

Halford

Like the Ever Ready battery, it just keeps going, going, going from a beginning in 1888, when the Union Pacific Railroad began Halford as the town of Verner. It's 2007 and still going and about the same size as it was in 1907 when the attached picture was shot. Different resources have been used to get the history of Halford and they are noted in this article.

Conrad Easterday, reporter for the Colby Free Press Centennial edition, September 28, 1985 researched and came up with this information.

"When the UP's Lincoln and Colorado line was laid through North Randall Township, Union Land's Isaac Mulholland filed the town plat of Verner, Kansas. It was October 8, 1888. Verner eventually became Halford. When and why the name was changed is unknown, but Halford as a name and place has survived. Lester Howard wrote that his father was responsible for the railroad's decision to place the town where it is. The father, W.E. Howard, gave up a quarter of land in trade for a Union Pacific Depot. Oscar F. Quick began a general store the next year. In 1892, a post office was moved into the store and Oscar became post master. Proprietorship of the store and the post master position went hand in hand."

According to Easterday, "The store and the depot are the only structures noted in county histories. Most note only the store. If there was a church or other business in Halford, they are not mentioned. Marion Roller took over the posts held by Quick in 1893. John Benda's son, Oscar became the owner of the general store in 1916. A list of the postmasters is attached to this paper. The store and post office closed sometime after Doris Harter became the last postmaster in 1953."

He also noted that "20 years after Harter assumed her job as postmaster, the Northwest Cattle Co. was established. It became Thomas County's largest cattle feeding operation and was constructed to handle 15,000 head. The company was sold and renamed to become the Halford Cattle Co. in 1982. In 1984, the operation was incorporated under the direction of Rex, Shirley, John and Ross Cranston." In 2007, the feed operation is still functioning under the name The Thomas County Feeders, Inc. with the address of 1762 US 83. That's not the end.

As we told you, **Halford just keeps going and going**, sometimes in the same buildings, but still a name to be remembered. The owners of the Thomas County Feeders Association in September 2007 have purchased Kenny and Joyce Rohn's and Anna Rohn's homes perhaps as places for their managers and workers to live near their job of keeping the cattle fed and watered. The Brenn Pump and Supply business operates from what was the grocery store and post office, with Dan Brenn and his wife living in the a home located on the lots next to it

The cattle feeding operation is located on land which was owned by Henry Bremenkamp, across the highway for the Halford School. A picture of the Halford school was taken during the 1915-16 school year is attached. In it are Roy Houston, Clarence Houston,

Ernest Houston, Eva Howard and their teacher, Mrs. Ida McBride McCall. It was closed in the school year of 1960-61, and later moved from the area.

From the Land of the Windmills, there is a picture of the original Halford Store, circa 1914, and owned by R.H. Howard.

Fires were a common occurrence in this area of grass lands and many of the histories mention them. From the Land of the Windmills, it is noted that July 15, 1916, Halford Store owned by Ralph Howard was totally destroyed by fire, struck by lightning and high winds. The building and contents were insured for three thousand, and the loss was figured at six thousand. August 31, 1916, the school house at Halford was struck by lightning and burned to the ground. On page 135 of the Land of the Windmills, is a picture dated 1916, of a new store, new school house and private home.

Other noteworthy items from the same source are that May 4, 1922, Halford voted to become a Consolidated school with districts, 39, 66, 78, 69, and 25, and that July 12, 1923, W. H. Chambers bought Halford Mercantile Co, and took possession August 1, 1923. The Halford School number was 84.

From the list of postmasters we note that William H. Chambers was appointed on August 31, 1923 taking over from George Wilharrison (sp) who had assumed it on September 25, 1920. Howard C. Chambers was confirmed February 16, 1940, followed by Donald R. Case in September 1950, who purchased the store and station. Donald R. Case was then called back into the service to serve in Korea, and Cleo and Keela Case purchased the store from him and his wife, Mona. Keela Case assumed charge of the post office in September 14, 1950, and was confirmed October 5, 1950. The Case's sold the store to Roy Brenn, Doris Harter's father in March of 1953. His daughter, Doris Harter was confirmed as post mistress on March 31, 1953 and remained until the post office closed. This was in October 15, 1953 according to "Post Offices in Kansas 1828-1961."

Another bit of history was located when the property owners in the town of Halford, Kansas waived all objections to the vacating of the lots, blocks, streets and alleys shown on the plat, located outside of the red lines drawn thereon. This was dated 11, July, 1930. Their signatures were P.S. Houston (who owned elevators in Gem and Halford), A. L. Downing, agent of the A. T. Downing Estate, Wm. Harrison, Wm Orcutt, Menlo State Bank, Ray H. Crumly. Several of them are not readable due to their way of signing their names

The Prairie Museum of Art and History has the records of the Halford School. The members of the board kept extremely good records for the time, and they are interesting. You have previously read of the burning of the Halford School building in 1916. A special meeting was held in Halford, on Sept 11, 1916, called to order by P.M. Houston, Director. A copy of this is attached. It reads "A motion was made that we build a new school house, motion carried, clerk gave a report of funds that were available to be used as a building fund. Total \$1,400. A Motion was made that the school board be limited to \$1,800 in building a new school house. Motion carried. A motion was made that the

foundation of the new school building be made two feet above the level of the ground on the south side. Motion carried.” There is more regarding the looks of the building, the heating plant, and then they balloted for a treasurer to fill a vacancy with the names of Smith-3 votes, and Riblett, 5 votes. Signed, R.H. Howard.

