

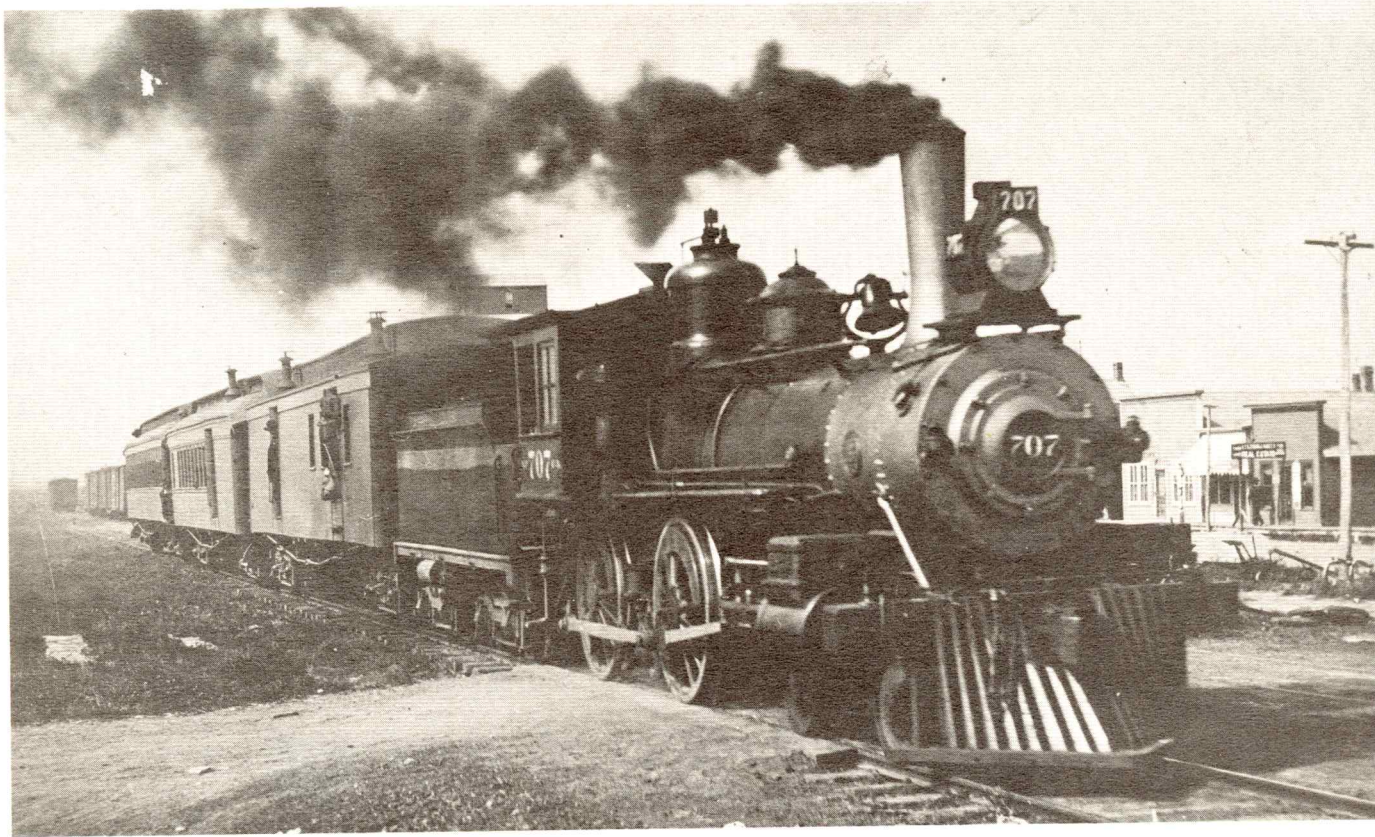
THE FIRST 100

Sykeston

Wells County, North Dakota
and Surrounding Area

July 2-3-4, 1983

1 8 8 8 3 3
1 9 8 8 3 3



"The Flyer" on the Sykeston Branch line of the railroad

The Coming of Railroads

At the close of the Civil War there was no railroads west of Saint Joseph, Missouri. Following the close of that gigantic struggle a new period in railroad development began, centered in the great region between the Mississippi River and the Pacific Ocean.

