



Albert Sorenson, the first rural route carrier for Lakebay in 1909. *Courtesy: KP Historical Society*

The Key Peninsula's Peculiar Postal History

LISA BRYAN, KP NEWS

Physical addresses and postal confusion have been troublesome on the Key Peninsula for years. The Lakebay post office, 98349, is located in the unincorporated town of Home. The Vaughn post office, 98394, is located in Key Center, virtually surrounded by businesses with mailing addresses of Lakebay 98349. The vast majority of Wauna residents have a Gig Harbor address despite the existence of the Wauna post office, 98395. Finally, far-flung Longbranch, with no post office at all, proudly retains both its historic name and ZIP code of 98351.

To understand addresses on the Key Peninsula requires a look into the history of its settlement by men equipped with surveyor rods and chains. Mail was vital to early settlers. Postal sorting and storing were first done on boats, in private homes and inside general stores as each settlement sought to establish postal service.

The Lakebay Post Office

Originally operating out of Henry Tiedman's home 100 yards south of the Lakebay dock, "Lake Bay, Wash" became the first official U.S. post office on the Key Peninsula in 1882. The name was later shortened to "Lakebay." By 1894, mail arrived by steamer from Tacoma. In April 1909, the Lakebay RFD (Rural Free Delivery) service was established. Mail was carried by horse and buggy over a distance of 26 miles.

By 1958, the Lakebay post office was moved to Home, just northwest of the Home Bridge on Von Geldern Cove to provide greater accessibility and more space. The only caveat was that the post office retain its Lakebay name.

The Home Post Office

There are various accounts of the short-lived Home post office. Most attributed the abrupt closure of the post office to the activities of the Home colonists. The Home Colony, as it was first known, was considered a radical socialist settlement sowing seeds of discontent with numerous publications on the politics of the day, labor struggles, women's rights, religious commentary, sexual matters and birth control. The political climate following the assassination of President McKinley Sept. 6, 1901, by a sworn anarchist, coupled with complaints about the Home post mistress (who was accused of distributing lewd publications), led to the permanent closure of the Home post office by April 1902. Mail service was absorbed by Lakebay, a mere 2 miles south on Mayo Cove.

The Vaughn Post Office

The early Vaughn postmasters were storekeepers using space within their stores on Vaughn Bay for postal business starting in 1888. In the earliest days, Vaughn mail was transported by horseback to and from the Elgin post office (originally Minter), but later steamers traveled from Tacoma to Vaughn several times each week. Low tides often prevented the steamers from reaching the dock, so the young Nellie Van Slyke assisted her postmaster father Alfred by rowing out past the sand spit through strong currents to carry mail to and from the boats. By 1954, the Vaughn post office was promoted to third class, a distinction based on the amount of money earned at post offices around the county. The Vaughn post office relocated to Key Center in 2001.

The Wauna Post Office

Originally the "Springfield P.O.," established in 1890, the office was later moved and renamed the Wauna P.O. in 1906. It was housed in the general store built on the Key Peninsula side of the Purdy Spit in 1905 by Mrs. Mary Frances White and her husband, William, who also operated the nearby Wauna Lodge. The post office functioned in the same location under three generations of White family postmasters until at least 1974. By 1982, the building was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Despite an impassioned effort to save the historic structure, the building was removed from the National Register and demolished in 2006. The current Wauna post office was built in 1990 at Lake Kathryn Village.

The Longbranch Post Office

Mail was first sorted on Ernest Shellgren's boat, the Monte Cristo, moored on Filucy Bay in 1891. Four years later, the operation was moved to Shellgren's store near the site of the current Longbranch wharf. By 1960, Miss Ellen Shellgren retired as the longest-serving postmaster in the state and the post office was converted to a rural station of Lakebay in 1965. None of the original buildings survived. The Longbranch Mercantile, which served as the last outgoing postal drop in Longbranch, was demolished in 2007.

Historical Attempts at Name Change

Numerous documented attempts to change the name of the Lakebay post office to Home, the unincorporated town in which it resides, all ended in failure. Nearing the centennial celebration of the Lakebay post office in 1982, a fierce battle, worthy of coverage in multiple newspapers, was waged between petitioners from Home vs. defenders of Lakebay over a requested name change. Letters to the editor and high-ranking politicians were filled with passionate arguments for and against. Notable pioneer family names appeared on petitions and in correspondence representing both sides.

Ultimately, it was the "Postal Service area" argument that trumped physical location, which explains why the post office in Home remains the Lakebay post office today, serving the communities of Longbranch, Lakebay, Herron Island, Home and northward into Key Center toward Glencove.

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