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NEWSLETTER

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THE MARLO POST OFFICE

by Marilyn Morgan

Marilyn Morgan interviewed Mrs Alice Winchester for the information in the first part of this Newsletter which covers the time the Winchester family operated the Marlo Post Office and Telephone Exchange.

The second part deals with the early history of the Marlo mail and telephone services researched from the pages of the 'Snowy River Mail'.

THE WINCHESTER FAMILY

In the late 1940s George and Myrtle Winchester, together with their daughter Olive, ran the Marlo Post Office from their home on the corner of Holy Nellie Lane and Argyle Parade.

In 1951 when George and Myrtle's son, Les, married, the Post Office moved to the house next door where Les and his wife, Alice, took over the running of the Post Office and Telephone Exchange.

While Les continued his daily work with Alaster Cameron on the Cameron farms along the Marlo Road, Alice ran the Post Office and Exchange from a small room at the front of their home.

The Exchange had about 15 telephone subscribers and when calls came in for people who were not subscribers Les would personally deliver any messages after he completed his work each day. The number of subscribers to the Exchange grew in later years when the Marlo Plains were opened up to selectors in the 1950s.



Winchester's General Store at Marlo

The selectors, mostly Dutch and English families, were confronted with hard times. Again if a home did not have a telephone and a message had been sent to the Post Office, Les would deliver it to the Plains.

At this time the Marlo Plains roads were in a very bad state; they were narrow and very sandy and one always expected to get bogged.

All the phones in the Marlo Plains area were on the party line system, and this lasted until the 1970s.



Although there was a designated time for the party line to operate, Alice took calls whatever the hour.

Until the new bridge over the Brodribb River was completed in 1961, the Marlo Road approaching the original bridge was subject to frequent flooding due to high tides and whenever the Snowy River was in flood, which was quite often in those days. These circumstances would involve Les having to row a boat from the Marlo jetty to the second island on the Snowy River with the mail for Orbost and elsewhere on board. Here he would meet up with Harold Sederlan who would take the mail to the Orbost Post Office in his bus. After exchanging the mail at Orbost and picking up bread and general shopping for the Marlo residents, Harold would bring the goods back to Les who, in turn, would row back to the Marlo jetty. Harold was the mail man until the new bridge opened in 1961. He retired soon after and Glenn Davies took over the Orbost to Marlo mail run.

The mail service was received 5 days a week and the Post Office was open for mail collection from 9 a.m. till 5 p.m. A balance sheet for the Post Office had to be filled out during a quiet moment each day and sent to the Orbost Post Office the next day. The Exchange was manned 7 days a week. The Telephone hours for Marlo in 1966 were Monday to Friday: 9—12.30, 1.30—10 p.m.; Saturday: 8—1; Sunday & Holidays (except Easter Saturday) 9—10 a.m.; Easter Saturday 9—11 a.m.

Up until the mid 1960s Marlo was very much a holiday destination, with many locals and visitors referring to “their shack at Marlo”. During this time Alice met and served people from many walks of life, and commented: “I often felt some of these people found Marlo the ideal place to have a break from family and society in general”.

With more Crown land being opened up on the Marlo Plains and the construction of the new Snowy River Bridge at Orbost in the early 1970s, Marlo began to grow and change. A number of the bridge workers were renting and living at Marlo along with some Orbost families making the sea change to become permanent residents at Marlo, happy to travel to work each day.

Alice and Les retired from the Post Office after the 1971 flood. The Post Office and Exchange then moved across the road to the Marlo General Store which was conducted at that time by Bill and Thelma Tait.

Consequently life then changed dramatically for Alice who, during the 20 years from 1951 to 1971, that she and Les conducted the Post Office and Telephone Exchange, also managed to rear a family of six children. She pondered: “I often ask myself, how did I ever manage the nappies, the bottles, unwell children, and all the basic needs of a young growing family life, as well as keeping up with the housework, having to stop and attend to a customer ringing the bell for service at the Post Office counter, along with ringing phones to answer”.

“When I needed to be away from the Post Office, my sister-in-law, Evelyn, along with June Broome, would help out in the post office and with the telephones”.

“One of my outlets during my time in the Post Office was tennis, the courts at that time were located behind the Hotel. Another was, on some nights, enjoying a game of cards with a few friends”.

The old Marlo of holiday shacks, timber cabins in the caravan park and the old Ozone Hall (Picture Theatre) have given way to a thriving residential community with most residents travelling to Orbost daily for work.

MARLO PLAINS TELEPHONE SUBSCRIBERS PARTY-LINE SYSTEM

Source: 1968 Telephone Book

Bell J	Marlo Plains	42-D
Brinkhuis C P	Marlo Plains	29-S
Brinkhuis G	Marlo Plains	29-W
Jackson J H Frmr	Marlo Plains	42-R
Mathers C	Marlo Plains	42-K
Mathers M P	Marlo Plains	42-U
Muller A J	Marlo Plains	29-D
Quinsey A	Marlo Plains	42-S
Reeves B	Marlo Plains	29-K
Van Tilburg K	Marlo Plains	29-U

HOW DID THE PARTY-LINE SYSTEM OPERATE?

