

## 2 Tiny Postoffices Are About to Close

### No One Can Erase Memories

(Continued from page 1.)  
The Star postoffice was established in 1882 at the request of settlers. It was named Star to round out a triumvirate with heavenly titles—Mars and Venus (Knox county), both nearby.  
Charles Downey proposed the name. Downey's home was more than a mile from where the first Star postoffice was established in a sodhouse, situated 26 miles northeast of O'Neill (land now owned by Robert Miller). Only remainder is a clump of cottonwood trees.  
Mrs. Keser was the first postmaster and she held the position until 1885. Fred Kelly was the first mail carrier, bringing the mail in by horseback or carriage from Orchard, via Mars, Venus, Middlebranch and Hainesville. Lewis Downey and Frank Butterfield were later carriers.

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Emory Downey started the O'Neill-Niobrara stage in 1885 and moved the postoffice one-quarter of a mile to a store operated by Reverend Damond.

Downey & Kelley, contractors for the O'Neill-Niobrara stage line, had gone to Omaha to purchase horses, carriages and a livery outfit. The business venture was spurred by the government land office in Niobrara, an upper Missouri river outpost.

Charles Downey and Fred Kelly, stage drivers, stopped nights at the Star hotel (now the home of Mr. and Mrs. William "Bill" Hansen). Traces of the old stage route, which took a beeline from O'Neill northeast, are still discernible to the old-timers who know where to look. The Downeys moved to Iman in 1890, recalls Louis Downey of Page, who is one of the few living persons remembering the stage in its heyday.

Various renters of the Downey land—the Johnsons, Cobb, Harris and Bates families—kept the postoffice.

In 1899, Henry Theiroff purchased the property, which is still owned by members of the family.

Mr. Thieroff was postmaster until 1910 when he moved to Creighton.

Mr. Cole, who did research for this article by interviewing Louis Downey and others, said his father, Elvin Cole, was appointed postmaster in 1910 and the office was moved to the present site on Sunny Slope farm. Elvin Cole retired in 1939 and his daughter-in-law, Mrs. Charles V. (Florame) Cole, received the appointment and carried on until her death in 1947.

Mr. Cole, the present postmaster, has been in charge since 1947, assisted by his daughter, Miss Cleone.

Prior to World War I, Frank Phillips had the route changed in order that mail would come from O'Neill (instead of Orchard). There would be a meeting of the star route carriers from O'Neill and Lynch and the interchange of mail. Star thus served as a distributing point.

In the pioneer days it was an arduous job of getting the mail to Star across the windswept, treeless, roadless plains. The advent of the model T flivver improved the service and a few road grades and culverts helped. Mr. and Mrs. Meyer of O'Neill



James E. Wiley, postmaster at Dorsey since 1918, and his wife are counting the hours when the death knell will sound at the historic old Dorsey postoffice and they'll no longer sort mail for the 43 families the office has been serving.—The Frontier Photo.



The William Hansen home (above) was an important stopping point in pioneer days. It was known as the Star hotel. First room inside the door was the lobby when the place was owned by the Downey family. Hansen plans to tear it down someday and build a new home, using much of the maple that was shipped in from Michigan.—The Frontier Photo.

introduce the model T. Meanwhile, back in the thirties, the National Association of Star Route Mail Carriers was founded at O'Neill.

Postmaster Cole recalls an anecdote his mother used to tell regarding the original Star postoffice. His mother's maiden name was Etta M. Ridgeway. She and her parents had just located in Nebraska. She went to the soddie postoffice to claim a letter that had just arrived from back east.

While a dozen grizzly, rough-looking men looked on, she gleefully withdrew some currency from the envelope.

W. V. McElhaney was the first postmaster in the Dorsey

community. Initially the community was known as Mineral then Apple Creek and later Omeral.

Apple Creek wouldn't do for a name because there were other towns similarly named.

In the beginning the mail man brought mail to Dorsey from Running Water, which was the end of the railroad. The distance was 25 miles.

John Emerson, second postmaster, became irritated when mail addressed to Omaha, the young state's metropolis, and Omeral, the bustling inland community in northern Holt, frequently got mixed up.

Emerson appealed to Washington for an official designation for the Holt community. Just because there was a phonetic ring that was similar, these neighbors weren't going to play second-fiddle to the ponderous big Missouri river town which already had horsedrawn streets, a packing plant or two and the mainline of several railroads.

Thus the postoffice department settled on the name Dorsey—named for Congressman George A. Dorsey.

Dorsey was the midway point on the O'Neill-Niobrara route. For more than 50 years inbound mail has come from Lynch and O'Neill. Years ago the mail also came in from Verdigre.

For years there were two mail arrivals and dispatches daily at Dorsey—to and from Verdigre and O'Neill.

Dorsey's third postmaster was Dudley Gaser, who was followed by Daniel Binkerd, Michael Connaughton and Philander Parker.

History of the Dorsey postoffice is inseparable with the story of the community. The village has had four locations.

"Old Dorsey", as oldtimers remember it, was located about a half-mile east from the present postoffice and down a big

hill. Traces of that hopeful location have disappeared.

The second Dorsey was situated a quarter of a mile south of the present site with portions of the town on both sides of the road. There was a block of wooden sidewalks on both sides of the street, drug store, blacksmith shop, hotel, general store and a number of dwellings.

It was William Davidson who investigated the third location—up north on top of the hill. He moved his drug store there and added a general store.

Coral McElhaney (father of O'Neill's Ted McElhaney) was postmaster for a time and operated the store, selling to Lettie Heurman. Moses Elliott, also an auctioneer, was the next postmaster and he was followed by Mrs. Thomas (Martha) Davis.

In Dorsey's heyday it was a busy trading center and a family lived on every quarter section (or less). At its peak it counted four stores, two hotels, a livery, church, school, bank, blacksmith shop and even a newspaper, The Dorsey News, edited by Joseph Coombs.

The bank was a branch of the Bank of Verdigre and Jack O'Donnell of O'Neill headed it for many years, assisted by Fred Pilger and Phoebe O'Donnell.



Louis Downey helped furnish material for accompanying story.—The Frontier Photo.

Even before World War I the tide had changed for Dorsey and other inland rural communities. When the land offices closed, the commercial intercourse between O'Neill and Niobrara-Running Water dwindled off.

When the Wileys took over the Dorsey postoffice in 1918, with many of the young men off to the war, the commercial pulse of Dorsey was growing faint—and the same applied to other outposts. The inexorable hand of time has done the rest.

Actually, both Dorsey and Star postoffices have done well to retain their identities down through the years.

During the past two years all of the Dorsey mail has been

routed through Lynch. Don Allen of Lynch has been the carrier. The Dorsey office, in drawing its last breath, has been serving 47 families. Dorsey maintains a telephone exchange, a Presbyterian church (served by the Niobrara pastor) and a rural school (Holt district 4).

The motor car and truck long ago sealed the fate of communities like Dorsey.

The postal inspector with a Scotch tweed suit, horned-rimmed glasses, a slide rule and a map can rub out the names of Dorsey and Star; the girl clerk in that Washington office can seal the files in the big iron vault; but no one can erase the memories.

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