Asa Whitney of New York was the first man to present a definite plan for a railway to the Pacific and to urge it upon the congress. He was an untiring worker and thoroughly convinced of the feasibility of his plan, and by 1848 had received resolutions from 15 states favoring his project. He claimed that if Congress would give him the land grant he asked, he could build the railroads from its proceeds.

During the 1850's the rumblings of the Civil War became more ominous and threw into the background all matters of railroads extension in the west.

There were five separate expeditions sent out in the spring of 1853 to survey the country west of the Mississippi River. It was the Stevens survey that went into the northern country to survey a route from Saint Paul to the Puget Sound. The survey party included engineers, mappers, miners, surgeons, naturalists, interpreters, hunters, and

guides. The land to be covered was 2,000 miles length by 250 miles in width. The route led across arid plain and two great mountain ranges, through a region still in the hands of predatory tribes, some of them not so friendly.

The first railroad west of the Mississippi was not built for some years after these surveys. Sentiment for granting land to aid in the construction of railroads gained a foothold and gradually became more popular. The Federal Government took the stand that the public domain was worth nothing without transportation. By giving the railroad alternate sections and doubling the price of the remaining sections, the government would lose nothing, but the whole country and especially the west, would be greatly benefited. The Northern Pacific Railroad Company received its charter from Congress and was signed by President Lincoln on July 2, 1864.

A land grant consisted of alternate sections of land for forty miles on each side of the proposed track in territories and twenty miles in each state. In case squatters occupied any of the sections granted to the railway within the forty mile limit, the railroad had the right to select other lands within an additional ten-mile strip, increasing the land

grant to fifty miles on each side of the railway or a total of 100 miles in width.

To build a railroad required much capital. The Northern Pacific received no money or credit grant and its charter did not permit a mortgage on its property, so immediate money could be raised only by sale of stocks or by floating bonds.

Then, just as now, different people had different opinions on just what kind of country "Our North Dakota" is. General Sherman advised Jay Cooke, who was considering the sale of bonds, to be very cautious, since "that part of the country is almost inaccessible during 7 or 8 months of the year, and is barren and worthless, especially the Dakota Territory extending over 400 miles in width.

The directors of the road wished to lay out the line by the most direct feasible route to the Pacific. The line crossed the Mississippi at Brainerd, continued to the Red River at Moorhead and then westward to the Missouri River at Bismarck.

The forty mile limit extended north into Wells county as follows: In Bilodeau township five miles, and extending west in a zig-zag manner across the country, passing out of the county on the section line a mile north of the township line between Lynn and Bullmoose townships.

In addition to these place lands, the Northern Pacific was given an indemnity of ten miles in North Dakota for lands lost through "Squatters Rights", "Soldier's Script", and "State Selection" lands.

In November 1880, John B. Fish, a Northern

Pacific civil engineer, with a corps of surveyors, ran a preliminary line for a brand from Jamestown to the big bend of the Mouse River. This survey was run on an air line to the northwest over the level prairie country and passed by the Hawksnest, Butte de Morale and Antelope Lake.

On July 11, 1881, President Henry Villard, accompanied by Chief Engineer Anderson and General Manager Haupt of the Northern Pacific and Commodore Corriage of the U.S. Navy, inspected the proposed line in the Sykeston vicinity. They were piloted by E.P. Wells, B.S. Russell and John J. Nichols of Jamestown.

In 1883, the Northern Pacific constructed 13 miles of new line from Carrington to Sykeston, the first train reaching Sykeston on August 18, 1883. Surveyor B.P. Tilden of Jamestown was the engineer of construction, Walker and Ely, with Chas. T. Hutchinson, manager, were the grading contractors and Barney McGhee was the conductor. Thomas Connelly was the first section foreman.

The Northern Pacific did not wish to establish a regular train service between Jamestown and Sykeston until March 30, 1884. This was called the tri-week service, leaving Sykeston at 5:00 a.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, with the Sunday layover at Sykeston.

When the Sykeston route was running in the earlier years, A.L. Carey was the first conductor. In those days during the winter months, trains were not operated by the Northern Pacific between Carrington and Sykeston. In early fall the railroad



A train carload of landseekers from Iowa in the early 1890's

would notify the public to put in their winter supply of fuel and provisions because the line would not be opened until the spring thaw.

