Wabasso Post Office
Historical Survey by Norman Hinds

I was curious about the history of my local post office, Wabasso. Many may wonder where that is. Well, it's just south of Sebastian and north of Winter Beach heading to Vero Beach. There is the lovely Wabasso Bridge going to the island and my favorite beach, Wabasso Beach. Also, the Disney Resort is next to the public beach. I live in Sebastian, but I chose Wabasso to be my post office. It is closer to my house, and the small atmosphere is nice compared to a bigger, more impersonal post office.

The history of the Wabasso Post Office spans over 125 years, serving as the central hub of a small citrus-growing and railroad community. Before residential home delivery became widespread, the post office was the daily meeting place for local pioneer families.

The transformation of how mail arrived in Wabasso highlights the evolution of early Florida transportation, moving sequentially from isolated waterways to high-speed rail, and finally to modern roads.

1. The Era of the Sailboat Mail Carriers (Pre-1893)

Before Wabasso, a postal stop called Orchid was established in 1887 on the barrier island just east of the area by the region's first permanent settler, Capt. Frank Foster, who was homesteading near where the Wabasso Bridge stands today. He established a post office on his property in 1887 and served as its first postmaster. This early post office (initially known as Orchid) served the surrounding Narrows community.

- The Narrows Post Office & River Docks: Before the Florida East Coast Railway arrived in 1893, mail was transported along the Indian River by steamer. Local general trading posts near the dock landings acted as distribution hubs where residents gathered to pick up mail and groceries simultaneously.
- The Weekly Event: Mail delivery was the event of the week for early settlers. Contracted mail carriers would travel by sailboat all the way from Titusville down to Jupiter.
- The Struggle: Carriers like C.L. Parks had to rely completely on the wind. If the lagoon was dead calm, they were forced manually to pole or paddle the heavy boats to reach the settlements.
- Island to Mainland: Pioneers on Orchid Island (the barrier island east of Wabasso) had to row across the river to spots like the Narrows or the Mitchell dock to trade goods and send messages.

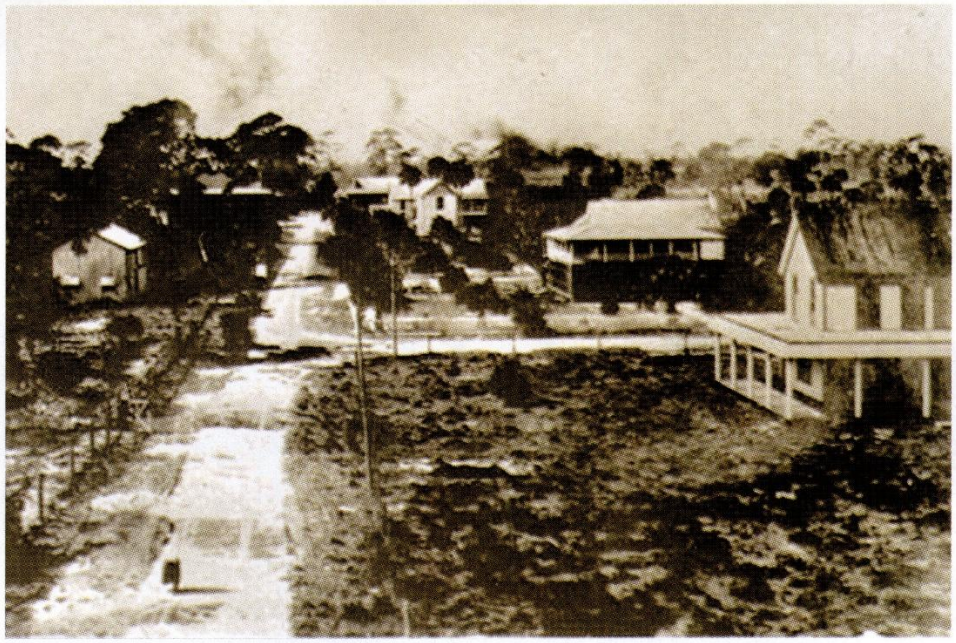
2. The Railway Boom and the "Mail Catch" (1893–1920s)

Following the arrival of Henry Flagler's Florida East Coast Railway in 1893, the mainland settlement grew. Postal operations shifted toward the tracks. The post office operated out of local mercantile stores and general supply shops clustered around the train stop—allowing storekeepers to dual-role as postmasters while handling citrus shipping and general merchandise.

Figure 1

A turn-of-the-century group on the porch of E.E. Smith's general store.
Only the three people on the far right and two babies are identified:
(L-R) baby Elizabeth Smith (later Mrs. David Cathcart) and baby David Clair Smith.
The three adults are Elmer E. Smith, Dora Beers Smith and Olive K. Jamison.

Figure 2



Downtown Wabasso in the early 1900s. On the right side (L-R): George Sears house, Elmer Smith home, Sam Beers home, Adam Eby house and Smith's store. On the left side is a mule barn of Deerfield Groves and a two-story hotel with the railroad crossing at the far end.

