



# WEBFOOTER EXTRA

## MARCH 2025



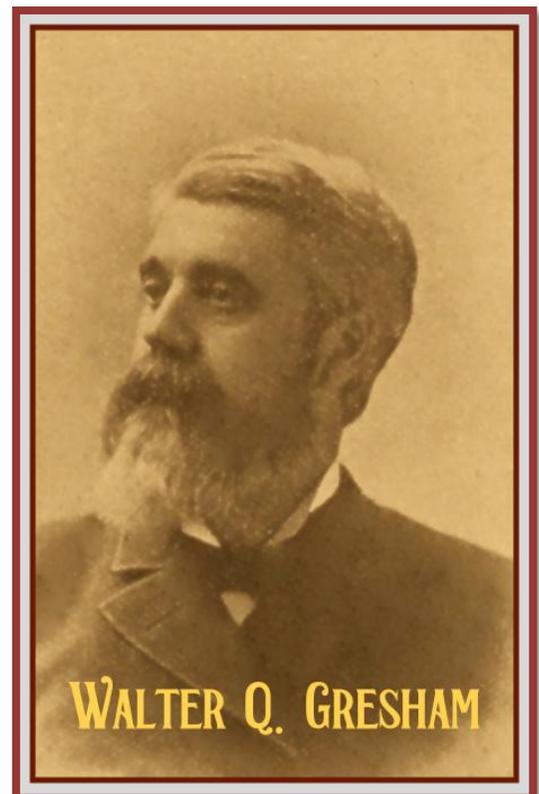
## GRESHAM GETS A POST OFFICE AND A NAME\*

BY MARK MOORE

Looking to draw in more business, Benjamin Rollins, a one-armed storekeeper who lived about 10 miles east of Portland, wanted his store to also contain a post office. He theorized that if residents were visiting the store more regularly to obtain their mail, he thought they would be inclined to pick up an item or two they might need around the house.

Ben penned a letter to then-Post Master General, Walter Q. Gresham, a former Colonel in the Union Army, offering a simple exchange – a post office for the name of the town. Oregon's fourth largest city got its name in 1884 when the town was given the name of Gresham in honor of the Postmaster General.

\* Shown above is a copy of a receiving cancel from a cover which is the oldest known cancellation for Gresham from Sept. 6, 1886. Steve King Collection.





Earliest known photograph of Gresham, Oregon showing Main and Powell Valley Road looking east, circa 1885. At that time, Main Avenue was called Damascus Road which extended from Fairview in the north to Damascus in the south. Powell Valley Road, which was little more than a trail, stretched westward to the Willamette River in Portland and eastward towards the town of Sandy.

In earlier days, the Gresham area was the agricultural capital of Multnomah County, Oregon. The town's economy was fueled largely by farming which included berries, grapes, and vegetables. European immigrants settled in the area beginning in the 1850s and Asian immigrants began to settle in the area in the 1880s.

Jackson Powell, who was the area's first settler, came to the area in 1851 and he filed a donation land claim with his new bride in 1852. In the 1870s, a religious Camp Meeting Ground was established near present-day Powell and Roberts Avenue and this became a popular stop-off point for people traveling to Portland. Roberts Avenue is one block east of Main.

Historian G.W. Metzger wrote that by 1884, there were 52 families living within a three-mile radius of the town that would become Gresham.

W.F.S.

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(No. 1004—NEW SERIES—JANUARY 1, 1882.)



# Post Office Department,

OFFICE OF THE FIRST ASSISTANT P. M. GENERAL,  
WASHINGTON, D. C., 188 .

Sir: Before the Postmaster General decides upon the application for a new post office at \_\_\_\_\_ County of \_\_\_\_\_ State of \_\_\_\_\_ at which you are recommended for postmaster, he requires that the blanks in the following statement be filled, and the questions carefully and correctly answered, verified by your signature, certified by a neighboring postmaster, and returned to this Department, addressed to me. The contractor should be informed of this application; and if the site of the proposed office be off the mail route, you will forward his certificate as to the practicability of supplying it, and also as to the increase of distance. If the proposed office is not on any route now under contract, it can only be established as a "Special Office," to be supplied without expense to the Department other than net proceeds.

