

Rural Free Delivery in Rockingham County, Virginia.

This exhibit explores the development of Rural Free Delivery (RFD) in Rockingham County, Virginia in the early years of the twentieth century. The county lies in northwestern Virginia in the Shenandoah Valley, bordered by mountains on the east and west.

In 1899 it was a rural agricultural area, with a few small towns. Harrisonburg is the county seat.

Prior to the implementation of Rural Free Delivery, rural residents were served by hundreds of fourth class post offices, often located in general stores. To dispatch or receive mail, they had to make a trip to the post office. Rural Free Delivery changed that. RFD carriers provided rural postal patrons with timely and convenient service. From 1900 to 1903, the Post Office Department issued small cancelling devices to rural carriers to mark mail received on their routes. The cancel showed the name of the home office, date, and the route number in the killer bars. Covers with these cancels demonstrate the early development of the system.

The primary sources of information on Rockingham County routes are Edith Doane's 1977 book, *County Systems of R.F.D.* and Harold E. Richow's *Encyclopedia of R.F.D. Cancels*. This exhibit extends Doane's work and answers most of her unknowns about Rockingham County.

There are not more than a dozen examples recorded for any Virginia RFD cancel. Many of the markings in this exhibit are the only reported copy. Cancels shown here on piece are from collections formed decades ago when this mutilation of covers was considered acceptable. Unfortunately, these are now the only recorded examples of some markings. As Doane said in reference to Rockingham County, "Specimen markings are very scarce indicating that their residents were not frequent letter-writers."

Initial Routes starting June 1, 1899

RFD came to Rockingham County on June 1, 1899 when three routes were created: Harrisonburg Routes 1 and 2 and Dayton Route 1. In late 1900, one of the Harrisonburg routes was discontinued. From the records it is not clear which one, Route 1 or 2, and why. Possibly the route was not generating the volume of mail expected; perhaps the carrier did not work out. Although cancelling devices were probably issued in the fall of 1900, no markings have been recorded prior to July 1901.



Harrisonburg,
route illegible.
July 11, 1901

Second Group, July 1, 1901

On July 1, 1901 a second group of routes went into operation. A total of 12 new routes were initiated: seven routes in Harrisonburg, Elkton Routes 1 and 2, Linville 1, Ottobine 1 and Penn Laird 1.

It is not clear if a new Harrisonburg Route 1 or 2 was started, since we do not know which number was discontinued in 1900. Harrisonburg Routes 3 to 8 were definitely new.



Ottobine Route 1.
August 25, 1902.
Only example reported.



Penn Laird. Route 1.
July 28, 1902
Only example reported.

County-wide System starting October 15, 1902

Routes 1 to 7

On October 15, 1902, a county wide system of RFD routes was created. This system employed consecutive route numbers, regardless of a route's home office. Rockingham's county wide system is unique in Virginia because it occurred during the period when RFD carriers canceled all received mail. Later, other counties would have similar coverage, but it would be after the RFD cancel period and difficult, if not impossible, to document with postal markings.

After studying the county for several months, Post Office Department Special Agent A.S. Barr initiated a 37 route system. He renumbered six of the existing fourteen routes in the county and established 23 new ones. The majority of these new and renumbered routes received Richow Type 2B cancelers (small serifed RFD with sans-serif office and state). Special Agent Barr also closed or recommended closure of 26 post offices. Two of these reopened as rural stations of Harrisonburg.

Routes 1 to 7. Harrisonburg. Harrisonburg's Routes 1 to 7 were not renumbered. They continued to use the old cancelers, as shown by these items below.



Left, Harrisonburg Route 3
November 24, 1902
Below, Harrisonburg Route 5
December 17, 1902.



Route 8. Harrisonburg, Mount Clinton Rural Station. Two of the new Harrisonburg routes were not based out of the Harrisonburg main post office, but instead out of newly created rural stations Mount Clinton and Singer Glen. In fact, these new stations were old independent offices with a new status.



Harrisonburg, Mount Clinton Sta. Route 8.
Above, July 20, 1903. Below, October 24, 1906.
Three reported copies; two in black, one in violet.

