

Dakota Collector

A Research Journal of North and South Dakota Postal History

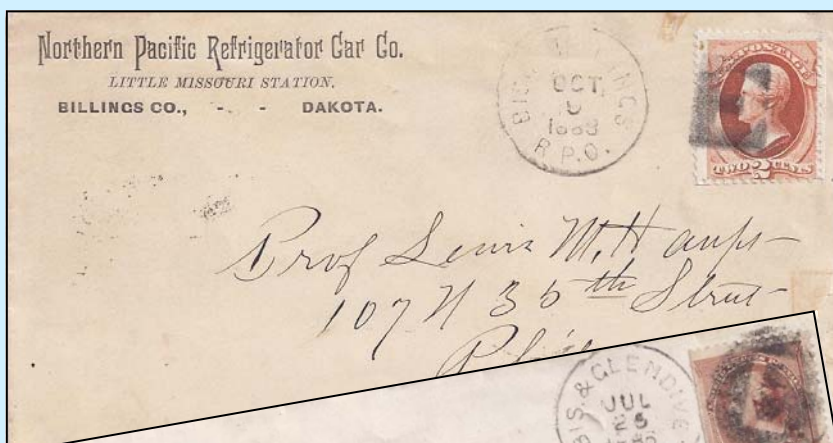
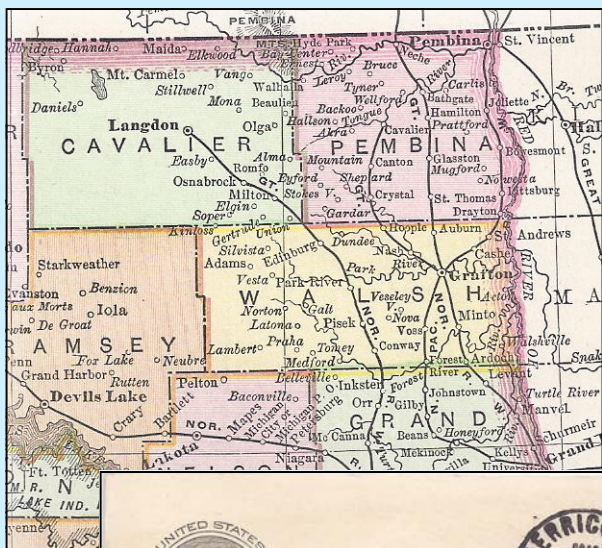
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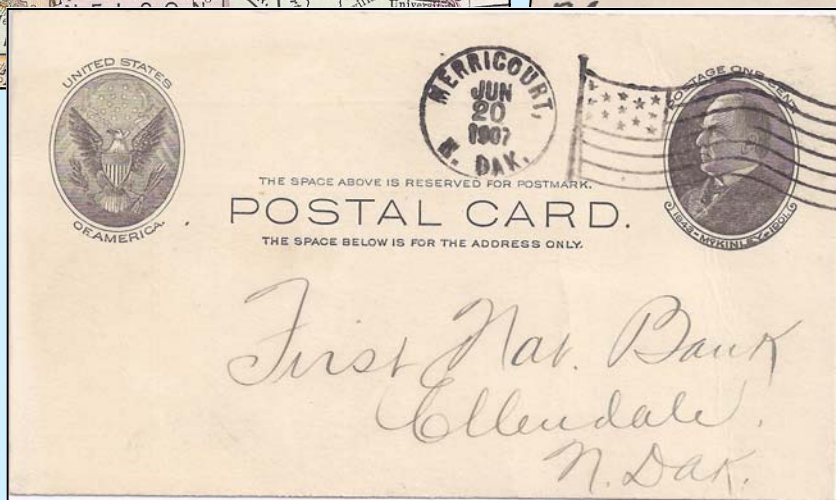
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AFTER TEN DAYS RETURN TO
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A special THANKS to all contributors

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Editorial Comments

from the President

Submitted by Ken Stach

We have two fine articles from Dakota Postal History Society Vice President, Mike Ellingson, in this issue. Mike has been one of our key contributors through the years and we certainly appreciate his articles. I don't know how he finds the time to write them, with three little girls around the house, frequent trips to the farm in North Dakota, and a full time job. I guess postal history is one of his outlets, like it is for many of us.

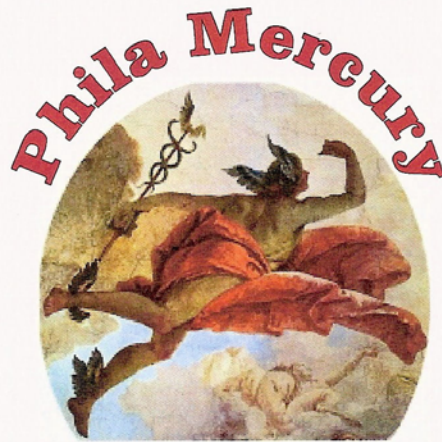
We'll likely return to our series on South Dakota counties in the next issue, with Custer County next on the slate. Please email me any items you'd like to have us consider adding to that article. Thanks.

from the Secretary/Treasurer/Editor

Submitted by Gary Anderson

With the increase in dues, we only lost seven members one of which has since renewed. We also picked up a new member via the website which is where most our recent new members have come from. Our Society is still going strong with over 70 members, while many Postal History Societies are struggling and have almost no membership. I hope we can keep it interesting enough to keep our membership. With your continued support this will be possible.

Any and all articles pertaining to any part of North or South Dakota Postal History are always welcome. Consider writing an article on your favorite cover or group of covers.



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A Survey of Railway Post Offices Operated in North Dakota

By Mike Ellingson

In the July 2009 issue of the *Dakota Collector*, I did an article entitled “North Dakota Railroad Postal History” in which I illustrated many various items related to railroading in North Dakota. At the end of that article, with link on our Society website provided here <http://www.dakotapostalhistorysociety.org/2009-07-Vol-XXVI-No3.pdf>, I hinted towards additional articles on the same subject, and this represents the initiation of that effort.

The vast majority of non-local mail in the last couple decades of the 19th century and well into the 20th century was carried by train, with the obvious exceptions being the regions, primarily the Western frontier, where the rail network was not yet fully established. However, most items bear no evidence of such carriage, as they were simply handled and postmarked by the local post offices and subsequently transported by the railroad with no additional markings applied.

A very small percentage of mail pieces carried by the railroad actually ended up with railway post office markings, commonly referred to as RPO postmarks. These were typically items that were dropped in a mail slot on the train itself, dropped in a mailbox at a depot, or in some cases mail that was presented directly to a railway mail clerk at a depot after the local post office was closed. This was a practice commonly done by hotels or businesses in close proximity to train stations as a courtesy to their guests or customers. These types of mail really bypassed handling by the local post offices entirely. Other types of mail that ended up with RPO postmarks include special delivery and registered mail, which were subject to specific regulations and required special handling by the railway mail clerks.

This article will present an alphabetical listing of the railway post offices that operated in North Dakota, along with some basic information including maps and illustrations of actual pieces of mail handled on those lines. For the directory listing of routes and dates of usage, I draw heavily on the Mobile Post Office Society publication “Directory of Railway Post Offices”, revised 1997, by John L Kay. Please note that the name of the railroad given in the listings that follow represent the owning railroads of that line at the time the service started.

For those readers who have an interest in railroad postal history in general, I highly recommend membership to the Mobile Post Office Society. They publish a quarterly journal and also offer for sale a large variety of publications related to railroad postal history. For more information, visit <http://www.eskimo.com/~rkunz/mposhome.html>.

