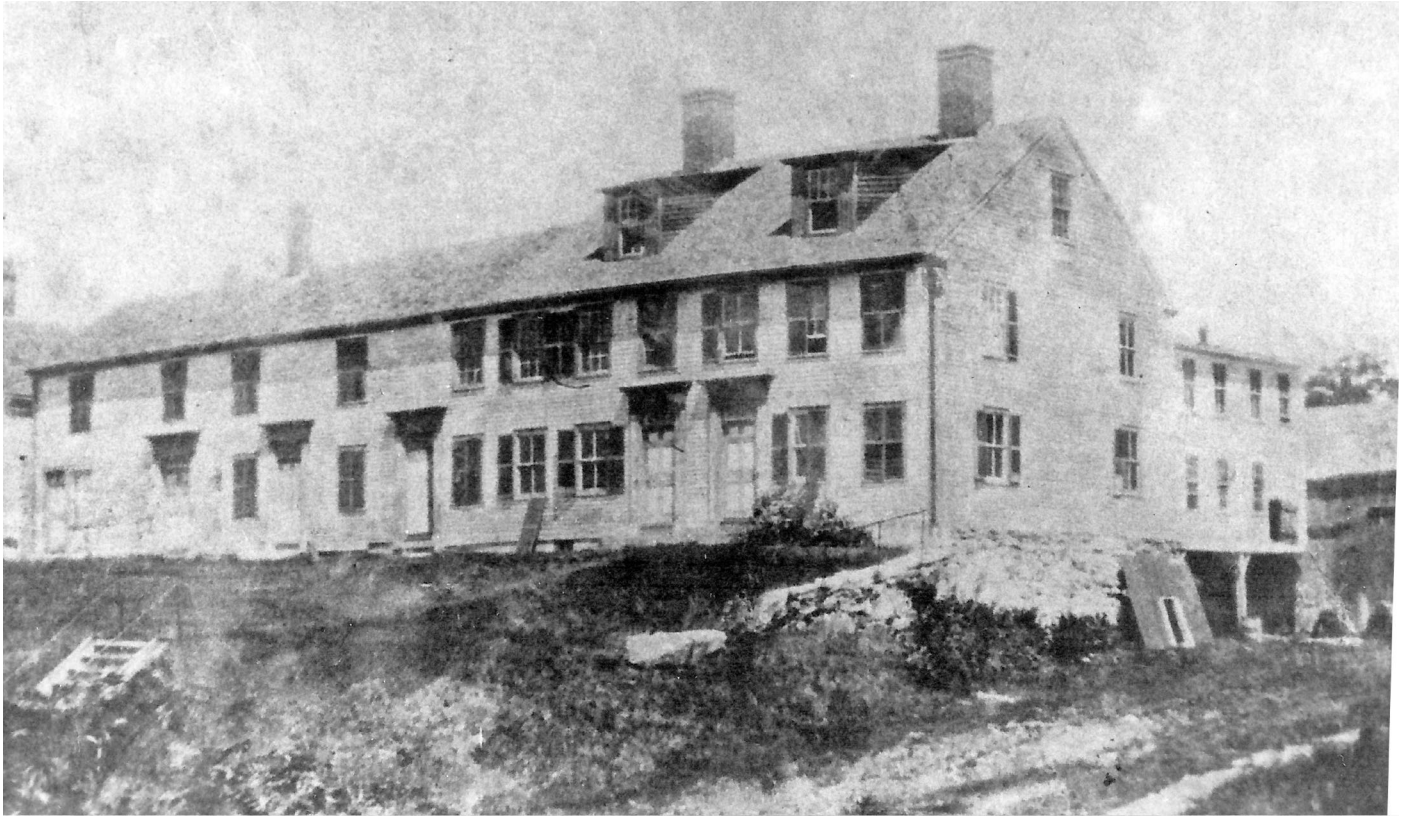
little pile of something white attracted their attention. Upon examination it seemed like fine plaster. They looked above and saw a small hole in the plastering. Mr. Cheeney immediately went to the attic and found his wife, whose curiosity had overcome her discretion, intent upon discovering some of the secrets of the order. What was said or done was not reported. Another story is told in connection with the lodge holding its meetings at the home of a member. The wife knocks on the door and says to the husband, who answers, "Mr. Richardson, if you are through with my gridiron (used in cooking), I should like it to use."