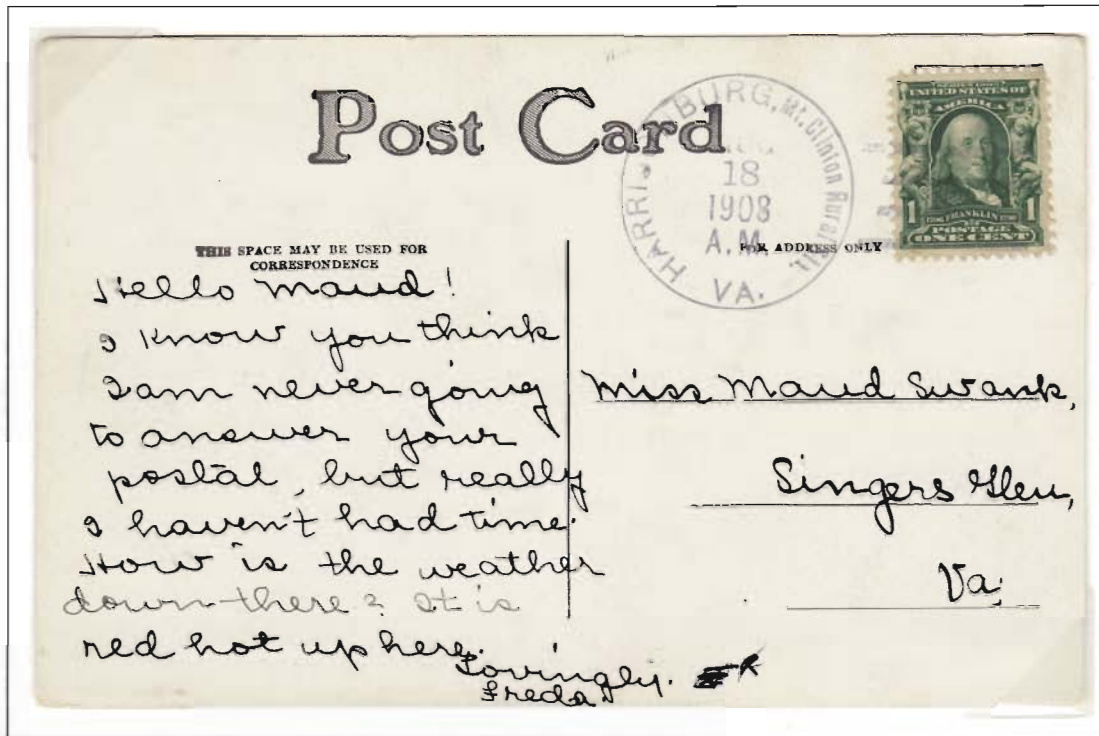


County-wide System

Mount Clinton Rural Station

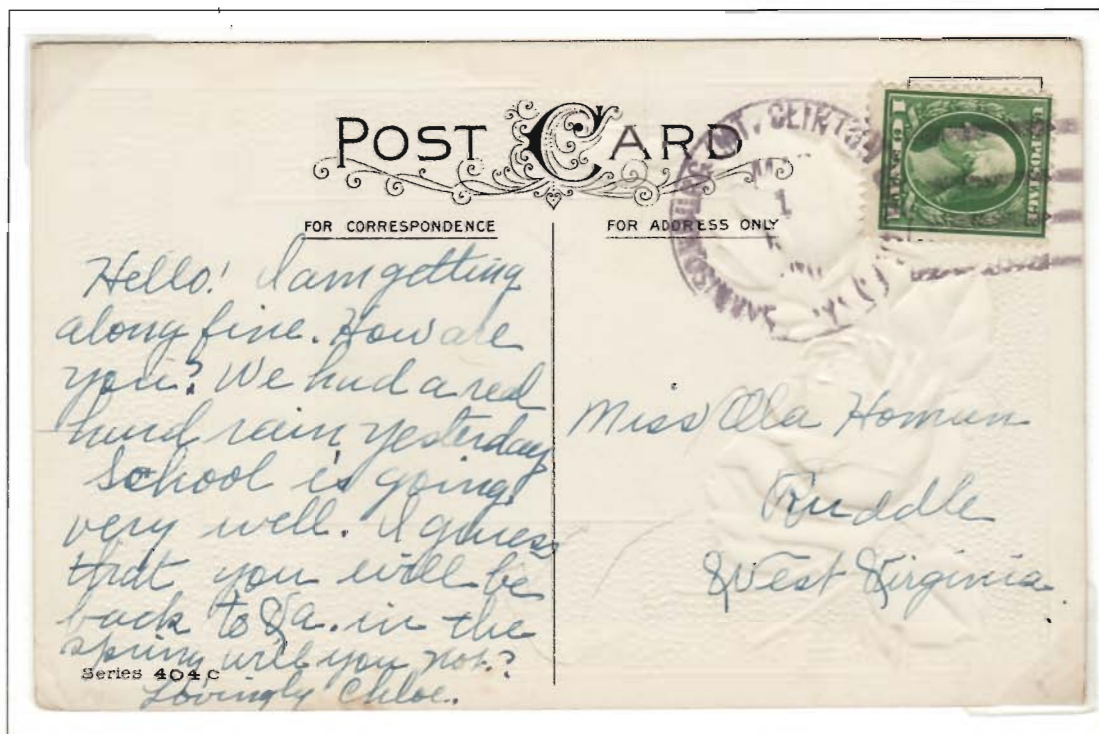
Mount Clinton Rural Station. The two rural stations were created in conjunction with the Rockingham County RFD system served as postal stations and bases for rural routes. Cancels are reported from Mount Clinton, but none from the Singer Glen Rural Station, probably due to its short 14 month life-span.

The Post Office Department intended that rural stations serve areas where residents would be better