There are records dating from November 1889 to the proceedings of the annual meeting for the school year of 1960-1961 when they voted not to maintain the school and to direct board to provide school privileges to other districts. They also voted to buy grade school books. This meeting was June 3 with 4 members present, Anna Rohn, Chairman, Clara Ryan, Treasurer, and Grace Bremenkamp, a member of the board. The report of the treasurer was \$1,138.36. They also voted to fix the windows and screen, and to clean school house and mow the lawn. This is just a sample of the information that is available about the students and teachers from the Halford School at the Prairie Museum of Arts and History in Colby, Kansas.

There is a “History of Halford and Vicinity” as written by Judge L.C. Howard (Lester C. Howard) of which a copy is attached to this story of the little town that kept going and going. He, too, talks of the fear of fires, the weeds, the names of the owners of the land, the changes from horses to tractors, and the importance of the schools which were provided to the children of that time. He also notes the ones who went on to high school, and to college. There is no date on the story of “Halford and Vicinity” to note when it was written.

As I mentioned before, this is the story of a town that keeps on going still in 2007 over a hundred years since it started. There is now, the Brenn Pump and Supply, the Thomas County Feedrs, Inc., Anna Rohn’s home which was once Rohn’s Service Station, and the home of her son, Kenneth Rohn and his wife, Joyce. The railroad is gone, 83 highway is widely used as a truck route, the school house is gone, and one more house is located north . The elevators are still there but mostly used for grain storage.

The story of the Rohn’s in Halford began in 1947 when they sold their place near Ogallah, Kansas and purchased a business they called Rohn’s Service Station from Mrs. Iles. The business included a store, creamery and filling station selling Conoco Gas. The home was included in the set-up. Anna ran the grocery store and creamery, and sold gas while Alvin managed the Halford Grain Elevator for H.S. King “because they couldn’t make enough money in the store.” This information comes from an interview made with Anna Rohn in 2005. They closed the store in 1962, and Alvin worked at the Upchurch Garage in Colby. They continued to live in Halford in the building which was remodeled into a home. After Alvin died in March 1975, Anna moved to Casper, Wyoming, and did various jobs, and made the decision to come back to Halford in 2000. That’s not the end of the story of the Rohn’s in Halford. Kenny and his wife, Joyce continued to live in a home in Halford, and raised their children, and as the story goes, after a disastrous snowy winter in 2006-2007, the decision was made for them to sell their home and move to Colby. Anna joined in selling her home, and settling in Colby in September 2007.

The story of Cleo and Keela Case in Halford began in 1950 when his brother, Donald Robert Case and wife Mona, (formerly Spencer) purchased the store, filling station, and post office from Howard Chambers. He had been there a month, when he got called back to service in the Korean War. Cleo had been living in the San Luis Valley in Colorado and wanted to get back to farming in Kansas, and he and his wife, Keela, made the decision to take over the store from his brother. The home was attached to the store building. There was a grocery section, hardware line, Sinclair gas pumps, and the post office. The train had to be met twice a day to send and receive mail. Their name for the store was Case's Store and Station. Two years later they found a farm near by to live on, and sold the business to Roy Brenn.

The history of the Brenn's involvement in Halford, began in 1953 when Roy Brenn purchased the place from Cleo and Keela Case and continues to 2007 with his grandson, Dan Brenn. Roy's daughter Doris and her husband, Clarence Harter moved in and continued to run the store. The post office, according to government records closed October 15, 1953. The Harter's kept the store open for a time, then moved to Colby, and Alton Brenn. Roy's son, and his wife, Marie Hamill took over the building, and eventually started the Brenn Pump and Supply business which is continuing with their son, Dan.

There is another house to be mentioned, located just north of the former railroad, which used to belong to Mabel Wade and is now the home of Belvia Flinn and her husband. It is located in a wind break area and is the home to chickens, geese, ducks, and even guinea hens.

So what am I saying? Halford is more than a wide place in a road, since 1888 it has been a place of constancy, homes to families, places of business, and in September 2007 it continues to do so. Two businesses, home to at least four families and perhaps, 15,000 cattle. These homes are well kept, surrounded by trees, grass yards, flowers. This is not the picture of a dying town, as in 2007 it's practically the same size as it was in pictures we've seen in 1914. Am I wrong in predicting, it will just keep going, going, going as a name to be remembered, Halford, Kansas. It's located on a main north and south highway 83, two miles south of Highway 24, a main east and west road, but no longer on a railroad. Makes you wonder just what makes a place a home and a place to do business? Halford is a good example of the survival of a small town in Northwestern Kansas.

Prepared by Keela Case
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Using resources available at the Prairie Museum of Art and History in Colby and memories of having lived in Halford for 2 ½ years, as postmaster, and store keeper of a place that sold groceries, hardware, gasoline, and served as a meeting place for farmers who came to pick up their mail. I need to note, that I do not remember of having seen a depot in the period of 1950 to 1953, as we met the train on the track with our mail bags twice a day.

