



Monograph No. 5

A Correspondence from End of Track, B.C.

by Brian Copeland
January 2022

During the summer of 1885, George Mitchell worked for CPR construction crews in the Selkirk Mountains. He began "working on the road," which he says was very hard work, and later worked as a cook. He sent letters to his wife Melissa in Oak Bank, Manitoba. Oak Bank is in the Rural Municipality of Springfield, just east of Winnipeg. Some of this correspondence has recently come to light. Included in the group are 6 covers with an End of Track postmark. In addition to 6 letters from George Mitchell, there is a postcard written from Melissa's brother Albert who also worked along the CPR construction line in the Selkirk Mountains in B.C., and a couple of letters from her sister Vina who was in Ontario.

Background

George Mitchell (1849 - 1904) was born in Scotland. He came with his family to Canada in 1853. From at least 1861 the family lived in Bathurst, Lanark County, Ontario. Melissa Smyth (1845 - 1931) was born in Drummond, Lanark County, Ontario. George and Melissa were married in 1870.¹

Several members of the Smyth family moved to Manitoba. The first to move was Melissa's brother William.² He arrived in Manitoba in 1872 as a member of the No. 3 Co. (Perth) 42nd Battalion, Canadian Militia, under the command of Colonel Scott. He served 3 years in the militia and received a land grant about a mile east of Oak Bank in 1875. He went back to Ontario to marry Margaret Mitchell (George's sister) in 1877 and returned with her to live near Oak Bank. George Mitchell and his wife Melissa moved to the area around 1880. According to a local history of Springfield,² they settled near Hazelridge which was about 6 miles northeast of Oak Bank. There was no post office at Hazelridge until 1909 and the letters are all addressed to Oak Bank.

In the letters, George mentions Melissa's brother Albert many times, saying that he has asked him to send Melissa money, and mentioning that Albert and Melissa had been corresponding. A post card from Albert below (Figures 2 and 3) indicates that he went out to the Selkirk Mountains around the same time as George; possibly they went together.

The earliest letters are from "First Crossing of the Columbia." This was at Donald, B.C. According to Lavallee³ (p. 297) it served as a base for railway construction in the Selkirk Mountains. Other letters are datelined "Selkirk Mountains," which was west of Donald, and in at least one letter, George asks Melissa to address her letters to "*Second Crossing, Armstrong's work east, care of Heather and Skelton.*" The second crossing of the Columbia was at Revelstoke. J.H. Armstrong was CPR Chief Engineer for construction in the Selkirks. George mentions that he is working for Mr. Heather's construction crew.

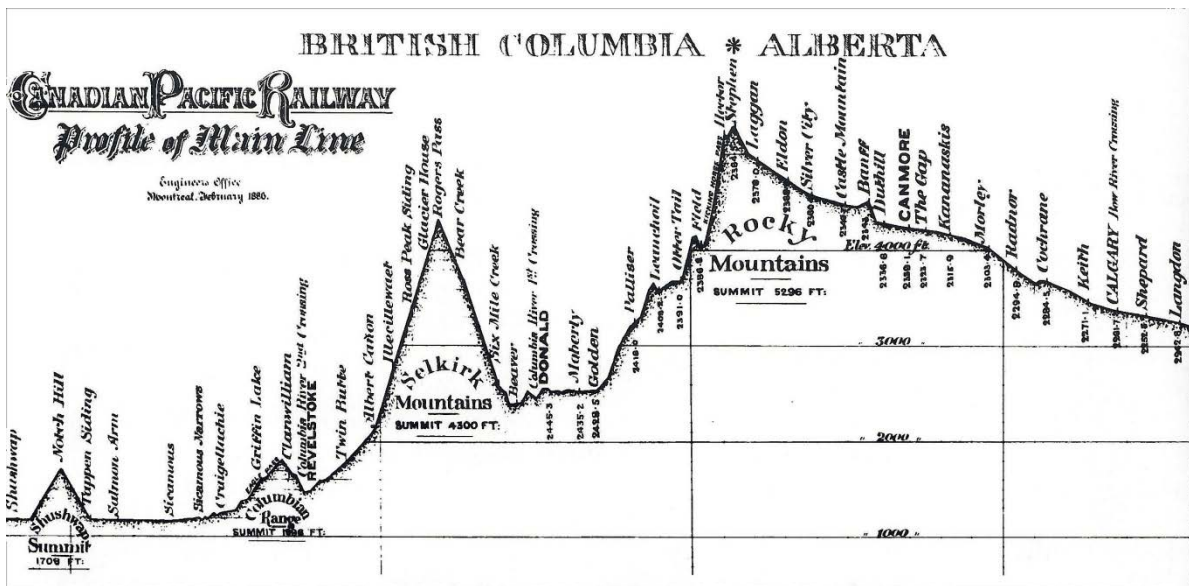


Figure 1. Profile showing the elevation changes along the main line of the CPR. This is from the CPR Engineer's Office in Montreal (1886). Reproduced from Omer Lavalee's book (p. 187).³

The map above shows the area where the letters were written. One cover was postmarked at Canmore, Alberta, which is on the far right of the map, east of the Rocky Mountains. The letters were all written between Donald (First Crossing) and Revelstoke (Second Crossing). Many simply have the dateline "Selkirk Mountains."