served by more convenient mail service than the once-a-day service offered by the rural carriers. In some cases, there were mail-generating businesses or institutions in the area or, later, the residents were frequent users of mail order.



Mount Clinton Rural Station of Harrisonburg

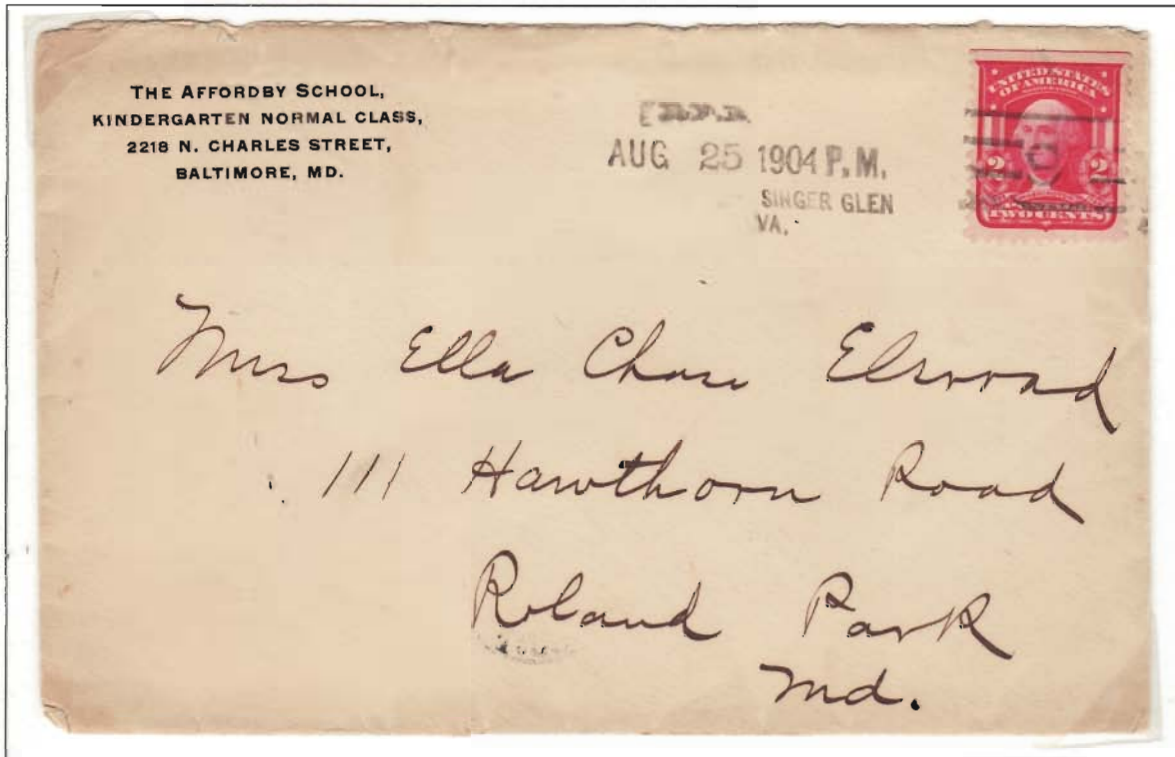
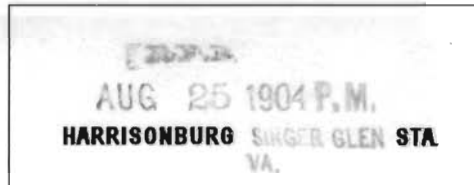
Two cancels with differing type. Above, August 18, 1908 with upper and lower case (Richow Type 10NC) and below c.1912 with lettering all same size and case (Richow 10LA).



