

# Post Office boom

Hermiston Post Office overflowed location in 1941

By **JENNIFER COLTON**  
Staff Writer

Mail service to Hermiston started slow, just like the sleepy farming town it served, but when the construction of the Umatilla Ordnance Depot exploded the city's population, it also sent mail service in orbit.

From horseback to wagon, rural mail in the Hermiston area found its owners one way or another. The city named its first postmaster in 1905 and didn't break ground on a designated post office building until 1922. The quiet mail service had an awakening two decades later.

In 1941, headlines in the *Hermiston Herald* chronicled the growing work at the site with weekly headlines like "City Booms as Work Progresses at Munitions Site." The student population for the Hermiston School district doubled and tripled, and, on a Friday evening, at least one local shop closed its doors early because it ran out of beer.

With the booming business and influx of workers, even the Hermiston Post Office felt the strain.

In June of 1941, 325 new mailboxes were installed, more than doubling the city's total, according to writings by local historian Ron Ingle. Employees were hired, but the small building constructed for a fraction of the business soon proved inadequate as Hermiston's population exploded.

Russell Lee, a photographer and photojournalist for the Farm Security Administration, traveled to Hermiston that September to document the growth and construction of the depot. Among Lee's subjects were the staff of the Hermiston Post Office, which grew from three employees in early 1941 to 16 employees by September of that year.

Lee reported: "Eight hundred people got mail at this post office before the boom; twelve thousand get mail here now." Lee also reported the Post Office sent out 8,000 money orders monthly with an average of \$20 each.

Ingle wrote of 1941 that, "A total of 6,021 money orders amounting to about \$97,000 were sold, 625 of them in one day. There was a waiting line for mail most of the day; on September 9, 98 people stood in two lines waiting for services."

Hermiston residents have a long history of disagreements as to where a post office should be located, and post office construction sites in the 1920s, the 1940s, and the 1980s were hotly debated on both sides of the city. While Hermiston debated, the settlement of Ordnance, about 10 miles from Hermiston, established a post office on Dec. 8, 1942, to serve the depot workers. That post office operated until Feb. 29, 1960.

A new Hermiston police office opened in December of 1945, east of the Oasis Theater on Main Street, and was followed by a location at Fourth Street and Main Street in 1956, according to Ingle.

The Hermiston Post Office moved again in the 1980s. The postal service reached an agreement with the city of Hermiston and Umatilla County to build a new post office next to the Umatilla County Fairgrounds in 1980. That building was dedicated in 1983.

## Photo history



PHOTOS BY THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

These photographs were taken by Russell Lee, a photographer and photojournalist who worked with the Farm Security Administration during the Great Depression and World War II. Lee visited Umatilla County in 1941 to document the growth of the region and the construction of the Umatilla Ordnance Depot. The photos are now part of the Farm Security Administration - Office of War Information Collection at the Library of Congress.

### Postmasters for the Hermiston Post Office

**Name - Title - Date Appointed**

- Joseph F. McNaught - Postmaster - 02/03/1905
- Clarence K. Bland - Postmaster - 09/09/1905
- John H. Williams - Postmaster - 03/14/1908
- John H. Young - Postmaster - 03/10/1914
- Charles H. Skinner - Acting Postmaster - 11/15/1919
- Charles H. Skinner - Postmaster - 05/06/1920
- Mrs. Leila A. Phelps - Acting Postmaster - 06/30/1924
- Mrs. Leila A. Phelps - Postmaster - 01/26/1925
- Hiram J. Stillings - Acting Postmaster - 06/01/1933
- Hiram J. Stillings - Postmaster - 05/31/1934
- Harvey P. De Moss - Acting Postmaster - 09/16/1935

- Harvey P. De Moss - Postmaster - 06/18/1936
- William E. Logan - Acting Postmaster - 05/11/1937
- William E. Logan - Postmaster - 08/19/1937
- Fred M. Reeves - Acting Postmaster - 10/31/1963
- Fred M. Reeves - Postmaster - 07/26/1965
- Ray Kurz - Officer-In-Charge - 04/08/1976
- Ray B. Moses - Postmaster - 09/11/1976
- Raymond E. Greenwood - Officer-In-Charge - 12/15/1978
- Samuel J. Via - Officer-In-Charge - 04/06/1979
- Michael B. Schaefer - Postmaster - 07/28/1979
- Kimberly J. Gillet - Officer-In-Charge - 01/03/2005
- Kimberly J. Gillet - Postmaster - 03/05/2005
- Scott D. Green - Officer-In-Charge - 04/01/2009

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