

The Lyndhurst Train Depot and Post Office

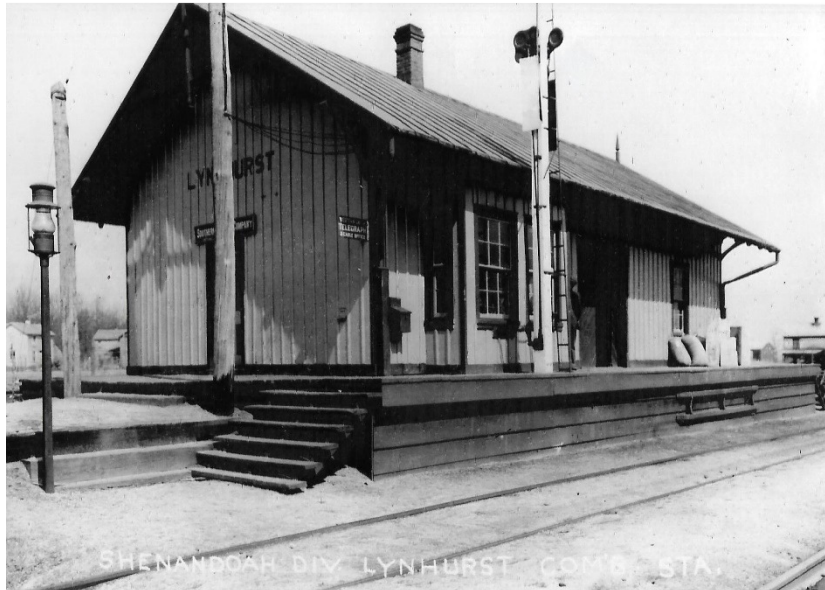


The train station in Lyndhurst, Virginia, has a rich history of early service before its eventual demise but thanks to the restorative efforts of Max and Sylvia Reinhardt, the derelict building has become their unusual private home, filled with mementos of the past as well as Sylvia's beautiful paintings. Read now about the depot's beginning and long career as a train station/post office and follow its history to the present day.

The Lyndhurst Depot located at milepost 148.0 on the original Shenandoah Valley Railroad (SVRR) line was a combination station and supposedly derived its name from SVRR's George C. Milne who named the community after Lord Lyndhurst.

The SVRR (1867-1890) extended up the Shenandoah Valley from Hagerstown, Maryland, through the West Virginia panhandle into Virginia to reach Roanoke, Virginia, and connect with the Norfolk and Western Railway (N&W). Construction began in 1870 and was completed on June 19, 1882. In September of 1890, the SVRR went into bankruptcy and was reorganized as the Shenandoah Valley

Railway. In December of that same year, it became part of the Norfolk & Western line. Today the tracks are a major artery of the Norfolk/Southern system.



An early photo of the Lyndhurst depot

Marian Davis, Gordon's successor at the new Lyndhurst Post Office, was also his part-time clerk at the depot from 1952 to 1969. After Patterson's retirement Mrs. Davis served as postmaster at the new office until March 1, 1984.

Gordon spent the first twenty-nine years of his working life as a telegraph operator for the Norfolk and Western Railroad and another twenty-four as postmaster of the Lyndhurst Post Office.

Around 1935, Gordon started his apprenticeship as a telegraph operator at the Lyndhurst railroad depot. He was twenty-four years old at the time, making sixty-three cents an hour. When he became an agent, his pay was increased to eighty-three cents an hour. He walked the five miles from his home in Sherando to the depot twice daily for a year while learning his trade. Telegraph training is a slow process. The ear is not naturally attuned to the clicking sound of Morse code, so it takes a long time to be able to send and receive messages with any speed. One who is proficient at it should be able to send messages as fast as one can type on a typewriter. Gordon laughed as he told me he used the "biblical system" of typing called the "seek and ye shall find" method!

When there were no messages being sent, Gordon helped the postmaster, Albert Finter, with duties in the post office, which was located inside the train depot. A year later, Gordon held rights as a telegraph operator from Winston-Salem, North Carolina, to Hagerstown, Maryland, on the Shenandoah Division.

In 1994, I interviewed Gordon Patterson of Sherando who served as stationmaster and post master at the Lyndhurst Depot for many years. In February 1969, a new modern post office was built just up the road from the old depot and Gordon resumed his duties there until he retired in 1976 at the age of sixty-five.



