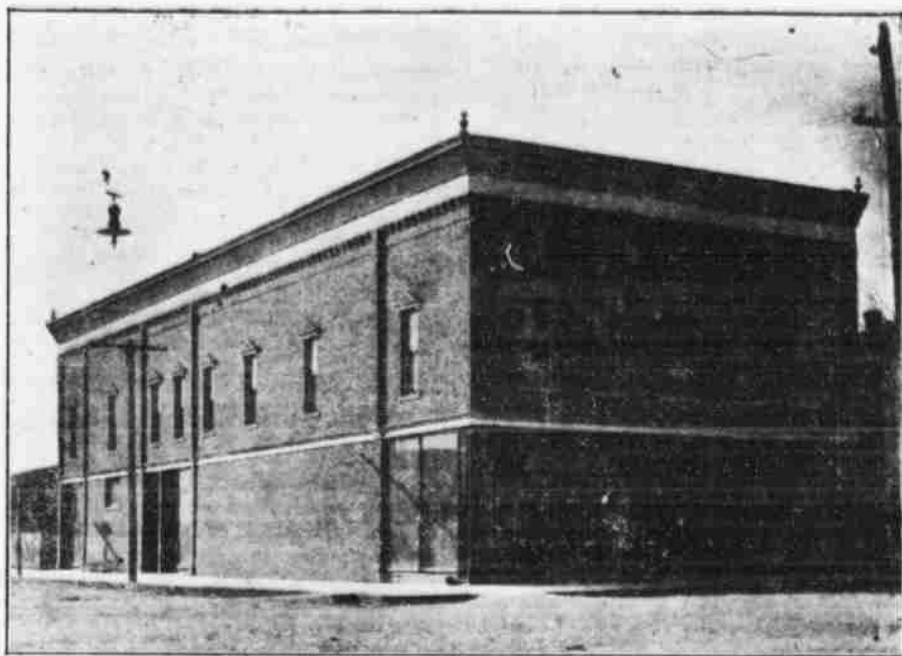


The Hastings Postoffice

Official Record of the Bargain
Made by the Government



DIETRICH BUILDING AT HASTINGS NOW USED FOR POSTOFFICE PURPOSES.

HASTINGS, Neb., Jan. 15.—(Special Correspondence.)—In his report of the postoffice investigation Fourth Assistant Postmaster General Bristow had the following to say relative to the removal of the postoffice in this city:

At Hastings, Neb., on May 1, 1897, a lease was made for postoffice premises for a period of five years, including light, heat, vault and equipment, at an annual rental of \$700 per annum. In March, 1901, the lessor was notified that the lease would be canceled on June 30, almost a year before its expiration. Shortly after this a proposal was accepted for another building no more desirable, at a rental of \$1,800 per annum. A most vigorous protest was filed against this action of the department by those interested in the canceled lease, and the matter was referred to an inspector for investigation, who, on April 17, 1901, reported as follows:

"Viewed from the standpoint usually assumed by the Postoffice department in the treatment of lease cases, and eliminating all questions of personal interest, I am unable to conceive what possible representations could have been made to the department of this case to result in the entertainments and acceptance of the proposition of Mr. Dietrich at the price named (\$1,800 per annum). The proposition is exorbitant, and the location one that is in competition with other propositions offering central locations at two-thirds the price asked could not conscientiously be considered.

As a result of this report the price for the new site was reduced to \$1,300 per annum, with the proviso that the department should pay for moving and installing the equipment and provide heat and light. The office was moved at an expense to the department of \$746.

The foregoing report of the fourth assistant postmaster general has been widely printed and commented upon. That the report is entirely misleading and unfair, and that it has created a false impression of the transaction, is shown by the following newspaper paragraph, which is a simple of many of the same kind that have been printed by newspapers throughout the state and country:

The grand jury is investigating the circumstances attending the removal of the Hastings postoffice to the Dietrich building, the cost of which was \$746. The amount is thought exorbitant by the department at Washington, and it is said there is evidence before the grand jury to show that the vouchers were padded to the extent of \$500 or \$600. It is also claimed that much of the expense involved was put into permanent improvements on the Dietrich building.

