

Federal Facilities

(Copied from Post Office files 1936-1939)

ROCKDALE POST OFFICE ESTABLISHED IN OCTOBER 1873

James A. Muir was First Postmaster: Of the 17 Only Five are Now Living

The Rockdale Post Office was established as an office of the Fourth Class on October 20, 1873, since which time fifteen men and two women have served as postmaster. Names and dates follow:

James A. Muir Oct. 20, 1873-March 3, 1874
Robert Doenicke March 3, 1874-June 6, 1876
Milton Anthony June 6, 1876-April 26, 1877

The office was advanced to the Third Class on January 1, 1879

Albert G. Wilcox April 26, 1877-April 14, 1882
Herndon C. Travers April 14, 1882-March 26, 1889
John C. Witcher March 26, 1889-Nov. 18, 1892
Hugh L. Witcher Nov. 18, 1892-March 30, 1893
W. B. Woody March 30, 1893-May 17, 1897
Miss Esta Witcher May 17, 1897-April 25, 1901
E. J. M. Hopkins April 25, 1901-Jan. 14, 1909
B. Loewenstein Jan. 14, 1909-May 20, 1913

The office was advanced to the Second Class on July 1, 1911

John A. Shapard May 20, 1913-Jan., 1918
Herman P. Talley (Acting) Jan. 19, 1918-April 1, 1918
Mrs. Nannie Shapard April 1, 1918-Oct. 24, 1918
Herman P. Talley Oct. 24, 1918-July 7, 1923
Elmer I. Wade July 7, 1923-Dec. 24, 1927
H. H. Turner Jan. 1, 1928-May 13, 1936
John Esten Cooke May 13, 1936-June 1, 1940
Mrs. Leona Cooke June 1, 1940-March 1, 1941
Clyde Franklin March 1, 1941-Nov. 30, 1963
Sam P. Peebles, Jr. Nov. 30, 1963-1982

Rockdale rose from Second Class to First Class Post Office July 1, 1953.

James A. Muir, the first postmaster, was a brother of the writer of this story. He was editor and publisher of the Milam County Messenger, published at Cameron, and when the railroad reached Rockdale he moved his paper to this city and changed the name to The Rockdale Messenger, which is still being published under the merger name of Reporter and Messenger by William H. Cooke, son of the present postmaster. Muir was a native of Petersburg, Virginia. He lived a useful and honorable life in Rockdale and died in 1897. Robert Doenicke was appointed to succeed Muir in 1874. Very little is known of his record in Rockdale.

Milton Anthony, third postmaster, was a practicing physician in both Cameron and Rockdale. He was a native of Augusta, Ga. His only son, Hon. Ed. L. Anthony, was an attorney, and was appointed congressman to fill the unexpired term of Roger Q. Mills.

Albert G. Wilcox was appointed postmaster in 1877. He was an attorney and served as trustee of the Rockdale schools. He was married to Miss Julia Fullenwilder, and moved to El Paso, where he served as district judge. (Copied from Rockdale Reporter dated Aug. 31st, 1939)

Herndon C. Travers was postmaster when the office was advanced to the Third Class. He was a special speaker, whose services were sought on all public occasions. He was president of the leading clubs while serving as postmaster and was one of the principals in a notable double wedding to Miss Shelby Raby of Gatesville; the two other principals were J. Sid Hudson and Miss Emma York.

John C. Witcher was made postmaster in 1889. The Witcher Family was prominent in the early days of the city. John C. Witcher located here in 1883, as a contractor and builder. When the town was incorporated in June 1874, he was elected city marshal and served four years during which there were some turbulent times.

Hugh L. Witcher succeeded John C. Witcher in 1892. He entered the mercantile business with J. R. Rowland, who later sold his interest to J. F. Coffield, Sr., the firm becoming known as Witcher and Coffield. He later served the city as Alderman and Mayor, and in 1884 was married to Miss Ruth Stribling.