Route 9. Harrisonburg, Singer Glen Rural Station. The second rural station, Singer Glen, retained that status for about 14 months. On December 20, 1903, it became the independent Singer Glen post office, no longer a rural station of Harrisonburg.

Route 9 was issued a canceller in October 1902 that read HARRISONBURG, SINGER GLEN STA., and it was probably used in that form for a time, but no examples are known. After the Singer Glen Rural Station became independent at the end of 1903, the carrier cut away part of the rubber letters on the cancel so that it now read only SINGER GLEN.

reconstructed cancel



Singer Glen Route 9.

August 25, 1904

Only reported copy and probably most interesting Rockingham RFD item.

Unlisted in Richow.

County-wide System

Routes 10 to 16

Routes 10 to 13. Elkton. Elkton's existing routes 1 & 2 were renumbered 10 & 11 and two new routes, 12 & 13, were created. Cancels have been reported from the renumbered older routes, 10 and 11, but not the new ones, 12 and 13.



Elkton Route 10.
June 13, 1905.

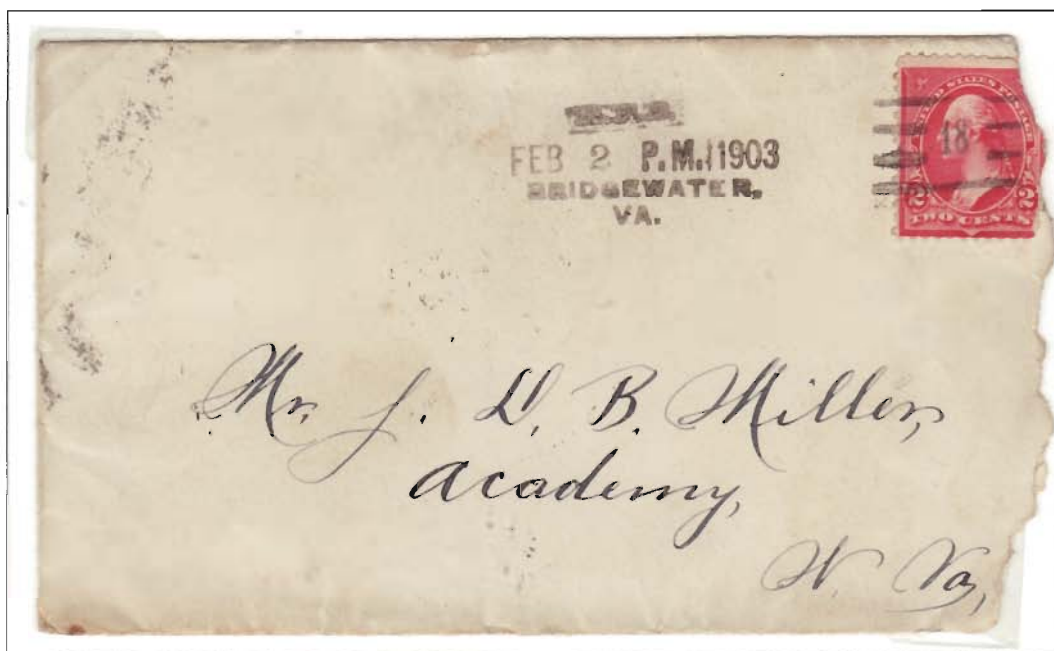
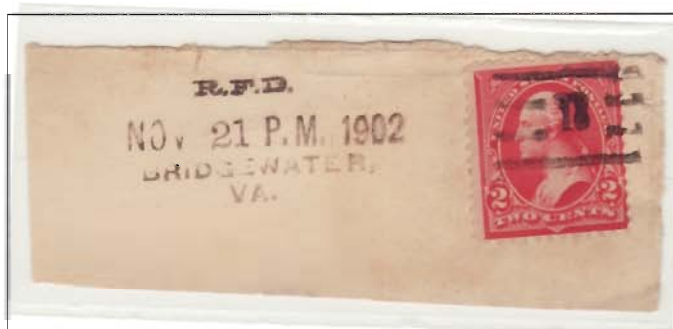
Routes 14 to 16. Broadway. Broadway's three routes were new with the creation of the county-wide system. One example has been reported from Route 14; none from the others.