During 1884, Reverend Wirt, a pastor for the Congregational Church, came to Sykeston regularly every other Sunday and conducted services in the Northern Pacific passenger coach. Services were conducted there until a church was built.

The train crew running into Sykeston most of the time during these years included Conductor Patrick McMonugal, Conductor N.F. Curran, and Engineer C.B. Buckley.

Once the tracks were laid from Carrington to Sykeston, expansion to the west of Sykeston was planned. Riding on horseback, Harry A. Hogue of Carrington, selected the route for the Northern Pacific Branch Line west from Sykeston in 1897.

In 1898, the D.S.B. Johnson Land Co. of St. Paul bought a large block of Northern Pacific lands, some of their purchases being located in Wells County. Then the Northern Pacific officials requested Richard Sykes to name the four new towns to be established in Wells County. With the extension of the Northern Pacific Railway Branch Line west from Sykeston in 1899, the towns of Heaton and Bowdon were added in September of that year. Those towns remained the western terminals until the spring of 1902, when the branch extended westward and the towns of Chaseley and Hurdsville were reached.

C.V. Brown, Wells County's first notary public, was the first Northern Pacific station agent at Sykeston when the depot was a very small platform and later was on an old flat car.

When the Northern Pacific Railroad came to Sykeston in 1882, it was thought it would improve farming transportation. The railroad was very accommodating in this period to homeseekers, for they received many considerations from the railroad. There were excursion rates for prospecting trips, special freight rates when they shipped their belongings in immigrant cars.

The trains were also the means by which the laboring harvest workers came and went. They didn't always pay their way and ride in a coach, most of the time they hopped in an empty boxcar and rode for free, getting off wherever they wanted to.

In the 1890's, farmers in North Dakota were already griping in a healthy manner about "unreasonably high freight rates" on Agricultural commodities and about what was called "the iniquitous system of grain grading and dockage".

Because Sykeston was the first town in Wells County to get the railroad, it was the county seat. When the town was founded in July 4, 1883, survey stakes were put in by the railroad. The town was surveyed by E.H. Foster and George Taylor. Many

people from the Sykeston area also worked on the railroad in the winter months and some would work full time.



A snow plow clearing the RR tracks in the 1920's

Of all the problems, snow seemed to be the biggest for the trains.



Charlie Neustle, depot agent, loading cream cans on the train in the late 1940's

People thought the depot platform should be lengthened because there was so much cream being shipped from the line. Thus it was necessary to have a special cream car.

Northern Pacific Railroad carpenters arrived to add a 30 foot addition onto the depot and a box car was used for extra storage. A new waiting room was also built and the office part was enlarged and