Be careful to designate the post offices by their true official names; and answer the subjoined queries fully and accurately, or the case will not be acted upon.

Very respectfully,  
FRANK HATTON,  
First Assistant Postmaster General.

To Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ care of the Postmaster of \_\_\_\_\_, who will please forward to him.

### STATEMENT.

The proposed office to be called Gresham "Gresham"  
Select a short name for the proposed office, which, when written, will not resemble the name of any other post office in the United States.

It will be situated in the N.W. quarter of Section Ten, Township South (North or South), Range 3 East in the County of Multnomah, State of Oregon

It will be on or near route No. 4411, being the route from East Portland to Single Creek on which the mail is now carried daily except Tues times per week.

The contractor's name is James N. A. Lawton  
Will it be directly on this route?—Ans. Yes

If not, how far from, and on which side of it?—Ans. Not any

How much will it INCREASE the travel of the mail one way each trip?—Ans. At the office proposed to be established

Where intersect the route again?—Ans.

What post office will be left out by this change?—Ans.

If not on any route, is a "Special Office" wanted?—Ans. To be supplied from Twello Valley

The name of the nearest office to the proposed one, on the same route, is Twello Valley its distance is three and one half miles in a Eastern direction from the proposed office.

The name of the nearest office on the same route, on the other side, is Rockford its distance is four miles in a North Western direction from the proposed office.

The name of the nearest office to the proposed one, not on this route, is Rockford its distance by the most direct road three and one half miles, in a Northerly direction from the proposed office.

The name of the most prominent river near it is Sandy  
The name of the nearest creek is Johnson

The proposed office will be two and a half miles from said river, on the Western side of it, and will be two hundred yards from said nearest creek, on the North Eastern side of it.

The name of the nearest railroad is Oregon Railway & Navigation Company  
If on the line of or near a railroad, on which side will the office be located; how far from the track; and what is, or will be, the name of the station?—Ans.

What will be the distance from the proposed site to the nearest flag station?—Ans.

State name of station: Fairview  
What will be the distance from the proposed site to the nearest station at which mail trains make regular stops?—Ans. three and one half miles

State name of station: Fairview  
If the proposed office is located where it can be supplied from a crane or flag station, or located over 80 rods from the station where mail trains make regular stops, will the mail be carried to and from the proposed office without expense to the Department?—Ans. It is not

be located  
If it be a village, state the number of inhabitants.—Ans. It is a paper mill, 100 heads of families could receive mail there

Also, the population to be supplied by proposed office.—Ans. say three hundred two hundred

A diagram, or sketch from a map, showing the position of the proposed new office, with neighboring river or creek, roads, and other post offices, towns, or villages near it, will be useful, and is therefore desired.

A correct map of the locality might be furnished by the county surveyor, but this must be without expense to the Post Office Department.

ALL WHICH I CERTIFY to be correct and true, according to the best of my knowledge and belief, this 27<sup>th</sup> day of March 1884

(Signature full name.) James F. Roberts, Proposed P. M.

I CERTIFY that I have examined the foregoing statement, and that it is correct and true, to the best of my knowledge and belief.

