

## 1960: Cottonwood Post Office Building Opened October 11

Glenda Farley Oct 19, 2020



The new Cottonwood Post Office and the incorporation of the town were notable events in the history and growth of the community which began to expand southward with shopping centers, banks, other new business buildings and residences. The population of Cottonwood was 1,879 in 1960.

May 3: "Charles Stemmer turned the first shovelful of dirt at the ground breaking ceremonies for the new Cottonwood Post Office next to the fire station Tuesday morning May 3, 1960.. Stemmer, postmaster for the Cottonwood Post Office [for over 29 years], gave a brief resume of the history of Cottonwood and predicted great things are in store for the community."

"Mrs. James Howard, present postmaster, turned the second shovelful of dirt." [Mattie C. Howard was postmaster from February 28, 1953, until December 26, 1974, serving as Mamie C. Mattos after March 29, 1971.]

"The project finally came to pass after nearly 2 years of work on the part of the Cottonwood Progressive Association. Ernie Broughton, of Cottonwood, was the successful bidder for the construction contract, and work on the footings is underway. Construction is to take about 90 days and the cost of the building will be about \$29,000. The Cottonwood Progressive Association is constructing the building and will lease it to the Post Office Department."

"Others attending the ceremony were Tony Kovacovich, president of the Progressive Association, Leonard Sexton, chairman of the Post Office committee, and about 30 residents of the town."  
(Verde Independent: Cottonwood; Thursday, May 5, 1960; page 1.)

There were about 60 people living in the neighborhood when they named the area "Upper Verde" during 1877. (Weekly Arizona Miner; Prescott; July 6, 1877.) In connection with the establishment of a new mail delivery route between Fort Verde and Jerome, a place in the Upper Verde became the Cottonwood Post Office on July 9, 1885. Postmaster George MacDonald "Mac" Willard was responsible for maintaining company horses in the barn and corrals for the daily (except Sunday) stage, a water trough for the horses, and conveniences for the stage driver and passengers, which included a small store in the post office building.

"One old-timer remembers quarters were in a temporary residence until a permanent site was built. ... The home of "Grandma" Willard" sometimes served as a post office. (Verde Independent; Thursday, December 1, 1960.) James H. A. Marsh, a builder, contractor, and bricklayer from Prescott, built a residence east of the Cottonwood Post Office for Mary Grace Willard and her sons during the fall of 1887. (Arizona Weekly Journal-Miner; September 28, and November 30, 1887.) When the postmaster was not available mail could be obtained at the Mary Willard residence before August of 1899. After Mary Willard died in 1921, her house was rented. James L. and Mamie (Cole) Howard began living in the old brick home of "Grandma" Willard before 1960.

Al and Callie (Goddard) Strahan homesteaded 40 acres (east of Main Street between Pima and Mingus) and obtained additional land (east of Main Street, north of Pima) from David Strahan. Before 1890, they were operating a general merchandise store (now, south of the "Old Town" Jail) and their saloon was located closer to the river. (Verde Independent; May 18, 1972.)

There was also a general merchandise store, blacksmith shop, and saloon at Carrollton (now, on the east side of Main Street, at the intersection of Mingus). "The new town of Carrollton, of which Thomas Carroll is the founder, promises to become quite a respectable sized village in the near future, ... and an application was made for a" Carrollton Post Office. (Arizona Weekly Journal-Miner; March 21, 1894; p. 1.) The request was denied. By 1923 "the old buildings that line the east side of the road across from Smelter City were "historic landmarks of the days when the country was truly wild." (Verde Copper News; June 15, 1923; p. 4.)

Cottonwood Post Office and stage stop was moved from the Mary Willard homestead to the Strahan family homesteads and located in the "Merchandise" store. William Marshall (husband of Martha Strahan) became the postmaster on August 31, 1899, serving until Samuel L. Strahan took over on January 14, 1901. The Strahan family sold the property and store to the Samuel Cotton Dickinson family. They came to the Verde Valley in 1875, and in addition to farming, Samuel planted a vineyard and made wine. Samuel was the postmaster at the Cornville Post Office, where the stage and passengers stopped about noon 6 days a week, from April 2, 1887, until July 13, 1905. Edward V. Dickinson took over the Cottonwood Post Office as postmaster on January 18, 1904, and was followed by Frank Dickinson on August 4, 1905. The Dickinson family sold the property and store to Alonzo "Lon" Mason.