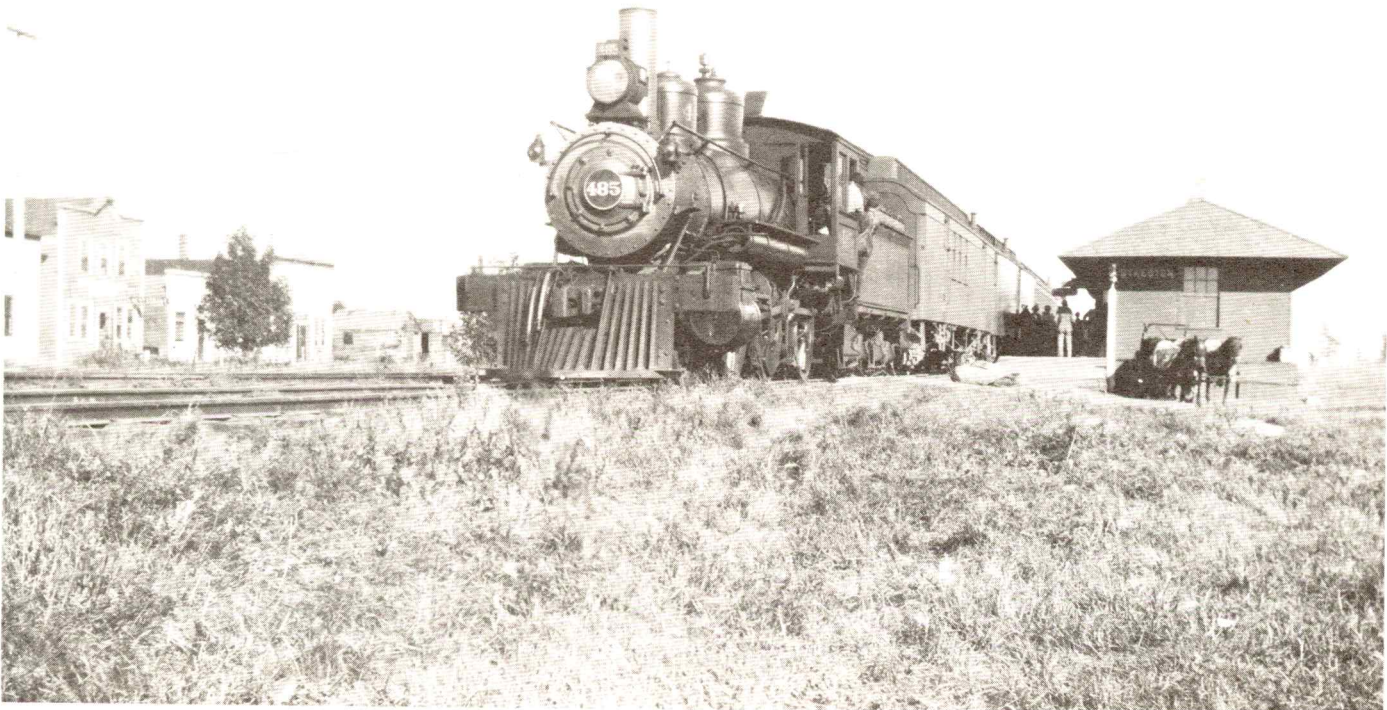


Fred Bierdeman unloading mail from the train in the late 1940's

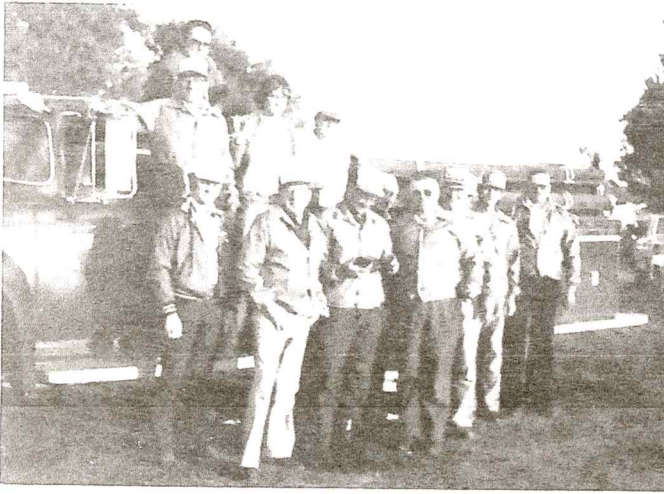
the building was used as a residence in 1907-1908. A 60,000 gallon water tank was completed July 26, 1907 for the trains and a new brick engine house was built that same year.

The railroad which was essential to the establishment of Sykeston is not non-existent. It passes through town on regular intervals. Passenger service stopped in the 1950s. Carload freight lots were eliminated in the 1960s and the depot was removed in 1970 after standing unused for two years. The freight runs now only when there are enough cars available for distribution to grain elevators for filling.

The first agent was C.V. Brown. Other agents included Agent Field, C.H. Geil, A.E. Soderholm, Mel Luten, Lyle Lemm, Paul Freeman, R.S. Best, W.W. Jaynes, J.A. Conrey, O.J. Rosendahl, A.G. Spiering and Mr. Ryan, George Wallin.



A view of the depot and an early train, that were so essential to the Sykeston community



The Sykeston Fire Department— 1982

Sykeston was close to spreading throughout the town.

On May 7, 1909, a mass meeting was held on a Saturday night to find out the sentiment of people on the question of fire protection. Four propositions were considered and the vote was as follows: 9-water works; 3-gasoline fire engines; 3-chemical engines; 10-favor of no fire protection. Undoubtedly there was a sentiment in favor of waterworks, but as it would be too heavy a load to carry, many did not want to install it at this time.