The contract for the removal of the postoffice was awarded by the postoffice department to O. N. Staley of Hastings, through competitive bidding. The bids were presented while Mr. Leopold Hahn was postmaster. Mr. Hahn, it should be understood was the unsuccessful candidate for reappointment at the time of the appointment of Jacob Fisher, and was the principal witness called by the prosecuting attorney for the grand jury investigation. On May 7, 1901, Mr. Hahn sent the bids to the department at Washington with the following letter:

HASTINGS POSTOFFICE, OFFICE OF THE POSTMASTER, HASTINGS, Adams County, Neb., May 7, 1901.—Hon. First Assistant Postmaster General, Washington, D. C.: Dear Sir—In accordance with your instructions contained in your communication "A. N." of date of April 24, I have the honor to transmit to you two bids with plan and specifications in regard to the removal of the present equipment to the Dietrich building. I have seen all of the contractors and these are the only two bids received. Should any be presented to me later on, I then shall submit same likewise to you. Very respectfully,

LEOPOLD HAHN, P. M.
C. E. N. HAHN, Asst. P. M.
Under date of June 6, 1901, the first assistant postmaster general wrote to the postmaster at Hastings as follows:

Postmaster, Hastings, Neb.: Sir—Referring to the bids submitted with your letter of the 1st inst., for moving, repairing and installing equipment in the Dietrich building, you are informed that the bid of O. N. Staley is accepted, with certain qualifications, viz: the items of a vault and partition from vault to west wall, etc., have been stricken out, as the department will adjust this feature of the case by supplying a suitable safe instead of going to the expense of \$645 to have a vault built.

The item relative to curtains is also stricken out and will be taken up for consideration later on.
You are therefore instructed to confer

with Mr. Staley at once and inform him that, with the elimination of the items above indicated, his bid is accepted, and the department will expect him to proceed with the contemplated work as soon as practicable, so that the postoffice shall be in possession of the Dietrich room and everything satisfactorily arranged by the end of the present month.

After conferring with Mr. Staley on the subject you will advise this office further.

From the report of Mr. Bristow it would appear that the charge of \$746 was merely for removing fixtures from one building to the other, or, in other words, that it cost the government \$746 to have a few desks, tables, chairs, counters, etc., moved into the new building. In addition to removing the fixtures from the old building Mr. Staley supplied new locks for the private boxes, relettered all boxes, stained and varnished all new work, supplied new keys for each box, put in a new money order desk, another desk with drawers, a long table, a wire railing, a wire partition, a bag rack, a mailing table, one mailing case, a lavatory and sink with sewer connections, and combination gas and electric fixtures. All this work was done in accordance with the specifications named in Mr. Staley's bid, which were approved by the department. In a letter to the postmaster, under date of October 1, 1901, the Postoffice department listed the work as follows:

Moving and placing office fixtures, new locks, with three keys to each lock, relettering all boxes, stain all new work, varnish all.....	\$145
One money order desk.....	29
One desk with drawers.....	15
One long table.....	11
Wire railing, money order counter.....	63
Wire partition enclosure, money order bureau.....	85
Bag rack (enlarged).....	11
Mailing table, 4x5 feet.....	8
One mailing case.....	18
Two coats of paint on above.....	4
Repairs to paper rack (old case).....	4
Water closet and sink, (sewer connections).....	65
Eleven combination gas and electric fixtures.....	95

It will be noted that Mr. Bristow in his report says that the proposal for the removal of the postoffice, "was accepted for another building no more desirable." It was meant by this statement that the new building, where the postoffice is now located, is no more desirable than the old one. The old postoffice room was long and narrow, the only windows being in front. The room is 19 feet wide and 121 feet long, but in the front of it there is a stairway leading upstairs, which cuts off the light from the rear of the room. The room into which the postoffice was moved measures 44 feet across the front and is 125 feet long. It faces both on Second street and St. Joe avenue and has doors and windows on both. The old room has 2,200 square feet of floor space, while the one into which the postoffice was moved measured 5,500, or over twice as much. Thus it will be seen that the room into which the postoffice was moved was not only twice as large as the old one, but had the advantage of fronting on two streets, and was better lighted and better ventilated.

The following paragraph is another sample of some of the things that have been said by newspapers in regard to the removal of the postoffice:

It appears from the report of Mr. Bristow to President Roosevelt, that there are really two postoffice scandals at Hastings, both involving Mr. Dietrich. The grand jury indictment for bribery and conspiracy is the one that has excited the state during the last two weeks. The one just published at Washington is connected with the removal of the postoffice from the Grand Army of the Republic building to Mr. Dietrich's own property. The removal at an advanced rent to a less convenient location is handled without gloves by Mr. Bristow. It is claimed at Hastings that it could never have been accomplished by a man with anything short of a senatorial pull. The Grand Army people were naturally very much worked up over the cancellation of the lease when it had a year yet to run.

As to the statement in the foregoing paragraph that the postoffice was moved to a less convenient location, it is well to say that the new room is just forty feet from the old one, facing on the same street, with an additional entrance on St. Joe avenue.



GRAND ARMY BUILDING AT HASTINGS IN WHICH THE POSTOFFICE WAS FORMERLY LOCATED.

In regard to the statement that the Grand Army people were agitated over the cancellation of the lease on the old building, which is owned by the Grand Army post, the following telegram now on file in the Postoffice department at Washington is sufficient explanation:

Western Union Telegraph Company, Hastings, Neb., April 24, 1901.—To the Postmaster General, Washington, D. C.: Commander and members of our Grand Army post unanimously have no objection to removal of postoffice to Senator Dietrich's building. ALBERT F. PIERCE, Post Commander, late Surgeon General of National Grand Army of the Republic.