The letters were written between June and September 1885. At the beginning of June, the end of track was at Surprise Creek, east of Rogers Pass (and west of Donald).³ During most of the rest of the summer, construction proceeded over the Selkirk mountains towards Revelstoke.

The track crossed the summit of the Selkirks on Aug. 17. By Sept. 27, it was 24 miles west of the summit, and about 15 - 20 miles east of Revelstoke. Revelstoke was reached on Oct. 8. The last spike ceremony was Nov. 7, 1885.

The End of Track post office was established on Oct. 1, 1884 with Thomas Gordon as postmaster.⁴ The post office was in a rail car and moved west as track was laid.^{5,6,7} It probably ceased operation in late 1885 after construction crews from western and eastern B.C. met at Craigellachie and the two sections of track were joined, although the post office was officially closed on Jan. 31, 1886. A post office at Farwell (which became Revelstoke) officially opened the next day, although it was likely in operation by late December 1885 with Thomas Gordon as postmaster. Postal revenue during the time the End of Track office was open totaled \$2660.51. It was very active in processing money orders, with \$124,184.75 in money orders being issued from the office.⁸

In the earliest letters George Mitchell and Albert Smyth were both at Donald (First Crossing), and the end of track was west of them. But the other letters were written while George was with a construction crew that was west of the end of track, working on grading, etc. in preparation for track laying. Because he was not in the vicinity of the actual End of Track post office, sending and receiving mail (and sending money) appears to have been difficult and unreliable.

Nowhere in these letters does George ask Melissa to address his mail to the End of Track post office. In one case (Aug. 2) he asks her to send mail to a construction site near Revelstoke. He says:

"Direct to Second Crossing, Armstrong's work east, care of Heather and Skelton."

In a letter written the following week (Aug. 9) he suggests that she send letters for him to Albert:

"... you may address my letters in an envelope to Albert with my own name inside and he will forward them to me, suppose they are small. I will be glad to get any. I can generally let him know where to send them to although I could not tell you now. I have had you send them so many places and have not got any of them. He will be up and down the line and he can bring them to me himself."

Mitchell says that letters have to pass through several hands before being mailed and that he did not feel comfortable enclosing money in the mail. He does not mention the use of money orders, although he says that he has asked his brother-in-law Albert to send Melissa money. Albert appears to have travelled along the track and through construction sites and so had easier access to the post office. In a letter dated Aug. 31, George says:

"I am depending on Albert to send you money now and then as he can post it in a government office and get it registered. Up here it would not be safe to risk 50 cent. It has to go through so many hands and the half of letters never get to their destinations."

The correspondence

The correspondence is itemized in Table 1. The covers from George Mitchell were numbered, probably from 1 to 14 (maybe higher). Of these, 6 covers are missing.

Letters to Mrs. Mitchell from CPR construction sites					
Number on envelope	Date of letter	Posted date	Postmark	Letter written at	Notes
	JU ? 85	JU 16 85	Winnipeg	First Crossing Columbia	Post card
	JU 15 85	?		First Crossing Columbia	letter; no cover
4	–	JU 21 85	CPR W of Winnipeg	–	no letter
6	–	JY 9 85	Canmore	–	no letter
8	JY 14 85	JY 30 85	End of Track	Selkirk Mountains	letter and cover
9	AU 2 85	AU 6 85	End of Track	Selkirk Mountains	letter and cover
10	AU 9 85	AU 13 85	End of Track	Selkirk Mountains	letter and cover
12	AU 23 85	AU 27 85	End of Track	West slope Selkirks	letter and cover
	Au 31 85	Probably was in SP 3 cover		Selkirk Mts	letter; no cover
13	–	SP 3 85	End of Track	–	no letter
14	–	SP 17 85	End of Track	–	no letter
Letters to Mrs. Mitchell from her sister Vina					
	JU 12 85	?		Drummond	letter
	JY 31 85	JY 31 85	Carleton Place	Carleton	letter and cover

Table 1. A summary of the correspondence. All items were sent to Mrs. George Mitchell at Oak Bank, Manitoba from June to Sept. 1885

Cover no. 13 which has an End of Track postmark dated Sept. 3 was sold without a letter. However, a couple of letters from George Mitchell subsequently turned up. One of these was dated Aug. 31, 1885 and was almost certainly sent in the envelope postmarked Sept. 3.

It is noteworthy that all of the covers from George Mitchell are addressed in blue ink, with a very clean writing style. The letters are almost all written in purple pencil and the quality of handwriting varies from time to time. It appears that George brought pre-addressed envelopes with him. On a scrap of paper that was probably sent with his letter of Aug. 23, he says:

"I have sent you all my addressed envelopes now but three so I have not done bad."

I will go through the items in the order that they were written, with the exception of a letter and note from Melissa's sister in Ontario, which I leave until the end. In transcribing the letters, I have added punctuation and paragraphs, and occasionally I correct spelling.⁹

The first item is a post card from Melissa's brother Albert written at First Crossing, Columbia. The dateline is Columbia, June 6th (? - the day is unclear). It is addressed to Mrs. Mitchell at Oak Bank. Although written near Donald, B.C., it was postmarked Winnipeg, June 16, 1885. The Birds Hill, Manitoba transit mark is dated JU 6/85, but it is likely that the "1" in the day (16) did not print. It is not clear why it was postmarked in Winnipeg. In a letter below from George Mitchell dated June 15, George says he is working for Albert that day, so Albert was at the First Crossing at the time the card was postmarked in Winnipeg. Either the card was given to someone to carry to Winnipeg on the train, or possibly some mail was sent in a bag to Winnipeg.