Party lines were very common in rural areas where telephone wires had to run miles to remote homes and a shared service meant that more homes could be served with fewer wires.

The system, although cheaper for the subscribers, had a number of drawbacks. If you picked up your phone while somebody else on your party line was talking, you would overhear their conversation (and could join in). This meant that you could not use the line if someone else was using it, and nobody else could call you.

Some people gained a reputation for being nosy and trying to listen in on other conversations to hear the latest gossip, or for tying up the line with excessively long calls.

The individual phones within a party line had coded rings, e.g. Party 1 might be a single long ring; Party 2, two short rings; Party 3, long-short; Party 4, long-short-short, etc.

THE MARLO MAIL AND TELEPHONE SERVICES FROM THE EARLIEST TIMES

THE MAIL SERVICE

Marlo had been receiving a weekly (Saturday) mail service, that was increased to three times a week when the 'Snowy River Mail' of Saturday 30th August 1890, reported that *"after this date two additional mail services will be despatched weekly between Orbost and Marlo, on Mondays and Wednesdays"*.

Road conditions and a river crossing must have challenged the contractor as the schedule allowed 2 hours for a one-way trip. The mail on Mondays left Orbost at 8 a.m. and was due at Marlo at 10 a.m., returning from Marlo at 2 p.m. and arriving at Orbost at 4 p.m. On Wednesdays the mail departed at 4.30 p.m., due at Marlo at 6.30 p.m., returning from Marlo at 6.30 p.m. and was due at Orbost at 8.30 p.m.

Three months later, in November 1890, the Orbost Progress Association made application to the Post and Telegraph Department for a loose bag service so the mailman, Mr James Welsh, could deliver letters to residents along the road between Orbost and Marlo on Saturday afternoons. On December 20th, the 'Snowy River Mail' reported that the request had been acceded to.



Mail Coach in front of Stirling's Marlo Hotel. The Hotel was the Post & Telephone office to 1910 and from 1925-1942.

In August 1893, John R. McInnes secured the mail contract to and from Orbost and Marlo, two days a week for £42 per annum, and Duncan Cameron was contracted to carry the mail to and from Orbost and Timbillicca, N.S.W., via Marlo, Bemm River, Cann River, and Genoa, once a week for £178 per year. This contractual arrangement continued to provide a three day a week mail service for Marlo.

Five years later the thrice weekly mail service ended when the Post and Telegraph Department informed the Orbost Shire council it was discontinuing the special mail between Orbost and Marlo as from the 1st September 1895. The 'Snowy River Mail' reported: *"In view of the limited extent of correspondence in connection with the mail service between Marlo and Orbost, the Postal department has decided on its discontinuance on Mondays and Wednesdays, but mails will be forwarded and received by the Cann River and Genoa service once a week as at present."*

The Shire council passed a resolution directing the secretary to write to the Hon. Henry Foster, requesting that the Monday and Wednesday mails be continued. At the council meeting Cr. Hugh Cameron

stated that "a great deal of inconvenience would be suffered by residents living down the river, as they would not be advised of the rain which had fallen at the head of the Snowy River in flood time, and that a weekly mail was quite inadequate to meet the requirements of those who had their mails three times a week for many years".

The reply from the Post-office and Telegraph department was no consolation as it stated the cost of supplying a mail service to Marlo was £50 per annum, while the revenue derived was under £13. The letter was received by the Shire council and it appears that no further action was taken.

In 1909 the mail between Orbost and Marlo left Orbost on Saturdays at 4.30 p.m. and was due at Marlo at 7 p.m.; from Marlo, the mail left at 1 p.m. on Fridays.

The weekly mail service continued until April 1915 when an application by local residents, with the assistance of Mr Wise, M.P., an additional mail was granted between Orbost and Marlo. The mails left Marlo on Wednesday and Saturday mornings, returning to Marlo on the arrival of the Bruthen mail coach.

The Marlo Hotel was the coach stop and the centre for receiving and despatching the mail. The licensee, Mr James Stirling, was officially appointed postmaster in 1894.

Duncan Cameron became postmaster when he took over the hotel licence in 1895, and was followed by successive licensees, William Andrew Gluth in 1906 and Samuel Parr Stewart in 1908, who also held the positions of postmaster. This continued until 1910 when the Post Office was transferred to James Stirling's home in Willis Avenue where it remained until 1925. Bessie Stirling (daughter of James Stirling) was postmistress from 1910 to 1925.

The Post Office returned to the Hotel in 1925 and remained there until 30th July 1942 when Mr George Matthew Winchester became postmaster, and the Post Office moved to his nearby residence in Argyle Parade. In 1951 the Post Office moved next door to Mr Les Winchester's residence, then in 1969 it moved across Argyle Parade to the Marlo Store where it continues to operate. Store owners since then have included Mr William E. Tait, Mr Stan Krupa, Mr James W. A. Clay, and Mr. Brian Shelley.