Station Master, Gordon Patterson, 1994.

The different work shifts were called “tricks.” Gordon said they consisted of three shifts from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., 4 p.m. to 12 a.m., and 12 a.m. to 8 a.m. Gordon worked forty-one stations on the Valley line of the railroad and eight places on the Western line. He recalled, “You’d have to work as many days at each station as they’d want you to. You would ride the train to your destination and the company

would pay you time-and-a half for travel. We had codes we used over the wire that we understood, such as ‘twenty-five on the wire’ meant ‘I’m busy...call me back later.’ ‘HR’ meant ‘hands ready’ (I’m ready to receive a message). And ‘2-copy’ always meant to make two copies of the letter.” Each station had a call signal and the Lyndhurst station’s was “HU”. If another station wanted to call Lyndhurst, it would continuously tap “HU” on the telegraph until someone answered.

Because of all his early training in the post office, Gordon decided to resign from the railroad when a job as postmaster came open. On January 19, 1951, he became acting postmaster of the Lyndhurst Post Office; on June 30, 1952, he was appointed to the office. Along with his new title, he continued to act as telegraph operator, express agent, and freight agent all rolled into one.

The Western Union was also located in the train depot, and one of Gordon’s saddest duties was to hand-deliver casualty telegrams to the families of men who had lost their lives in the Korean War. He said the government would authorize and pay for a taxi for as much as five dollars if the family was outside walking distance. He also remembers another sad incident when Levi Yoder was killed while walking across the railroad tracks and failed to see an oncoming train.

As postmaster, Gordon had to sort the mail and put it in people’s boxes. He placed mail on the carrier’s desk for those he mail for people who didn’t have a box at the post office, and the route carrier would sort it according to the boxes along his route. Early mail deliveries, both incoming and outgoing, were put into cloth sacks and hung on an outside hoop, which was a metal stick shaped in a circle. It would be taken outside and held up so the brakeman could grab the bag as the train went by. Later, there was a panel of two lights that sat outside the station. When it

was green, it meant there were no orders or shipments. When the panel showed red, it meant there were orders. A sidetrack adjoined the freight office where the train could pull next to an unloading dock, unload large items, and place them in the cavernous room.

As postmaster, Gordon worked closely with the mail carriers. Andy Arnold received his first contract as a rural route carrier on July 1, 1909, delivering mail



from the Lyndhurst depot where it was dropped by Norfolk and Western Railway, to the community of Love where he lived.

He picked up the mail at Lyndhurst daily, except Sunday, when the train arrived about 10:30 a.m. and then carried it to the Love Post Office around noon, a round trip distance of 26 miles. He served 450 patrons, including boys and officers at the CCC Camp in Sherando. Arnold then carried the outgoing mail from Love at 6 a.m. and arrived at the Lyndhurst station later that morning. Arnold completed thirty-one years of constant service from 1909 until 1940 with no vacation time and only used substitutes when he was ill, which was seldom. It is not known if he retired at this time or continued to carry the mail for several

Longtime rural carrier, Andy Arnold

more years. Prior to Andy Arnold, there were only three other carriers; Peter Coffey, F. E. Campbell and Columbus Hatter.

Although Andy Arnold was the rural mail carrier when Gordon started, Reginald Hatter carried the mail once Gordon became postmaster. Gordon's finest compliment came from Reginald, who said, "It didn't make any difference to Gordon Patterson who came into the post office. If a person was a millionaire or a hobo, he treated them all the same." People responded in kind, bringing Gordon all sorts of gifts and coming in just to visit and talk with him. Gordon remembered with fondness two of his favorite men of color, Walker Burden and John Vest.

“Walker had box number twenty-three, and he was just such a nice fella to talk to. John would come and walk down the tracks in the springtime and pick creasy greens. He’d come in with a big bag of them for me, and I’d offer to pay him, and he’d always tell me, ‘Why you don’t owe me anything, Mr. Gordon, but maybe I’ll get you to help me fill out my tax papers when they come.’ And I would, too!”

Gordon recalled that Tazewell Tench always had post office box number eleven from the time he moved to Lyndhurst until he moved away. “When we moved to the new post office in 1969, I saved box number eleven for him over there, too.”

Lyndhurst in the early days was nothing but rural farmland, with houses that were few and far between. In the 1930s, when Gordon was still making his daily walk to the station, he said it was not uncommon to walk there and back without seeing one vehicle on the road. He said Lyndhurst was classed as a “star route,” which meant individual contractors could make a bid on it if they wanted to carry mail for that area. The lowest bid always got the route.