*Figure 2. Card written by Albert Smyth at "Columbia" in early June 1885.
The back of the card is shown on the next page.*

The card is signed A.J.S. and is addressed to his sister, Mrs. Geo. Mitchell. A.J.S. is Albert John Smyth. Albert is mentioned in almost all of George's letters.

Columbia June 21st
 Dear Sister
 I am sorry
 I could not get over to
 bid you goodbye before
 leaving, but the country
 was too awful wet to
 walk back then.
 I have my gallery
 fitted up here and
 expect a good summer
 of it. I suppose you will
 get most of the news so
 I must not enter into
 details. The strawberries
 are ripe now. The
 weather is very warm and
 fine.
 Your aff. brother A.J.S
 1st Crossing Columbia, Rocky Mts.

Columbia June ?th

Dear Sister

I am sorry I was not able to get over to bid you goodbye before leaving but the country was too awful wet to walk back then.

I have my gallery (?) fitted up here and expect a good summer of it. I suppose you will get most of the news so I must not enter into details. The strawberries are ripe now. The weather is very warm and fine

Your aff. brother A.J.S
 1st Crossing Columbia, Rocky Mts.

Figure 3. Back of card shown in Figure 2.

Next is the group of covers and letters sent by George Mitchell to his wife. The first is dated June 15 and was not found in a cover. However there is a cover with a CPR West of Winnipeg postmark dated June 21 that is marked envelope No. 4. It is possible that the letter was in this cover, or it may have been in a cover marked envelope No. 3, which is missing. The text of the letter is as follows:

"First Crossing Columbia
 June 15

Dear Melissa

I feel very much put out because I did not get a letter from you today. I have not got any since I came up. I wrote to you just after I arrived. I did not write to you last week because I had no chance of posting it. I was away working on the road. It is very hard work. I don't intend to stay at it only until I can get a better job. They are only paying 1.50 per day and 4.50 for board so there is not much left each week.

I will not stay very long at it. There is not half the chance here this summer that there was last. Cooks are too plentiful altogether and of course wages are cut down. Mr. Heather and two other fellows are going to take out ties and when he comes back he has gone down home for teams. He may be around that way coming or going. I did not see him before he started but Albert told me so I think I will get a chance with them as cook. They are going up near the second crossing about 85 miles from here. I think I will stay where I am until he comes back.

The road is over run with men this summer, men of all nationalities. Some of them are of the most degraded character. We had service here yesterday by an English minister. We went to hear him in the evening. His text was Daniel 3rd and 13th. He gave then some very sound advice and told them that he was surprised at the looseness of their language as many a one. No doubt would be he came by invitation.

Albert got his boxes up all right so I got shoes and pants. I am very sorry I have got no money from Albert to send you yet - he is not making money like slates yet. He has a good deal of trouble and expense getting started. What money I am earning I have to wait on the company's pleasure for it. Some people tell me they have not got paid this three months. I will do what I can. I would like to know how you got along with your crop and your potatoes and pigs and everything else. Tell me if you got your potatoes and millet from Winnipeg all right.

I got two pair of blankets from a fellow for 1.50 so I am pretty well off for bedding. I am very glad I brought my old straw hat - the sun is very warm here. The weather is hot in day time and very cool at night. I am working for Albert today. I intend to go back to the road this evening or in the morning. Tell me all the news about Amy and Wellington. The Sunday School. Oh I forgot I was sick last Sunday but I was all right on Monday morning for my work.

*Good bye for the present.
God bless you all,
George Mitchell."*

There was an added scrap of paper that may have been sent along with the letter:

*"Address First Crossing, Columbia River, Rocky Mountains.
Albert will be here if I am not.*

We had a funeral here yesterday. That young girl Albert was showing you standing in the door leaning on some fellow. She was so drunk she could not stand alone. I wonder who she leans on now. She is gone anyway.

Kiss Wellington and Amy for me and tell them to get up early. I hope the Sunday school will get along well.

George Mitchell"

The letter mentions Amy and Wellington. Their daughter Amy was born in 1871 and so would have been 14 at the time. Their son Wellington was two years younger.

All of the letters are written in purple pencil. The scrap of paper also had a note written in black pencil. It was crossed out but said:

"Reached Calgary at 9 o'clock on Thursday evening. Laggan Friday morning. About 6 inches of snow. I saw Mr. Milligan at first siding. One car ran off the track near third siding. Met a host of men coming from end of track."

Envelope No. 6 was posted at Canmore on July 9. The cover was found without an accompanying letter. The post office at Canmore opened on Oct. 1, 1884. It was on the main line of the CPR. Tracks reached Canmore in October 1883.



Figure 4. Canmore, Alta. (July 9, 1885) to Oak Bank.

Envelope no. 8 was posted at the End of Track post office on July 30, 1885. It contained a letter dated July 14.

