

# VOICES OF VAIL

## THE TOWN BETWEEN THE TRACKS

Steel rails, mining, ranching, an expanding young nation, and homesteaders' tenacious desires to build a better life converged at what would become Vail. The daily rhythm of life was simple, revolving around family, faith, and work. Community members began calling themselves the Vail Villagers. They were proud of their little community centered between the railroad tracks. Join them and share some of Vail's significant events as it grew from a railroad siding into a great place to call home.



Vail Villagers in the 1937 Tucson Rodeo Parade.

1873

Arizona was declared a Territory by Abraham Lincoln in 1863. Ten years later Theodore White surveyed Section 16 as settlers began to see opportunities in the sparsely settled landscape.

1878

The blast of a train whistle was heard in Arizona for the first time when the Southern Pacific Railroad reached Yuma. Railroad workers continued laying track eastward following the established wagon road.

1880

By April 1880 the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks made it to Punta de Agua where the Pantano Wash and Cienega Creek meet along the old wagon road. Vail's Siding was built on the last stretch of flat land before the railroad tracks entered Cienega Creek. The click-clack of passing trains and the blowing of their steam whistles became familiar sounds.

Vail's Siding was named for Walter and Edward Vail who built up the Empire Ranch that stretched southward from the Rincon Mountains almost to Sonoita. The Empire was called El Rancho Grande by many of the cowhands who worked it. Walter Vail and partners granted an easement to the Southern Pacific Railroad to lay tracks across their holdings in 1880 and again in 1887 when the tracks were realigned.

1883

About 25 people resided in Vail. They picked up their mail nine miles to the east at the new post office in the town of Pantano. The railroad was binding the nation together and transforming the lives of settlers in Arizona Territory. Manufactured goods from the eastern United States became more readily available and affordable. Some local residents even ordered glass for windows.

1880s

Track washouts resulted in frequent delays to passenger, freight, and mail service.

1887

Three train robberies took place along Cienega Creek before the bandits were caught. Wells Fargo Agent J. E. Smith had the misfortune to be on all three of the robbed trains. It was he who finally stopped the crime spree. 'Hold-up' was also an expression used to describe a track 'wash out' that held up travel and mail.

1888

The passing tracks between Vail and Dragoon Summit to the east were realigned and easements renegotiated with the Southern Pacific Railroad. The Vails and their partners seized the opportunity to negotiate and received \$1,500.00, the construction of wooden buildings at Vail and at Pantano to be used for commerce and rented to them for \$5.00 a year, as well as corrals that would hold 21 boxcars full of cattle. All were to be completed within 90 days!



Chinese railroad workers toiled along Cienega Creek.

'Owney' the postal mascot.



1888

About 1,000 Chinese railroad workers were brought in to lay the new sets of tracks.

1893

'Owney,' the unofficial mascot of the railway mail service, passed through Vail while traveling on the Southern Pacific Railroad's Sunset Express.

1895

Copper was king. Business was booming, and the sale of railroad passenger tickets began at Vail's Station. The Tucson to Helvetia stage passed through daily. For \$2.00 each way passengers could reach mines in the Santa Rita Mountains along the new \$10,000.00 wagon road built by the Helvetia Mining Company.

1898

Miss Hattie Ferrin rode the Sunset Express to Vail's Siding to take charge of the school attended by children of railroad and ranching families.

1899

The Southern Pacific Railroad built a cistern at Vail's Station. Water flowed on the surface just half a mile to the northeast, but between the tracks it had to be brought in by tanker car.

1900

A passenger station and post office for Vail! Mail was delivered out of the new Southern Pacific Railroad Passenger Station. S.P.R.R. Agent Harry Mann was appointed Vail's first postmaster. The 100 people living in Vail also had a pool hall, stagecoach station, and a general store.

1902

D.C. Cage operated a general store, livery, and bar in a wooden building on the site of the Old Vail Post Office. Mail was delivered out of the S.P.R.R. passenger station 100 yards to the north.

1903

Vail's night telegraph operator, Mr. Clough, failed to pass a message to the west-bound Pacific Coast Express traveling through Vail, and it collided head on with the Crescent City Express at Esmond Station six miles to the west. 19 people were confirmed dead.

1905

The post office moved from Vail's Southern Pacific Railroad passenger station into Schley's General Store between the east- and west-bound tracks along the wagon road. Otto Schley became Vail's second postmaster. Mining was Vail's leading industry.

1907

Daily shipments of frogs were transported aboard the Sunset Express from the Cienega Ranch near Vail to Tucson where frog legs were a delicacy sold at the Adams & Co. grocery store.

