

# Local Railway Items from Ottawa Papers 1971

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Picture shows a mail truck loaded with bags of mail, and staffers with signs denoting end of an era, and titled: 'A mail bag and the end of an era  
Railway mail clerks hold impromptu ceremony to mark end of mail trains.

The mail train doesn't stop here any more.

By Matt Hart Citizen staff writer

Most post offices don't sway, bounce, lurch, jerk or scream around curves. In fact, most just sit there like a good post office should.

So it wasn't always that way. At one time, the best training for a certain type of mail clerk was trying to sort letters while jumping up and down on a trampoline being dragged over a rough road.

Sound rather hairy? It was.

But those were the sort of conditions that coloured the daily existence of an elite band known as railway mail clerks.

As late as 1952, the post office operated 177 rolling post offices across Canada, employing 1,368 clerks. It was the clerks' task to sort mail en route between various points.

And the problem? When the train lurches, so does the sorting rack nailed to the floor.

But the clerks were the envied few. Their exams were tougher than those of the regular mail clerks. They were the "crème de la crème", if you will, as opposed to the skim milk that stayed behind.

Alas, no longer.

The post office has decided to eliminate the service for economic reasons, and the palace guard will be going on duty in the stables.

At 6:35 a.m. Saturday, April 24th, 1971, the last mobile unit rolled into Ottawa Station from Toronto, and tossed out is mail, its clerks and 117 years' worth of nostalgia.

What the clerks will miss most is the relative absence of supervision on the runs. Sure, there were the occasional inspections, but, you know, when one has friends in the main office . . .

And where else would one find mail clerks setting their tables with linen and exquisite silver? Or carrying attache cases with the ingredients for martinis and singapore slings? Not at the corner of Alta Vista Drive and Industrial Avenue, that's for sure.

And that's where the 13 clerks from the Toronto-Ottawa run will be working from now on.

And the nicknames! Holy Zappata! Most you couldn't print. A mild example name for the train between Halifax, Bridgewater and Yarmouth --known fondly as "Hellish, Slow and Wobbly."

But that's finished for good now. The mail service may still be hellish and slow, but it won't be wobbly.