The Sykeston Fire Department was organized in December, 1915, with A.S. DeVoice as Chief, Casey Daniels as assistant Chief; R.J. Atkinson as Captain and Bohlin as Secretary-Treasurer.

About 1915-1920, the Fire Department was located in the back of Kremer's Store. The first fire station was located where the east duplexes are now and was later moved. The fire station is now located on the north end of Main Street near Lake Hiawatha, housing two fire trucks. One was bought in 1956 from the Fessenden.

Various members have had their turn as acting Fire Chief and the men have added much to their department for helping the community. In 1980, a boat and motor was purchased and they also made a drag bar. In 1982, the Fire Department got a trauma kit-ambulance kit.

For service in the Fire Department, pins were awarded for 25, 35, and 50 years membership in June, 1979. 25 years: Conrad Garhofer, Edwin Huss and Roland Evans. 35 years: William Schultz, Ralph Hollingsworth and Orvell Lundby. 50 years: Dr. F.W. Dummer and Ed Miller.

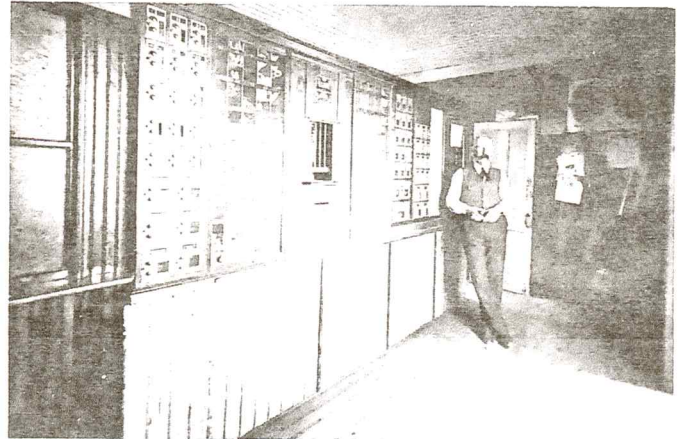
Officers in the 1982-83 year were Arnold Kurtz, Chief; Ed Mittleider, Assistant Chief; Rodney Magnussen, Captain and Don Nichols, Secretary-Treasurer.

A resolution approving the establishment of the Sykeston Rural Fire Department was approved by the Wells County Commissioners in March 1977.

The fire district includes the four townships of Hawksnest, Bilodeau, Sykeston, and Johnson as well as the city of Sykeston. The Fire Department serves the district with two trucks.

Directors for the Fire District are Mike Laber, Chairman; Gordon Kunz, Norman Young, William Balvitsch and Ed Mittleider.

The fire department meets the last Wednesday of every month.



Walter Lee, Postmaster, in the Sykeston Post Office in 1911

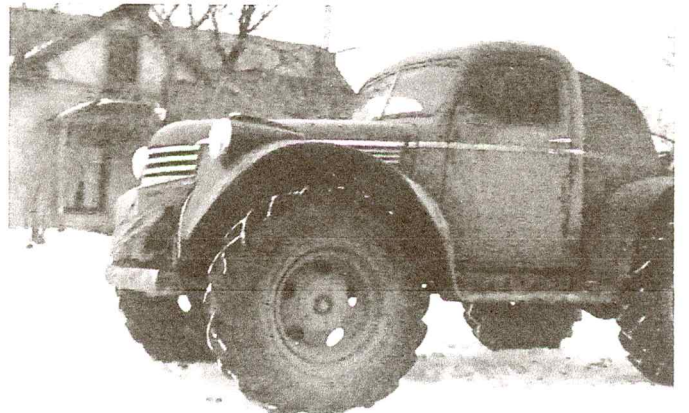
Post Office

With the expansion of the settlements over the county, rural post offices began to be established. The post office of Sykeston was established October 11, 1881, with Harry L. Durbrow, postmaster, and was the first postoffice established in the county.

In 1904, the postoffice was located on Main Street between Atkinson's and Wikey's. It was moved from the old location at the west end of town. In June of that year the flag pole was put up.