Aberdeen, SD & Linton, ND; Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway; 117 miles

- 1905 FR: Aberdeen & Eureka
- 1907 TO: Aberdeen & Mobridge, plus Linton & Roscoe
- 1924 FR: Linton & Roscoe
- 1931 TO: Linton & Roscoe

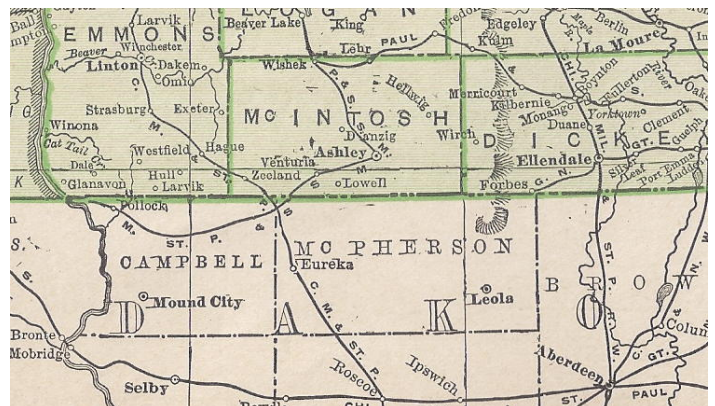


Figure 1. 1911 Rand, McNally & Co. map showing line from Aberdeen, SD (via Roscoe) to Linton, ND.



Figure 2. 1908 Aberdeen & Linton R.P.O. postmark

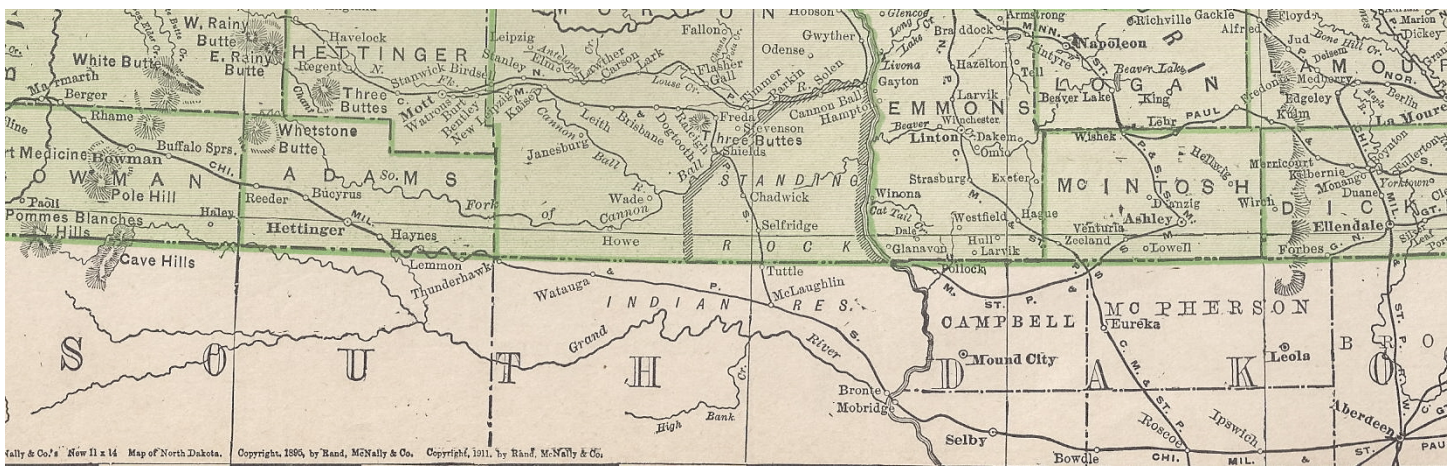


Figure 3. Rand, McNally & Co. map from 1911 showing line from Aberdeen, SD to Marmarth, ND.

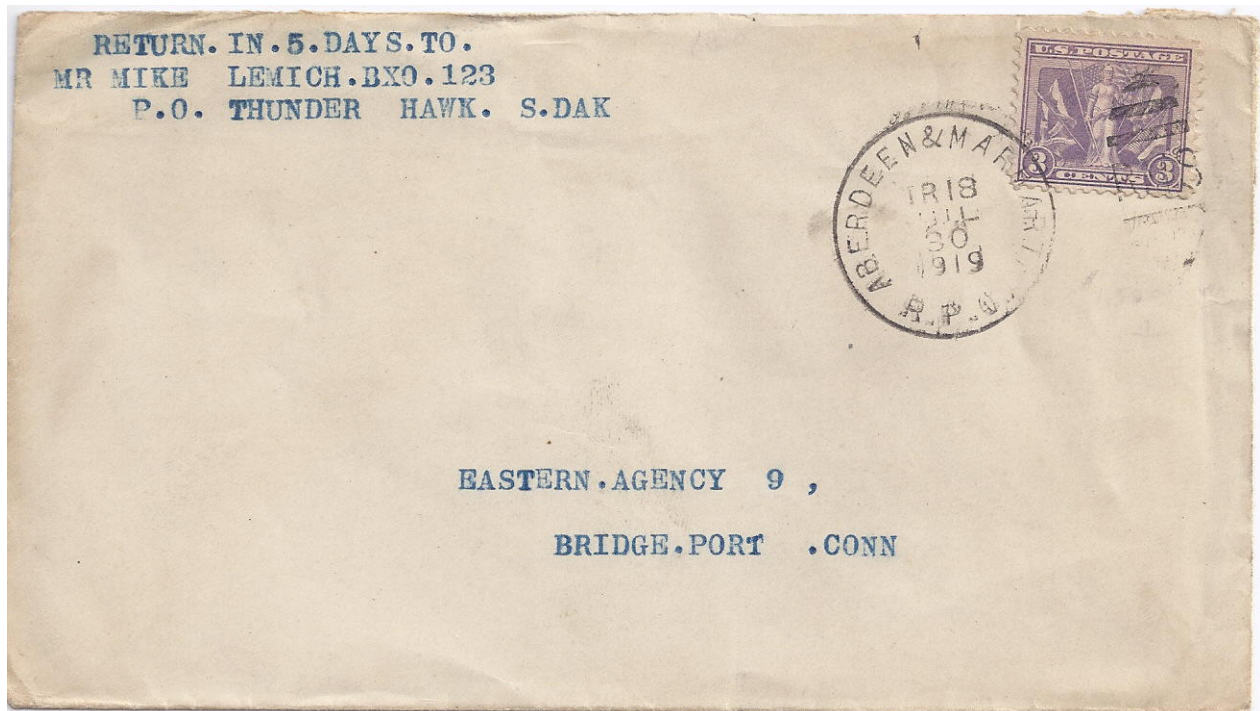


Figure 4. 1919 Aberdeen & Marmarth R.P.O. postmark, with return address of Thunder Hawk S. Dak., a village along the rail line on the border of North and South Dakota.

Aberdeen, SD & Marmarth, ND; Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway; 288 miles

- 1919 FR: Aberdeen & Miles City
- 1921 TO: St. Paul & Marmarth

Aberdeen, SD & Miles City, MT; Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway; 412 miles

- 1908 FR: Aberdeen & Mobridge, plus Lemmon & Bowman
- 1919 TO: Aberdeen & Marmarth + Marmarth & Butte
- 1944 FR: Minneapolis & Miles City (WD = Western Division)
- 1960 Discontinued

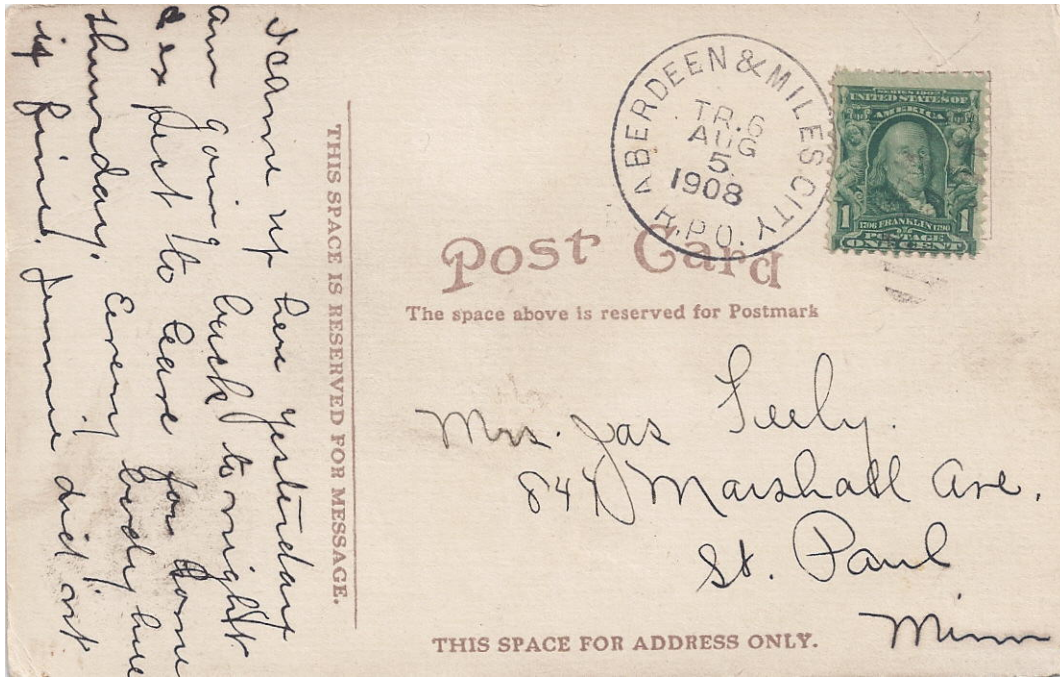


Figure 5. 1908 Aberdeen & Miles City R.P.O postmark from the first period of operation.



