

Post Offices of the San Gorgonio Pass

Before Beaumont and Banning were established as cities there were at least three post offices in the San Gorgonio Pass. They all have been documented as first showing up in the late 1860s. References to these post offices are found in books by Tom Patterson and Francis Johnston, and in notes from one of Banning's pioneer families, the Bird Family.

It is nearly impossible to determine which post office was the absolute first post office to begin processing mail in the San Gorgonio Pass but it may have been one that was established about a quarter of a mile north of the intersection of Cherry Valley Blvd. and the I-10 Freeway. This location would most likely have been associated with the Bradshaw Trail which hugged the hills from the Gilman Ranch to the present-day I-10 Freeway. The Bradshaw Trail branched off into two directions at this point, one going north through the Yucaipa Pass and the other going west through the San Timoteo Canyon. The post office would have been somewhere between Cherry Valley Blvd. and Singleton Road, wherever the Bradshaw Trail branched west into the San Timoteo Canyon. It may still be possible to locate this site if anyone can provide information as to where the Bradshaw Trail junction was in this area.

Another 1868 post office was established at the Edgar Winery in Cherry Valley. The postmaster was identified as Mark Garrett. One more candidate for the earliest post office was established in 1868 by Newton Noble at the Gilman Ranch, at that time referred to as the Pope Adobe. Noble was a driver for the U.S. Mail Company's weekly run between San Bernardino and La Paz, AZ., a gold rush town on the Colorado River near present day Blythe.

The Banning Post Office was officially established on October 11, 1877, in the Worsham General Store building in downtown Banning. Jack Worsham was the first Postmaster. The building was on Railroad Street, facing the railroad station. Sometime in 1880 Dr. Welwood Murray became the postmaster. In 1884 the Post Office was moved to the Reid Building on the northeast corner of Livingston and San Gorgonio (still standing) with Dr. John C. King becoming postmaster. Prior to 1894 the postmaster position seemed to be synonymous with the store owner. This changed in 1894, when French Gilman became the first postmaster who was not also the storekeeper.

In 1913 the Banning Post Office was moved to the Wood Building, later known as the Corey Building which was located on Livingston. A new post office building was finished in December 1917, on San Gorgonio, near Livingston. A 1917 article in the Banning newspaper described the location as "near the site of the old livery stable." On January 1, 1929 mail delivery began in Banning.

There is a hole in the research of the Banning Post Office between the 1930s and the 1950s. We would welcome any input on this missing section of the history. At some point in the 1940s or 50s the post office was relocated to 133 N. San Gorgonio. The flagpole is still visible on the building that has recently been added to the Dorothy Ramon Learning Center on the corner of San Gorgonio and Hays St.

John Pratt, who's father owned Pratt's Radio and TV on the southwest corner of San Gorgonio and Hays, remembers the post office when it was at this location on San Gorgonio. In his words, "the post office had the old oak wood and cage bars separating the windows from the public and the old style mail boxes. My uncle, Dale Pratt worked there. He used to take the mail down to the freight station on the north side of the railroad tracks and hang the bag for the train mail car to "hook" so they wouldn't have to stop. They would also throw a bag out for him to pick up."

Banning resident, David Adrian, contacted the library to inform us of his father, James Adrian, who was the postmaster of the Banning Post Office when it was at the location of 133 N. San Gorgonio. He was also postmaster for two years after the post office had been moved to its current Alessandro address in 1961. David also remembers the bag that was hooked at the railroad station for the train to pick up the mail. His father got a telephone call late one night during the 1950s informing him that a worker on the train who had grabbed the bag lost his grip and dropped it along the track. The entire Adrian family rushed to the train station in the middle of the night and carefully picked up letters and other mail that had been scattered along the railroad tracks.

There was an early post office in Hall City, the short-lived community against the hills in south Cabazon but the official U.S. Post Office in Cabazon was not established until January 29, 1912.

Information on Beaumont's post offices has been even more difficult to verify. Long time Beaumont resident Virginia Henderson's husband, Paul Henderson worked for the Beaumont Post Office for 30 years and was postmaster for two of those years. Thanks to Virginia Henderson, Bernie Howlett, John Pratt and David Adrian for their contributions to this article about Pass area post offices. (Banning Record Gazette article by Bill Bell)