MAIL SERVICE IN TIBURON & BELVEDERE 94920

By Susan Cluff

In June 1956, the new joint Belvedere-Tiburon post office opened at 6 Beach Road across from the Boardwalk shopping center with much fanfare. After four years sending petitions and letters to prevent the planned consolidation with Mill Valley, local residents turned out en masse for the grand opening that concluded with a helicopter carrying a bag of cacheted mail from Tiburon's Main Street to the new location.

From the earliest days of California, mail service here was always a challenge. After letters and packages arrived in San Francisco by steamer ship or rail car, it could often take days or weeks to transport them by ferry and stagecoach to San Rafael (the nearest post office). That changed when Donahue's railroad came to Tiburon with its railroad and ferry depot, machine shops, small town, telegraph station and post office. By the 1890s, special U.S. mail rail cars were rolling daily along the tracks from Tiburon to San Rafael, Santa Rosa, and north to Ukiah with a rival rail and ferry service from Sausalito serving Mill Valley, San Anselmo, Olema, and the North Coast.
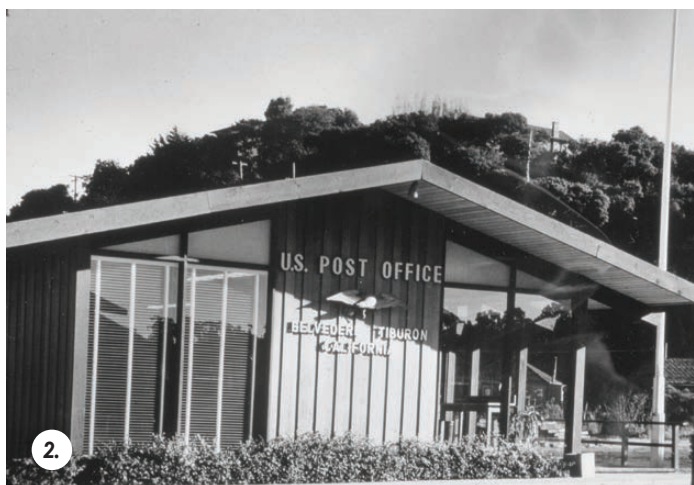
Letters were sorted en route into padlocked mailbags that got dropped off at rail stations for the postmasters who had special keys to open them. On the return trip, clerks would throw out empty bags to be filled and picked up the next day. Town post offices were often located inside the rail stations or in a grocery or candy shop nearby, making them an important part of the social life of the community. For years, Tiburon's post office was next to Chapman's grocery on Main Street. In 1894, Belvedere opened a post office that moved to the Land Company building in 1905.

Mail wasn't delivered, residents and business owners had to come into the post office and ask for it by name. In the 1920s, Belvedere taxi driver Bill Barr began delivering mail to some island homes for a fee. "Rural" home delivery came in 1949 after residents installed street mailboxes and started using street addresses with numbers. With the suburban housing boom after World War II, Mill Valley handled mail delivery to Strawberry, Belveron and the Tiburon hills. But after the new joint post office opened, most of the neighborhoods on the Tiburon Peninsula became part of the Bel-Tib postal service area. The 94920 zip code arrived in 1963, part of a nationwide effort to speed mail sorting.

In 1999, the Belvedere-Tiburon post office expanded into the adjacent space and renovated to provide walk up windows, sale kiosks and rental post boxes. Keeping with tradition, staff is friendly, efficient and seems to know just about everyone by name.

Please help the Landmarks Society preserve our local history and keep it accessible to the community. Visit our website at www.landmarkssociety.com or call 415-435-1853.

1. Post mistress Stella Ehrenfelt closes up shop at the Belvedere Post Office.

2. Belvedere and Tiburon's new joint post office in 1956.

3. First day cover for the opening of the Belvedere-Tiburon Postal Station.