Figure 6a (top) and Figure 6b (bottom). Figure 6b shows that the route cuts across the southwest corner of North Dakota. Figure 6a shows a rather scarce cover in that it has return address as evidence of being mailed on the very short North Dakota segment of the route.

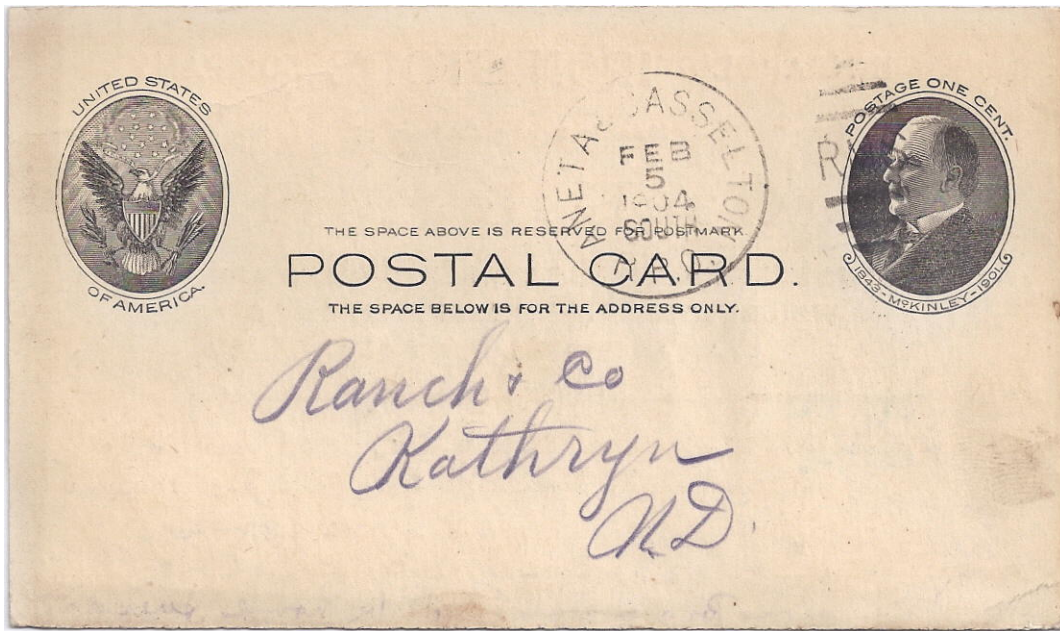


Figure 7. 1904 Aneta & Casselton R.P.O. from a short lived route.

Aneta & Castleton (sic), ND; Great Northern Railway; 68 miles

- 1903 Established
- 1905 TO: Aneta and Fargo

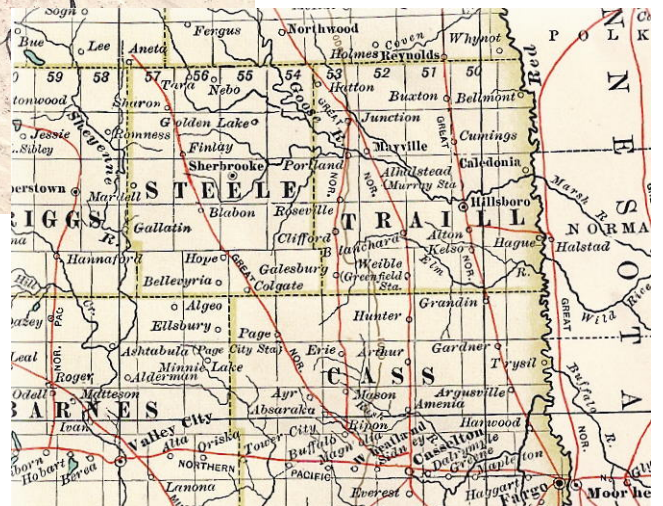
Aneta & Fargo, ND; Great Northern Railway; 87 miles

- 1905 FR: Aneta & Castleton (sic)
- 1907 TO: Fargo & Devils Lake



Figure 8 (above). 1907 Aneta & Fargo R.P.O. postmark from another short lived route.

Figure 9 (right). Circa 1900 map from "The Century Atlas" showing Great Northern line extending to Aneta.



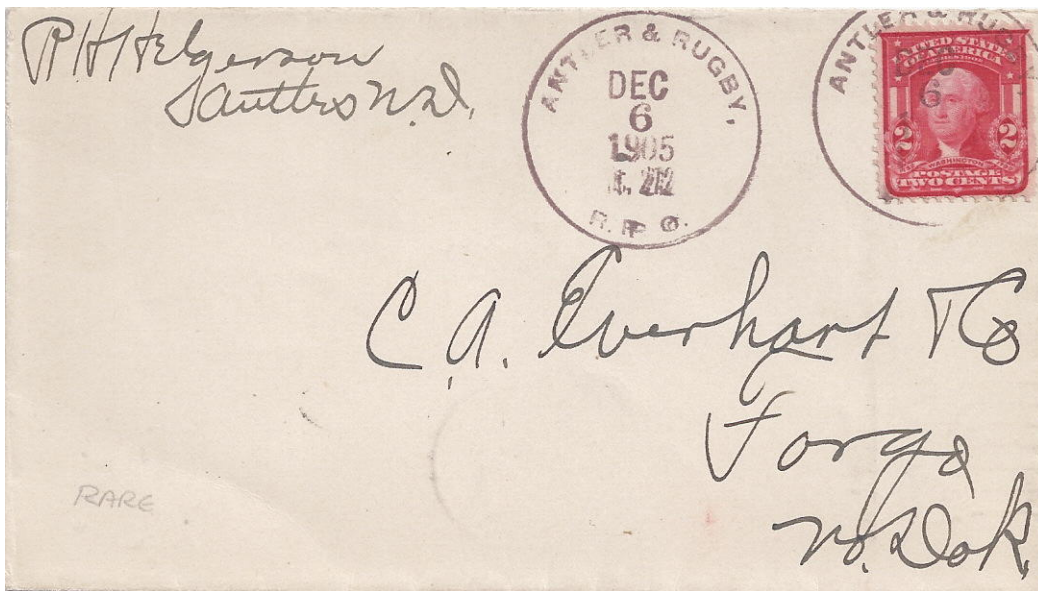


Figure 10. 1905 Antler & Rugby R.P.O. postmark from first year of line's operation.

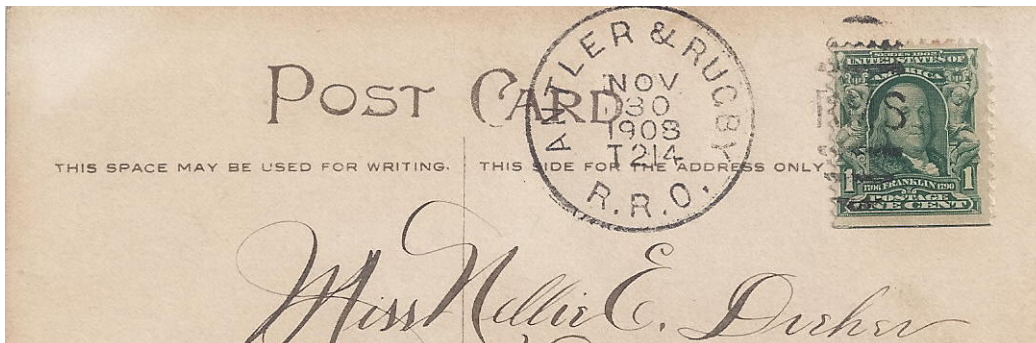


Figure 11 (left) and Figure 12 (below). 1908 Antler and Rugby R.R.O. (sp. error of R.P.O.) and 1933 copy of same, but worn, postmark. R.P.O. "hammers" were typically made of steel and some devices remained in use for decades.

