

The Little Post Office on Wheels

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New Chillicothe, Dickinson County

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Chapman Center for Rural Studies

MAP OF
SHERMAN
 TOWNSHIP
Containing 36 Sections

Township 11 South Part of Range 3 East of the 6th P.M.

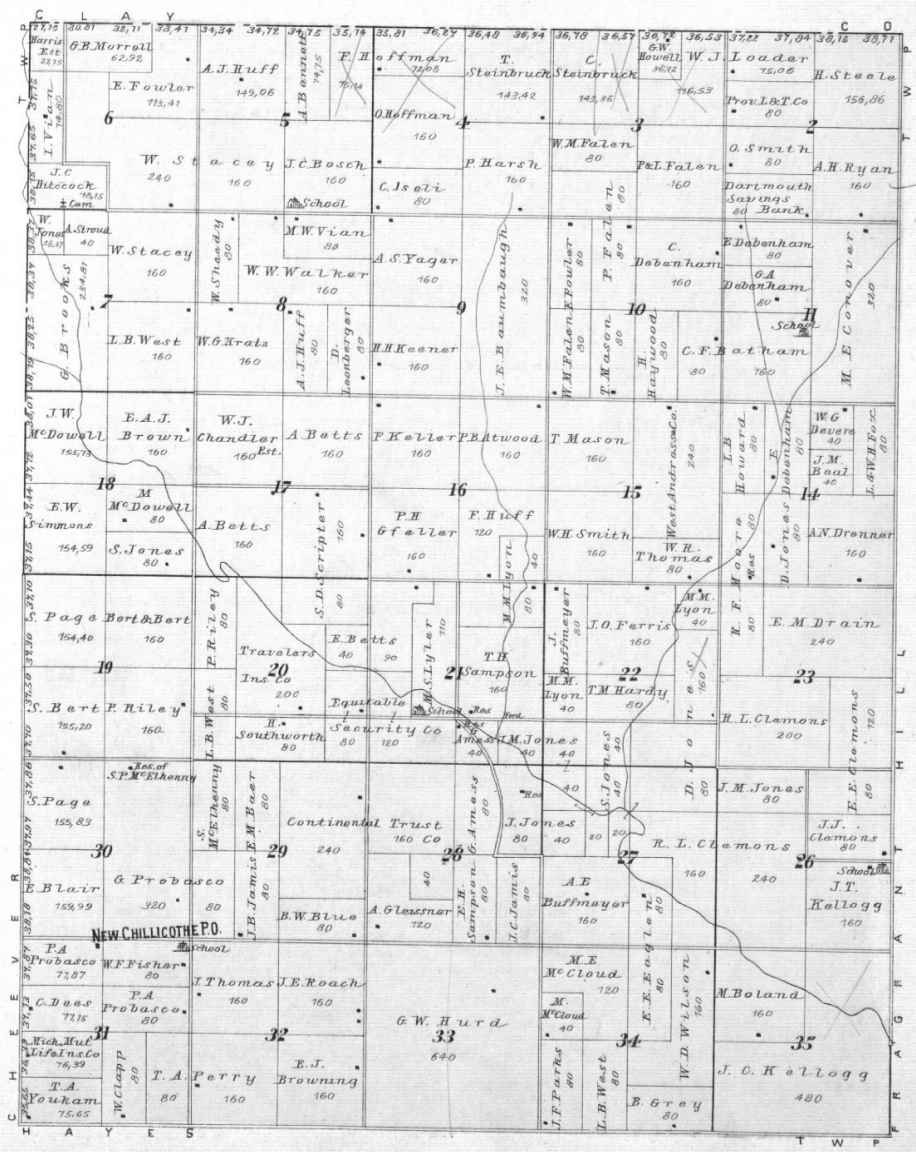


Figure 1: 1901 plat map showing location of New Chillicothe P.O. Source: www.kansasmemory.org

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Calling New Chillicothe a “Lost Town” may be stretching the imagination a little bit. New Chillicothe was a postal station located in Sherman Township in northern Dickinson County. This station moved a total of four times in a matter of 28 years. The first post office was located in the home of James Kerby. Kerby came to Sherman Township in 1865, where he built a one room log cabin with a loft above it. He may have been from Ohio, as the town of Chillicothe was founded there in 1796. New Chillicothe may have been a Kansas homesteader’s dream. In 1873 the post office of New Chillicothe was created in Kerby’s home and mail was delivered there once a week from Junction City. Kerby also carried a small supply of hardware items and there was believed to have been a blacksmith shop at this location as well.