After the building of the brick store, the Post Office was removed there and the Masons occupied the hall. As children, we remember the bottomless pit, an opening about three feet square at the back of the hall, its depth we never knew. The lodge continued in existence until 1826.

From 1830 to 1840, several attempts were made to have the office removed to a store, which stood between Mr. Dwight Davis and Mr. Jackson now (44 Hubbardston Rd.), Dean Sturgis. Copies of letters and remonstrance's among Mr. Russell's papers, which have lately been placed in the library vault, show the efforts made to hold the office,



19 Merriam Rd – 2nd Post Office



The Building connecting 44 and 46 Hubbardston Rd. was a factory, store, and PO in the middle 1800's

which were successful until 1846, when the store was bought and became the Goodnow store, Mr. G. Cheever, Mr. Moses Goodnow's grandfather, as Postmaster. Here it remained until 1849 when Geo. F. Folger, a successor to Mr. Russell in the brick house, was appointed. But the people were not satisfied, business was active in the Center of Town and West Village, and but little doing at Russell's Corner. Much complaint was made and Mr. Folger felt that if he attempted to keep the office in his store a new man would be appointed, therefore he arranged with Mr. Ivory Wilder (1 Hubbardston Rd.) who lived in the house now occupied by the Telephone Co. to take the office and care for it as Assistant Postmaster. This was about 1850. In 1854 Mr. Wilder was made Postmaster and continued caring for the mail until 1856. The room used was on the corner at the right of the front door. (The old boxes that he had are in the attic over the center store).



1 Hubbardston Rd.

When the administration changed from Whig to Democrat and Franklin Pierce of New Hampshire was chosen President, Moses Gill was appointed PM in 1856. The



53 Worcester Rd. Blacksmith Shop & Post Office

people were not generally pleased with the change and Mr. Gill had difficulty in finding a place for the office. He lived in the house, now down beyond Dr. Comey's, which was too far from the center. He tried to hire or buy one of the horse sheds, which then stood on the Common back of the church; but they would not sell one. He finally rented a little shoe shop a few rods this side of William Brooks farm (50 Worcester Rd.), Armstrong's now, just across the causeway. There it remained for several months. Mr. Gill was not used to the business and made some amusing mistakes. Papers kept coming addressed to P.M. He did

not know whom they were for, until one day he happened to think P.M., they must be intended for Paul Mirick. He made up a package and sent them over to Mr. Mirick by way of a neighbor. The shop was so far from the center much complaint was made and Mr. Gill (living at 85 Worcester Rd.) succeeded in hiring a room in the house now owned by Ellsworth Howe (7 Hubbardston Rd.). There was a small sink in the room into which the mails were emptied from the bags. In a short time, he hired the shoe shop that stood about where Dr. Howe's Office now stands (11 Gregory Hill Rd.). Here it was kept for several months. Mr. Gill, a man nearly 70, coming two miles each winter morning in season to have the mails ready at 7 o'clock. He lived on the Gireaurd place. It was quite a task, and it was a new business for him. He did not satisfy the people and much complaint was made. Dr. E. Brooks (2 Radford Rd.), who lived across the street from Mr. Roberts, was induced to act as Postmaster and take the office into a room just back of the sitting room. It remained there under his care until 1866. That year Mr. Beaman of the Wachusett House, Mr. A. Thompson of the Prospect House and others thought it would accommodate the majority of the town better if the post office was nearer the hotels and through their efforts D.H. Gregory (2 Mountain Rd.) was appointed Postmaster and the office moved into the store Sept. 27, 1866.



2 Mountain Rd

There was a change in the administration in 1884, Cleveland having been elected. In 1886 Mr. E.H. Heywood was interested to have the office placed in the hands of one of his party. Then he found he could not get appointed himself he succeeded in securing it for Leonard Chandler, John Chandlers father who lived 3 miles away, on the farm of Clayton Hubbard now. Mr. Chandler did not seek the office and when it was thrust upon him, he came to see us in regard to the matter which resulted in my being appointed Asst. Postmaster, doing the work and paying him a specified sum each quarter when he came up to sign the reports.