Alonzo Mason became the postmaster on May 21, 1907. "The application of Alonzo Mason for the privilege of making a slight change in Road District 27, at Cottonwood, was taken up and granted with the understanding that Mr. Mason will make the change at his own expense and leave the road in as good condition after the change as it was before." Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors of Yavapai County, Prescott, November 4, 1907. (Weekly Arizona Miner; November 13, 1907.) Cottonwood's main street, then a county road, was defined by the work of Alonzo Mason and Charles Stemmer. They used a heavy log attached by ropes at both ends, called a "drag," hitched to 2 mules, who pulled the log

through the brush. The "drag" removed the brush, smoothed and widened the trail along the section line separating the Willard and Strahan homesteads. In front of the general merchandise store and post office the road divided, leaving cottonwood trees standing in the middle to shade the front of the building from the afternoon sun. The area was named "Mason Corners" because it was the northern end of the road to Camp Verde, the western end of the Lime Kiln Road crossing the Verde River, the beginning of the road to Jerome, and a road north along the river (to Clarkdale after 1912). During the 1920's, the trees were being hit by careless drivers and were finally removed.

"Mason, a bachelor for many years, stayed at the helm (as postmaster) until he married and his wife, Mrs. May Mason, took over." (Verde Independent; Thursday, December 1, 1960.) Alonzo Mason was elected to the Yavapai County Board of Supervisors, serving from 1912 until 1914. May M. Mason was the postmaster from March 16, 1914, until December 30, 1916, when Alonzo Mason became to postmaster again until September 30, 1919. The population of Cottonwood was 110 in 1900 and 1910.

Smelter employees who did not want to live in "company housing" became residents of Cottonwood. The population began to increase with the construction of the Clarkdale smelter in 1913 and increased more after the smelter began operations in 1915 and was enlarged in 1922. (The Clarkdale population was 2,435 in 1920, 4,647 in 1930, and 2,280 in 1940.) In 1917 temporary construction workers at Verde filled Cottonwood boarding houses and the population of Cottonwood increased as smelter workers rented or purchased homes for their families.

South of Cottonwood, the new United Verde Extension Mining Company smelter and town were called Smelterville or Verdeville. The town was named Verde on April 13, 1917. (Jerome News; April 13, 1917; p. 1.) Verde Post Office was approved on October 10, 1917, and mail was handled through the Clarkdale Post Office. The new Verde Post Office building was completed in December and mail was delivered there, but it was not fully functioning until 1918. (Jerome Sun; December 17, 1917; p. 3.) The name was changed to Clemenceau in 1920. (The population was 603 in 1920, dropped to 500 in 1940, and was 300 in 1950 and 1960.) "Located adjacent to Cottonwood, the town housed the area's once active smelter and at one time was bigger than Cottonwood." The Clemenceau Post Office was closed on July 31, 1954, due to a lack of business. (Prescott Evening Courier; July 8, 1954; p. 9.)

Jeremiah "Jerry" A. McGimsey became the postmaster on October 1, 1919. "He moved the Cottonwood Post Office to another building (now, a few doors north of Pima). He fell from the roof, however, and so badly sprained his ankle he was unable to continue in the position." (Verde Independent; Thursday, December 1, 1960.)

The Cottonwood Post Office "was returned to its former location" where it had been since 1899. Bessie L. Thompson was the postmaster from May 25, 1920, until December 31, 1923. "The position remained in the family." She is the daughter of May Mason, and by 1960 she was Bessie Orr, of Phoenix. (Verde Independent; Thursday, December 1, 1960.) The population of Cottonwood was 1,621 in 1920, and more residents were arriving. The Cottonwood Post Office needed more space.

Charles C. Stemmer took over as postmaster on January 1, 1924. He moved the Cottonwood Post Office across Main Street to his own building (now, a city driveway). The population of Cottonwood was 1,950 in 1930, then decreased with the closure of the smelter at Clemenceau to 1,710 in 1940. As smelter operations decreased at Clarkdale prior to closure the population of Cottonwood decreased to 1,626 by 1950. When Charles Stemmer retired, Mamie C. Howard took over on February 28, 1953, and moved the

Cottonwood Post Office across Main Street to the Ray Manley Building. Mail formerly directed to Clemenceau was sent to the Cottonwood Post Office beginning on August 1, 1954. After the Clarkdale smelter closed in 1953, Cottonwood began promoting the town as a tourist destination. New businesses, industries, and residents arrived.

