

## Flensburg: Minnesota's Sweetest Post Office

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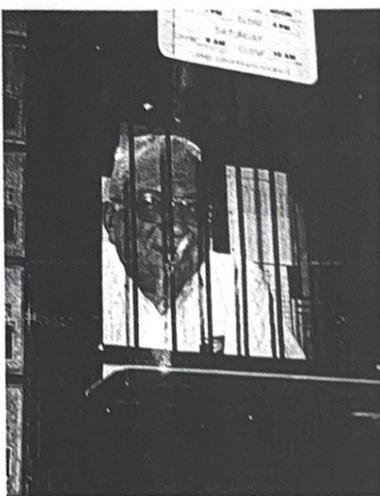
Flensburg is located in Morrison County about eight miles west of Little Falls and then about a mile south of Highway 27 on County Road 1. The new green street sign calls County Road 1 "Dove Rd," but nobody in Flensburg calls it Dove Road. As you're coming from Little Falls, a sign says you are headed for Swanville and Long Prairie but there's no mention of Flensburg.

History says that the place was settled by Alen Flynn. It is told that Mr. Flynn stopped off and started a lumber mill to make ties for the soon-to-come railroad.

We drove into town and stopped to take a picture of the "Welcome to Flensburg" sign. We covered Main Street, 1st, and 2nd Streets and Ash, Pine, Maple, and Oak Streets and didn't see a soul. We drove up to what was once a gas station. It is one of those buildings that, no matter what you do to it, will always look like a gas station. We stopped because it had a "Flensburg Post Office" sign hanging on it.

Inside we found Jerry Gwost. Jerry was sitting at the bar, but it's okay. The place used to be a beer joint and gas station. The pumps are gone now, and so is the beer. The old worn wooden bar takes up one side of the place, and the post office and rest rooms take up the other side. There are seventy of those little pigeon-hole mail boxes with combination locks. When the kids stop in to get the mail, Jerry retrieves it for them. The post office and the municipal liquor store vie for being the most active place in town. School was out the day I stopped, and there was a steady stream of kids coming to get the mail. Stacey Lease picked up the mail for her mom. Stacey and the other kids in town go to school in Little Falls. Stacey is a sixth grader and says Flensburg is nice. "The kids play in the park and we ice skate in the winter. We come to the post office to pick up mail, rent a movie once in a while, and buy candy and pop."

Young Aaron Frank showed up with fifty cents in his pocket and no thoughts of mail. He wanted candy. Mr. Gwost assisted. Aaron ended up with the last three lime Blow Pops in the place and a



Jerry Gwost has been the Flensburg Postmaster since 1974.

nickel left over. The nickel got him a gummy worm. He carefully stuck everything in a secret compartment in his jacket and stalked out with his day's fix of sugar and a smile on his face.

Jerry Gwost moved into Flensburg in 1959. He bought the place—which was Deep Rock gasoline at the time—from Lorraine Fietk Fafara's dad. The building was built in 1932. Jerry and his wife have their residence in the back. "Yah, I walk to work," Jerry says with a laugh. He became postmaster in 1974. Next door he used to have a garage where he changed a lot of oil and greased a lot of cars. Nowadays he just handles the distribution of mail, pop, and candy. He's sixty-five years old and "might retire one of these days." In his spare time, Jerry plays a concertina with the Jolly Fishermen old-time band.

There is not a lot of business going on in Flensburg. Besides the post office and the municipal store, there's Kulus Feed Store and Mark's Tractor & Truck Repair. American Legion Post #136 is still going strong, and so is the Sportsmans Club along with the Flensburg Falcons town baseball

team. The Sportsmans Club puts on the annual Flensburg Fun Days every June. There is a volunteer fire department. Offices of the mayor, Scott Gardner; three council people; and the city clerk are combined in one building. Seventy-six-year-old lifelong resident Ben Lapos is in charge of the sewer mains and treatment ponds. "I'm retired, mostly," says Ben. I met Ben in the middle of a Flensburg intersection as he was peering down a manhole. "Sewers gotta flow . . . or we got trouble," Ben points out.

Flensburg gets along without a gas station. They have no grocery store and, for heaven's sake, no cafe. "There used to be a hardware store kitty-corner from the post office here, and they had coffee in there," Gwost says. "Had lots of things in town at one time," he says. "A bank, couple grocery stores, creamery, pickle factory, barber shop, stockyards, all those things, but not anymore. Small businesses have tough sledding." The biggest employer in town is the feed store with four employees. "And two of them are the owners," Jerry points out.

There was a time when there were hardly any kids in town, but that has changed in the past few years. "For a while there, when they sent out the social security checks, they could have just sent them to *Baxholder*," Jerry says with a laugh. Now, the post office appears to be a good hangout for the kids in town, and Jerry knows them all.

Flensburg was incorporated in 1913. The only church in town, Sacred Heart Catholic, was built in 1907. A lot of people of Polish descent settled in and around Flensburg, and the story goes that the Polish in Flensburg are a lot smarter than the Polish in Chicago. After all, the Polish in Flensburg know right where Chicago is; the Polish in Chicago would have no idea where to find Flensburg, Minnesota. □

Ben Lapos checking sewer flowage