The parody song “When Chillicothe Becomes a Seaport Town” was composed in regards to this first post office location. The song spoke of the slough known as Jones Bay which was located on Daniel Jones’ property, a neighbor to Kerby. The closing line of the song declared that a ship was coming up old Jones Bay. Ironically, some people thought that the post office should have been put on wheels to keep up with the city of New Chillicothe wherever it went. Unfortunately, the ship never came and the “new” city never developed into anything more than a post office.

Several years later, in 1885, the post office was moved to its second location in the home of Lyman Cook in the northeast quarter of section 22 in Sherman Township. Cook’s father, Josiah, was one of three veterans of the War of 1812 who took up residence and later died in Dickinson County. Very little is known about this second location other than it being a post

office. It served its purpose until a location was found that would better suit the people who received their mail through the New Chillicothe post office, and it was moved accordingly.

The date is not for certain when the New Chillicothe postal station was moved to its third location, but it was believed to be in the early 1890s. This time around, the post office was located in the northwest quarter of section 21 in Sherman Township. Miss Alice Wilson became the postmistress at her father's farm. Once again, the people were right when they said that the post office should have been put on wheels because this post office would soon be on the move once more.

New Chillicothe's fourth and final location was in the northwest quarter of section 31 in Sherman Township. While the other three locations were all within a mile of each other, this final location was approximately five miles southwest of the others. Again, there is no official record of the date of the move, but this was indeed the final move for the New Chillicothe postal station. The move may have prompted the opening of the short lived Kennedy post office to better serve the residence of northern Sherman Township.

New Chillicothe and Kennedy simply served as mail centers. So many communities and towns were being founded in the 1880s in Kansas that some tiny places never had a chance to develop. The introduction of the telephone and rural mail routes created for the area rendered the two post offices obsolete. In 1899, the Kennedy post office was closed. The New Chillicothe post office was dismantled in 1901.

Today, the original site of New Chillicothe No. 1 is located on the Paul Hoover land. The old log house has been replaced with a modern home. More than forty years before the Hoovers moved onto the land, this was the home of the Daniel Garrison family where Lela Gloss

Schlappi, granddaughter of Daniel and Emma Garrison, recalled the old post office letter boxes stored in the tool shop on the farm.



Figure 2: Example of the postal boxes that would have been used. Source: http://www.telephonearchive.com/dmworkshop/items/po_boxes.html

New Chillicothe No. 2 and Kennedy were located east of the old Caughron saw mill on Chapman Creek. Any evidence of New Chillicothe No. 3 has been lost or inadvertently destroyed. New Chillicothe No. 4 was located three quarters of a mile west of Bethany United Methodist Church on the Hoffman farm.

The Bethany United Methodist Church was the main church for most of the residents of Sherman Township. The church was also used as a school building for the Probasco School when the United Brethren group was created in the school in 1887 (Helen Dingler, 231). The church is still in moderate use today, and the students of the former Probasco School and the other students in Sherman Township now go to the Chapman School District. Like its post office on wheels, Sherman Township's other institution – church and school – seem to have had a variety of identities. It is somewhat remarkable that a place so mobile, existing over 140 years ago, can still be recalled and talked about. New Chillicothe may not ever have been a true town, but as a re-locating postal community, it has survived in memory.

Sources

Dingler, Helen. *New Chillicothe – Kennedy, Past & Present Towns of Dickinson County, Kansas*. (1999), 229-232.

Kansas State Historical Society, “Kansas Post Offices, 1861 - 1928” at ksks.org.

Ogle, George A. & Co. *Sherman Township*, Standard Atlas of Dickinson County, Kansas, (Chicago: 1921).