

Paoli Post Office closes the doors

Written by Chris Lee

“I really feel badly that I let my people down, but I feel like I served them well for 46 years,” former Paoli Postmaster Marilyn Miller said Monday morning, Dec. 3.

Miller closed the Paoli Post Office, which was located on the west side of her home, on Nov. 16. She retired earlier this year on July 31 after serving just over 41 years as postmaster. For the three and a half months leading up to the closure of the post office, a leave replacement employer was being utilized.

Miller began as a postmaster relief in 1966, so in all she has over 46 total years of service to the USPS.

When the doors closed on the Paoli Post Office last month, the United States Postal Service opted to install a community cluster box on the east side of Town Hall. All of the P.O. boxes and street addresses will stay the same, according to Miller.



A new cluster of boxes has been installed right in front of the Paoli Town Hall for post office customers. Addresses have stayed the same and a carrier from Haxtun drops the mail off at the boxes in Paoli each day instead of a driver stopping at the former post office connected to the home of long-time postmaster Marilyn Miller.

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—Enterprise photo

“It’s been working out really well,” Miller said.

Miller’s daughter, Melinda Groshans, is the postmaster in Haxtun and lives in Paoli. “She knows everybody,” Miller said.

Miller has already begun construction on the former post office and has plans to turn it into a personal office space. She will continue to serve as Paoli’s town clerk—a job she began in 1976. Since there isn’t an office for the clerk’s position, Miller keeps the town files in her home. She plans to move them down into the newly remodeled area. It obviously won’t operate as a town office.

Miller built the addition on to her home in 1972 and leased it to the USPS five years at a time. When she decided to retire earlier this year, she opted to terminate the lease and had to give the USPS six months notice. Miller wrote a letter in May and the lease was up in November. That’s when the doors closed and the newest chapter of mail delivery in Paoli began.

“I feel like I supplied them with a service for 40-some years, and that’s about all I can do,” Miller said. “I have to start something new in life,” she added with a chuckle.

Miller assumed the Postmaster title in 1971 after Ruth Strehlow who served for 30 years as the Postmaster retired. At that time the office was located in the Flaker Store—a building located south of the Paoli Coop Elevator.

Strehlow lived in a room in the back. Miller remembers the living quarters being heated but the post office wasn’t. Heat would drift in from Strehlow’s living quarters.

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Miller remembers hearing mice chewing around as the coop had storage connected to the space.

Miller said each day they would begin with three dollars in the small cash drawer. At the end of the day, anything over three dollars was considered the stamp sales and that money was put into a cigar box with a cheap lock on it.

In those days, Miller said they offered insurance, certified mail and money orders. “There wasn’t any of this other stuff.”

At night, they would put the mail out in a small shed that the truck driver had a key to. Miller also said there was an old light in the middle of the post office that had a pull string. Those retrieving their mail at night had to turn the light on and off themselves.

When Strehlow decided to retire, she told Miller that she should work from June 30 to Sept. 30—the end of the fiscal year. “She said I know they’re going to close it,” Miller remembers Strehlow telling her.

At the end of the fiscal year, the USPS sent Miller a letter telling her to post the job to see if anyone was interested. She still has that letter, by the way.

No one bit and Miller wrote back asking what she needed to do to get the job. The USPS wrote back and offered it to her.

“That was 40-some years ago. I don’t know how many times I have been threatened that it’s going to close.”

Days began to get very long at the Flaker Building and that is when Miller asked the USPS to

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move the office to her home. They agreed.

Miller had saved up \$1,500 for the 180 sq/ft addition to her home and construction began in 1971. She remembers the final price tag to be a little higher after some of the ceiling tiles flew out of the back of her husband Leland's truck.

The addition worked really well, Miller said, until the addition of the scanner, printer, credit card machine and other items. She said it became a bit crowded, but "it served its purpose."



Mail is no longer dropped off at the addition on the back of Marilyn Miller's home. The sign has been painted over and Miller plans to use the space for a personal office.□ □

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Miller moved to Paoli in 1961 with her husband Leland. Leland has been gone 26 years after losing a fight with cancer.

She has four children. Daughter Melinda Groshans lives in Paoli and serves as the Postmaster in Haxtun. She has been with the USPS since 1985. She has three children Grady, Garet and wife Crissey and Gade.

Daughter Melissa and husband Ron Evans live north of Lemoyne, Neb. They have two children son Ridge and daughter Lacey and husband Mitch Williams and son Karder Lee.

Twin son Mike Miller farms and lives southwest of Holyoke.

Twin son Mitch Miller and wife Julie live near Bennett and they have twins Jake and Lindsey.

Paoli was established in Weld County as a station on the Burlington-Missouri River Railroad in 1881 on the road from Holdrege, Neb. to Sterling. In 1887, with a population listed of 199, it became a part of Logan County, and in 1889, Phillips County.

The town is said to have been named after Paoli, Pa. by a chief engineer of the Burlington Railroad. The Pennsylvania town was named for an Italian General, Pasquale Paoli who was a French Corsica patriot.

A post office was established on June 8, 1888. It was discontinued on Feb. 11, 1890. By 1909 there was a railroad shed, stockyards and a general merchandise store.

In 1910 there was a blacksmith, billiard hall, restaurant and lumber yard. With this boom, another Paoli Post Office was established on March 9, 1910. In 1916 there were approximately 3,000 acres broken by plow. By 1919 there were 10 times that many. The Paoli Land Office operated by Oscar Lohn, Ira Taylor and William Krueger was an abashed promoter of growth in the area.

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With persistent advertising and boasting, and planting crops of their own, they encouraged much new settlement.

As Paoli residents settle into a new routine with their daily mail, Miller plans to keep bowling in a couple different leagues in Sterling and Julesburg.

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