

## **Post and Telegraph Office**

### **Henry B Jefferson, Postmaster**

### **James E Rankin, Junior Postal Clerk**

At approximately 12.45pm on Monday, 10 February, 1879 the local school teacher, Mr Elliott, called at the post office to collect his, and the school's, mail. As it was not yet 1.00pm, Mr Elliott decided to cross to the bank and deposit the previous day's church takings, before returning to the Traveller's Rest Hotel for his lunch.

At 1.00pm Mr Jefferson left the Post and Telegraph Office for his usual lunch at the Traveller's Rest Hotel. On completing his lunch, Mr Jefferson remarked that something must have been going on over at the bank, as the school teacher had gone to the bank shortly before 1 o'clock and had not turned up at the hotel for his lunch (as was his custom).

On returning to the post office at 2.00pm, Mr Jefferson was confronted by a 'policeman' who brushed by him and went behind the counter to read the telegraphic correspondence that had transpired that day. On admonishing the 'policeman' for going behind the counter, Joe Byrne drew his revolver and ordered Mr Jefferson to shut down the telegraphic machine.

Mr Jefferson and Mr Rankin were kept under guard until Ned Kelly arrived. After a brief inspection, Ned walked next door and ordered the bootmaker, Mr J Roe, to fetch his axe from the wood heap and start cutting down the telegraph poles so as to prevent any further communications.

Ned had Mr Roe relieved of wielding a very blunt axe by Mr Martin Murphy, the publican of the Riverina Hotel who had unsuspectingly strolled down to the post office from his hotel to see what was going on. Seeing that not much progress was being made, Ned Kelly then ordered two bystanders, Mr Thomas Brown and Mr Charles Naw to go across to Mr J D Rankin's store and get a new axe each, and keep cutting down telegraph poles until sundown.

The two gentlemen, Brown and Naw, carried out their orders, cutting down 8 poles for a distance of approximately 500 metres.

By then Ned and Joe Byrne had escorted Mr Jefferson and young Rankin across to the Royal Mail Hotel, and from there to the Police Barracks where they were locked up, along with Senior Constable Devine and Constable Richards. During this time Joe Byrne had taken Mr Jefferson's watch, which Ned Kelly ordered Joe Byrne to return.

Despite the warnings of Ned Kelly not to attempt to repair the telegraph lines or help others to do so, Jefferson, whilst still confined in the 'logs', issued instructions to Messrs. Elliott and Mackie. When released by Mrs Devine (also acting on Ned Kelly's instruction), Jefferson soon strung temporary lines along fence posts and began communicating to Deniliquin and Wagga Wagga Police Barracks (in particular) on the events that had unfolded during the day.

## History of the Old Post and Telegraph Office Situated on Lot 50 Part Portion 4, Powell Street, Jerilderie

Prior to his official appointment on 1 October, 1862, the founder of Jerilderie township, Mr J C Powell of the Traveller's Rest Hotel, later named the Albion Hotel, was the unofficial Postmaster.

In 1864, Powell received a Land Grant of some 35 acres located on the south and east sides of the Billabong Creek, generally bounded by what has become Lake Jerilderie on the western boundary, Jerilderie Street as its southern boundary, and Bolton Street being its eastern boundary.

In the latter part of 1870 Mr John McCulloch, a surveyor living in Deniliquin, was commissioned by Mr Powell to draw up plans for subdividing his Land Grant, with Mr Powell retaining some four acres on which his hotel, stables, store, and blacksmith shop were located. The subdivision was to also provide for public access to the bridge over the Billabong Creek, which Powell had also built.

During the interval between commissioning Mr McCulloch and the production of the subdivision plans, a widow by the name of Teresa Hedwidges Schaneck (or Gliniska, it not being clear which was her married name and which was her maiden name) approached Mr Powell about purchasing some land on which to establish a residence and dressmaking business. Subsequently McCulloch amended the proposed subdivision plan to create a new allotment, Lot 50, by annexing a strip of land 24 feet wide (7.2 metres) from the eastern boundary of the four acres of land that was intended to be retained by Mr Powell.

In July, 1871 Teresa Hedwidges Schaneck became the registered owner of Lot 50, paying the sum of £16 for the said property. At the time of purchase her occupation was listed as domestic servant and her address was given as Yamma Station, being a property located some 40 miles (70 kms) north of Jerilderie.

On 12 May, 1872 Teresa H Gliniska (her name before marriage or maiden name) married Michael John Curtin, of Jerilderie.

A letter dated 2 May, 1873 was forwarded to the Postmaster General "offering" a brick building for use by the Department should he favourably consider re-introducing telegraphic services for the convenience of the residents of Jerilderie and district.