In September 1905 new larger call boxes were installed and some new combination books were installed making 25 additional boxes. Mail was being hauled on train in that year and some stage routes were discontinued. In December, 1906, another tier of lock boxes were installed.

The Parcel post system went into effect January



Jeep used to deliver mail by Elmer Eaton

1, 1913 and after July 1 of that year, money orders were payable at any Post Office in the United States.



The present Post Office— 1982

CITIZENS STATE BANK

SYKESTON, NO. DAK.

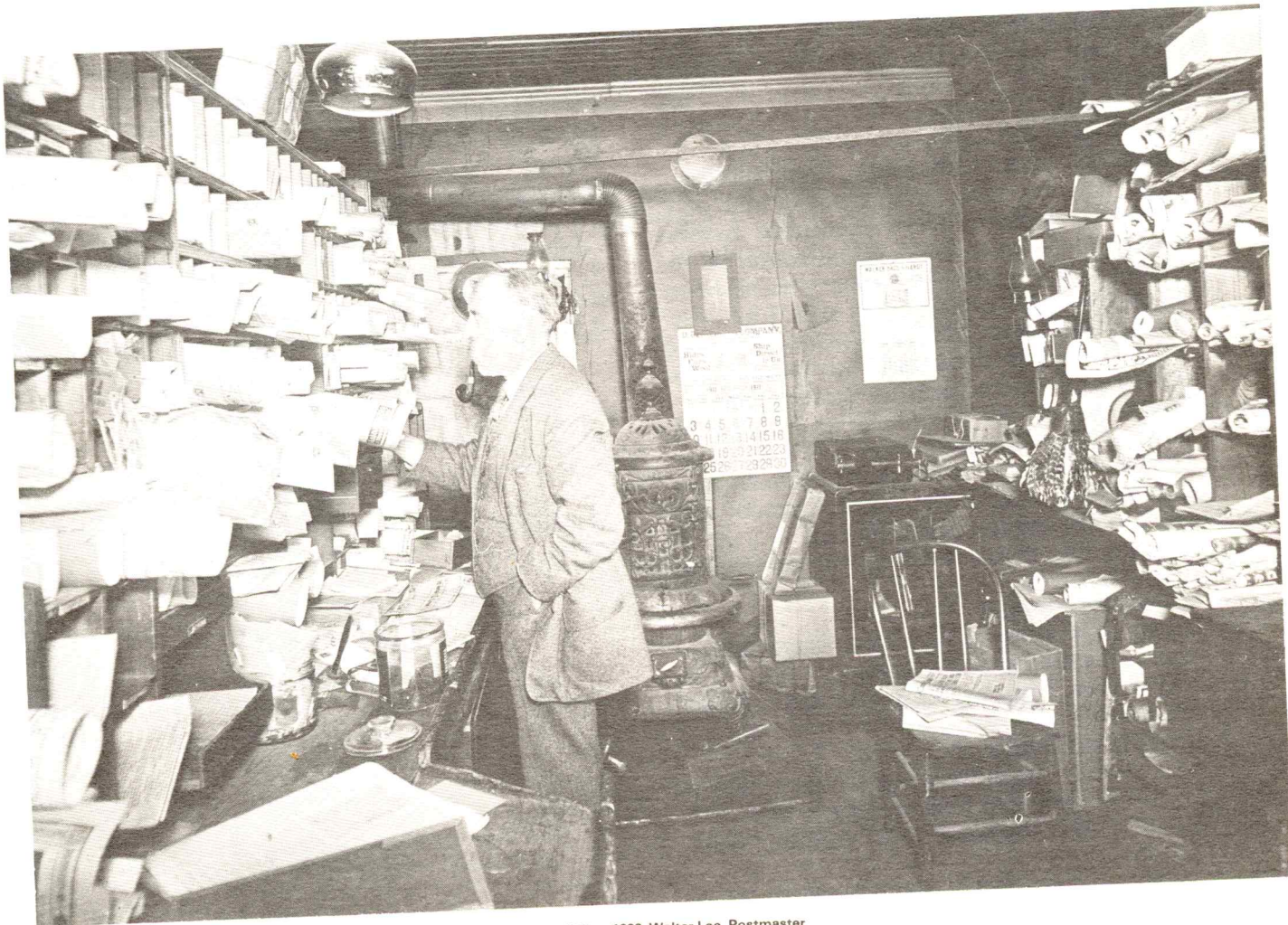
IN ACCOUNT WITH

SAVINGS DEPARTMENT

ACCOUNT NO. _____

Rate of Interest 5%
Payable April 1st, July 1st,
October 1st and January 1st.