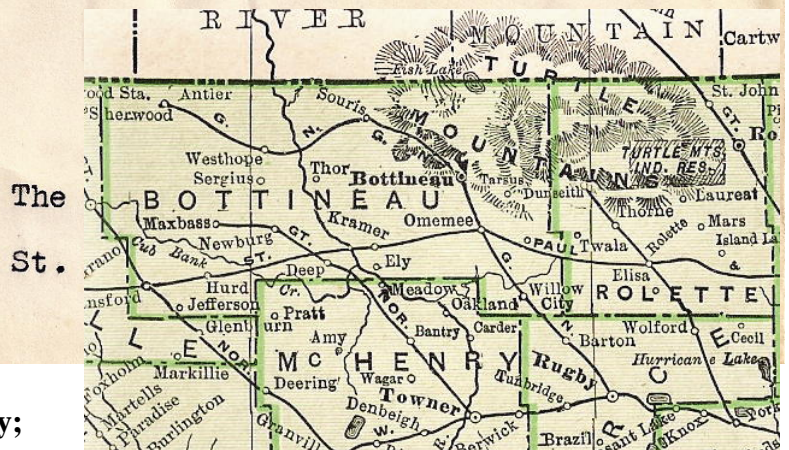
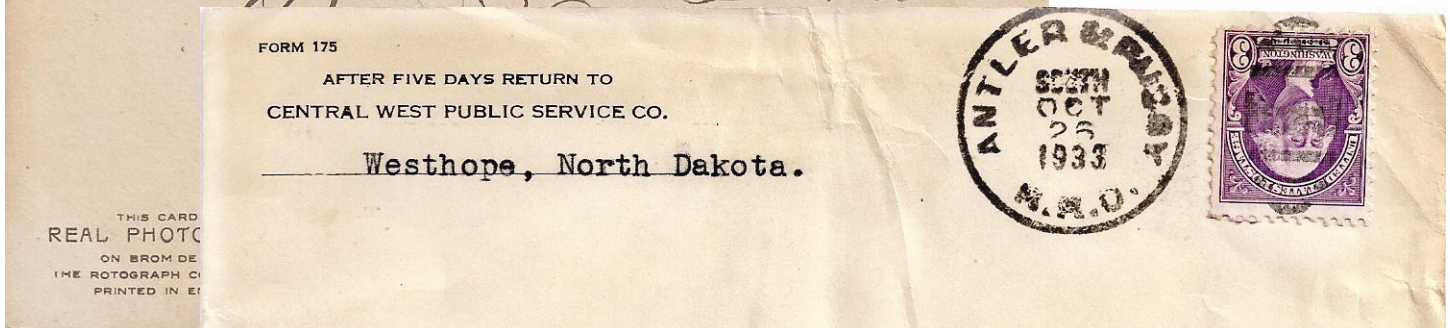


Figure 13. Circa 1900 Rand, McNally & Co. map showing Great Northern branch line from Rugby to Antler.

Antler & Rugby, ND; Great Northern Railway; 80 miles

- 1905 FR: Westhope & Rugby
- 1955 Discontinued



Figure 14. 1890 Barnes(ville) & Minot R.P.O. postmark. Mailed at Grafton, which would have been on the Boundary Line and Saint Paul portion of the route.

Barnesville, MN & Minot, Dakota Territory; St Paul, Mpls & Manitoba Railway; 312 miles

- 1888 FR: Crookston & Minot, plus Boundary Line & Saint Paul
- 1890 TO: Saint Paul & Minot

Berthold & Crosby, ND; Great Northern Railway; 89 miles

- 1915 FR: Minot & Crosby
- 1916 TO: Minot & Crosby
- 1920 FR: Minot & Crosby
- 1927 TO: Minot & Crosby
- 1932 FR: Minot & Crosby
- 1952 Discontinued

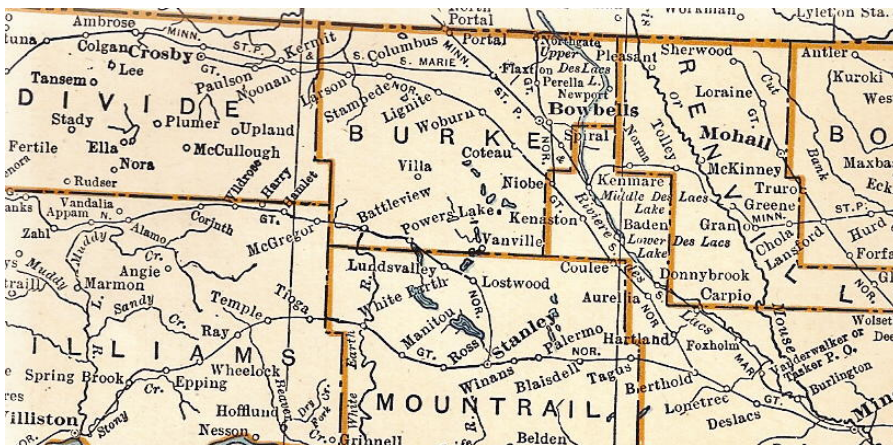


Figure 15 (above). Circa 1915 Rand, McNally & Co. map showing GN branch line from Berthold to Crosby.

Figure 16 (right). 1915 Berthold & Crosby R.P.O. postmark from the very brief 1st period of this route.



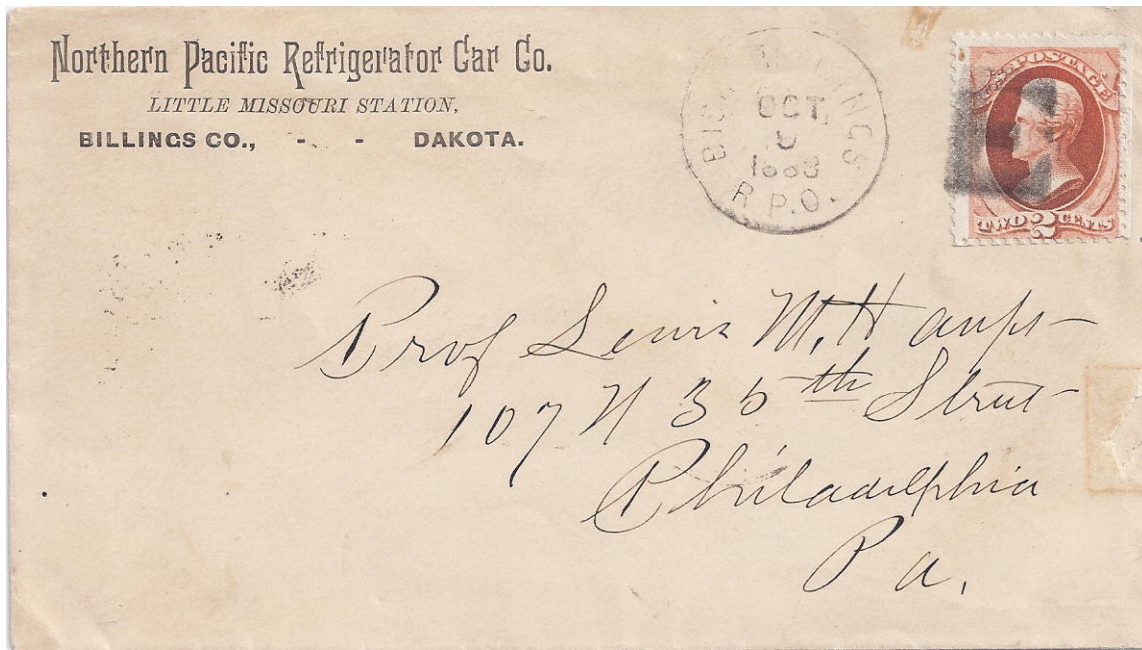


Figure 17. 1883 Bis(marck) & Billings R.P.O. with nice corner card from present day Medora ND area.