There is archival evidence relating to a Post and Telegraph Office being "fitted out" in Jerilderie, preparatory to the arrival of Mr D R Kenane in December, 1873 to take up the combined postal and telegraphic duties. There is some speculation however, as to whether the building situated on Lot 50 began its life as the Post and Telegraph Office at this time, because it was not until 1876 when there appears a reference in the National Archives:

*"Premises used for postal purposes were rented from Michael Curtin on a weekly basis from 27/8/1876 at £52 per annum, £26 for Postal Department, and £26 for Telegraph Department."*

One could conjecture as to what the term “offer” by the residents in 1873 actually meant. Was the building “offered” for a specified period free of rent, or prior to 27 August, 1876 the rental paid was for some other period of lease and for a different amount to the £52 per annum? Whatever the correct answer is, it nevertheless does not alter the fact that from other evidence compiled, this building located on Lot 50 of Part Portion 4, Powell Street, Jerilderie, was the Post and Telegraph Office visited firstly by Joe Byrne and then Ned Kelly, on 10 February, 1879.

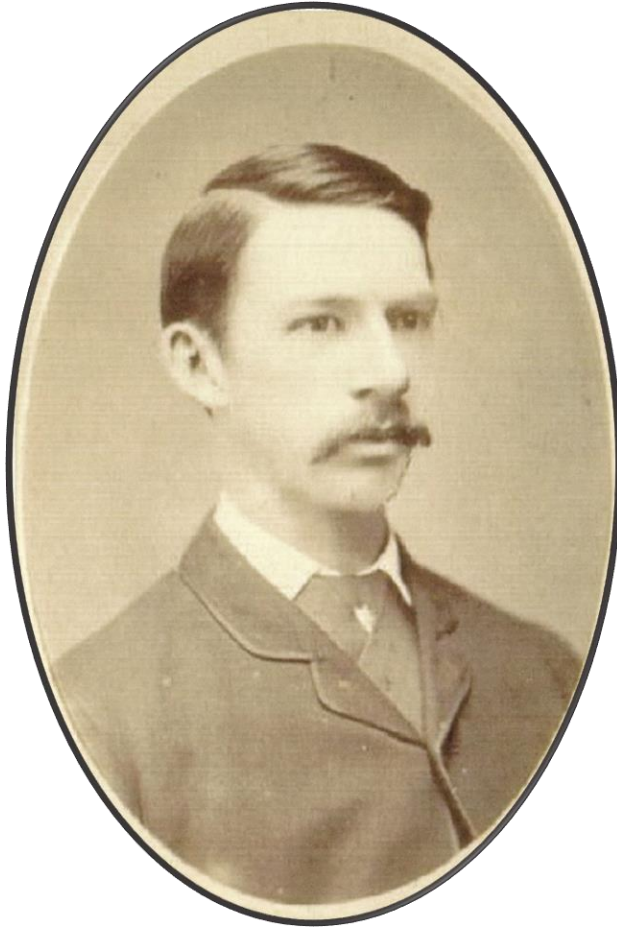


*Earliest known photograph of the Post and Telegraph Office*

Photo courtesy of Jerilderie & District Historical Society.

The specific purpose-built Post Office, situated in Jerilderie Street (and now occupied by the office of Murray Local Land Services) did not commence operating until October 1879, some 8 months after the raid on Jerilderie by Ned Kelly and his Gang.

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*Henry Betteley Jefferson*

Photo courtesy of Jill Gough Wheatley

Mr Henry Betteley Jefferson was appointed Postmaster at Jerilderie on 2 January, 1875. Shortly after the Kelly raid, Mr Jefferson was temporarily transferred to Deniliquin for 6 months ***“as it would not perhaps be safe for the Post and Telegraph Master at Jerilderie, Mr Jefferson, to remain at that place at present”***, Ned Kelly had reportedly threatened to ***“do for him”*** for repairing the lines too quickly after the raid.

Mr Jefferson was promoted to Balranald in January, 1880 and after subsequent promotions rose to Postmaster at Newcastle, the second most senior office in New South Wales.

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Mr James Ewan Rankin, at thirteen years of age, was appointed probationary Postmaster on 14 January 1878. He remained with the Postmaster-General's Department, stationed at Jerilderie, until his death on 23 April 1887, at just 23 years of age.

Mr James Ewan Rankin is buried in Row U, Lot 10 of the Presbyterian section in the Jerilderie Cemetery.

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The bootmaker neighbour, Mr John Roe, continued as a bootmaker up until 1899, but from a different address in the latter years. He purchased the farm “Brae” situated some 3 mile (5 km) Jerilderie on the Oaklands Road.