Brown-Blodgett Co.-A2



Post Office, 1906, Walter Lee, Postmaster

Sykeston Village and City Government

Presidents and Mayors

On December 6, 1905 the first meeting was held to form a village and a three member board of Trustees.

- 1906— 1st President of the Board— O.J. Lindland with members Chas. Stewart, John Bohlin, and clerk, Chas. L. Smith who served through 1915.
- 1907— President Bert Legg
- 1908— President P.F. Mathews
- 1909— President P.F. Mathews
- 1910— President A.F. Belcher
- 1911— President Thos. Wagner
- 1912— President Thos. Wagner
- 1913— President Will H. Moore
- 1914— President C.S. Atkinson
- 1915— President H.P. Hamann
- 1916— President M.E. Kremer (resigned); W.A. Zwemke; Clerk, Thos. Lindland
- 1917— President E.F. Swarthout (resigned); H.P. Hamann; Clerk, C.S. Atkinson
- 1918— H.P. Hamann; Clerk, P.E. Wumkes
- 1919— President H.P. Hamann
- 1920— President A.F. Belcher; Clerk, W.M. Covell
- 1921— President H.P. Hamann
- 1922— President O.J. Lundby
- 1923— President O.J. Lundby
- 1924— President Ed Nichols; Clerk, John Bohlin
- 1925— L.J. Lundby with Ed. Nichols, and A.J. Weist as trustees were petitioned by the voters on the question if village shall be incorporated as a city. The issue was voted on by 94 people with 82 in favor and 11 against. A city election for officers was held on June 25, 1925, in the Woodman Hall from 8 to 5. The first officers on the City Council were:
- 1925— Mayor O.J. Lundby; Treasurer, Thos. Lindland; Police Magistrate, A.G. Covell; Justice of Peace, M. Rasmussen; Aldermen— Ed Nichols, A.J. Weist, M.M. Corson, and Joe G. Paa; Auditor, John Bohlin.
The first city board meeting was held on July 2, 1925.
- 1926— Mayor W.A. Daniel
- 1928— Mayor M.E. Kremer; Auditor, Floyd Anderegg; 1929 Auditor, A.J. Carlson
- 1930— Mayor F.W. Dummer; 1931 Auditor A.E. Soderholm
- 1932— Mayor F.W. Dummer
- 1934— A.G. Covell— upon the death of Mr. Covell a special election was held on June 3, 1935
- 1935— Mayor F.W. Dummer; 1937 Auditor, C.M. Corson
- 1938— Mayor Harry Wolff; 1938 Auditor, W.A. Zwemke

- 1942— Mayor M.D. Kremer
- 1946— Mayor Joe A. Laber; Auditor, Emil C. Stern; Aug. 4, 1947— F.W. Dummer
- 1954— Mayor Bernie Huss
- 1956— Mayor Andrew Nolz
- 1962— Mayor Robert Reiland
- 1975— Mayor Frank Linhart
- 1976— Mayor O.O. Lundby
- 1982— Ann Marie Lundby; Aldermen— Darrell Hansen, Myron Nelson, Norbert Richter, Vernon Richter; Auditor-Treasurer, F.W. Dummer; Assessor, Ann White; Police Magistrate, Grace Huss; Chief of Police, Edmund Mittleider; Park Board— Edwin Huss, Ann White, Lawrence Zwinger.

Postmasters

- Harry M. Durbois October 11, 1883
- Joseph P. Cox December 20, 1883
- John J. O'Connell August 20, 1884
- Alton G. Covell May 14, 1887
- David Harris February 1, 1890
- Ole T. O. Lindland April 13, 1895
- Walter Lee February 28, 1903
- Ralph J. Atkinson March 6, 1919
- Forrest Daniel January, 1920
- Lena Kremer June 27, 1934
- Sylvester Sondag July 1, 1949
- Edward Sondag February 13, 1951
- Edwin Huss March 7, 1981