

# Rural postman: be part of each family

By BECKY LEAKE

The kids sit fidgeting on the porch, shading their eyes and betting on who will be the first to see him. Mom peers frequently out the window, drying her hands on her apron and wondering if he brings news from Aunt Susan and Uncle Henry. Every once in a while Dad even interrupts his spring plowing to look down the road when he reaches the end of the row.

A cloud of dust appears on the road and the kids are off to greet one of the most welcomed visitors of farm families, the rural mail carrier.

Ever since 1896, when Rural Free Delivery was established, the rural carrier has been an important part of every rural community. For many farm families, he was the only contact with the outside world they had for days or even weeks at a time.

For James R. "Jimmy" Earls of Waco, delivering the mail every day was more than just a job.

"You know your people, their troubles and happiness. You just become a part of each family," says Earls, who is retired after spending 43 years with the postal service.

Each rural carrier was appointed as a civil worker by the governor of the state and had to be of high moral character with no black marks against him.

"Not even speeding tickets," Earls said.

Usually, 99 percent of the rural carriers were involved in community and church affairs, said Earls, who is still active in community and church service around Waco. Each rural route was 24 miles long, and in the early days a rural carrier needed two horses to get the job done in one day. Rural carriers were expected to provide their own transportation and were paid by the mile rather than by the hour like city carriers.

These "traveling post officers" as they were called, provided the same services as the post office in town. Besides delivering mail and packages they could sell stamps, issue bonds and insurance and pick up outgoing mail. A good rural carrier could always be counted on to bring up-to-date local news and events, re-

cent deaths and births, lend a helping hand with chores when needed and even bring the pound of coffee he was asked to pick up in town yesterday.

"I always enjoyed my work," Earls said. "It was like going visiting every day."

Earls has delivered everything from chickens to queen bees in his years as a rural carrier. His devotion to his work started a local saying that Jimmy would have taken a dress up to a customer's door and helped her to try it on if need be.

"I probably would have, too," said Earls with a grin.

"Service with a smile" is the motto of rural carriers and they are well known around rural communities for their dependability in providing that service. Earls described how many times he and the other carriers delivered the mail in every kind of weather and under trying circumstances. About three times Earls helped farm families fight fire and always carried a tow chain and extra gas to help motorists in trouble.

During World War II, the rural carriers helped keep the nation together by delivering the mail to small towns despite low wages. Earls said he felt it was and still is a real necessity to keep the mail moving and to bring the nation's citizens in contact with each other.

Today, there are approximately 1,716 rural carriers in Texas alone and they are still known to be the most efficient workers of the postal service. Earls said that in 1926 there were eight rural carriers to 28 city carriers in the Waco area. Today there are only 10 rural carriers to over 200 city carriers in Waco.

The standard of service is still high among rural carriers, Earls said. During the 23 years he spent as president of the county chapter of The Nation Rural Letter Carriers Association, only 10 out of the 32,000 rural carriers in America were removed from service.

Though the social importance of the rural carrier may have changed through the years, they still provide a valuable and needed service to rural families today.



Photo by Becky Leake

James R. "Jimmy" Earls stands by the symbol of his 43 years with the U.S. Postal Service.

## New tropic farming course

By MARK PERRIN

Wanted: Graduates with a degree in agriculture to work in tropical regions. Average temperature 80 to 85 degrees, year-round growing season, plentiful rainfall and fertile soils. Salary negotiable.

Advertisements such as this may become numerous in the near future as tropical agricultural regions are further developed in Latin America, South America and Africa.

A new course to be offered by Texas A&M in the 1980 spring semester, Special Topics in Soils and Cropping Systems of Tropical Regions, will help prepare students interested in working in the tropics.

The course will be taught by Dr. Frank G. Calhoun, professor of tropical soils and crops at Texas A&M.

Calhoun has over six years work experience in the tropics. He worked for Firestone in Liberia, West Africa, did soil research in Columbia, South America and worked as a party chief for the United States Agency of International Development through a contract with the University of Florida in El Salvador.

Tropical regions include areas that have less than a five degree centigrade difference between the average monthly temperatures. Rainfall in these areas may average 100 to 125 inches per year, and contrary to popular belief, Calhoun said that about 80 percent of the soils are very fertile and highly productive.

Calhoun feels these areas will play an increasingly important role in future world food production.

Farming practices are unlike the United States because mechanized agriculture is just now beginning to be utilized in many of these areas. Calhoun said the main reason machinery is not used to a greater extent is because most of the farmers cannot afford it.

Some of the tropical regions are beginning to use chemicals and fertilizer, especially in Latin America where the people have been very receptive to the introduction of new farm practices.

There are two different channels to choose from if a person wants to work in the tropics. Calhoun said there is "tremendous opportunity for graduates" in technical assistance jobs, such as in extension and education programs for the United States government and for universities.

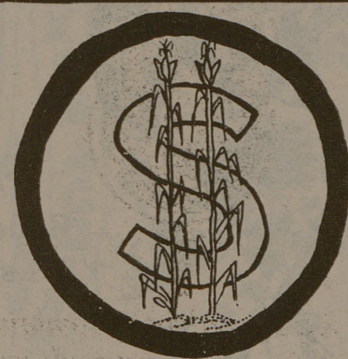
A second channel would include working for multinational companies, who have operations located in the tropics, such as rubber or farm implement companies.

Special emphasis in the new course will be placed on the management and improvement of tropical soils. Other topics to be discussed will include tropical soil formation, cropping systems in the tropics and food production potential.

Students interested in international work, such as Peace Corps or USAID, will find the course particularly useful. It is a three-hour course and is listed as Agronomy 489 in the spring schedule.

Cindy Douglas, a junior bio-medical science major, takes a close up look at her chicks daily, to keep accurate progress reports for nutrition trials. The chicks are used in Dr. Howard Heshby's Animal Science 304 nutrition class.

Photo by Linda Warinner



**Ag Economics Club  
Speech Contest  
and Meeting Nov. 27**

108 Harrington 7:30 p.m.  
Contest open to all club members

for information call  
Nick Bambert 779-9428