Bismarck, Dakota Territory & Billings, Montana Territory; Northern Pacific Railroad; 446 miles

- 1882 FR: Bismarck & Miles City
- 1883 TO: Bismarck & Glendive, plus Glendive & Billings

Bismarck, Dakota Territory & Glendive, Montana Territory; Northern Pacific Railroad; 221 miles

- 1883 FR: Bismarck & Billings
- 1887 TO: Mandan & Glendive, plus Saint Paul & Mandan

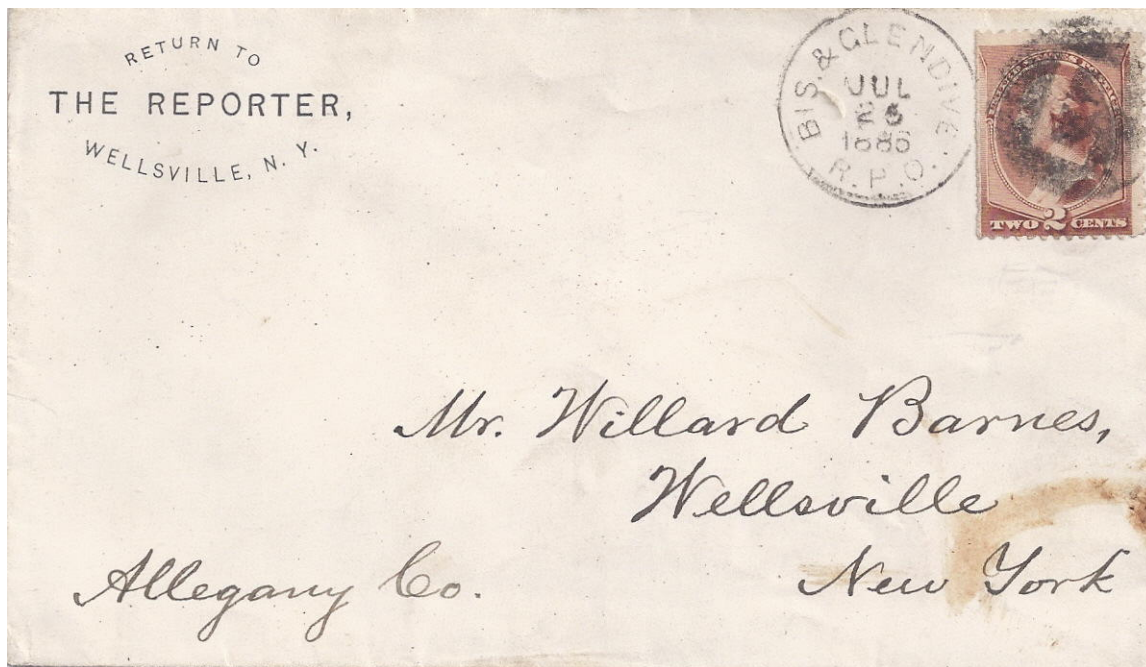


Figure 18. 1886 Bis(marck) & Glendive R.P.O. postmark. See story below for details about the cover.

The cover at the bottom of the previous page was mailed by E.W. Barnes, editor of *The Reporter*, a newspaper in Wellsville, NY. He was apparently on a trip out west and wrote letters back to himself as editor detailing the trip, which was probably quite an interesting read for folks out in New York. Article in part reads:

As the train stopped briefly, we were able to secure some handsome specimen souvenirs of Dakota's famous Bad Lands.... Opinions differ as to whether these formations are due to volcanic action, but that some time this section was covered with water and was, in fact, an inland sea, is not to be doubted, as shells of the clam and oyster and crustaceans are found promiscuously scattered. But whatever agency wrought out this wierd and wonderful picture, one thing is certain, and that is that the Bad Lands are rapidly reforming and getting good. A few years ago there was no vegetation among them, while now it is good grazing lands for cattle and much prized as such. Here the Marquis de Mores, a wealthy young French gentleman, has invested his wealth in cattle ranches and a great slaughter-house for shipping dressed beef to the eastern markets, and is getting rich again. Here, also, the Hon. Theodore Roosevelt of New York, the dude cow-boy of the wild west, is operating his extensive ranch and learning to talk "Injun." Every year brings

Figure 19. "As the train stopped briefly, we were able to secure some handsome specimen souvenirs of Dakota's famous Bad Lands.... Here the Marquis de Mores, a wealthy young French gentlemen, has invested his wealth in cattle ranches and a great slaughter house (see Figure 17 for related item) for shipping dressed beef back to the eastern markets.... Here, also, the Hon. Theodore Roosevelt of New York, the dude cowboy of the wild west, is operating his extensive ranch and learning to talk 'Injun'..." Source: Wellsville Daily Reporter, Monday, August 9, 1886.

Bismarck, Dakota Territory & Miles City, Montana Territory; Northern Pacific Railroad; 299 miles

- 1882 FR: Bismarck & Miles City Route Agent
- 1882 TO: Bismarck & Billings

Bismarck & Mott, ND; Northern Pacific Railroad; 133 miles

- 1911 Established
- 1913 TO: Mandan & Mott



Figure 20. 1912 Bismarck & Mott R.P.O. postmark on postcard datelined Solen N.D., a small town on the line in northern Sioux County.

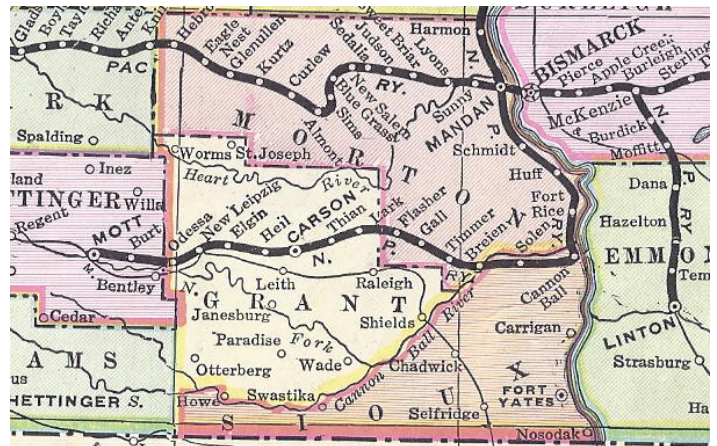


Figure 21. 1920s map from a Northern Pacific promotional brochure for North Dakota showing the route from Bismarck (and later Mandan) to Mott.



Figure 22. 1890 Bound(ary) Line & Barnes(ville) R.P.O. postmark. Though the item never travelled in North Dakota, this line served as a segment (along with the Fargo, Willmar & St Paul branch) of the route from Boundary Line, Manitoba to St Paul, MN.