The rural route carrier after Reginald Hatter was Robert Monroe. After him, the route was consolidated with Stuarts Draft and Homer Hinkle carried both routes. Years ago, a postmaster was paid by how many stamps he cancelled in one day. The newspaper printed a list of unclaimed letters at the end of the month. If no one came to claim them, they were sent to the dead-letter office in Washington, D.C., which would try to return them to the sender.

Gordon said, "Some of my fondest memories were of the school children who used to come in the depot while waiting for the bus. I used to jaw at them about everything, and if one morning I was kind of quiet, they’d whisper to each other, ‘You better be quiet... Pat’s a griping!’ For the ones afraid to cross the railroad tracks alone, I went out and walked them across.”

Postal hours were Monday through Saturday from eight in the morning until five in the afternoon, but many days Gordon Patterson went in at six o'clock in the morning. The office was portioned from the railway station with wooden pigeon holes for the mail slots. The building was heated with a woodstove that sat in the middle of the waiting room.



Mailbox slots from the old depot post office

Marian Davis said the worst part of working at the old depot was that there was no bathroom and she just *knew* the “Johnny house” out back was filled with snakes. She opted to walk over to neighbor Christine Floyd’s house to use her facilities when the need arose.

Many changes have occurred since the early days of the Lyndhurst Post Office when Patterson became postmaster. It now seems that paperwork has replaced people, and stress is an on-the-job given. Gone are the days when ruffed curtains draped the front window, and punch and cookies were served on Valentine’s Day... and a man by the name of Charles Gordon Patterson had the time to hold a small hand and walk a frightened child across the railroad tracks.

When the Lyndhurst depot was no longer used, the building was abandoned and boarded up and then bought from N&W by Max Quillen and used for storage.



The abandoned railroad depot in 1980

Just as the Quillens were contemplating tearing the building down, a woman came and offered to buy and renovate it as a private residence. It was in a bad state of disrepair and yet she could see the depot had “good bones” and made an offer. That plucky little woman was

Sylvia Leake, who had

a vision of what the depot could be with a certain amount of “elbow grease.”

Sylvia was born in Madison Heights on January 26, 1932, the daughter of Harry and Virginia Singleton. She lived there until seventeen years of age when her father took a job in Richmond and she began pharmacy school at the Medical College of Virginia. There she met Max Reinhardt who was in the same class and they graduated in 1956. After graduation, Max moved to Waynesboro and found work as a pharmacist at Standard Drug and worked there thirty-one years. Sylvia also became a pharmacist and was working at the Standard Drug Store warehouse in Richmond where Max would call to place orders and talk to Sylvia. By this time, both had married other people and had families. Sylvia found work at People’s Drug Store in Staunton and Waynesboro. Years later, both of their marriages had dissolved and Sylvia and Max reunited and were married on May 23, 1992.

Max was born in Augsburg, Germany, on February 7, 1931 to Hans and Regina Reinhardt. The Reinhardts are Jewish and when his parents saw the antisemitism



The Reinhardt family: Max is the little boy on the right

against the Jews growing, they had the foresight to leave Germany with Max and his sister Annalisa. A cousin, who was already living in the United States, sponsored the family and Max was six years old when the family boarded a ship on October 27, 1937, bound for New York City. An uncle was able to make it out several months later and lived with the Reinhardts for a time. Everyone else in Max's family was lost in concentration camps during the Holocaust. Max's father, who owned a cigar and cigarette business in Germany, did all kinds of odd jobs in the U.S. to keep the family afloat. Eventually they moved to Richmond where Max enrolled at MCV and met Sylvia. The couple was not yet married when Sylvia bought the Lyndhurst depot in 1985. The windows were all boarded up and the interior was full of old bags of fertilizer and an odd lot of litter. Max came to look at the building one night and with one sweep of a flashlight's beam he said he thought Sylvia had lost her

mind. However, she was not deterred and hired two local men to help with the cleanup. While this was going on, longtime postmaster, Gordon Patterson came in and was delighted when Sylvia offered him his old desk that was still in the depot office.