The present Marlo Store and Post Office. The Post Office moved from Winchester's home to this location in 1968.

THE TELEPHONE SERVICE

The first reference to a telephone service to Marlo appears in the 'Snowy River Mail', of 30th August, 1890: A letter from the Postmaster-General replying to an application from the Orbost Progress Association to the effect that it would be necessary for the residents of Marlo to guarantee an income of £75 per annum and to make the necessary arrangements for conducting the service at the Marlo end.

The Progress Association was informed that Mr. James Stirling would provide an office at his hotel and was prepared to undertake the management at Marlo, as well as the Snowy River Shipping Company would utilise the line by means of a switch off at the Landing for which they would be willing to pay one half of the guarantee money.

The 'Snowy River Mail', of 7th September, 1890, reported that there was "every probability of the early erection of a line to connect Marlo and the Landing with Orbost by telephone". The Post and Telegraph Department had acceded to the request of the Shire Council and Progress Association on the condition that five responsible persons enter into a bond to guarantee the Government against loss.

There was a long delay due to the Postal Department being tardy in preparing the required bond, and then the guarantee form not being properly completed. In July 1891, the Marlo correspondent in the 'Snowy River Mail', wrote "that the long promised telephone would have been a great boon to residents in the locality during the flood. There is not the slightest doubt that the telephone would have proved of the greatest value and might be made instrumental in saving life and property. It is a scandalous shame that this work has not yet been effected by the Government".

Another five months passed by before it was reported in the 'Snowy River Mail', on the 12th December, 1891, that a survey of the Orbost to Marlo telephone line had commenced, but it was not until February 1892 that tenders were called for the construction of the line.

It is assumed that the construction of the telephone line had been completed in July or August 1892. Reports in the 'Snowy River Mail' during July refer to the Snowy River Shipping Company having arranged with the postal authorities for public messages to be sent, at the usual charges, on the Orbost to Marlo telephone line as soon as it was completed; and the Tambo Shire engineer reported that he had inspected the telephone line from Orbost to Marlo and had found that the contractor responsible for the erection of the line had satisfactorily cleared all timber off the tracks used or cleared by the Shire of Tambo, but timber felled by the contractor on the frontages to the Snowy and Brodribb river still needed to be removed. The engineer then handed the matter to the newly constituted Shire of Croajingolong Council.

At the time it was not cheap to make a phone call. Initially the charges in July 1892 were fixed at 1s 6d (15 cents) for a conversation of 3 minutes and 1s (10 cents) for each additional 3 minutes or part thereof. Mr. James, manager of the Snowy River Shipping Co. made representations through Mr. Foster, M.L.A., to



The Stirling Home in Willis Avenue where the Post Office and Telephone Exchange operated from 1910-1925.

have the prices reduced. On 26th November, 1892, the 'Snowy River Mail', reported that Mr. James' efforts had been successful, the fees were reduced to 1/- (10 cents) for a three minute conversation, and a charge for advising a person that a call was waiting would be 6d (5 cents), provided the person resided within 1½ miles of the office.

After twelve months of operation the guarantors were called upon to supplement the cost of the service. A report in the 'Snowy River Mail', of 6th August 1893, reads: "When the Orbost to Marlo telephone was constructed, a number of local residents were required to enter into a guarantee to ensure payment to the Post and Telegraph department of the interest and working expenses on the line. The guarantors have recently received a statement showing that the expenses for the past year amounted to £38 19s 5d, and the receipts of £21 9s 7d, they are accordingly called to pay the balance of £17 9s 10d to the department. Mr. H. James, manager of the Snowy River Shipping Company, states that he has been endeavouring, unsuccessfully, to arrange with the department for the privilege of using the line for which he would have paid £20 per annum. Had this offer been accepted there would have been a surplus instead of a deficiency".

The manual telephone exchange, started off at the Hotel and, in tandem with the post office, moved to the Stirling residence from 1910 to 1925, back to the Hotel, then to George and Les Winchester's residences from 1942 to 1971. The manual telephone system was upgraded to an automatic exchange on December 8, 1974.

'Snowy River Mail', Wednesday, November 20, 1974

We Go Automatic On December 8th

Switchover dates for Orbost, Cabbage Tree Creek and Marlo exchanges to automatic service will be Sunday, December 8th, 1974.

Federal Member for Gippsland, Mr. Peter Nixon, said today that he had been advised to this effect by the Postmaster - General's Department.

Mr. Nixon said that the switch over would be an historical event, because Orbost had the last of the major manual magnetic type exchange networks in the State.

At the same time automatic telephone facilities will be provided at Bemm River and Club Terrace.

He said that all the subscribers, including Genoa, would now have nationwide subscriber dialling facilities available to them.