"July 14th
Selkirk Mountains, BC

Dear Melissa,

I have got away up here in the wilderness at last. It took us seven days to come from First Crossing. It is a tremendous road. I don't think I should call it a road at all. Nevertheless, we had to get over it as best we could. We had a wagon and a load of outfit for the camp. It costs seven times the price of the goods to draw them but he had the stuff and he thought we would take it with him. Some of it he could not get to buy up here. There was four of us altogether. Three of us walked all the way.

He very near lost his life and his mules too. He, Mr. Heather, was driver and going down a hill. One of the mules stopped a little to one side and away they goes over the bank and he on top of the load. All the men in the mountain could not save them when once they got started. It was so quick he jumped over the mules and came out safe. He may thank the Lord for planting a big tree which held the wagon from upsetting.

The poor mules got badly piled up. We had to cut their harness several places to let them up. The poor things could not tell us how they felt. They came out very safe from being cut but they must have been bruised very bad. However they took our load up all right. Nothing broken but the wagon tongue.

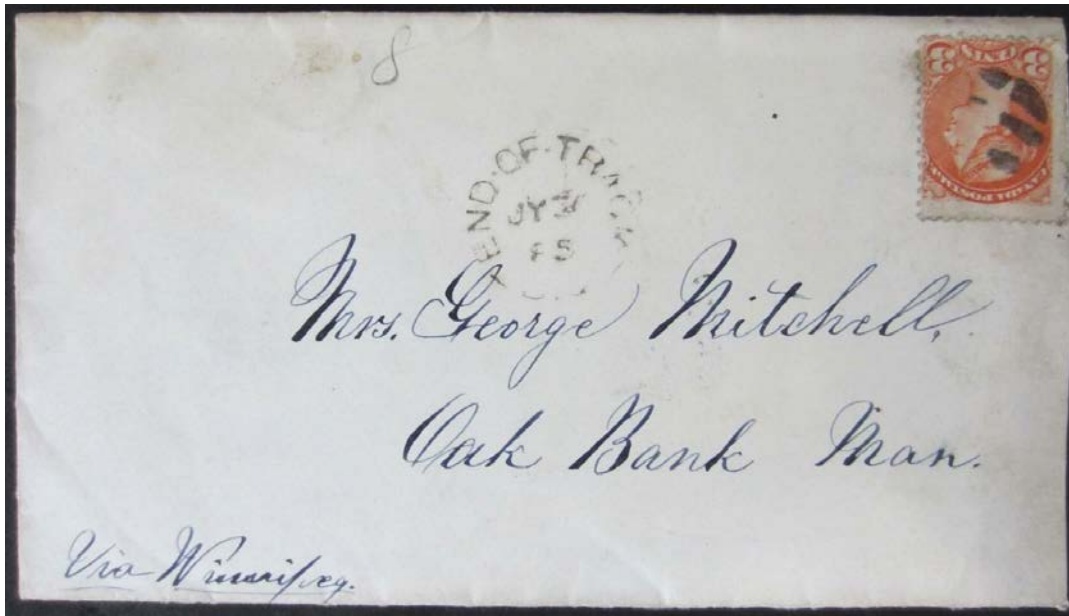


Figure 5. End of Track (July 30, 1885) to Oak Bank.

Well I go on with something that will concern you more about myself. The last night on the road I took such a pain in my stomach that I did not know what to do. I was clean willed with it. The boys done all they could for me. The only thing we had was [?]. They made a fire and gave me lots of that. One started back 3½ miles for the doctor who we seen in the evening but he was away so he had his trip for nothing in the night in this wild woods.

They put hot clothes to my stomach for about two hours. I think only for that I could not stand it much longer. I have not got over it yet but I am getting better slowly. I won't go to work until I feel able to. They have got a fellow to cook for a few days until I get round again. Now I don't want you to think that I am still sick when you get this letter.

I hope to be well long ere that but you remember you told me to write and tell you if I was sick. I am not sick this time but very weak. I got a bottle of stuff from the ospitle (sic) for my stomach and I am taking plenty of pills. I have set my first yeast to rise. I am longing for it to get up to see how it will do. I am going to set bread tonight.

I got some knives and forks on my way up here at some old camps and a shirt or two, 1 pair pants and drawers that are good. I could have a lot of clothes if I could have carried them. The old camps are strewn with clothes, some of them very good ones.

I got a pepper mill on the trip too and a lot of little things too numerous to mention. I can't think of any more news at present.

Hoping you are all well, I remain your loving husband,

George Mitchell"

Envelope no. 9 was posted at the End of Track post office on Aug. 6, 1885. It contained a letter dated Aug. 2.



Figure 6. End of Track (Aug. 6, 1885) to Oak Bank.

"August 2nd

I hope you will get along with taking up your crop all right and getting it saved. Try and save a little of the old wheat for seed if the hens can get along without it. I think Mr. Jickline or Mr. Mitchell in town will let you have what groceries you want until I get home. If they will, don't want for anything. You can tell them how it is; that it is not safe to risk sending money down. So many letters go astray. Perhaps you can get somebody to cut the crop that can wait for the money until I get home. Do the best you can.

You need not be surprised at me not getting your letters. Duncan McKae told me the other day that he had not got one yet and he felt pretty bad about it.