There was another change in the administration in 1888, and John Wannamaker, who was Postmaster General, appointed me (Josiah D, Gregory). Raymond J. Gregory was appointed April 15, 1915.



East Princeton Store and P.O.

The office in East Princeton was established in 1849 with H.S. Pratt as Postmaster.

- In 1855 Joseph Whitcomb took his place.
- In 1870 J. Allen Mirick.
- In 1878 Warren Whitcomb,
- In Cleveland's administration of 1886 the same influence that placed Mr. Chandler in the Princeton Office put Samuel Jewett in the East Princeton office

- In 1889 Warren Whitcomb was reinstated.

Within a few years the town had six Post Offices in operation at one time;

- Princeton Center – Gregory Store,
- East Princeton – Whitcomb Store,
- Brooks Station – Railroad Station,
- Princeton Depot - Railroad Station,
- Ropers Mills or East Hubbardston,
- Mt. Wachusett – at the Mountain House Hotel

The last two were been discontinued and West Sterling office moved over the line into Princeton so that now we have five offices within the limits of our town lines.

The Rates of Postage as listed in 1813 book given to Samuel Stevenson printed in 1813, our first Postmaster were pennies. Now you can send your letter to East Princeton or 3000 miles to California, 5000 miles to Sandwich Islands or 8000 miles to

Shanghai, with only a two-cent stamp on the corner. If you put on a blue 10-cent stamp your letter will be specially delivered, if the party addressed with one mile of the office. Parcel Post now adds much volume to the mails and has become a great convenience when you can send a dozen eggs (if you can get them) to your friend in New York, for 75 cents, or a suitcase weighing maybe 50 lbs. for 54 cents it is proving or great convenience.

We are frequently required to keep a record of the weights of mail sent and received. The last one in May of this year showed that from May 16 To June 16 there was recorded 3917 lbs. and that we sent out during the same time 1487 lbs. and 70zs. The weight was kept in classes. Second Class (newspapers from publishers) was the largest amount received being 1773 lbs. Letters First Class 208 lbs. Circulars Third Class 252 lbs.

Parcel Post 1250 lbs & 100ozs. Pouches and Sacks 932 lbs. The record of mail dispatched from the office was

Letters - First Class	11,412.
Second Class	39.5
Third Class	35.
Parcel Post	385.15
Pouches and Sacks	912
Total	1487.7 lbs

Mail at first was sent by stage, going to towns north of us. Afterwards a line ran through from towns west to Boston. Upon the completion of the Worcester and Nashua R.R. about 1840, the mails were carried by stage to Oakdale and this continued until the Boston, Barre, and Gardner R. x R. was completed to Gardner in 1871. Some one has said the road was given this name because it did not start at Boston did not go to Barre and did not end in Gardner.

During the building of this road, there were held two town meetings, probably as exciting as any on our records. The road needed money and private subscriptions were insufficient. Friends of the road got a special act through the Legislature of 1868 allowing towns on the line to subscribe 5% of the valuation to capital stock. A town meeting was called Sept. 2 1868. The center and west part of the town led by William

Goodnow and S.S. Hastings favored the plan, while most of the people east of the center led by Albert C. Howe, and William Brown of East Princeton were opposed. The location of the road was fixed, so that no subscription from the town would have brought it nearer the center.

The town meeting was well attended. Mr. Hastings who used to live in this house (50 Hubbardston Rd.) made the motion that "The town subscribe for \$20,000 of stock." There was not much talking. It had been well argued out side. The vote was taken by the reading of the Check List, each party present responding by "Yes or No". The result was 91-Yes and 97-No. 188 having voted. Mr. Goodnow offered some remarks moved to make the amount subscribed \$10,000, and the roll was called again, "90 Yes and 99 No". Another meeting was held Sept. 25 and the question tried over again. Both sides had made a thorough canvas. The old and young the blind and lame were brought out and the vote taken in the same manner with result - 120 Yes and 120 No." 240 persons voting. Time has proved that we of the center and west side were fortunate in being defeated. The stock was turned over to a new organization at about 10 cents on a dollar. The town was saved a heavy loss. Holden and Hubbardston both made subscriptions. Hubbardston to the amount of \$45,000 5% of its valuation.

