

Oh! Canada!

by Jasmine Krotkov, Editor Montana Chapter NAPUS

I spent some considerable time this summer driving across the northern tier of the US, and a broad swathe of Ontario. Canada's "cottage country" is so named for the quiet countryside, with thousands of loon-filled lakes, whose shores are littered with cottages, where the country's city folk come to relax. Cottaging is as Canadian as maple syrup, hockey and decorum. While summering on the lakes, cottagers can pay six dollars to have their mail forwarded to the general delivery sections of local post offices, or they can just let it collect at their city "points of call" (what we call delivery points or, more simply, addresses).

The town near my own family's cottage has a little post office, with two delivery routes (160 and 200 odd points of call) and about 90 general delivery boxes. The locals and cottagers alike wander in when the mood strikes them, to see if they have any mail. There is no room in the office for a box section, so if you want mail delivered to you here, you need to erect a mail box on the street, or get it through General Delivery. In the office can be found much of the same sorts of things we have in American post offices, including commemorative stamp sets, express post envelopes, coils and books of stamps (much prettier than ours, in my humble opinion, but then I'm half Canadian, ay?), duck stamps and picture post cards, plus the odd fund-raising candy bars for the local fire department and fishing and hunting licenses. These last are only available in "premise provided" offices, which are owned by the Postmaster, who has to pay for all the services, including electricity, phones, internet service, snowplowing and upkeep out of pocket. They get a "leasing allowance", but that doesn't cover all the costs, so postmasters have to write off the expenses on their taxes. And sell fishing and hunting licenses alongside the fundraising candy bars. Presumably in these offices Canada Post has less interest in micro-management.



It reminds me of how small offices used to be managed in the US about 10 or 15 years ago, in the post office-cum-store-cum-coffee shop-cum-newsagent, which was the center of small town life, and before the advent of the scanners, revenue goals, CPMS, SPMS, AM/PM, EXFC and the rest of the acronym soup that describes postal life today. The postmasters in Canada still get called upon to

officialiate at town functions, like dedications of memorials, ribbon cuttings, and even to act as Judge for the Festival of Trees. Nobody calls them Maytag repairmen (It's worth noting that the President and Chief Executive Officer of Canada Post is named Deepak Chopra. Not *that* Deepak Chopra, but still...). Just this year the good postmasters of Canada were paid to go to a CPR course, so they could step forward and lead their communities in life-saving, along with tree-judging. Our idea of according dignity and respect to postmasters is a bit different, I found myself explaining to the various Canadian postmasters I chatted with. We are respectfully asked to be dignified as we stifle our voices in public, and refrain from pointing out that the numbers-driven, short-sighted policies of Headquarters are bad for the American public. Its in the ELM: *Thou Shalt Not Discuss Postal Policies in Public*. In Canada, postmasters are encouraged to discuss policies in public; they are given fliers for their counters, with the address to which people can send comments and suggestions about the proper direction for the future of Canada Post. I'm not saying that anyone pays attention to what is sent to that suggestion box - but it exists, and postmasters are allowed to have their voices heard.

Even so, Canada Post seems like it isn't too far behind us, on the road to profits trumping service. The small-town postmasters there get a pop-up on their computers daily, giving them revenue goals. They don't get punished for not meeting their revenue targets, but there is an active sense of friendly competition between postmasters, who get to compare notes at yearly postmaster meetings (remember those?).

In the various conversations I had, I was surprised to hear the opinion that American postmasters are much more assertive about protecting their rights than their Canadian counterparts. I was told that Canadian postmasters won't do anything about the current push to close small post offices, since they are "too polite". They will just "complain after the fact". American



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