

Nuggets from the Past
When Forest Hill became Foresthill
By Norman McLeod

June 27, 1984, marked the 125th anniversary of the U.S. Post Office in Foresthill, California (up to 1995 it is 136 years). On that June day in 1859 the post office business in the community of Bath was transferred to the larger, growing settlement of Forest Hill. At the time the no longer existent Bath was an erstwhile gold mining town located about one mile southeast of Forest Hill.

What brought this little nugget of local post office history to the surface was a letter written by philatelist Vern Younger of Fort Collins, Colorado, to then Forest Hill Postmaster Darrell Herold, who included with his letter two stamped and return-addressed envelopes with the polite request they be canceled on the anniversary date. The word "forest" is a popular community pre-name in the U.S. According to Younger, California at one time had 10 places so named, the oldest of which is Foresthill. We checked a 1981 post office directory and found five such names: Forest Falls, Forest Knolls, Forest Ranch, Forestville and Foresthill.

In the total U.S. there are four other Forest Hill (spelled with two words) communities, one each in the states of Louisiana, Maine, Virginia and West Virginia. Six post offices bear the name Forest Hills (plural) located in Florida, Kentucky, Michigan, New York, North Carolina and Texas.

Originally the Placer County town on the divide was spelled Forest Hill. In 1859 the settlement was 9 years old, having been first christened in 1850 by three 49ers who erected the first Forest House, around which the town developed. So when did its name change to the single word Foresthill?

The writer, in company with the genial postmaster Herold, dug into postal archives and discovered the change occurred in April, 1895, done arbitrarily by post office fathers to furnish the town distinction from other communities in the state with the same name.

Ex postmaster Herold advises the local post office location has changed three times since 1859. It is currently located in the Foresthill Plaza, a modern business mall to be found on the main highway to the left just before entering downtown. Originally it was located in today's Oddfellows Building in downtown Foresthill (one of our oldest structures). The second site is today a vacant store at 24470 Main St., on the lower side.

From the aforementioned 1981 directory we learned that in 1859 there were 28,539 post offices in the entire nation, the postal rate for mailing an envelope was 3 cents --- which rate lasted until 1958 when it increased to 4 cents an ounce. That's 99 years at 3 cents. It's been going up ever since.

In June 1851 there were a mere 34 post offices in the entire state of California. This was during a period when homesick miners often walked miles to pick up their mail (if they were lucky). It is no secret that postal services during the gold rush could be described as "a few hits and many misses," due largely as the result of mismanagement, corruption, under-financed offices and just plain carelessness. At that time all the mail from the east was shipped by clipper ships around Cape Horn to San Francisco, thence to the northern mines by boat to Sacramento and from there via stage to the diggings.

It was not until 1863 that the designation First Class Mail became operational. Three years before, in 1860, the Pony Express was inaugurated. This service was a godsend to many miners who could then receive mail from home in seven days, where by ship it required months. Unfortunately, the Pony Express was short-lived. Eighteen months and it was replaced by the telegraph.

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