I have not time to write to Amy and Wellington but I hope they will be good to their ma and help her all they can. I have got a nice little present for W and I will try and get one for Amy too. But of course they will have to be good good and look after the things all they can.

I would like to know how all the crop is doing, if the oats on the braking is any good. Wellington will be able to tell me about the cattle and pigs.

I suppose you will want to know what I think about the country. Well I have seen a good deal of it and there is nothing good about what I have seen, but the water and timber is good and plentiful. But I hate it every other way. A person can get a fresh cold every night no matter how careful they are. There is such a damp cold atmosphere. Cold from the fact that snow is always on the mountains and damp from the fact that the water is always running down into the valleys. The valleys in some places are barely wide enough for the road bed.. There is cedar tree up here eight feet across the stump and very tall. It is the finest country for timber that I ever seen. So tall and straight. I just wish I had one acre of the cedar down at home. It would be a fortune itself.

I haven't heard any good accounts of the coast. I have seen a good many people that has been out there and come back again discouraged. They say there is good strips of land there but there is no free land and that you

could not buy it where it is worth having. Unless something good turns up I don't think that I will go out there this fall to spend all the money that I make and not be a bit the better off.

No I think you have more need of it at home. If I could have left you about one hundred dollars when I came away I would feel a good deal better than I do. It annoys me to think how you are going to wiggle through. Albert promised me he would send you money but that is all I have - his promise. I hope for your sake he will keep it for once.

That is all I have time to write at present. I hope you are all well.

Direct to Second Crossing, Armstrong's work east, care of Heather and Skelton.

From your own
George"

Regarding the return address, Second Crossing was at what is now Revelstoke. J.H. Armstrong was CPR Chief Engineer for construction in the Selkirks. In a previous letter, George mentioned he was working for Mr. Heather who would have been one of the contractors.

Envelope no. 10 was posted at the End of Track post office on Aug. 13, 1885. It contained a letter dated Aug. 9.



Figure7. End of Track (Aug. 13, 1885) to Oak Bank

"Selkirk Mts BC,
Aug. 9th 85

Dear wife and children,
I am going [to] write you another few lines although it is very lonesome not to get any letter from you. I don't know where they are. I may get a lot of them some day and no doubt I will not be able to answer them all at once. It is hard for me to write. I have so little time and if I got your letters I would know better what to write. You may be wanting some particular news that I can't think anything of just when I am writing.

I saw Albert since I wrote last time. He was up here. He went as far as the crossing selling views. He got along well. Sold all he had, about \$170 worth. He started back last Thursday. He told me he had a letter from you and that you were getting along pretty well only you were hard up for some money which I knew you would be.

He told me he had sent you \$10 and that he would try and send you some more when he went back. He is pushed for money himself. He sent Sid [one of Melissa's other brothers] \$40 and thought he would have to send him more on account of the company not passing any more men up here. Binnetto was pushing him for a big [?] but notwithstanding all that I done my best to induce him to send you some more when he went back.

I told him how things were with me, that I could not get any just now and that you would be terribly disappointed if you did not get it. God knows I fell sorry for you but that does not help you out of your troubles. He intends to be up here in about three weeks time and I told him I would try and get him some money then if he would send you what you wanted. He said he would try. I told him if I had it I would not care to send it from here as there is no safe way of doing it and I know you will not blame me. It is so hard to earn it and we have nothing to lose. I hope something will tempt him to do what we both want him to this time.

I have not time to write to Amy and Wellington but I hope that they will be good to ma, and try and look after the things for her all they can, and be good to that little colt. I almost forgot about it. I hope you made a good bargain and that you will have good luck with. I suppose I will be in for getting a mate for it. I hope I will be able to.

I have written to you every week and intend keep at. Suppose I don't get any letters it is enough for one of us to [be] disappointed. I hope you get all my letters.

It is a terrible country for white people to live in. They should not be here at all. Your neighbours has been using you pretty rough by rather pity them for not knowing better if they deserve it, pity. I am awful glad to have a wife that get along if she has half a chance. You will have to do as you think best and it will please me. Have your breaking plowed if you can get it done this fall [?] to suit you.

Although I don't get your letter I feel satisfied that get along to the best advantage you may address my letters in an envelope to Albert with my own name inside and he will forward them to me, suppose they are small. I will be glad to get any. I can generally let him know where to send them to although I could not tell you now. I have had you send them so many places and have not got any of them. He will be up and down the line and he can bring them to me himself.

I feel nearly all together well again. I am in hopes that you get some of my [letters] so you will know what was wrong with me as I told you in two of them that I had a very bad time of it coming up here. I took cramps in my stomach. I can't tell you how I was until I go home. They left me very weak for a time but don't be uneasy about me. I feel first rate now. Able to cook for 18 men and I have only got a tin cooking stove to do it on. I get great praise for my baking at home and abroad it is beginning to spread. I am making yeasty today, instead of going to Sunday school. It is rising splendid. It wants to climb out of the dish. I can't think of much more news.

Our work here will last about five weeks. We have got some Finlanders working. They can't talk English, only one or two of them. I don't know where they are from. I guess Amy will be able to tell me when I come home. I must go and feed them. Excuse my scribbling. I wish I could get a letter from home.

*Good bye from your loving husband
George Mitchell"*

Envelope no. 12 was posted at the End of Track post office on Aug. 27, 1885. It contained a letter dated Aug. 23.