Broadway
Route 14.
March 3, 1903

Routes 17 to 18. Bridgewater. Bridgewater received two routes under the new system in October, 1902. Only two examples reported from Route 18, none from 17.

Bridgewater Route 18.
November 21, 1902
Five weeks after start of route.



The route numbers in the killer bars can be extraordinarily hard to read. In this style of cancel, small serified type was used that clogged easily with ink residue. Richow incorrectly reports three of the fourteen Rockingham County route numbers which he lists.

Routes 19 to 20. Dayton. Dayton's existing Route 1 was renumbered, probably to 20. No cancels have been reported from Route 19.



Dayton Route 20.
Above, February 18, 1904. Below, February 25, 1904.



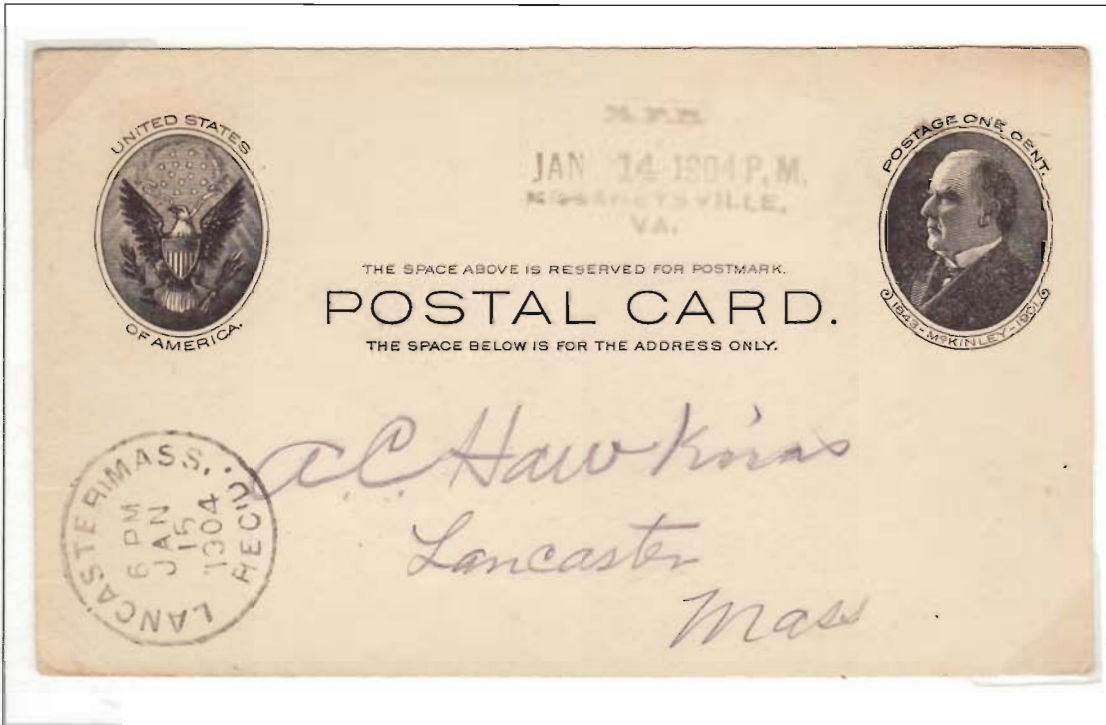
The faint 'R.F.D. 1' in the lower left corner of the cover at right, is a mystery. Lipscomb, Va. had no RFD routes in 1904, so it is not part of the address. Did the carrier on the Dayton route (old number 1, new number 20) apply it?