John Roe died on 8 July, 1905 and is buried in Row K, Lot 77 of the Church of England section of the Jerilderie Cemetery.



78-1890

1253

Subject of Communication: Suggesting a temporary exchange of appointments between Mr. A. Jefferson Post, and Telegraph Master Sercolerie, and Mr. P. A. Dunne Line Repairer at Demiliquin

From whom received: Telegraphs

Date of Communication: 14 Feb 1879

As it would not perhaps be safe for the Post and Telegraph Master at Sercolerie, Mr. A. Jefferson, to remain at that place at present, I beg to recommend for the Post Master General's approval that a temporary exchange be effected between him and Mr. P. A. Dunne, the Line Repairer at Demiliquin; Mr. Dunne can perform the Postal duties satisfactorily, and I would recommend also that his expenses be allowed him during his stay at Sercolerie.

The Secretary  
General Post Office  
B.C.

*[Signature]*  
14/2/79

Submitted  
11th

Mr Sercolerie (ltd)  
P. A. Dunne. (4)  
Telegraphs  
M. V. S.  
Journal

14  
2  
26  
D.

Approved  
*[Signature]*  
14. 2. 79

Over the 17.0  
Stamp etc  
to be on 18 Dec as per

*[Vertical handwritten notes]*  
I should like to see the  
stamp when possible but cannot  
do so as I am not in the  
country.

**It was in Max Brown's 1948 novel *Australian Son* that the term *Jerilderie Letter* was first used to describe Ned Kelly's 8,000-word manifesto, but very few Ned Kelly enthusiasts know of *Jerilderie's Own Letter* – written by probationary Postmaster, James Ewan Rankin to his cousin Duncan Rankin, who, at the age of 23, had been appointed Manager of the 75,000 acres Goonambil Station, south of Urana.**

Jerilderie, 1879

My Dear Cousin,

I am still in the land of the living, having passed through the ordeal scatheless. I can tell you a person does feel queer when he has a revolver within three or four inches of his head. As you asked me to give you an account of my doings (which weren't very brilliant) when bailed up by the Kellys, I will now try to give you a pretty fair one.

On Monday afternoon at about half past two, Jefferson came up from dinner and said the waitress told him that the Kellys had stuck up the Bank, which we wouldn't believe. We were standing in front of the office when a man came charging across the street and pulled his horse up at the fence. I said "There's Hart", and walked inside. I had no idea who he was. He passed Mr Jefferson, and stopped at the telegraph forms, put his hand in his pocket, pulled out his revolver, and told us to bail up, and come inside (which we immediately did). He then commenced jawing to Jefferson about stopping the line from working, and cut the wires in two places inside the office. Had a drink, first asking was it good. We then went outside, and met Ned Kelly, who immediately started to cut down poles, but finding it hard work, he gave the contract to Charley Naw. We then proceeded to the Royal where we saw a whole crowd of people vainly trying to look as if they relished the joke. After staying there for a bit, we started up the street, got into a hawker's wagon, and then went to the lock-up. After staying about until they were ready to start, we were locked up in the logs with strict instructions not to come out before 7pm. They then had a row over a horse when Kelly said he would shoot Hart. Dan Kelly and Byrnes having subsequently left with the proceeds of the robbery. Kelly and Hart went down the road, got a coat and saddle, then cleared out, and it was the last time I saw them; and I don't want to see them anymore.

We, with Richards and Devine, stayed in the lock-up until half past six; then getting tired of waiting, we went down to the Office, fixed up the wires, and sent the news all around the country. So ended my doings.

Hart took Gribble's watch. Mr Gribble went to Ned Kelly who made him give it up. Mr Gribble told Willie if he saw Hart again to shoot him down like a dog. He has a fearful down on Hart. Mr Gill, after drinking two bottles of brandy, arrived at Wilson's (doing the distance in the shortest time on record). He told them that Papa was shot, that they were shooting people right and left.

The other day Gill was shooting down the creek, and Jimmy Mackie, Elliott, Tarleton and England (the new clerk) were out riding, they came cantering over by Gill, who dropped his gun and plunged head first into the creek and out on the other side into the timber – Elliott said it was fun.

Papa received a telegram from your father for Lena to come home.

I hope you are enjoying good health and my advice is keep clear of the Kellys – a man comes to the conclusion (when you come to think about it) it was rather rude of Ned Kelly to stick a revolver in a person's face.

I must now finish this scrawl with kind love from all.

Believe me to be  
Your affect cousin,  
J E Rankin