Figure 8. End of Track (Aug. 27, 1885) to Oak Bank

"West Slope Selkirks
August 23, 1885

Dear wife and children,

I am going to write to you again. I hardly know what about, only I can tell you that I have not had any letters from you yet it is simply awful not to hear from you attal but I must grin and bear it. I hope you get at least some of mine. I hope you are all well and getting along far better than I expect.

Keep up a correspondence with Albert and I will hear from you occasionally that way. I expect he will be here some of these days, I suppose Sid [her brother] and Sophia [probably her sister Melvina Sophia] are up before this. Our job here will be done in about three weeks. I don't know what we will go at next but it does not pay to be idle up here and pay for board.

Everything here is an awful price, flour eight dollars per sack, beans 10 cents per pound, bacon 22, sugar 19, baking powder 60 and everything else as high as possible. It is to be hoped when the track is laid up this far that we will be able to get things a little cheaper. I forgot about potatoes they are 8 and 9 cents per pound. Those things I mention by the pound are just the same to take a quantity. The last beef we got was 22 cents and butter 50. It is a pure fright now.

I hope you are all well which is the only thing which troubles me very much at present. I would feel a great deal better if I knew how you were getting along. There is other things bothering me too you know but then they are not unbearable at present. I think I will be home early this fall. There is no good chances here now to make money and nothing would keep me in the blooming place if they will pass me out free.

I will try and save all I can while I am here. I have picked up old clothes enough to do me so that I won't have to buy any. I am pretty well now and pretty busy on an avrige [?] I have about 15 men to cook for and nothing but a sheet iron stove to cook on. I surprise the natives with my bread. It's so good.

Oh I will have a lot of news to tell you when I get home. What people has to go through here would kill a mule in civilization. The most predominant feature here is selfishness. I know there is a good deal of that all over. I have no news that I can think of. I arranged with Albert to send you some money now and then and I would pay him when I got mine. I would be satisfied if knew he would do it. It bothers me to know how you make out. If I knew you were getting along pretty well I would feel better. I would not risk to send 50 cents from here I am so disgusted with the mail and you won't wonder at it.

There was a man shot dead a short ways from here at a saloon the other day. They don't think much of that up here.

*Good bye for the present from your loving husband,
Geo. Mitchell"*

On an enclosed scrap of paper:

"I saw Duncan McCrae. On Sunday he was here. He feels bad about not getting any letters so does somebody else."

On another enclosed scrap of paper:

"I hope you got my last letter. I expect Albert up some of these days with a letter or something for me. Send my letters to him so that I may get an old one now and then. This is bad scribbling but you will know who done it and of course it will be all right.

I have sent you all my addressed envelopes now but three so I have not done bad.

I would like to have a feed of potatoes. We had none since we came here. They are only 8 cents per pound at the second crossing.

Good bye Ma, W. and Amy

From Papa"

Envelope no. 13 was posted at the End of Track post office on Sept. 3, 1885. It was found and sold without a letter. Subsequently, a letter dated Aug. 31, 1885 was found. It was most likely sent in this cover.

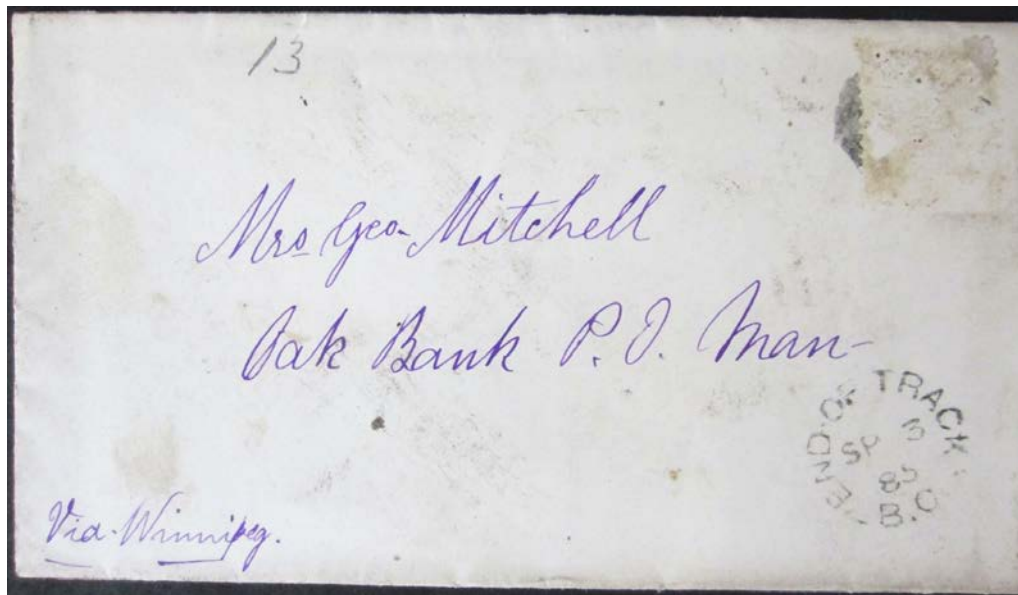


Figure 9. End of Track (Sept. 3, 1885) to Oak Bank

"Selkirk Mts.
August 31st

Dear wife and children.

