

Address labels

I get a lot of fan mail, most of it addressed to Current Resident or Occupant. I bet I get more incoherent and childish mail than Santa Claus. And that's just the junk mail I get from insurance and credit card companies.

But once in a great while I leave my post office with a giddy feeling after having received a piece of fan mail. (Okay, so the only real fan mail I get is addressed, "Dear Idiot.")

Most of the people who buy my books or read my column are country folks and over the years I've made the following generalization: People who live in the country have much simpler addresses than people who reside or work in the big cities of this nation. The closer you get to a metropolis the more complicated the address.

It seems this has always been the case. Theodore Roosevelt owned two ranches and you could send a letter to our Teddy bear of a President either at Elkhorn Ranch, 25 miles north of the railroad, Medora, N.D., or Chimney Butte Ranch 8 miles south of the railroad, Medora. And it would get there! Even today I get mail with just a town, zip code and a ranch name like Happy Valley or Whispering Pines Ranch.

Most mail I receive that originates in the country either has a P.O. box number or something like HC 31, Box 1327. For you townies, the HC stands for "Highway Contract," and refers to non-postal service employees who deliver the mail under contract to USPS. A lot of my mail that comes from Idaho and Utah carries an address like 30 W 20 S, which is a brilliant system for naming streets and roads that I've been told originated with the Mormons. You don't need a GPS to find such an address!

What little city mail I get usually carries an impressive address with a company logo, name, title, building name and suite number. In general, the longer the address the more egotistical the person is, the only exceptions being preachers and inmates. Attorneys have the most highfalutin addresses and they nearly always add "esquire" to their names, which used to mean that the person was a candidate for knighthood. I fail to see how that applies to lawyers of today

but I'm sure an attorney will write and tell me. (And I guarantee his or her address will be real long.)

Another thing I've noticed about mail from the country is that either the person writes their return address longhand or has a rubber stamp. You won't believe this but in 25 years of selling books via mail order there were only two handwritten addresses that I could not decipher. Country folks take a lot of pride in the disappearing art of writing longhand legibly. Except for the feedlots that send me mail, I see very little personal stationery. Country folks are very conservative, thrifty, do not waste resources, aren't showy, and well over half the mail I receive is sent in small envelopes. Many country folks will paste on a return address sticker that features the Cowboy Hall of Fame, a picture of a bull or a patriotic theme such as "Support Our Troops." You seldom see these types of stickers on mail from big city firms. Also, country folks put a lot more effort into the stamps they select.

I've also observed lately that the Post Office has slowed down. Back when California became a state the joke was that by the time it took the election results to get from Washington DC to San Francisco by mail, a newly elected Senator from California might find his term of office had expired by the time he got to Washington. Considering the politicians from the Golden State lately, one can only hope for a return to the good old days.

I shouldn't pick on the Post Office. For the most part they do a great job. Only recently I heard of an elderly person who, during a senior moment, addressed a letter to a person's e-mail address and used their phone number instead of a zip code.

It got to its intended destination in just three days! Really.