

Neither Rain, nor sleet, nor dark of night...

By Calvin L. Barbee

For several years both the Illinois Central Railroad and the Central & Eastern Illinois Railroad lines brought passengers and mail to the village of Kinmundy. It was nice to see that not only did the train deliver passengers and mail, but also baby chickens and turkeys and other assorted livestock and produce. The local train was also the perfect avenue for local people to forward mail and a variety of other items to distant locations.

For many years, the mail brought to the Kinmundy Post Office was picked up from the rail lines by a fine gentleman by the name of Eugene Keen. The type of train available often determined the mail schedule on that day. The early train from the old C&EI brought most of our mail. Mr. Keen used his personal car and a two-wheeled cart to pick up the mail from the rail site and bring it to the post office. This train would actually stop to load or unload passengers, freight and mail at a specific rail site. The express train, however, handled mail in an entirely different way.

Deliveries from the fast moving express train meant the mail pouches would be thrown from the train toward a specific target. So much for parcels marked "fragile!" If there was mail to be picked up by the express train, the outgoing mail pouch was tied up and suspended between two catcher poles. The pouch was stuffed with mail and had a rope wrapped around the center section several times to secure the bag and to absorb the impact of the hook of the express train traveling at speeds of up to 90 mph. The pouches needed to be balanced on both sides of the center rope to keep from sliding off the catchpole. Pouches that were not balanced often meant disaster and tedious trackside clean up after the train rolled on down the track.

When Mr. Keen retired, George Neival took over his duties. If several trains were entering our rail systems at the same times, I would often meet one of the trains and bring the pouches to the post office. As the roads improved, the mail was moved by buses that actually stopped at the post office, thus ending the need to have anyone from the local post office meet the train.

Once the mail was in the Kinmundy Post Office, it was up to the local carriers to get it to its final destination. In the early days, the rural carriers often resorted to various ways to adapt their means of transportation to the poor road conditions. One local carrier switched out the back wheels with modified tractor tires to try to handle the soft roads and deep ruts. As roads and cars improved, the rural route carrier often delivered the mail from the right hand side of the vehicle while driving with the steering wheel, brake and gas pedals located on the left side of the vehicle. This often caused a few heads to turn and a few choice phrases to be muttered by the general public until they got used to the idea of American ingenuity at work. Some vehicles can now be ordered with right hand drive to make the local carrier's job easier and safer.

Today the mail is delivered and picked up at the local post office by trucks from regional locations like Carbondale, Centralia, and Effingham. This is done on a schedule that

allows the local post offices to sort their mail by route for daily delivery in the mornings and collect the post in time for the evening pick up to be routed back to the regional offices.

Progress is a wonderful thing; it keeps us all going forward!