It is a long time since I have heard from you although I send you a letter about every week. I hope you will get the half of them. I hope you are getting along as well as could be expected under the difficulties you have to contend with which I know are not a few. I wrote you last week telling you that we were going to move. We have moved about 2 miles farther east doing grade work. We have 15 men and expect more next week. I am very busy; have hardly any time to write. It won't be writing, you will get only scribbling and may have a time of it trying to read it.

I am happy to tell you that I am getting quite well again only I am not fit for heavy work yet. The men cut nearly all my wood for me. They are building me a bake oven and trying to have things as handy as possible. Men only get \$2 a day here and have to pay $5^{1/2}$ and \$6 per week for board. Provisions is very dear. Flour \$8 per sack, beans \$10 per bushel, butter 50 cent per lb., oats \$7 per hundred and everything in proportion. My wages are small only \$40 per month but I was glad to get a job for I am not able to do hard work.

You need not send me shirts or any other kind of clothes as I have plenty to do me six months yet and hope to be home long before then. I sold an old shirt and drawers the other day to a fellow that wanted them worse than I did. I won't wear much clothes at my work which is just as well as they are pretty dear up here like everything else.

This is Sunday and I am as busy as any other day. For fear you did not get my last letter I will tell you what was the matter with me. I took cramps in the stomach and had them very bad. The boys did not think I would get over it but I have not had a touch of them since, nor never want to. I am improving as fast as I could expect. I will write to you as often as I can get time to. I have only had three letters from you yet, none in July. I know it is not your fault. I want you to get along just as well as you can and do as you think best.

I am depending on Albert to send you money now and then as he can post it in a government office and get it registered. Up here it would not be safe to risk 50 cent. It has to go through so many hands and the half of

letters never get to their destinations. I told him I would make it all right with him in the fall but I know he is not to be depended on, he is so careless.

I hope Sid and Sophie are up by this time.

Try and manage the same as if I never heard from you because I don't expect to with any satisfaction. You need not send me anything but your love. I find very little of that in the mountains.

Remember me to Mr. Tueson (?). Tell him I will make it a point to see him if I am spared to get home safely.

My love to you all
George Mitchell"

Envelope No. 14 was posted at End of Track on Sept. 17. It was found without an enclosed letter.



Figure 10. End of Track (Sept. 17, 1885) to Oak Bank

There are two letters to Mrs. Mitchell from her sister Vina (Melvina) during the time that George was working with the CPR construction crews in B.C. The first is a short note without a cover.

"Drummond,
June 12 1885

...If all be well, I expect to start for Manitoba before long. Joining the volunteers will not keep Sid from going where he likes, they are not bound to stay in any certain place. He is not sure yet just when he will start, but it will not be long I do not think... "

She goes on to talk about some marriages and deaths, and says to address her mail to Tennyson P.O. (south of Carleton Place, Ontario) where she is staying with her aunt. Sid, who she mentions in the letter, was their brother.

The second letter was in a cover posted at Carleton Place.



Figure 11. Carleton Place (July 31, 1885) to Oak Bank

"Carleton Place
July 31st/85

Yours of June 22 to hand. I have been in Carleton for the last 4 weeks or more. I did not get you letter where it came, it was addressed to Tennyson.

I am very sorry to hear you are lonesome. But Amy will surely be great company, she will be quite a woman now and Wellington too will be able to do a lot of work.

I intended to go with Sid when he would go, but when I came here to Carleton I sewed for awhile. Sid was not ready to start just then, and Mrs. Sam Price (Aunt Maritta's youngest daughter) was very poorly and her hired girl was no use, she could not get along right and she was not able to work herself so she wanted me to stay and live with her this summer. She would give me the wages she was paying the girl, and I would be like one of themselves in that house. She was extremely good to me when I most needed kindness and help. I did not know what to do; she said they would like to have me when she was so delicate and the work is light and it is just like home. I thought as the summer is so near over that it would be as well to stay at this point till spring, for I dread to face a winter in Manitoba. And if all go well I could go up in Spring to have a good long summer there. I feel far better since I came here, I feel more contented that I have felt for a year. I was tired of knocking around, but now I am making something to support myself and I feel better. I have been a burden on poor Sid. He has kept me this past year. I do not know what I would have done only for him. He has been more than good to me. I will never forget his kindness. He was disappointed when he heard I was going to stay here this summer, but I thought it was best to work when I got such a good chance to earn some money... Besides the summer will soon be over and if all be well I will be in Manitoba in Spring I hope. I pitied her, she has not got any children to help her and she sent her girl away.

You did not say when Geo. would be back.

Sid was to start for Manitoba last night from Perth. He will ... show you the views he took.

Mariah Tetlock wishes to be remembered to you, she has got eight children living ... and two dead.

Well I must close. Please write soon. Perhaps Sid will reach there before this letter.

*No more at present
From your aff. Sister, Vina"*

In the letter she mentions a difficult year and the support of their brother Sid who was about to leave for Manitoba. Their mother died in 1884 and Vina was 20 years old then; this is probably the source of the sadness during the past year and perhaps is the reason for the mourning cover.

Epilogue

After working on the CPR George returned to Manitoba, where he and his family had a farm. The census shows them living in the rural municipality of Springfield in 1891 and 1901. Sometime around 1902 or 1903 they moved to Calgary.