C. E. Fields  
Postmaster at Mount Labor  
Oregon

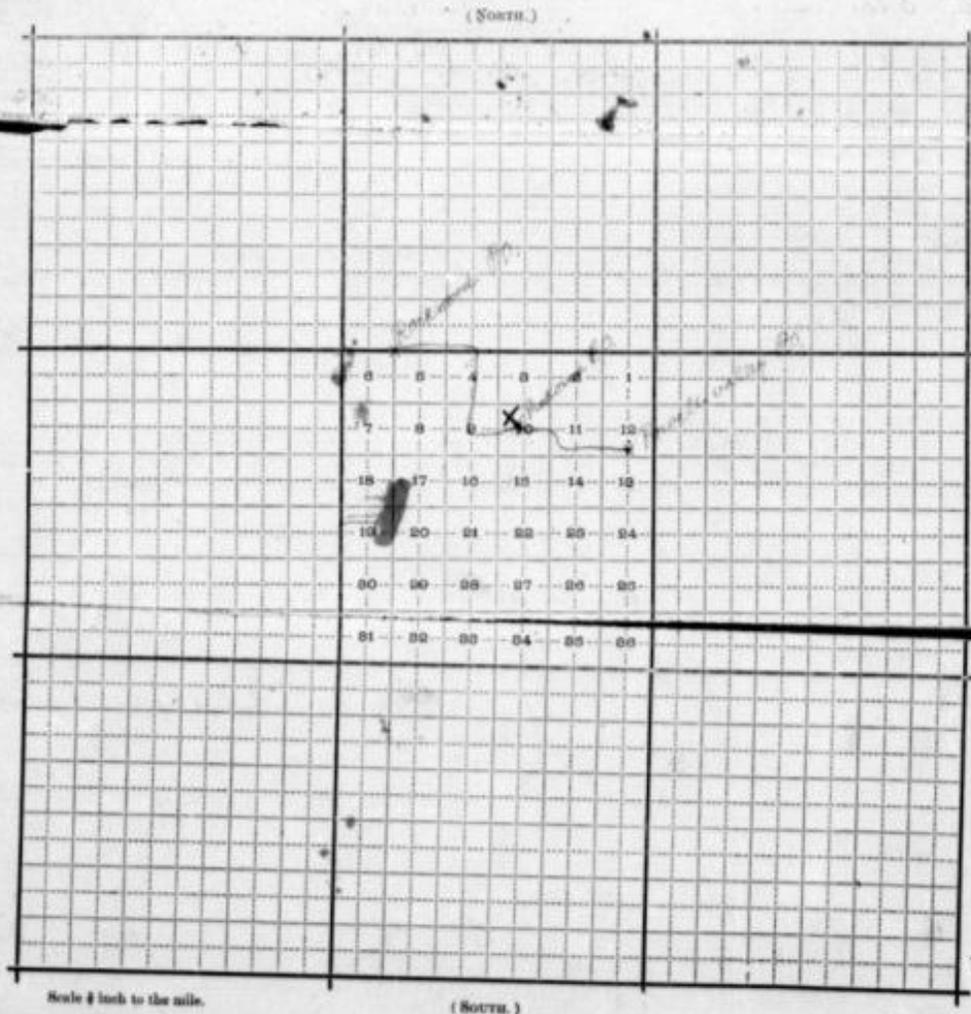
(OVER.)

*Not to be established "Gresham" in place of "Camp Ground" on account of the location being exactly the same. W.F.S.*

Copy of the original application for a post office for the town of Gresham, submitted March 27, 1884 and signed by the proposed postmaster, James F. Roberts. Also, the nearest post office not on the route, Cleone, now Fairview, is three and 1/2 miles north.

Diagram showing the site of the proposed Post Office  
 in Township 1 S. (N. & S.), Range 3 E. (E. & W.) of Willamette Principal  
 Meridian, County of Multnomah, State  
 of Oregon, with the adjacent Townships and Post Offices.

It is requested that the exact site of the proposed or existing Post Office, as also the roads to the adjoining offices, and the larger streams or rivers, be marked on this diagram, to be returned as soon as possible to the Post Office Department.

