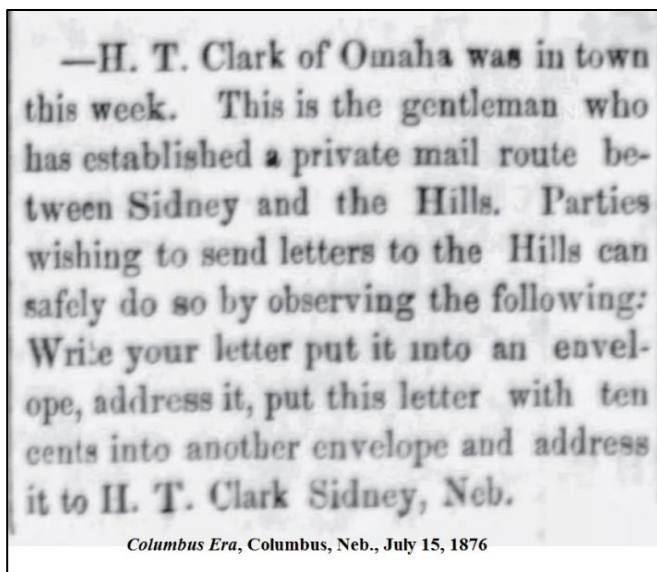


## FROM STAGE STOP TO TOWN OF HERMOSA

Lilah Morton Pengra, HAHA volunteer researcher

Omaha businessmen William W. Marsh and James Stephenson built a road from Sidney, Nebraska, to Deadwood, Dakota Territory, in 1876 and operated the first transportation service, the Sidney Stage Company, to the Black Hills' gold fields. They constructed barns along the route where horses could be fed and stabled in preparation for changing places, relay style, with exhausted teams pulling overloaded stages. Some of these stage barns were at "Division Points," places that also had overnight accommodations for the convenience of passengers and company employees. By December 1876, there were ranches, as division points were commonly called, at Water Hole (25 miles north of Red Cloud agency) in Nebraska and Horsehead Creek, Buffalo Gap and Battle Creek in Dakota Territory. Hence, the earliest designation for the area just west of present-day Hermosa was "Battle creek stage station," or, Battle Creek for short.<sup>1</sup>

At first, the US Postal Service refused to provide mail service into the Black Hills because it was part of the territory ceded to the Lakota by the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty; and, the Postal Service



feared the danger posed by indigenous people protesting the intrusion by attacking mail carriers. For an additional ten cents per letter mailed to him in Nebraska, H.T. Clarke carried mail privately into the Black Hills but when he found that the profit did not compensate for the extreme danger, he transferred the service to Marsh & Stephenson's Sidney Stage Company who continued private mail delivery along the Sidney–Black Hills Road.<sup>2</sup>

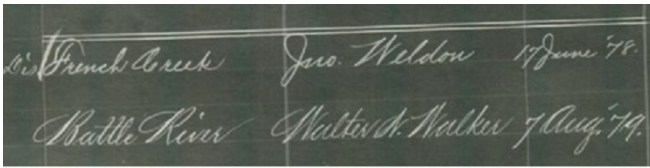
The US Agreement of 1877 (still contested today by the Lakota) overrode the misgivings of the USPS. At first, they provided mail service through contracts to several companies, including the Sidney Stage Company. Stage

drivers dropped off mail along their routes to men who were contracted by the USPS to distribute it in their local areas although they were not official US Postmasters. Walter N. Walker moved to Battle Creek Station in April 1878 and in August 1879 became a contract postmaster. Because there already was a post office in Nebraska named Battle Creek, to prevent confusion, the USPS changed

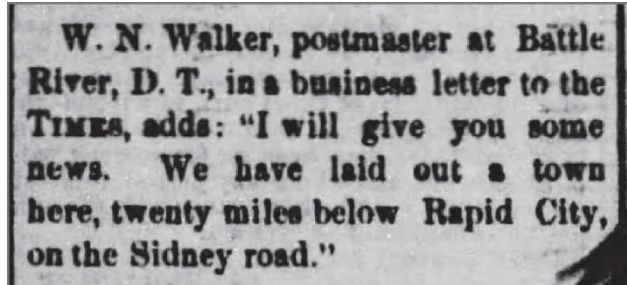
<sup>1</sup> "Sidney Stage Line," *Black Hills Weekly Pioneer*, Deadwood, Dakota Territory, December 16, 1876; Gerald R. Lee, editor, *The Tales and Notes of Henry E. Lee*, privately printed by Gerald Lee, Australia, 1985, p 281; Norbert Mahnken, 1949, "The Sidney-Black Hills Trail," *Nebraska History* 30(3): 216; Abbey R. McNair, 2005, "All about a line: The Sidney-Black Hills Trail's impact on the cultural landscape of western Nebraska and South Dakota," <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/studentwork/>, accessed 22 Sep 2019.

<sup>2</sup> "Mail Contract to This Place," *Black Hills Weekly Times*, Deadwood, Dakota Territory, April 15, 1877; A.F. Buechler & R.J. Barr, *History of Hall County, Nebraska*, Lincoln, Nebraska: Western Publishing Co., 1920, p. 97; "The Storm on the Sidney Route," *Black Hills Daily Times*, Deadwood, Dakota Territory, March 2, 1880.

the name of the Dakota Territory mail stop to Battle River and thus, a second name for the area was coined. However, local newspapers, the tax assessor and the Custer County Register of Deeds used both names, Battle creek and Battle river, interchangeably.



USPS Mail Contracts, 1870 to 1880



Black Hills Daily Times, Deadwood, D.T., February 26, 1880.  
Note that Walker is identified as the postmaster at Battle River.

Chge to	Strater	John Strater	12 April '83	Battle River	6 Nov '85
changed	French Creek	Wm D Hudson	11 Feb '85 to	Paulina	17 March '87
late "Strater"	Battle River	Wm C. Walker	6 Nov '85	Hermina M. M. Knight	10 July '86

**And from Stater back to Battle River with the appointment of the next official US Postmaster!**

Finally on April 12, 1883, an official US Post Office opened for business on the banks of Battle Creek and was named after its first US Postmaster, John Strater.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the third name associated with present-day Hermosa was "Strater" or, due to inconsistencies in spelling, Strator. But not for long.

Residents vied for the relatively well-paid job of US Postmaster so Walker must have been pleased when on November 6, 1885, he was appointed as an official US Postmaster. Voila! Strater was no longer the post office name; it became Battle River again—three names, four time periods—but only until the Fremont, Elkhorn & Missouri Valley Railroad laid track from Chadron, Nebraska, to Rapid City, Dakota Territory in 1886. Rails were laid on higher ground located a mile east and slightly north of Battle Creek. Pete Folson, engineer with the Pioneer Townsite Company, laid out a new town and called it beautiful in Spanish: *HERMOSA*.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> U.S., *Appointments of U. S. Postmasters, 1832-1971*, NARA, Roll 116, image 136.

<sup>4</sup> Eastern Custer County Historical Society, *Our Yesterdays*, Hermosa, SD, 1970, p. 796; Douglas Hesnard, editor, *Hermosa 1886-1986: Railroads, Cowboys and Memories*, Hermosa Centennial Committee, Hermosa, SD, 1986, p. 2.