Fig. 12 shows incoming mail to George Mitchell in Calgary sent from Oak Bank.



Figure 12. Oak Bank to Calgary (March 13, 1903).

George died in 1904, not too long after the move to Calgary. Melissa continued to live in Calgary for many more years until she died in 1931.

Melissa's brother Albert Smyth also ended up in Calgary, where he was a businessman. Fig. 13 illustrates a 1902 cover sent from Albert's company to Oak Bank before the Mitchells moved to Calgary.

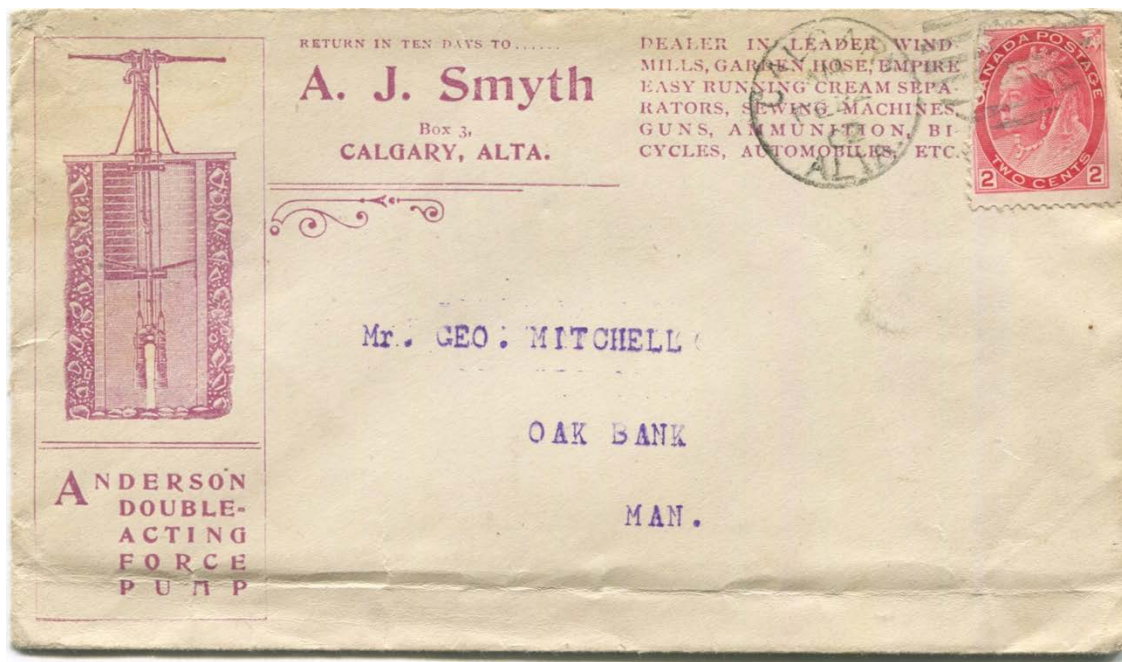


Figure 13. Cover from A.J. Smyth in Calgary sent on Feb. 24, 1902 to Oak Bank

Albert eventually moved to Vancouver and died in West Point Grey in 1921.

References and notes

1. Much of the information on dates of birth and death, marriages, and family is available in family trees for the Mitchell and Smyth (or Smythe) families at ancestry.ca. This is backed up by information from the Canada Census, marriage records, etc.
2. Dugald Women's Institute, *Springfield, 1st Rural Municipality in Manitoba, 1873-1973*; p. 292.
3. Omer Lavalee, *Van Horne's Road* (1974, 2007).
4. The Postmaster General's Report for the year ending June 30, 1885 indicates that it opened as a Money Order Office on Jan. 2, 1885. In another table in the same volume, it reports postal revenue from the office from Oct. 1, 1884. Postal revenue for the year ending June 30, 1885 was \$902.28.
5. H. A. Price, "End of Track and the C.P. Mail Co.," *BNA Topics*, Sept.-Oct. 1987.
6. "Thomas Gordon and post office patronage," *BC Postal History Newsletter* #90, July 2014.
7. Tracy Cooper, "Early Canadian Pacific Railway mail service in BC Part 2: New observations on the End of Track post office," *BC Postal History Newsletter* #107, Sept. 2018.
8. Postal revenue and money orders are from the Postmaster General Reports for the years ending June 30, 1885 and June 30, 1886. The End of Track Post office data is listed with the offices from Manitoba and the Northwest Territories, despite being located in B.C. Before the railway was completed, railway post offices between End of Track and Calgary were in the Manitoba and North-West Division. The Postmaster General's report for 1886 notes: "183³/₄ miles on main line between Calgary and Donald – included in last year's return in mileage in Manitoba and North-West Division, now transferred to the British Columbia Division."
9. Three of the letters were originally transcribed by Greg Nesteroff for an article, "Letters from End of Track." posted on the website, *The Kütne Reader*. Scans of those letters are also available on the website. Those transcriptions were used here, although I compared them with the original letters and made small edits. In this article, I also include transcriptions of 3 additional letters from George Mitchell, a card from Albert Smyth sent from the Selkirk Mountains, and 2 letters from Melissa's sister Vina.