Senator Dietrich and Jacob Fisher, the present postmaster, were among those who contributed largely to the Grand Army post of Hastings, for the construction of the Grand Army of the Republic building. After the postoffice had been in the Grand Army of the Republic building several years the department at Washington insisted that the room was inadequate and in order to keep the postoffice as a tenant it was necessary to build an addition in the rear. Again Mr. Dietrich and Mr. Fisher made substantial contributions to assist in building this addition, which was necessary in order to prevent the postoffice from being moved.

As shown by the report of Mr. Bristow, the rent paid by the government to the Grand Army of the Republic post was \$50 per year, but by the terms of the contract the post had to supply the light and heat. The records of the Grand Army post at Hastings disclose the fact that after paying the coal and light bills it enjoyed a net average revenue of less than \$23 a month. The same room, which, when occupied by the postoffice, netted the post less than \$23 a month, is now and has been since the removal of the postoffice occupied by municipal officials, and the city pays for it a rental of \$30 a month and furnishes its own heat and light. From these facts it is apparent that the Grand Army post now has a more profitable tenant than when the room was used by the government.

It was Mr. Hahn, the disappointed candidate for reappointment, who first proposed the removal. This fact, and the history of the events leading up to the removal of the office to the Dietrich building, is shown by the following recent correspondence between Senator Dietrich and former Postmaster General Charles Emory Smith, who was in charge of the department at the time the office was moved:

HASTINGS, Neb., Dec. 2, 1903.—Hon. Charles Emory Smith, Philadelphia, Pa.: Dear Sir—I beg to invite your attention to the enclosed newspaper clipping. You will note that in it the statement is made that "the old postoffice room was in every respect as commodious as the new one." You will recall that I called upon you in Washington while governor of Nebraska, and there attending the second inauguration of President McKinley, and you will doubtless remember the conversation which took place regarding the postoffice here. I told you that I understood that on your recent visit to Hastings Mr. Leopold Hahn, who was then postmaster, went with you to the postoffice, and while there recommended to you that a better room be secured. I had heard that he had called your attention to the fact that the room was not only entirely too small, but was

poorly lighted, and generally unfit for use as a postoffice in a town the size of Hastings. You said that he had done this and that you agreed with him that a better room for the postoffice should be provided.

After learning of this, and in the same conversation, I told you that I was having completed the construction of a new building within forty feet of the room then occupied by the postoffice, and I offered to rent the first floor of it to the government, provided a satisfactory rental would be paid. The new building, I explained, was on the corner, facing both on Second street and St. Joe avenue, with windows and entrance from both, and the first floor, which I offered, over twice as large as the old one, then being used. You were favorable to the proposition of renting in the new building, and before I left your office a contract or agreement was entered into for the execution of a lease providing for an annual rental of \$1,800.

In view of the fact that the transaction has been greatly misrepresented by the newspapers, in the publication of such statements as the enclosed, I would appreciate the favor if you would advise me if what I have stated is not true, or, better still, give me your own description of the transaction and the conversation which led up to it. I am very anxious to get this matter straight before the people, and I sincerely hope you will favor me with an early reply. Thanking you in advance for the courtesy, I am, very truly yours,

C. H. DIETRICH.
THE PHILADELPHIA PRESS, Office of the Editor, December 29, 1903.—Hon. Charles H. Dietrich: Dear Sir—Your letter came here while I was confined to my bed with illness and an earlier reply has been impossible.

My general recollection of the circumstances connected with your visit to the Postoffice department while you were governor of Nebraska, relating to the postoffice at Hastings and its proposed change, corresponds with your statement of your understanding. I had visited Hastings during the fall of 1900 and had seen the postoffice which was represented to me to be inadequate. When you came to the department some months later the subject was canvassed and I concurred in the expediency of a change which would give better facilities. I have no special recollection as to the arrangement of the details, though I believe the rental first proposed contemplated your providing the complete outfit of fixtures, and that upon a subsequent arrangement to use those in the old postoffice a reduction was made. The records, however, will give the exact facts. Yours very truly,

(Signed) CHARLES EMORY SMITH.
The foregoing is a true and full statement of the now notorious Hastings postoffice "deal," and shows how much of misrepresentation has been indulged in by biased newspapers. S. G. H.

Arbor Day Advocates

While Mrs. eGrove B. McClellan was lunching with some women friends one day recently the oldest of the party began to entertain the others with an account of her only matrimonial quarrel. She said that after making it up with one another, her husband had planted a tree in remembrance of it.

"What a splendid idea," laughed Mrs. McClellan, "I must make a note of it for the benefit of a few couples of my acquaintance who are always quarreling. If they adopt a similar plan they will have a magnificent avenue in no time!"—Philadelphia Ledger.