I remember one other town meeting where we had a tie vote. It was in 1885 when meetings were held in Wachusett Hall (where was this) after Boylston Hall was burned. The question was on License. The vote stood 17 to 17. At this same meeting I noticed that a vote was passed granting a bounty of 10 cents a head for all woodchucks killed within the limits of the town. I don't know whether the Brunson Boys were interested in the matter but the friends of the plan were not out in force at the adjournment of the meeting and the vote was rescinded.

With one more incident that comes to my mind I will close my rambling talk. On the morning of the 4th of July 1885, my mother looked out of a chamber window toward the west village and saw suspended over the road, the form of a man. Apparently there had been a murder or suicide during the night. There was much excitement at first but when the object was reached a placard was found attached saying, "School Committee, Three in One". Somebody cut the rope and threw the stuffed old clothes back of the sheds. That 4th of July afternoon our band, we had a brass band then and a band stand, gathered, placed the form on a stretcher, marched to the top of Meeting House Hill where cremation was made. I was about 10 years old but remember well the awful dirge, which was sounded as they ascended the hill. M. B. Reed had the bass horn and made it very effective. There had been some opposition to the ruling of the Committee, and it was publicly expressed by the young man, Rev. J. B. Bigelow, Asa N. Goddard, and Geo. E. Pratt, were the Committee.

Princeton Depot, Postmasters - established	- discontinued, 1916
Geo. F. Wetherbee	Jan. 29, 1877
John E. Boyer	Sept. 18, 1886
G.A. Bigelow	May 28, 1889
Brooks Station, Postmasters -	
C.R. Bartlett	Jan. 17, 1877
Chas. Winship	Oct. 22, 1877
W. K. Parker	Mar. 12, 1888
Daniel Davis Jr.	Sept. 13, 1888
Geo. F. Pratt	Jan. 16, 1893
Edw. W. Sheedon	Jan. 13, 1894
Alex St. George	July 3, 1896
M. H. Warner	May 10, 1910
Mount Wachusett, Postmasters	Discontinued Oct. 14, 1903
D. A. Putman	July 28, 1873
M. H. Bullard	May 25, 1875
W. L. Bigelow	June 26, 1884
M. H. Bullard	Mar. 11, 1886
G. H. Derby	Mar. 29, 1895

Quotes From Articles About Our Post Offices since 1915

“As you can see from above, in the 1900s the town of Princeton was served by a variety of post offices. Both the center of town had a post office with mail boxes and East Princeton had a post office with mail boxes (86 Main St.). Both of these small post offices originally existed within a general store. Mail was handed to the customer by the postmaster, who was also the store owner for many years. If the store owner was busy, you had to wait, but you could find out the news of the town while you waited.

By the late 1960s the mail function was separate from the store, but still in the same building. New mail boxes with combinations (for instance A left to G, right to B) were installed. Mail consisted of hand-written letters, post cards, a few magazines and seed catalogs, and occasional packages from far away. ZIP codes (Zoning Improvement Plan) were phased in nationwide beginning in 1963. Rural delivery to houses in outlying sections of the town was provided by rural routes from adjoining towns, specifically:

- **Jefferson:** Jefferson Road and some of Worcester Road
- **Hubbardston:** Hubbardston Road to at least Gates Road

- **Westminster:** Redemption Rock Trail North as far as Osgood Road
- **Sterling Junction:** Sterling, Esty, Forslund, Coalkiln, & Town Farm Roads.
- **Rutland:** Dowd's Lane.

In the early 1970s a petition was circulated asking for rural delivery from the Princeton post office. In response, a rural delivery route was established which served most of the town. One mail carrier delivered to the various households in town, and the routes from other post offices (see above) were discontinued.

In the 1970s there were no house numbers, so mail was delivered based on name and street. Some mail was delivered on the basis of name only; the town was small! Some streets had more than one name, such as Depot Road/Hubbardston Road. There were also no signs identifying streets, only signs indicating where the road would take you. "The mountain road" would take you there.