County-wide System

Routes 21 to 26

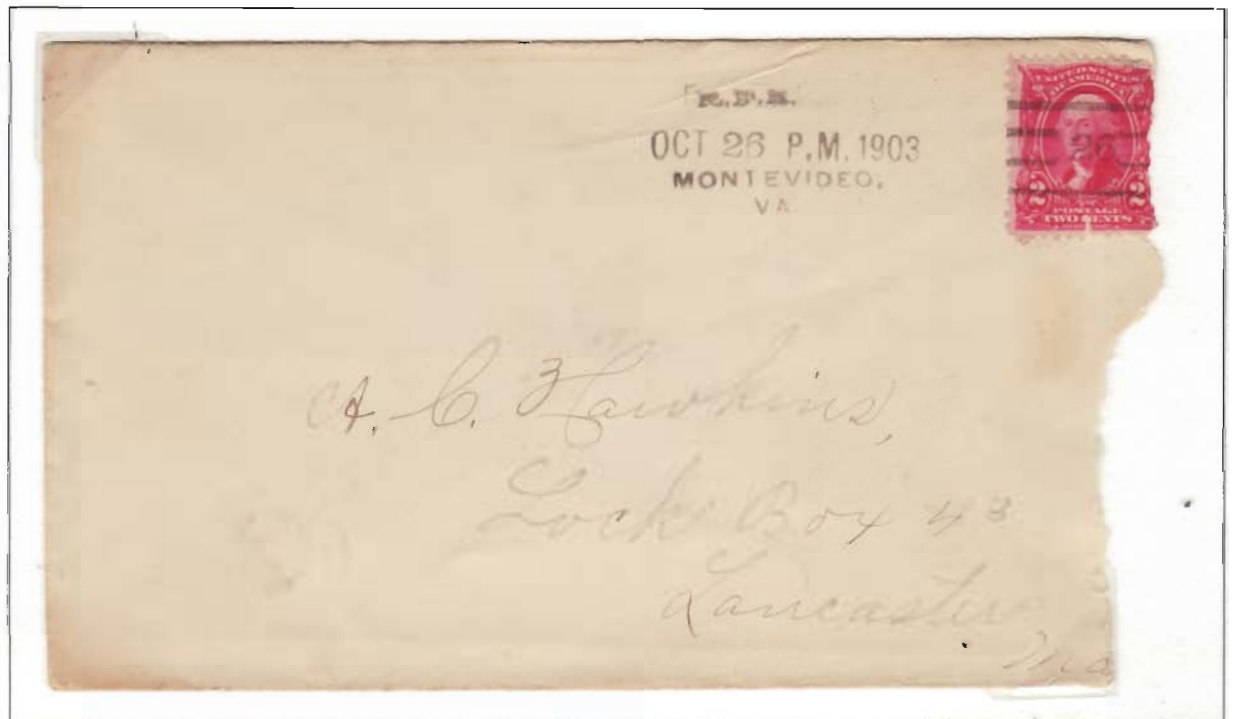
Route 21. Keezletown; Route 22. Linville; Route 23 to 24 Linville Depot. All these routes were new with the start of the county system. No markings have been reported.

Route 25. McGaheysville. Also a new route. Richow incorrectly lists as Route 30.



McGaheysville Route 25.
January 14, 1904.