William B. Woody became postmaster in 1893. He was a native of Virginia, and at the age of 16 he had enlisted in the Confederate Army, serving in the Army of Northern Virginia, and surrendering with General Robert E. Lee at Appomattox at the age of 18 years. With his wife he came to Rockdale in 1875, and both died and are buried here. He was a member of the early mercantile firm of Woody and Perry and later had responsible connection with several industrial, mining, and manufacturing concerns. In his later life he was prominent in all ax-Confederate affairs.

Miss Esta Witcher was appointed postmaster on May 17, 1897. With the late C. K. Stribling as her assistant, her term was the most satisfactory in the life of the city up to that time.

Elias J. M. Hopkins succeeded Miss Witcher. Prior to his taking the office he operated an ice factory in Rockdale and during his term he was also in the grocery business. He died and was buried in Huntsville on Sept. 30, 1938.

Benjamin Loewenstein was appointed postmaster in January 1909, serving under two administrations. He was a native of Prussia, but came to Rockdale in 1873, where with his brother Joe he opened a mercantile store under the firm name of B. Loewenstein & Brother. From a modest beginning the business grew until it occupied three modern brick buildings. He was a public spirited man and was identified with every forward movement of the city; was member of the first school board, helped build the German-American Academy, and helped organize the First National Bank in 1890. He made a good postmaster and during his administration the office was advanced to the rating of Second Class on July 1, 1911. In the early 80's he built one of the finest homes in Rockdale. This home remained in the ownership of the heirs until 1938, when it was sold to the Government, and on the site now stands the \$70,000 Federal Building which will be dedicated Monday September 4, 1939.

John A. Shapard was named postmaster under the Wilson administration in 1913, and served until January 1918, when he died suddenly at his desk, after engaging in the sport of snowballing. He was a native Texan, having been born in Richmond, Texas, August 31, 1850. He was raised on a farm and learned the printer's trade on the old Brenham Enquirer. He located in Rockdale in 1881, and worked on the old Messenger, and later The Reporter & Messenger. He was a Democrat of the old school, and a fine all-round citizen.

When Shapard died Herman P. Talley, his assistant, was named Acting Postmaster, serving as such until April 1, 1918, when Mrs. Nannie Shapard (Mr. Shapard's widow) was named by recess appointment to succeed in that capacity. She served until October of that same year, at which time Mr. Talley was appointed regular postmaster.

Talley resigned to take up the practice of law, and Elmer L. Wade was named postmaster and received his commission on December 19, 1923. Mr. Wade was killed in an unfortunate accident in front of the post office on Christmas Eve night, 1927.

(Copied from Rockdale Reporter dated Aug. 31st, 1949)

Homer H. Turner, assistant postmaster, was appointed Acting Postmaster after the death of Wade and received his commission for regular appointment in April 1928. He served until May 13, 1936, when he was succeeded by postmaster John E. Cooke, who for 25 years had been editor and publisher of The Rockdale Reporter.

John Esten Cooke, a public-spirited southern gentleman, active in civic affairs, past President of Rockdale School Board and past Worshipful Master of Rockdale Lodge 414 A. F. & A. M., father of William H. Cooke, now owner and publisher of The Rockdale Reporter, and Mrs. J. C. Wallis, now residing in Rockdale.

Mrs. Leona Cooke, widow of John E. Cooke served the remainder of this appointment.

Cbde Franklin, it appears, served longer than any other postmaster, 22 years, 8 months and 29 days before retirement. He was a veteran of the First World War, a kind and public spirited gentleman in every respect. He lived and served his day well. His unstinting public services will long be remembered as the very best. Unfortunately, he is now nearly blind and resides at 516 West Cameron, in Rockdale.

Sam P. Peebles, Jr., present postmaster, resides at 501 East Belton in Rockdale. He and his wife, the former "Bootsie" Camp, have two children, a son, Parker, and a daughter, Patti. Sam is a continuance of all the characteristics of the good postmasters we have had in the past.

1962-1982 postal employees include: assistant postmaster, Robert N. "Babe" Baker, clerks, Vesper Christian and Clifford Caffey; carriers, Louis Rinn, Rufus Graves, Lester Hirt, Forrest Lee Pounders, Wilhelm Backhaus, Alfred Garza, and Glen Frie; custodians, John Mendoza and Charlie Denmon.