Boundary Line, Manitoba & Barnesville, MN; Saint Paul, Minneapolis, & Manitoba Railway; 183 miles

- 1890 FR: Boundary Line & Saint Paul (via Grafton)
- 1890 TO: Boundary Line & Saint Paul (via Grafton)

Boundary Line, Manitoba & Grafton, ND; Great Northern Railway; 41 miles

- 1927 Established
- 1934 TO: Boundary Line & Grand Forks

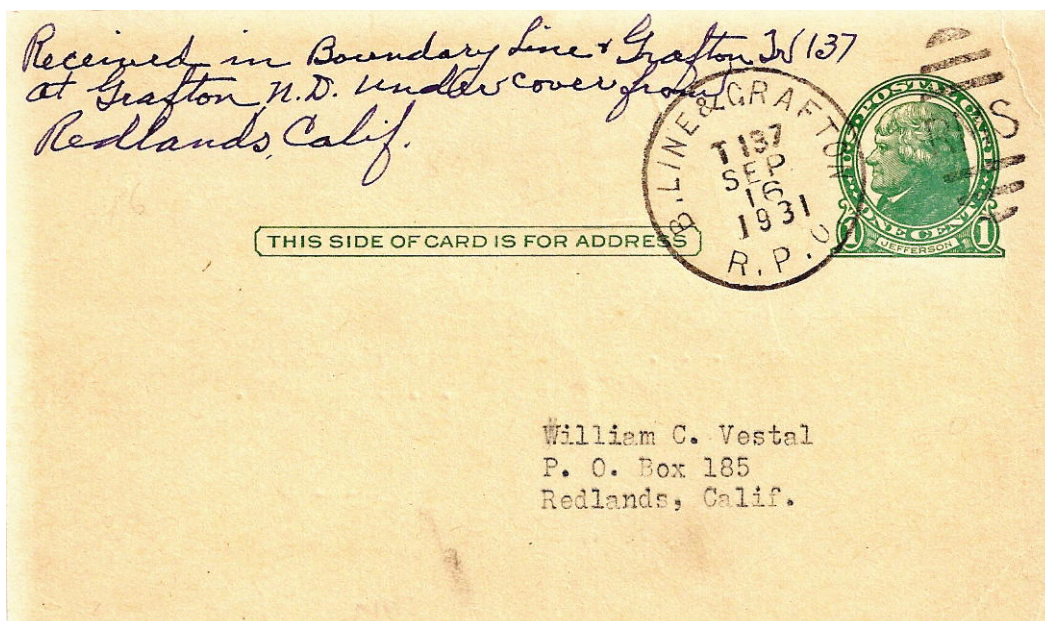


Figure 23. 1931 B(oundary) Line & Grafton R.P.O. postmark on UX27 government postal card.

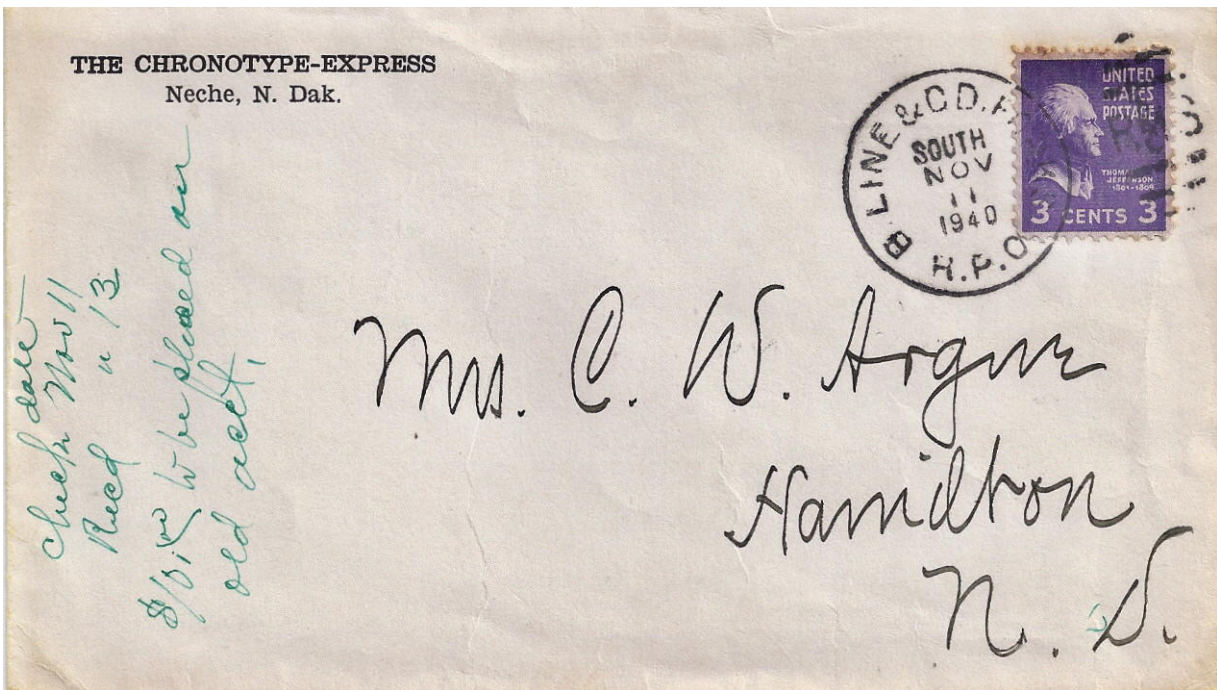


Figure 24. 1940 B(oundary) Line & G(ran)d Forks R.P.O. postmark on cover that entered the mails at Neche, a small town barely one mile from the boundary line with Manitoba.

**Boundary Line, Manitoba & Grand Forks, ND;
Great Northern Railway; 82 miles**

- 1904 FR: Boundary Line & Saint Paul
- 1905 TO: Neche & Grand Forks
- 1905 FR: Neche & Grand Forks
- 1918 TO: Walhalla & Grand Forks
- 1934 FR: Boundary Line & Grafton, plus Walhalla & Grand Forks
- 1955 Discontinued

**Boundary Line, Manitoba & Saint Paul, MN (via
Grafton); Saint Paul, Minneapolis & Manitoba
Railway; 420 miles**

- 1888 FR: Boundary Line & St Paul (via Warren), plus Neche & St Paul
- 1890 TO: Boundary Line & Barnesville, plus Fargo, Willmar & St Paul
- 1890 FR: Boundary Line & Barnesville, plus Grand Forks & St Paul
- 1904 TO: Boundary Line & Grand Forks, plus Grand Forks & St Paul

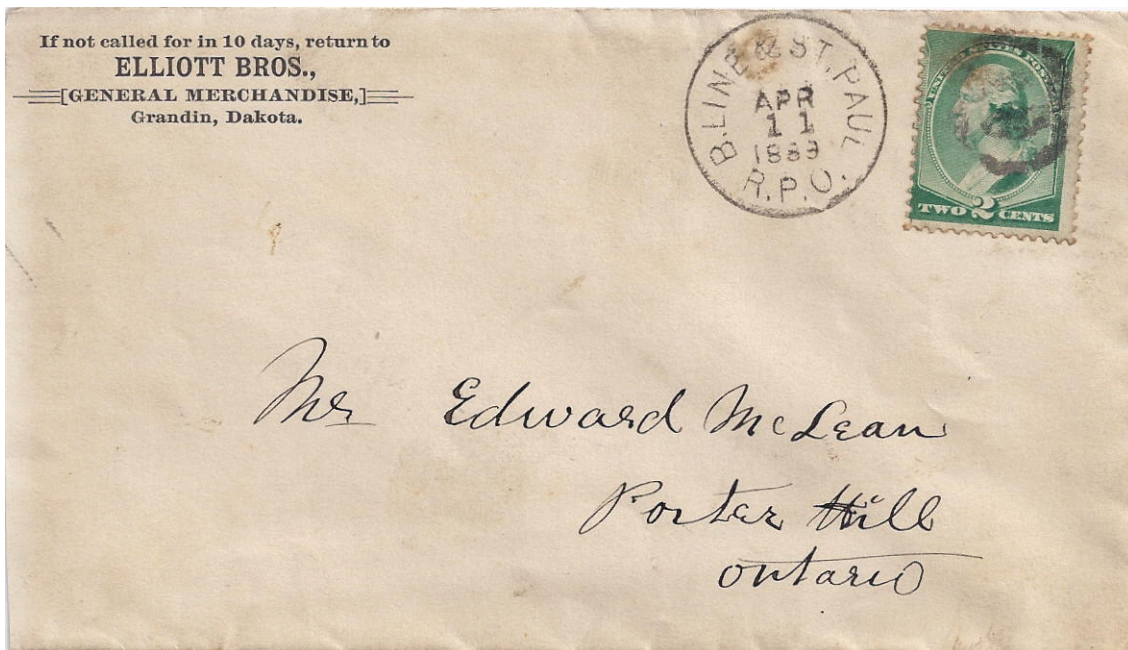


Figure 25 (left). 1889 Territorial use of B(oundary) Line & St. Paul R.P.O. marking with return address of Grandin, Dakota, a small town on the line between Grand Forks and Fargo.