1908

Crackling flames in the middle of the night burned down Vail's general store and post office. Postmaster and general store proprietor Otto Schley declared that he would rebuild, "This time with brick!" By August a new adobe brick store and post office were opened. The Vail Stage Line delivered mail daily to the Helvetia and Cuprite copper mines. Business was good!

1912

Arizona Territory became a state.

1913

In the earliest photo of the adobe post office Vail Postmaster Otto Schley was paid a visit by Pima County Postmaster Knox Corbett.

1914

Vail's population dropped to 25, dwindling along with the price of copper. Postmaster Otto Schley died and Andrew Duffey became postmaster. Sarah Evelyn Rac 'Evie' Schley continued to operate the General Store.



Felipe Bejarano bringing the last load of ore out of 49 Mining Camp.

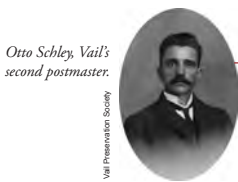


Vail school children about 1910.



Vail Southern Pacific Railroad station.

Sorting through the debris of the Esmond train wreck.



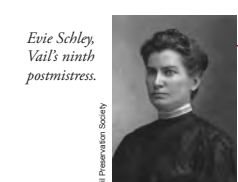
Otto Schley, Vail's second postmaster.



Evie Schley and daughter Jesse at Cienega Ranch, now called Rancho del Lago.



The first photo of the Vail Post Office.



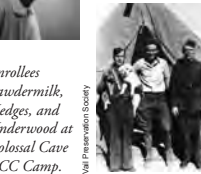
Evie Schley, Vail's ninth postmistress.



Mary Jane Warner, late 1930s.



Mary Jane Warner, late 1930s.



Enrollees Lawdermilk, Hedges, and Underwood at Colossal Cave CCC Camp.



St. Rita's dedication celebration. The post office is on the right.



Norman Wagner and Bill Allen often helped with mail bags.



Mary Jane working inside the Vail Post Office about 1962.



Art Kelley visits with friends inside the Vail Feed Store.



Water barrels with warnings.



Volunteers who stabilized the Old Vail Post Office.

1927

The old wagon road on the north side of the adobe post office between the railroad tracks was designated Highway 80. It became part of a major east-west roadway across the United States. Trains were preferred, but more people were beginning to travel by car.

1929

The Woolsey family, driving west on Highway 80 seeking health and opportunity, ran out of gas in front of the Vail Post Office. They decided to stay. Dovie Woolsey became postmistress.

1934

Mary Jane Warner was appointed postmistress. Controversy swirled around her selection. The chairman of the Pima County Democratic Party had a candidate selected until Vail community leader Carolyn Beach and even Congresswoman Isabella Greenway became involved.

1934-1937

FDR's New Deal came to Vail. 'Pop' Schmidt, operator of Colossal Cave, worked tirelessly to bring a Civilian Conservation Corps camp to Colossal Cave. The CCC enrollees picked up their mail at the Vail Post Office.

1935

The Shrine of Santa Rita in the Desert was dedicated. Many dignitaries, as well as ranching and Southern Pacific Railroad workers' families attended the celebration and worshiped at the new chapel.

1940s-1950s

Vail school children often helped Postmistress Mary Jane Warner place the special postal 'mail by rail' bag on poles adjacent to the east and west bound tracks.

1947

Vail's passenger station was removed. Highway 80 was realigned to the south in 1931. Mining wasn't bringing the business it once did to Vail, and there was no longer a need for a passenger station in Vail.

1973

Mary Jane Warner retired after 39 years as postmistress.

1975

Arthur and Mary Jane Kelley purchased the Old Vail Post Office. It began a new life as the Vail Feed Store until 1994.

1981

Community life for many of Vail's young people centered between the tracks where the Agua Verde 4-Hers were led by Patty Kelley. They learned horsemanship and, like the Vail Villagers, were a part of the Rodeo Parade.

1992

The first well between the tracks hit water at 614 feet in 1992. During the 1940s water barrels at the Dillon's Texaco gas station at Highway 80 and Wentworth Road warned travelers to conserve water in Vail.

2009

Local Boy Scouts joined by 4H Vail Vaqueros, Middle School Leadership students and Vail Pioneers helped stabilize the Old Vail Post Office with the Vail Preservation Society.

2013

Be a part of preserving Vail's heritage with the Vail Preservation Society.

2013

You will be a part of history, too! Write your name and what you'd like to achieve on the lines at the right.

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