Route 26. Montevideo. Another new route. One example reported.



Montevideo
Route 26.
October 26, 1903.

County-wide System

Routes 27 to 29

Route 27. Mount Crawford. No examples reported.

Route numbers can be confirmed by mail addressed to the route.

Confirmation of Route 27 for Mount Crawford. 1907 card from North River to Mount Crawford Route 27.



Route 28. North River. A new route. Example of cancel reported.



Confirmation of North River Route 28 in address. Origin Cancel of Mount Sidney Route 2 (Augusta County). Also shows receiving cancel of North River.

Route 29. Ottobine. Existing route 1 was renumbered to 29. No examples known from renumbered route.

County-wide System

Routes 30 to 33

Routes 30 to 32. Penn Laird. Penn Laird's one existing route was renumbered 30. No examples of new Routes 31 or 32 have been reported.

Penn Laird. Route 30.
Right, July 19, 1904.
Below, February 9, 1903.



Route 33. Port Republic. A new route created with county-wide system.



Port Republic. Route 33.
June 2, 1903.

County-wide System

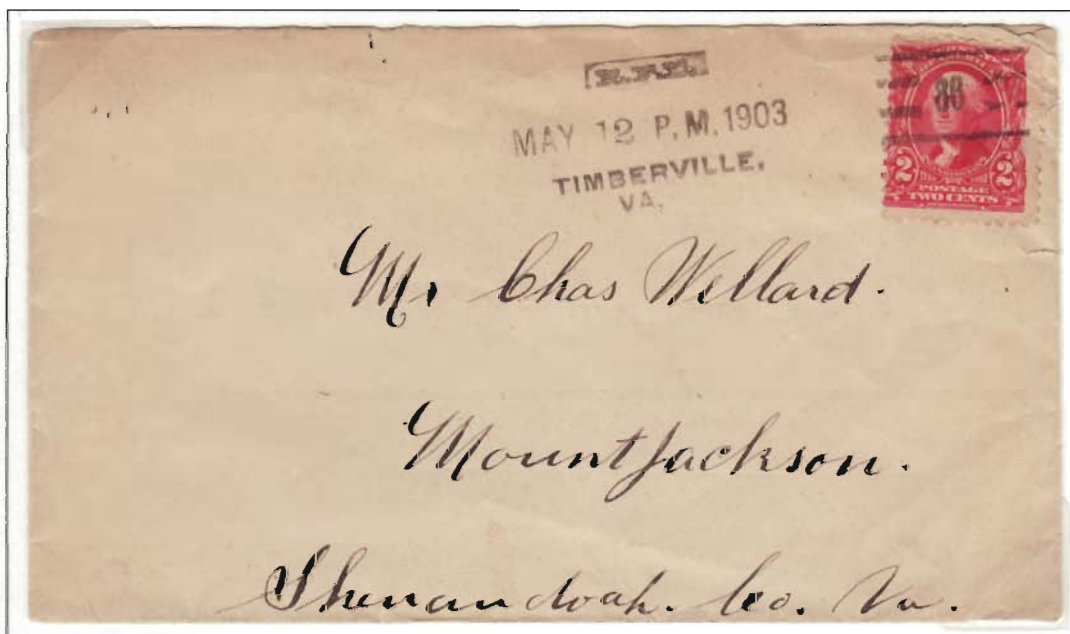
Routes 34 to 37

Route 34. Springcreek. Also a new route.



Springcreek. Route 34.
October 12, 1903.

Routes 35 to 37. Timberville. Three new routes were based in Timberville. Richow reports a cancel from Timberville Route 27, undoubtedly a misreading of Route 37. No cancels have been reported from Route 35.



Timberville Route 36.
May 12, 1903.

Small Post Offices Closed by RFD

The new Rural Free Delivery routes caused the closure of many fourth class post offices, since postal patrons no longer had to visit the post office to send or receive their mail. Below are two examples of the more than two dozen offices in Rockingham County that were shuttered in 1902, replaced by RFD routes.



Hupp.
Cover to New Market.
July 15, 1898.
Replaced by RFD routes
from Timberville.



