



View east as J. Murray Webster stands in front of his home and post office circa 1915.

Old Man Webster

Leonard Humphrey in his “A note on Port Haney and Websters Corners 1912 – 1915” wrote about Mr. Webster:

...the old man fumbled and grumbled as he dealt with stamps or your mail. One snowy day he gruffly said, “come inside,” and I entered the only room. It was very dark inside, a small four-legged iron stove threw out some heat. Webster went to get his post office stamp, and I saw leaning in the corner his long-barrelled musket with its ramrod. He had been a trapper. The windows were completely covered over with thick cobwebs. When I remarked, “You have a lot of spiders,” he replied emphatically, “Them’s my friends.” What was astonishing was that throughout the year the old chap cracked his eggs into the fry pan and dropped the egg shells in one place. They formed a pile over knee height just as he dropped them day after day by the leg of the stove. You could never read his post mark, for the

ink pad lay open and exposed all through the year. He had to bang his office stamp many times on the ink pad before it showed any imprint. One summer day returning from Haney, as the buggy turned into Martin’s Road, Webster came towards me holding out his walking stick on which a skunk hung at the end. I was glad when the pony got past him but all he did was chuckle and laugh. I never say him smile or laugh except on this day. I suppose Webster was about 72 years old. His musket was a smooth bore with a large trigger for percussion caps. He was short in height. He looked dirty and always appeared in a bad temper, the more so in winter time. I never knew him to leave the place. I think his eye sight was poor, since he peered through the little wicket hole at the office counter. I often had to coax him into a better humour. He usually wore a round skin mat or cap. Scraggy hair covered his eyes.

A Skunk Story

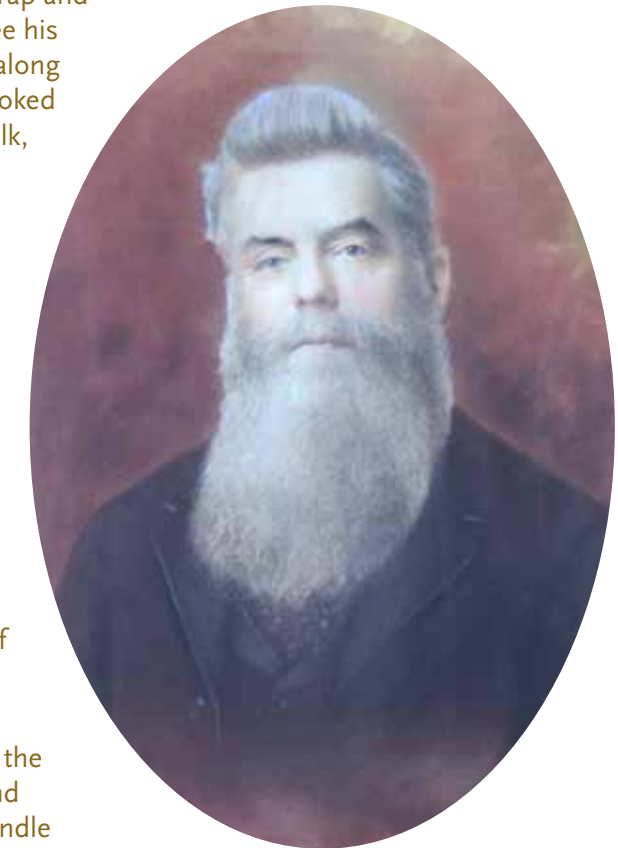
A short sketch on Mr. James Murray Webster written in 1961 by his neighbour, Mr. Tom R. Johnston

One morning he caught a skunk in a trap and decided that his neighbours should see his catch, so he drove the injured animal along the road making it drag the trap. He poked the skunk with a stick exclaiming, “Walk, damn you, I will make you walk.” The skunk threw everything he had at the elderly postman, but a squirt of skunk perfume could never halt a homesteader.

Another day he arrived and stated that he had been reading the bible. “Well,” someone asked, “What did you read, Mr. Webster?” “I read,” he replied, “Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” He was silent for a second or two and then said with some force, “Damned if I believe that.”

“Mr. Webster had a unique method of giving out the mail. As soon as he got the mail bag he unlocked it, thrust his hand down in the bag and brought out a bundle of mail. He then shouted out the names carried on whatever mail he had got hold of. Outside the wicket were gathered the patrons of the office. They in turn shouted “here,” and their mail was shoved through the wicket. The patrons had started to arrive some time before the mail arrived and stood exchanging gossip until the mail time. Sometimes someone would be absent. Their mail was left over, and Mr. Webster would look at this mail and say, “They should be here when their name is called.”

We look back at the times of the homesteader and think we have progressed. The homesteader looked back on the times of the ox, the ass and the eunuch and thought he had progressed. Such is life. Mr. Webster ran away from school, but somehow he had collected quite a lot of information and he had a good sense of humour. His eye and his ear were quick and active. His step was light. His beard—patriarchal.



James Murray Webster.