In 1986 the East Princeton post office was closed, and rural delivery was made available to the box holders from that post office. The 01517 zip code became obsolete.

House numbering, in conjunction with enhanced 911, was completed in the 1980s. This process required a determination as to correct street name, for instance Hubbardston Road was no longer Depot Road, and the assigning of numbers, based on feet of road frontage. A new number was assigned every 250 feet. This provided a uniform address format, consisting of a street number, street name, and suffix, such as 1 Mountain Road. The use of ZIP codes and the emergence of computers allowed for the growth the catalog business, and the targeting of particular demographics for different mailings. This uniform letter format also allowed much mail to be sorted by machines. Fewer people were writing letters.



Malcolm Chase in front of the mailboxes in his Village Store

In 1987 the Princeton Post Office moved from the center of town to new quarters at 206 Worcester Road. Many patrons

chose to have rural free delivery at that time. This change and growth of households in town required three rural routes by about 1990. The widespread use of computers reduced the volume of first class mail, as people communicated by email or cell phones, used electronic funds transfer to pay bills, and ordered goods from online catalogs.” Others who were involved in delivering Princeton’s mail and some brief vignettes.

The Malcolm Chase photo does bring back fun memories, Larry Vaughn and I often stopped in after school and Larry would beg Mr. Chase to wiggle his ears and he accommodated. So many people in and out and a barrel in the middle of the store with pickles! Mr. Chase rented box number 1 and was the envy of everyone, Anne would have loved that box however Richard, Malcom's son continued to rent it, he may have let it go by now. Not only have stamp prices dramatically and frequently increased in price, but box rent is outrageous considering its work in house not the cost of a carrier delivering to the street. Dale was one of the last customer service and sales personnel to leave the East Princeton Post Office transferring uptown, Dolly Sullivan stayed on and became Postmaster and her own staff of one shortly before East Princeton Post Office closed. Shirley Abbott had a small vehicle and the mail and packages would be jammed in and around her as she sped off from the office waving and smiling. Darren Botwelll, from Rutland acted as a replacement until finally securing his own carrier route, sadly he passed shortly thereafter. How can we forget the friendly family dogs that wondered to the office at the center of town.

By Dale (Rice) Stafford 2023

Bob Mason Sr worked there; I don't know if his brother Rocky did, too. Rocky owned the building for a while, after the Chases. I think before Malcolm Chase, Al Vanasse may have been postmaster like in 1946.. Anne Mason took a civil service exam to become postmaster. The first rural carrier for the rural routes set up in the early 1970's was a woman from Rutland named Libby; I don't remember her last name. Libby was a big help to Anne Mason in getting the rural routes established, as she had experience in various offices. She was followed by Jo Claghorn as rural carrier. Other carriers were Nancy Orlando, Becky Mosher, Terry Thompson, Shirley Abbott. Over the years many other carriers from out of town helped out during vacations and illnesses. Clerks besides Dale Stafford, were Priscilla Genest, Kathy Conway, Linda Albrecht, and others. There were people who were hired just for the summer to help cover vacations.



Nancy Orlando

Rural carriers had to supply our own vehicles until the introduction of the now ubiquitous white postal vans. Nancy covered the whole town except East Princeton when I started in c. 1980. Then later I served East Princeton as the town grew and more routes were added, and the E. P. PO was closed.

UPS and FedEx were just coming in as big competition to USPS. In the early 1980's packages were a big part of the USPS service. We also delivered live chicks, bees, human cremains and other odd things. We delivered the 2 inch thick Sears catalogs. Sears was way early in the mail order business. Everyone got IRS forms by mail. Christmas cards had a big impact after Thanksgiving. All sorts of communications that are now sent electronically went through the mail.

Wes Dingman was the person who measured the roads to assign house numbers. As more highway workers and firemen came from out of town, there was a move to put up street signs. It would be interesting to establish when the road signs were put up. When mail began to be sorted remotely by machine, address standardization became necessary. The machines wanted numerals, street name, street type(road, avenue, lane etc) suffix (North or south, for instance). Incorrectly addressed mail would still be sorted by hand. Some people were quite resistant to these changes.

