

BEATIES PRAIRIE, A POST OFFICE

By George H. Shirk*

The exact location of the United States post office known as Beaties Prairie has been the subject of doubt and some misunderstanding. Beaties Prairie, from which the name of the office was adopted, is a distinctive land feature in northeastern Oklahoma which measures approximately ten miles east and west and, at the maximum, five miles north and south. The extensive prairie extends into Arkansas from extreme eastern Delaware County, Oklahoma. Maysville, Arkansas, is the principal community in the flat, well-defined region, and Old Fort Wayne was located at its western extremity. It was named for the first settler in the region, Adam Beatie, who came to the vicinity in 1828.

On December 21, 1840, the Postmaster General established a post office named Beaties Prairie with John A. P. Carr as Postmaster. Post Office Department records show that it was located in Benton County, Arkansas. Later, on July 5, 1844, William Cawood was appointed Postmaster, and on March 5, 1850, the name of the office was changed to Maysville.

It has been said that the first location of the post office was in the immediate vicinity of Old Fort Wayne, and that the site was moved across the line into Arkansas at the time the name of the office was changed to Maysville in 1850.

Careful research and investigation has determined this not to have been the case. There exists no evidence that the post office, before its name was changed to Maysville, was at any time located in the Cherokee Nation.

Many contemporary maps show the name used to designate the land feature with all or part of the words in the Cherokee Nation. Therefore, it would not be difficult for a casual observer to assume that the words designated the post office location, when in fact, the name was shown for another purpose.

The daily order sheet of the Postmaster General was reviewed on a recent visit to Washington, D.C., and there is no indication of a site change at any time. I am not unmindful that the Postmaster General often located Cherokee Nation post offices in a county of Arkansas, and I recognize that

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consistently listing the office in Benton County, not only on the date of its establishment but on the later dates when a new Postmaster was appointed and when the name was changed to Maysville, would not in itself be conclusive. However, it has been the consistent policy of the Postal Department to use a slightly different terminology when a new location is involved. A phrase such as "location changed to Benton County, Arkansas and name changed to Maysville" would have been used if there had been a site or location change, especially as for the first time the office would have then been located in Arkansas.

At the time of statehood, the main street of Maysville was located exactly on the western Arkansas line and ran in a north-westerly direction consistent with the state boundary. There were no buildings of note on the west side of Main Street, for such was located in the Cherokee Nation. The major improvements of the town were on the east side of the street with the buildings fronting on Main Street, thus facing to the west.

At the time of Oklahoma statehood, in 1907, it was recognized locally that the boundary between Arkansas and its new sister state to the west ran immediately in front of the row of Main Street buildings on the east side of the street facing west, and that as a matter of fact, some of the front porches, steps and other appurtenances were located in Oklahoma.

In due time, the buildings were gradually remodeled and faced to the east, so that the former front exposures were now the rear of the row of buildings. As a result, the back of the buildings were located almost exactly on the state line.

So it was with the structure housing the post office. At the time of statehood, it faced west and its front porch reached across the Arkansas line into the Cherokee Nation. Later, the building was remodeled so as to face east. The porch protruding across the state line was removed, and to that extent it could be said that the post office of Maysville was "located," in part at least, in Indian Territory. Indeed, this could be the only basis of an assertion that the post office was not in Arkansas.

In the absence of any evidence whatsoever tending to indicate that the post office of Beaties Prairie was not located at the same site that it was before the name was changed to Maysville, I believe it is established that even though the major area of Beaties Prairie is in Oklahoma, the post office of that name was not located at any time physically in the Cherokee Nation.