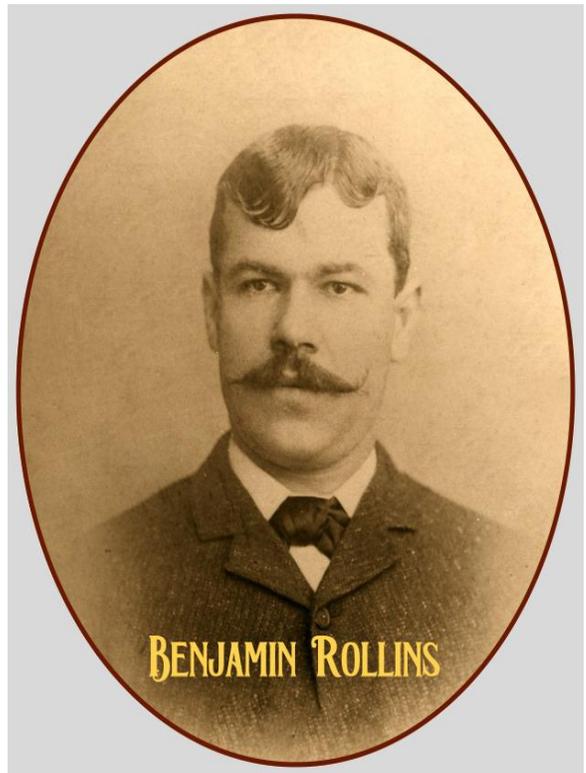


Copy of the diagram showing the scribbles of the proposed location of the Gresham post office (by the center x) which was submitted with the original application in 1884. Nearby post offices are indicated showing Rockwood to the west of Gresham and Powell Valley to the east. These post offices were on the East Portland to Eagle Creek route.

From the application, Powell Valley Post Office was three-and one-half miles east of the proposed Gresham Post Office and the Rockwood Post Office was four miles to the northwest. Powell Valley was established on Feb. 13, 1873 and it was discontinued Feb. 28, 1903. Rockwood was established on March 14, 1882 and it was discontinued on Feb. 28, 1903.

Benjamin Franklin Rollins is credited with bringing the first post office to Gresham, and in so doing, named the town. In the mid-1880s Samuel Metzger and his step-son Ben Rollins built a General Goods store on the southeast corner of Main Avenue and Powell Valley Road. Constructed with logs and roughhewn planks, the building measured only 16 feet by 24 feet. The store is seen in the far right in the photo on page 3.

Rollins' business partner, James F. Roberts, was also one-armed, and he was named Gresham's first postmaster. The four-block area surrounding what is now Main Avenue and Powell Boulevard was known as "The Crossroads." The Crossroads offered a hotel, feed mill, blacksmith shop, church and a school. Everything a weary traveler or a hopeful homesteader might need.



According to Post Office Publications, Gresham briefly had a second post office under the name of Camp Ground which operated from May 19th to June 9th in 1884. This post office was closed when postal officials in Washington D.C. realized that they had already approved another post office named Gresham at the same site on May 15, 1884. No known cancellations from Camp Ground are known to exist.

Later, Samuel Metzger went on to run another General Goods store on the northwest corner of Powell and Main. In 1887, the son of early Gresham settlers Boone and Hannah Johnson, William Johnson, purchased Ben Rollins' store and later expanded the business to include a bakery in 1892. As early as the 1890s, farmers used the dirt path that would become Powell Valley Road to take their wares to market.

Officials in Portland saw a need for supplying fresh water to its residents. An elaborate water purification and delivery system was built through Gresham to transport water from the Bull Run Watershed to the residents of Portland and the surrounding areas in 1893. The first telephone line in Gresham was installed in 1894 when the Portland Water Bureau ran a line from Portland to the headworks at Bull Run. Local residents could use the phone only for an emergency.

Then, in 1902, the first public telephone was extended from Portland to Lewis Shattuck's Store in Gresham where the switchboard was installed and the Portland-to-Estacada, Oregon Water Power & Railway Company pulled into Gresham. The only others to install a phone were Dr. J. M. Short, Judge W. W. Cotton, the construction company working on the railroad, and the local drug store. Subscriptions for phone service were a hefty \$5.00 a year or \$1.00 a month. The switchboard was moved to the Gresham Drug Store the following year.



Real photo postcard of the transporting of a water pipe at Powell Valley Road and Main Avenue in Gresham in July 1910. Gresham began supplying Bull Run water to its residents that year. The First State Bank building is in the background.

The citizens of Gresham elected Lewis Shattuck as the first mayor in 1904. Articles of incorporation for Gresham were submitted and they were approved early in 1905.



Real photo postcard published by Pictorial Views of the Gresham Post Office at Miller Avenue and Powell, circa 1945. Postally unused. It was built in 1941 and it was later expanded in 1989.

# EDITOR'S NOTE

Several years ago, we began a series of articles under the category of Hometown Histories. The Gresham area is very rich in history. Some of the information in this issue comes from Postal Historian Charles Neyhart and thanks to Steve King for providing a copy of the oldest known cancellation for Gresham from Sept. 6, 1886.



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