Nancy's dog Hank came to the post office quite often. He would lie across the doorstep. For years Santa would visit with children at the P.O. Anne Mason loved Christmas. In the old yellow building days, there was always a tree in the lobby with a model train running around its base. Anne also gave school kids a little P.O. tour, an inexpensive field trip. You could always find the latest town news posted outside the PO, events, yard sales, meetings, and even the Labor Day tennis draws.

By Nancy Orlando 2023

Postmasters since 1915:

- *David, Josiah, and Ray Gregory for 111 years*
- *Malcolm Chase 1947 – 1967*
- *Anne Mason (great-great granddaughter of Charles Russell Princeton's 2nd Postmaster) 1967 – 1999*
- *Nancy White 1999 –*

Princeton Post Office "Notes"
by Anne Mason and Nancy Orlando - 2008



Anne Mason

"On or about May 1, 1961, after 149 years of having mail handed out personally by the town postmaster, folks will be able to walk into The Village Store and take their mail from their own mail boxes with their own keys.

What a change that will bring in the daily routine. No more chatting with neighbors while waiting in line for the morning mail. Store patrons recalled it was here one first heard of a newborn babe, the passing of an old friend or the engagement of a couple, "who were only knee high, to an arbutus bush awhile back."

Soon, this hustle-bustle innovation of city life standing in the corner of the store will eliminate those friendly small-town gatherings.

An era of old New England that outlived the cracker barrel chats will die when the glassed-in rows of wooden mail boxes are ripped out of Chase's rambling store—next to the village green.

The previous neighborly link to go, folks recalled, was the party-line phones with the town-raised operator who knew everyone."

"Old Routines End"

T & G Staff Reporter Jack Tubert - 1961

The Move to a New Building

Extra space will be the greatest asset of the new post office. There will be 4,000 square feet versus the 868 square feet in the current building. But this will be achieved at the expense of breathtaking sunrises and sunsets, skeleton keys and post office boxes with combination locks.

"I happen to be a fan of old fashioned niceties that you don't find in any (modern) buildings: the finishing touches, the charm, the warmth — the atmosphere that almost always says 'welcome,'" says Mrs. Mason, explaining her misgivings about the move.

At this point, she rises from her desk and walks to the rear door of the post office to show her questioner what she means by "old fashioned niceties." She opens the door, revealing a wooded panorama to the south and east.

"On a clear day, you can see Boston," she says. "The sunrises in the morning are absolutely spectacular. They're almost Caribbean."

"Postal Shift Old Fashion Niceties"

T & G Staff Reporter Terry Williams – May 6, 1986

A Slower Life

In 1967, Princeton had no rural delivery. Residents either had a Post Office box or their mail was delivered by a neighboring town's postal service.

On Saturday mornings, "it was busy and the parking was fair scarce," Mason said.

"The ladies would come to the post office and then go to the library. The gentlemen would come to the post office and then to the coffee shop," she said with a laugh. "Sexist it may be, but that's the way it was."

Men worked all week, "so this was their Saturday fun thing to do: Go to the dump, pick up the mail, go to the coffee shop.

"They miss that routine. I've heard it many times. It was a social Saturday morning."

A woman in town thought the post office lobby looked bare, so she provided lace curtains. "People got a huge charge from the fact that the Princeton Post Office had lace curtains in the lobby windows," Mason said.

Christmas was a hectic time. There used to be a local rate for anything mailed within Princeton. "If the postage was four cents, you could put three cents on a card. But it could not be forwarded," Mason recalled.

People came to the post office and leafed through "a whole bunch of cards" to pick out their Christmas cards."

"Princeton R.F.D. Memories of a Slower Life"

T & G Staff Reporter Susanna Seymour June 22, 1993

Instillation Ceremony

Letters were delivered by foot post at a rate of speed of about 16-18 miles a day. In 1638 there was established by the crown a post office in New England at the tavern of Richard Fairbanks in Boston. People brought their mail or picked it up there. Much of this was correspondence between England and the colonies. A mail service between New York and Boston was established in 1672 by the government of New York. A post traveled monthly between these two cities.

"Nancy White Postmaster Installation"

November 16, 1999 – Ronnie Waters