

## **First Postmaster Kept Post Office From Being Stolen**

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Postmasters of today have many problems, but probably none of these who are in Hugo today for the annual district convention of the National Association of Postmasters U.S. ever had to cope, as did Hugo's first postmaster, with danger of having the post office stolen lock, stock and barrel from under his very nose.

That's an experience which Hugo's first postmaster, Enoch Needham, of Grant, had to face back about 1902 when about 25 Hugo residents thought the easiest way to move a post office was to pick it up and move it without the sanction of the United States government.

It's a story Mr. Needham will never forget.

The first post office was in J.J. Thomas' general store, located immediately southwest of the present intersection of West Main street and the Paris Highway. Although Bailey Spring was named the original postmaster, he did not serve, and Needham, a brother-in-law of Mr. Thomas, became the first postmaster.

After a few months, as the town began to grow, an argument started as to whether the town should be developed on the east side or the west side. Since the post office, Thomas' general store, a bank operated by Thomas, J.P. Ward's store, a barber shop and some other establishments already were operating on the west side there naturally developed a hot argument and some fist fights.

However, the east side proponents bought the Thomas interests with a specific understanding that the post office would be moved, along with the bank, to the east side of town.

The store stock and bank were moved, but moving a post office even in those days was not too [unreadable]. One had to write Washington and wait until the government authorized the move. Because an error crept into the land description regarding the move, the wait was pretty long-drawn-out.

In the meantime, a wooden building at about the present location of the Schooler Printing company was prepared for the new office. But no word came from Washington. The East-siders were eyeing the West-siders suspiciously. There were some pretty hot arguments and a few fights but still Needham waited for orders from the department.

One evening a group of about 25 men decided to end the waiting, "We've come to move this post office," the spokesman told the postmaster. "Stand aside."

Needham realized the dangers to them of such action and tried to outtalk the group of hotheads. They argued and he argued and finally the

moving crew got to arguing among themselves. They even had some fist fights there in the post office.

The day's mail was already gone, and Needham suddenly thought of a plan whereby he could defend the government property and at the same time satisfy the visitors' minds, for he was convinced they would not leave unless they thought they were carrying out their plan.

When the Thomas stock had been moved out of the store a rack had been left behind, and into this Needham had tossed an accumulation of dead mail, intending later to dispose of it according to law.

"All right, boys," the young postmaster finally said. "You say you won't leave without taking the post office with you. I have told you it is a federal law violation and that you'll get in serious trouble but still you insist and say you are going to move the office. All right, the stuff in that rack is all that remains today," he said, pointing to the dead mail. "Take it and get going."

Not knowing they had been outwitted they carried the rack out, loaded it and left. Needham immediately notified Washington of the situation, corrected the question of the property description error, and received orders to proceed to the new location.

Fearing possible difficulties from the group, although they had not yet realized his deception, he contacted United States Marshal Clark Wasson. Together they loaded the mail and equipment into a wagon and were rounding Henry's corner with it before the move was discovered.

Mr. Needham served as Hugo postmaster of about twelve and one-half years. He was succeeded by John Larecy, whose successor was the late Hubb Babb. Hugh Johnson was the next in line, succeeded by the late Carl Sager, who served as acting postmaster for one year. Postmaster Roy Hardway has held the office since December 1, 1944.

During the years before it moved into the modern plant which now is Hugo's federal building, the post office was located, after its first move, in the present location of E.M. DeWeese and Company, publishers of this newspaper, the Brader building, in the 300 block on North Broadway, and the Eastland building at Second and Kirk streets.

transcribed & submitted to OKCHOCTA by Ron Henson