The Wabasso Post Office officially opened in 1898, solidifying the town's unique name (a reversal of "Ossabaw," Georgia into federal records. The Ossabaw Indian tribe were run out of their original place, Ossabaw Island, near Savannah, GA. They headed South, staying along the coast and settled in Wabasso. The reason for the name reversal was to not give their location to the large tribe that apparently ruled the southeastern region.

Like many early Florida pioneer towns, the post office did not start in a standalone federal building. Instead, it operated out of local businesses; a hardware store owned by John H. Rahskoph and E.E. Smith's General Store as pictured **Figure 1.** Downtown Wabasso in the early 1900s is pictured in **Figure 2.**

A New Idea is Hatched!

- The Mail Crane System**:** To keep the express trains running on time, the trains did not always come to a full stop at small settlements like Wabasso. Instead, they utilized a mechanical *mail crane and catcher pouch* system. A picture of the Wabasso Depot from 1935 can be found in **Figure 3**.

- The Snatch and Drop**:** The local postmaster or "post-mistress" would hang outgoing mail bags on a trackside crane. As the train roared past, a metal arm or hook on the mail car would cleanly "snatch" the outgoing pouch. Simultaneously, the train clerk would hurl the incoming mail bag onto the ground or a platform.

- Scattered Mail**:** Local historical accounts from early postal workers note that it was a frequent chore to hunt around the railroad tracks and high weeds to pick up the incoming mail bags when the mechanical hand-off missed or the bags burst open on impact.

Wabasso's East Coast Railway depot in 1935.
Beyond the depot beside the tracks are the Graves Brothers' tomato packing house and the American Fruit Grower packing house.

Figure 3

3. The Bridges and Roadways (1920s–Present)

As motor vehicles grew in popularity, the mail shifted from the tracks to the roads, and regional connectivity tied the barrier island directly to the mainland.

The 1925 Wooden Bridge: In 1925, the first narrow wooden Wabasso Bridge was built on the site of the old Mitchell shipping dock. This allowed mail carriers to transition away from boats entirely when delivering to residents living on the barrier island. *Fun historical fact: That original wooden swing bridge was eventually replaced, and the old historic mechanism was purchased by Disney engineers to use as the railroad drawbridge at the Disney Magic Kingdom!*

Post Office Building Locations: The Beginnings

- **Highway Delivery**: By the mid-20th Century, the Railway Express Agency shifted delivery entirely over to trucks traveling down US-1.
- **The 1950s**: By the mid-20th Century, the post office had moved to the west side of Beach Road (now State Road 510), operating just down the street from the historic Corbett house **[Figure 4]**.
- **The 1960s**: the post office shifted locations again, moving directly across the street on Beach Road to accommodate the growing influx of residents during the mid-century coastal boom.

Post Office Building Locations: Modern Era to Present Day

Today, instead of waiting by the lagoon or the train tracks, mail is sorted at large regional hubs and delivered directly to residential mailboxes and the modern retail P.O. boxes on US Highway 1.

As smaller settlements shifted their postal services in the mid-1900s (such as when nearby Grant consolidated its mail services in 1959), local PO box routes and mail sorting were folded into Wabasso's central post office facility.

Today, the Wabasso Post Office no longer operates from a historic roadside storefront. It has been located at 8114 US Highway 1 since 1988 in a small commercial plaza on the mainland. It retains its unique ZIP code (32970). Reference **Figure 5**.

Administratively, while it functions as an independent retail unit where locals maintain P.O. boxes, it falls under the broader regional management of the Melbourne Postmaster system, which oversees operations across Indian River and Brevard counties.

Figure 4

Figure 5

Wabasso Postmasters Through the Years

- John H. Rahskoph: One of the earliest recorded figures acting as the postal host at his local general/hardware store around the time of the town's early incorporation. Another source mentions John Leatherman who was the Postmaster in 1897, with a robust population of 35 souls.
- Diane K. Tindle: Appointed as the 18th Postmaster of Melbourne, she assumed executive oversight of the operations, employees, and mail flow for the Wabasso branch and 13 other regional cities.
- Kristel Rath: The current local Wabasso Postmaster is appreciated by residents for doing a great job managing the modern US-1 retail location with friendly service and interactions. Kristel **[Figure 6]** has been postmaster since 05.15.2004. Her only other full-time co-worker is John "BJ" Pedersen. They have one other part-time colleague, Darrin, that fills in with smiles as needed. I'm very happy to have a wonderful, helpful post office. If I need something tracked, Kristel or the guys will be glad to do it.

Figure 6

Editor's note: The Mail Crane System is quite the idea. This is a must read!

Associate Editor's note: My family discovered the Wabasso area in the middle 1970s and enjoyed many a summer day at the beach at the end of road. I have continued to go to the area all through the 1980s and well into the present time. It is frankly my favorite beach to chill on! ***Figure 7*** *is a picture I took of a driftwood snag just north of the end of the road beach area sometime in the early 1980s. I am doubtful that it is still there has the area has experienced a lot of major storms. FF*

Figure 7