"BIDS FOR THE NEW COTTONWOOD POST OFFICE IN THE PARK: Bids for building and leasing a new Cottonwood Post Office at the southeast corner of Main Street and Ellefson Avenue (now, Pima) are now being accepted, according to Mrs. Mamie Howard, Cottonwood Postmaster. The new structure will contain approximately 1,976 square feet, more than double the present office, and will have over 1,000 mail boxes. The present office has 518. Specifications call for an outside loading platform and adequate space for parking and truck maneuvering."

"This proposed new building will provide expanded postal services for the rapidly growing Cottonwood area' Mrs. Howard said. The Post Office Department holds a \$5,000 assignable land option on 10,500 square feet of land in Cottonwood Park. Under the Post Office Department's unique commercial leasing program, resources and investment funds of private enterprise are utilized to obtain needed postal buildings. ... An important feature of the program, Mrs. Howard said, is that these leased facilities remain under private ownership, and pay local property taxes."

(Verde Independent; Thursday, September 10, 1959; page 1.)

"FINAL PAPERS PREPARED FOR THE POST OFFICE: The Cottonwood Progressive Association learned at their meeting Friday the final steps have been taken in order to secure a new Post Office for Cottonwood. The title for the land north of the fire station has been cleared and if everything goes smoothly, the building will be completed by mid-summer 1960."

"In establishing a rental price to the government the group determined to cover the loan payment and taxes that the rent be \$260 per month. Taxes will be about \$250 per year. Since banks would not give a long term loan, a private lender has agreed to furnish the necessary funds on a 20 year contract. The government is also requesting a 10 year original lease with two 5 year renewal clauses."

(Verde Independent; Thursday, December 17, 1959.)

October 11: "NEW POST OFFICE OPENS ITS DOORS: Cottonwood residents began receiving their mail at the new United States Post Office Building Tuesday. Construction is complete and local officials have been awaiting approval by the United States Post Office Regional Engineer to move in, which has come. A technician has been here several weeks to assist in the move."

"The handsome Phoenix Fire Brick structure is 1,976 square feet and was constructed by Ernie Broughton, Cottonwood contractor, at a cost of \$28,000. It is located at the corner of Main and Ellefson (now, Pima)."

"The structure has all new combination boxes. There are 700 boxes installed and 200 more will be installed in the near future. [They were installed in June of 1969.] ... New furniture has been installed and more will arrive, along with a dedication plaque. A stamping table, electric cancelling machine and new parcel post truck are all modern features of the new structure," Other features of the building include counters instead of windows, better lighting, modern architecture, inside plastering, wainscoting of tile, a furnace room, refrigeration unit and a gas heater."

"Ironically, Cottonwood's second post office [1899-1919; 1920-1924] was in the process of being torn down as the modern edifice opened its doors."

(Verde Independent; Thursday, October 13, 1960; pages 1 and 12; and June 5, 1969.)

December: COTTONWOOD PROGRESS DAYS, a 3 day celebration "marked the incorporation of Cottonwood and the dedication of the Cottonwood Post Office. "It was jointly sponsored by the Cottonwood Civic Club and the Cottonwood Progressive Association." The master of ceremonies for the Cottonwood Post Office dedication program on Saturday, December 3, was "Leonard Sexton who introduced former postmaster Charles Stemmer and Don Willard, son of Cottonwood's first postmaster, "Mac" Willard. Cottonwood Mayor John Garrett, spoke briefly on what the new post office will mean to the community." ... (Verde Independent; Thursday, December 8, 1960.)

The population of Cottonwood and Clemenceau increased from 2,815 in 1970 to 4,550 in 1980. A new post office building was constructed before the population reached 5,918 in 1990. The Cottonwood Post Office Building at 827 N. Main Street became Cottonwood City Hall.

(See: "Population History of Western U. S. Cities and Towns: 1850-1990;" by Riley Moffet; The Scarecrow Press, Inc.,; Lanham, Md., and London; page 10.)