

"Rural Mail Report" Newspaper Article, October 24, 1899

Rural Mail Report

W.F. Conger, the Special Agent Tells of the Work.

HEDRICK ROUTE LAST TO BE PUT ON

Forty-Three Free Delivery routes in Iowa--Popular Where it Has Been Tried--It Stimulates Use of the Mails.

Des Moines, Oct. 19.--There are 43 rural mail delivery routes in Iowa. The last to be established was at Hedrick, in Keokuk county. The route extends from there southeast into Wapello county. The special agent of the post-office department for rural free delivery in Iowa is W. F. Conger, of Clinton. His report for the month of September has just been issued, and is herewith reproduced. Little is understood by the average person about the efforts being made to demonstrate the practicability of free rural delivery. Interest in this city was lately awakened by the address of Hon. Francis M. Dice, special agent in charge of the western division of rural free delivery, at the good roads convention.

"Dear Sir: In compliance with your request, communicated to me by the special agent in charge of western division, I beg leave to submit the following:

"First, I desire to say in general that I have found the people eager for rural free delivery of mail wherever they have come to understand its advantages and benefits. I find a majority of the people know little or nothing about rural free delivery or the attempt on the part of the government to establish and test it. I might say further that few postmasters have given it serious attention or realize its advantages to the people served by it or the just claims of the rural population to a fair share of the benefits of our postal system.

"I do not desire to speak in disparagement of free city delivery, but aside from a business delivery in cities the claims are, to my mind, much stronger in favor of rural free delivery than residence delivery in cities.

"The residents of the average free delivery city are within a short distance of the post office or some of its sub-stations and have the additional advantage of sidewalks and street are by which to conveniently reach it in any and all kinds of weather.

"Farmers are miles from the post office and often prevented, through the busy producing season or by reason of bad weather and bad roads, from getting their mail for many days or weeks at a time.

"Again, farmers, being producers of food supplies, grains, etc., need the daily market reports, which are of small advantage to the residents of a city.

“Why eight hundred or one thousand people, living within a mile of a post office in a city, with sidewalks and street cars at their service, should have their mail delivered by a carrier, costing the government \$800 to \$1,000 a year and an equal number of farmers living from five to ten miles from a post office, should not be served by a \$400 carrier, I am at a loss to understand. The stronger claim of the farming community to daily delivery of mail is becoming better understood each year, and whenever and wherever a rural route is established the advantages become at once so apparent to those served that the justice of the claims of rural delivery is at once admitted.

“One of the most frequent and apparently most formidable objections urged against it is that since all cannot have it none should. I try to answer this objection by saying that in the very nature and constitution of society there cannot be an absolutely equitable distribution of public advantages. Comparatively few communities can have the advantage of fast mail trains, but no fair-minded or intelligent man upon reflection would want to suspend the fast mail service on that account. There are few cities and towns favored with free carrier service, but because all incorporated towns cannot have free delivery is no good reason why cities where it is a business necessity should be deprived of it. All communities do not have banks, colleges, railroads or telegraph lines, but no one would be so unfair as to wish to deprive the world of these great commercial and educational advantages, because all cannot be equally served by them. Others urge the great cost of the service and the inability of the government to maintain it. This would suggest the inquiry as to the best and wisest use to be made of the public revenues and whether or not the application of it in free rural delivery of mail would not be a much more just and proper use than many ways in which it is now freely and lavishly expended. In my judgment one-half of the millions annually given to rivers and harbors could be much better employed in a practical service to the people by means of rural free delivery of mail. Should a service or prime advantage and general benefit to the great farming population be postponed or denied when millions are being annually appropriated for less beneficent and less useful ends? Can the government afford to withhold so valuable an agency from the people? To my mind it is not so much a question whether the government can afford to give the people free rural delivery as whether it can afford to withhold from them a service of such inestimable benefit.

“Every community served by rural delivery feels itself set a long distance forward in the scale of civilization and brought into closer touch with the life and progress of the world. The monotony and isolation of farm life are greatly relieved from the discontent so noticeable on the increase with the farmer youths of the country is allayed. It is not only a business advantage, but a social benefit of even greater value than any commercial consideration.

As to your inquiry in regard to increased use of the mails by reason of the rural service, the universal testimony as shown by the records of the various routes is that letter correspondence is greatly stimulated and that on every route scores of daily papers are now taken where there was none before the service was established. On one route I find 47 daily papers are now being taken, and the number is constantly increasing, where not one of them took a daily paper before the route was established.

In the southeastern portion of my district, where there are some twenty or more rural routes, the postmasters have joined hands with county boards of supervisors to hold a great Good Roads convention at Burlington, Des Moines county, Iowa, in October of this year. I might further say that the postmasters at Burlington and Mt. Pleasant, where we have rural mail routes established, are officers of the good roads organizations in their counties (Des Moines and Henry counties, respectively), and are doing all in their power to aid in the making of better roads.

In the inspection of the routes which I have personally traversed with the mail carriers I find a universal satisfaction with the service and have met with frequent expressions such as these:

"I would not have the route changed so as to pass my farm for \$500."

Another patron said to me: "I consider my land worth \$5 per acre more since the establishment of our rural free delivery route."

Such statements as these are very frequent and too numerous to mention, and are made to me by patrons of nearly every route over which I have traveled.

On May 12 I was assigned to work in the state of Iowa, since which date I have investigated fourteen proposed routes and recommended their establishment. I have personally gone over and inspected seven routes in this district. Wherever I have inspected routes I find a universal sentiment in favor of the service. Indeed the people along these routes express the gravest alarm that the service be taken away from them. Their appeals for its continuance is the index of its appreciation by and value to them. I do not find the people critical about the method of conducting the service. They are satisfied with it as it is and ready at all times to demonstrate their fidelity to it.

W. F. Conger, Special Agent.