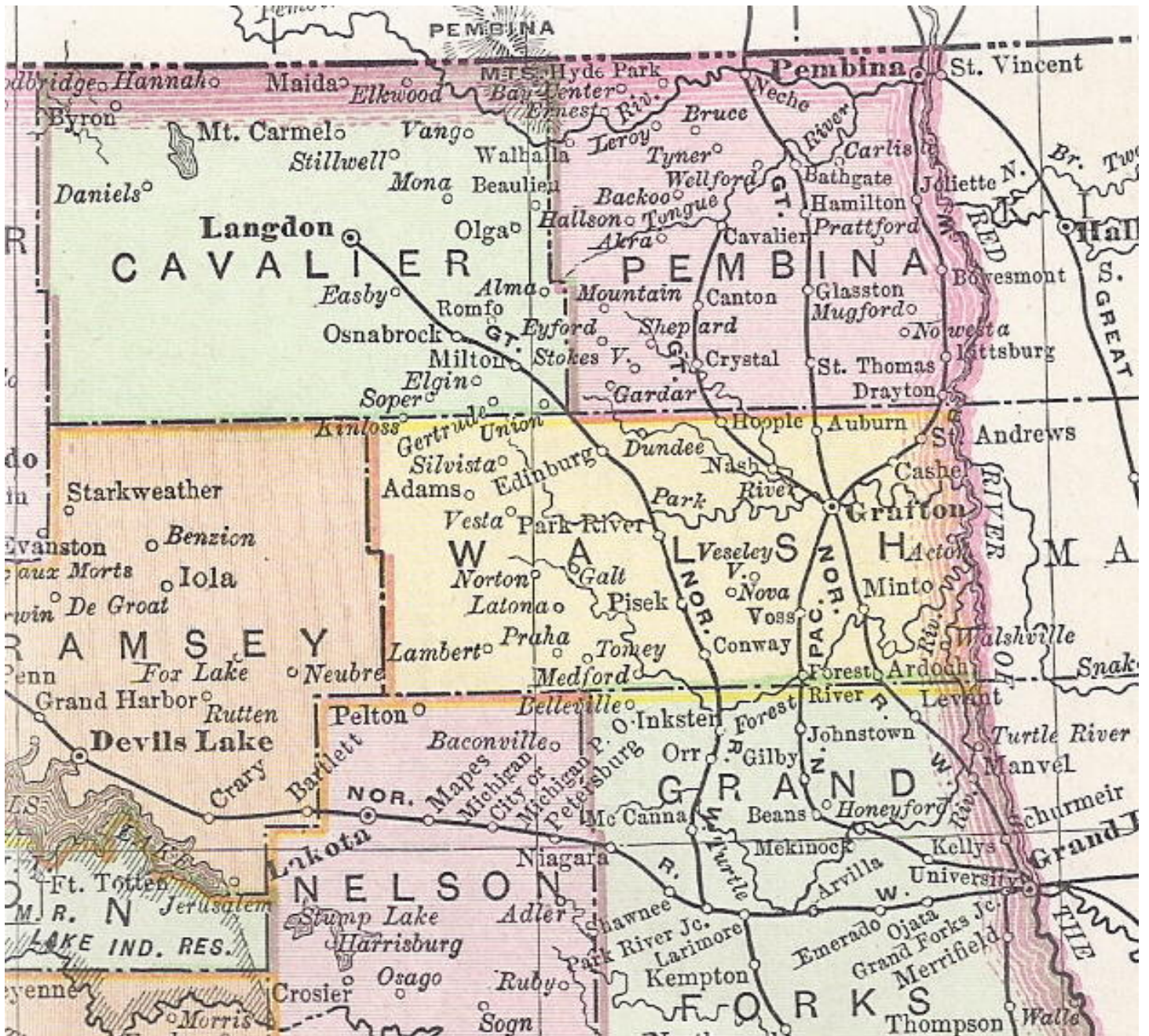


Figure 26. Rand, McNally and Co map showing the railroad extending from Grand Forks through Grafton, and on to Neche, just south of the boundary line with Manitoba, and then continuing into Canada.

It is labeled on the map as a GT. NOR. (Great Northern) line, since the St Paul, Minneapolis, and Manitoba Railroad was absorbed by the Great Northern before this map was produced.



Figure 27. 1890s Breck(enridge) & Aberdeen R.P.O. postmark from the first period of operation.

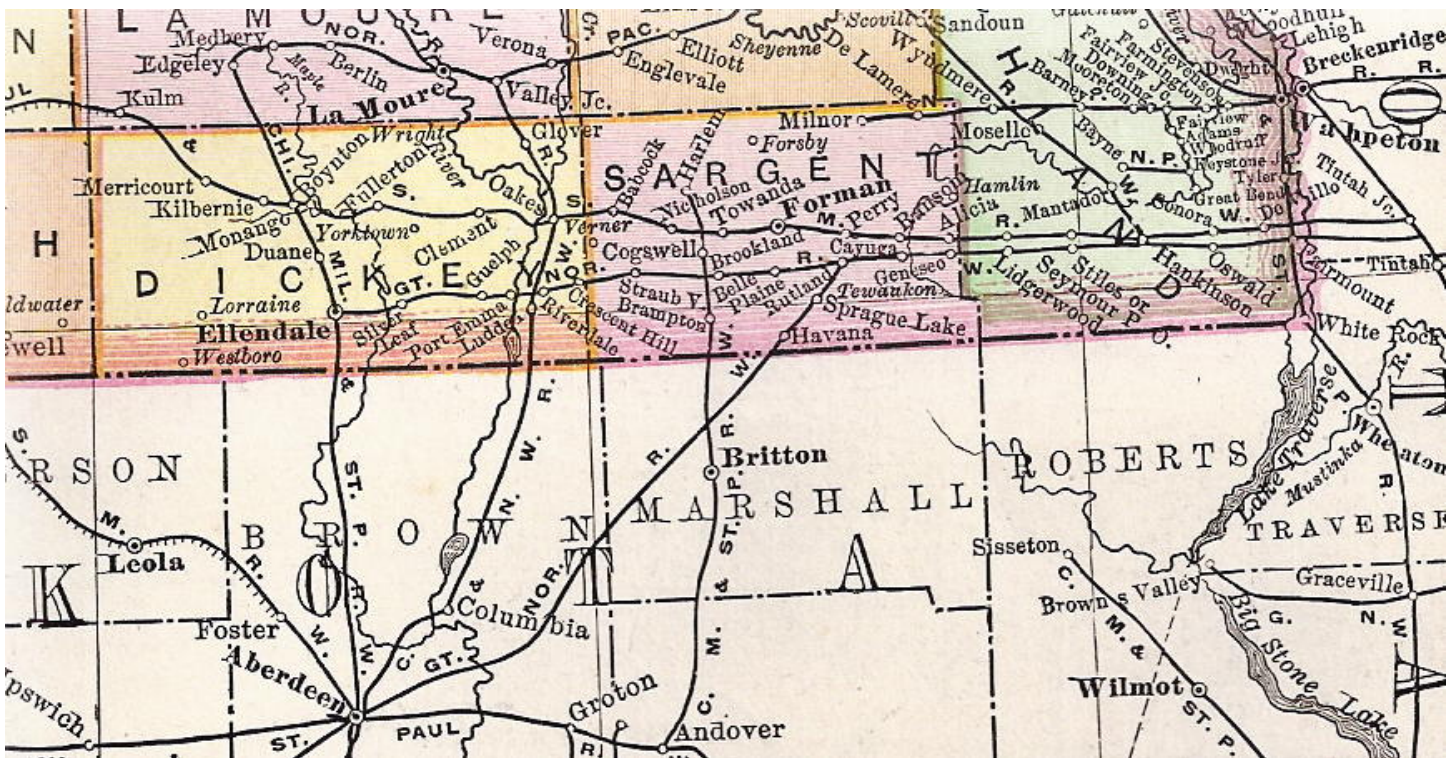


Figure 28. Rand, McNally & Co map showing route. Note the section east of Cayuga and how closely it runs to the 'Soo Line'. It also shows Aberdeen's status as a major rail hub.