Massanetta Springs.
Cover to Roanoke
June 6, 1902.
Replaced by RFD routes
from Harrisonburg.

After 1903

Routes 38 to 41. In later months, four new routes were added to the Rockingham system: Bridgewater #38, January 1, 1904; Grottoes #39, January 1, 1904; Elkton #40, June 1, 1904; and Port Republic #41, January 2, 1905.

After the end of July 1903, the Post Office Department stopped issuing hand cancel devices to rural routes. Carriers were instructed not to cancel all mail received on the route. They were issued indelible purple pencils to cancel mail that was for addresses further down their routes. Carriers were supposed to write the name of office, route number, and date on the mail piece and cancel with stamp with the pencil.



Harrisonburg Route 6.
June 8, 1906.
The carrier abbreviated 'Harrisonburg' as 'Hbg' in his cancel.



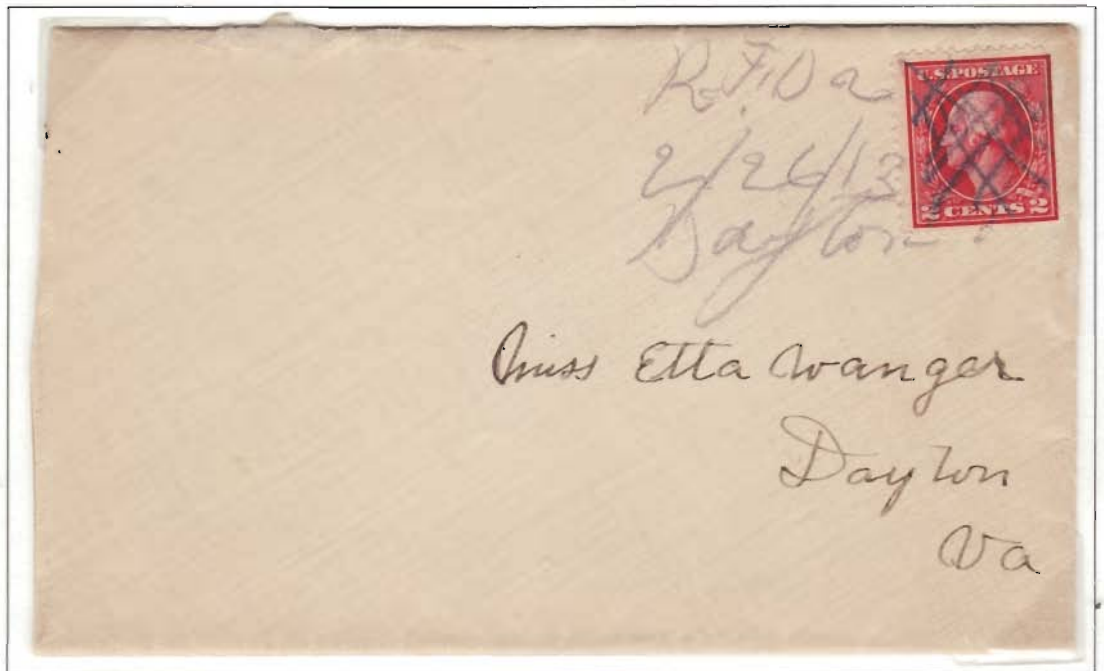
Harrisonburg Route 7.
May 10, 1913.
Carriers did always write all elements as required by regulations. Here there is no office name. In these cases, the address is the only way to identify the route of origin.

After 1903

Sometime between 1905 and 1911, the use of consecutive county route numbers was dropped. Routes at all offices, except Harrisonburg (since routes at that office were 1 to 9 already), were renumbered. Now each office had a Route 1, and if they had additional routes, perhaps a Route 2 and more. On this page these down-the-line manuscript cancel covers show the renumbered routes for for McGaheysville and Dayton.



McGaheysville
Route 1.
August 18, 1911.
Established as Route 25



Dayton Route 2.
February 26, 1913.
Established as Route 20.

The Rockingham County RFD routes remained relatively unchanged until the 1930s when a great consolidation of routes occurred because routes could be serviced by automobiles instead of horse and buggy.