A steam locomotive passing the depot in 1985

A wrap-around deck was built, electricity installed, partitions were put in, the walls were painted, plywood flooring put down, a bathroom was added, and insulation and new wood paneling began to make the old depot look more like a home. An upstairs loft was built, utilizing the open space of the freight room that had no ceiling. The railroad waiting room was turned into a bedroom and the postal office became the kitchen, complete with the pigeon hole mailboxes that the Reinhardt's left intact and now use as utensil cubbies. Sylvia said if there was one thing she would have done differently it was stripping the many layers of paint on the walls down to bare wood.

Max explained the railroad line was not only used for freight but as a passenger line as well. Not many back then had cars so people from the Lyndhurst community would buy a ticket and sit in the waiting room before boarding passenger cars that were pulled by an engine. They would ride to Waynesboro in the morning and come back on the three o'clock afternoon run. Gordon Patterson recalled that there were four passenger trains a day and people riding the train paid seventeen cents for a one-way ticket. I asked Sylvia if the train going by several times a day ever bothered them. She said that over the years they have grown accustomed to the noise and hardly ever notice it. She also said because of the huge timbers the depot was built on, the house never shook when the trains rumbled by.

The Reinhardts were married in 1992 at The House of Israel Synagogue in Staunton and rode to the reception at the depot in a 1930 Buick Marquette.



Max and Sylvia on their wedding day



Max and Sylvia the day of the interview

They hired a band that played classical music at the wedding as well as music at the depot. A dance floor was put down and guests danced the night away... Max laughed, "Until the mosquitoes came out!" Max, who is the main cook in the family, baked and decorated a bride's cake and groom's cake (in the shape of an old car) for the wedding. Sylvia sewed her own beautiful wedding dress but bragged on her husband, saying he was an accomplished woodworker, electrician, and could do most anything else that needed to be done. "He is always interested in learning new things and that is so important," Sylvia added, "And he's been so good to me."



The living room with Sylvia's artwork

"He is always interested in learning new things and that is so important," Sylvia added, "And he's been so good to me."

Sylvia is a successful artist, working in mediums such as oils, acrylics, and paper mache. She paints murals, landscapes and life-like portraits and at eighty-seven years of age is still taking on work. The walls of the home are decorated with her paintings giving it an art gallery feel.

Several years ago, the Reinhardts hosted an open house at the depot and they said about a 150 guests came, with many community members pointing out the exact mail box that belonged to them when Gordon Patterson was postmaster.

Thanks to Max and Sylvia Reinhardt, two very talented people, for inviting a virtual stranger into their home and letting her write the history of the Lyndhurst depot and giving a glimpse of their personal lives as well. As the interview came to a close, a freight train rumbled by the depot; a fitting end to a perfect day.

List of Appointed Post Masters for Lyndhurst, Virginia, 1883-2019

Thomas M. Ziegler – October 2, 1883

John A. Stewart – December 28, 1883

Henry B. Sweeney – April 13, 1888

John M. Harner – March 28, 1890

Joseph A. Patterson – May 26, 1893

George W. Perry – 1897

A. P. Finter – 1897

C. Guy Wilson – July 1935

Charles G. Wilson – January 1, 1936

Orin B. Turner – April 6, 1941

Dorothy D. Turner – May 6, 1942 (acting)

Dorothy D. Turner – July 1, 1945 (appointed)

Charles Gordon Patterson – January 19, 1951 (acting)

Charles Gordon Patterson – June 30, 1952 (appointed)

Until retirement in 1976

Marian Davis – 1976 to March 1, 1984

Bruce Chandler – August 1984 to 1994

Elizabeth Berretta-Davis – Officer-in-Charge – June 26, 1998

Tsianina Barbara Baldwin – Officer-in-Charge – October 19, 1998

Tsianina Barbara Baldwin – Postmaster – November 7, 1998

Sandra L. Burnette – Officer-in-Charge – January 21, 2005

Debra K. Fitzgerald – Postmaster – April 2, 2005

Debra K. Fitzgerald's name changed to Debra Sue Kidd on April 20, 2005

Naomi Veney – Officer-in-Charge – June 28, 2012

On January 12, 2013, Lyndhurst Post Office converted into a Level 6 (6 hour)

Remotely Managed Post Office under the direction of the Postmaster of the Waynesboro Post Office. The Lyndhurst Postmaster position remained until ultimately vacated.

Sonny Cabbage – Officer-in-Charge – June 5, 2013

Mandy K. Connellee – Postmaster – August 10, 2013 until present time