Breckenridge, MN & Aberdeen, Dakota Territory; St Paul, Mpls & Manitoba Railroad; 137 miles

- 1887 Established
- 1903 TO: Evansville & Aberdeen
- 1904 FR: Evansville & Aberdeen
- 1905 TO: Tintah & Aberdeen

- 1908 FR: Evansville & Aberdeen
- 1927 TO: Wahpeton & Aberdeen
- 1929 FR: Wahpeton & Aberdeen
- 1960 Discontinued

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Hand Stamp Flag Cancels of North Dakota

By Mike Ellingson



Figure 1a (above): Previously unlisted Hand Stamp Flag Cancel, Heimdal, ND, with cropped and enlarged postmark highlighted in Figure 1b (below).



Many of us, in addition to finding material for our core collections, occasionally pick up “hometown” items from the area surrounding where we grew up or live. I fall into that collecting category. Recently, I picked up a generic “Greetings from Heimdal, ND” postcard for my Wells County, North Dakota collection.

The front of the card was nothing special, but the real discovery was when I turned it over, hoping to perhaps find a nice Heimdal postmark. When I saw what was on the back of the card, I couldn’t believe my eyes! It was a Heimdal N.D. flag cancel, which I had never seen before, and which I was fairly certain was a discovery copy.

I sent off a scan to my friend Larry Haller, a specialist in hand stamp flag cancels of the United States, and he indeed verified it is a new listing! See Figure 1 for a close up scan of the Heimdal marking.

It is one of just a few towns in North Dakota known to have used a hand stamp flag cancel, as opposed to the 45 North Dakota towns and cities that use a cancelling machine to produce flag cancels. Flag cancels have been very well researched and there have been many advanced collections built over the years, so finding unlisted flags, whether from real flag machines or hand stamps, is very unusual. The fact that this new flag is from a town only a couple

Table I - North Dakota Hand Stamp Flag Postmarks			
Town	Earliest Use	Latest Use	Notes
(Eckman ND)	Nov 19, 1909	Feb 19, 1913	Used by R.F.D. carrier, O.S. Buck
Granville (N. Dak.)	Mar 6, 1896		Unique
Heimdal, N.D.	Dec 3, 191?		Unique
Merricourt, N. Dak.	Feb 5, 1907	Jun 20, 1907	



Figure 2. Unique copy of hand stamp flag from Granville North Dakota, the only 19th century flag cancel known from North Dakota. (Courtesy of Larry Haller)

miles from our family farm makes it extra special to me.

The rest of this short article will show the remainder of the towns that used hand stamp flags in North Dakota. Table I contains an alphabetical listing of the known hand stamp flags from North Dakota, and the earliest and latest known dates. Illustrations of each are provided on the following pages.

References:

- 1.) Langford, Frederick, *Flag Cancel Encyclopedia*, 2008, Self Published.
- 2.) Richow, Harold E., *Encyclopedia of R.F.D. Cancels, Second Edition*, 1995 LaPosta Publications.
- 3.) Haller, Larry, *Personal Correspondence*, 2012

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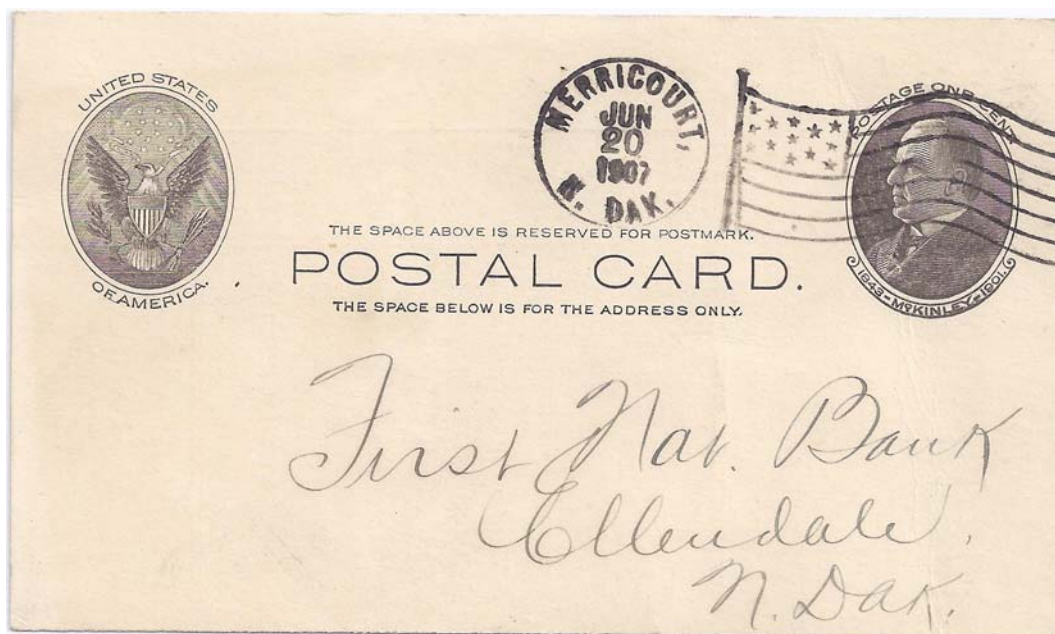


Figure 3. Hand stamp flag cancel, 1907, Merricourt, N. Dak. Known as a “Third Commercial Style” hand stamp flag cancel. Latest known date.

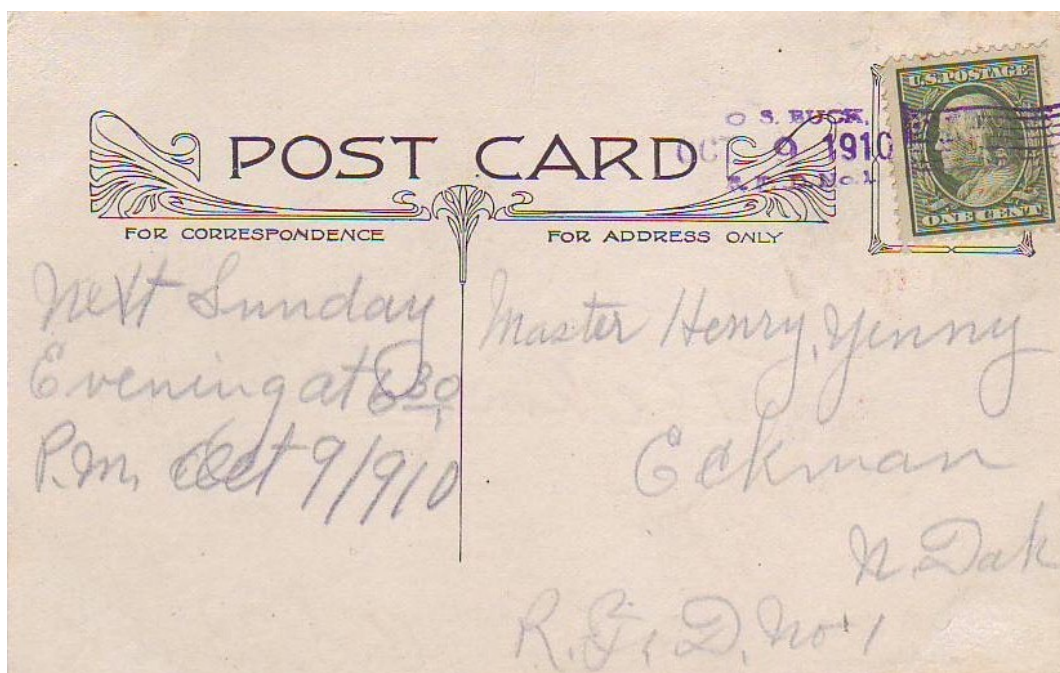


Figure 4. Hand stamp flag cancel used by O.S. Buck, a rural free delivery mail carrier in Eckman, North Dakota. Eckman is the only town in North Dakota known to have used an R.F.D. flag cancel. Close-up shown in Figure 5. (Courtesy of Gary Anderson)



Figure 5. Cropped and enlarged illustration of the hand stamp flag cancel used by O.S. Buck, a rural free delivery mail carrier in Eckman, North Dakota. (Courtesy of Gary Anderson)

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