



Centreville/Centerville, Iowa

By James C. Ehrhardt

PETER HUNTOON'S RECENT ARTICLE ON "TOWN SPELLING Varieties and the U. S. Board on Geographic Names" which appeared in the November/December 2010 issue contained much interesting information. I would like to add some further detail to his discussion of the name of Centreville/Centerville, Iowa. Huntoon doesn't provide any rationale for the use of the Centreville spelling by the bankers. To get some early information on the name I consulted several sources.

Iowa legislative records include an Act changing the name of the town of Chaldea to Centreville that was approved on 18 January 1847.

The post office records were different. I consulted Record of Appointments of Postmasters 1832-September 30, 1971, in the National Archives and available on microfilm. This volume lists the names and dates of appointment of each postmaster for each post office in the U.S. The Centerville listings start with the appointment of Geo. W. Perkins as postmaster in Chaldea on 6 Nov. 1846. The listing includes the name change "to 'Centreville' 7 April 1847". Inner quotations are in the original, implying a deliberate choice of spelling when the name was changed. In 1853 and 1858 others were appointed postmasters of "Centreville (c.h.)". On 28 May 1861 the first modern spelling appeared with an appointment to "Centerville (c.h.)". Centerville remained the given spelling thereafter, while the (c.h.) notation for court house was dropped in 1895. In another publication, the U.S. Postmaster-General's Annual Report of 1884 referred to "Centreville".

The State Historical Society of Iowa has an almost complete collection of state maps from every year since 1846 statehood. These were issued by a variety of publishers. On maps from 1850 to 1881 the town name was "Centreville." After 1881 the town was named "Centerville." An 1875 Appanoose county plat and an 1870 report by the Iowa Geological Corps used the "re" also.

An internet search of digitized newspapers from the era found both usages of the name, with Centreville appearing as late as 1875.

The First National Bank of Centreville, Centreville, Iowa, was chartered in 1864. At that time it is not clear whether anyone in town knew or paid any attention to an official name. However, it is clear that the "re" spelling remained in common usage by the state and national governments as well as various publishers for many years afterwards. The bankers had probably been in the community for a long time and preferred the old name.

Sources:

1847 Iowa Acts, p. 21, (*Acts and Resolutions ... of the State of Iowa*, Chapter V, 1847).

1875 county plat, *Historical Atlas of Appanoose County*, 1996.

Annual Report of the Postmaster General of the United States, 1884, p. 310.

Gray, Frank A. *Gray's New Map of Iowa*. Philadelphia: O.W. Gray & Son, 1877.

White, Charles A. *Report on the Geological Survey of the State of Iowa*, 1870, p.270.

Various additional maps.

Early title blocks from the three Centreville/Centerville national banks; charter #s 337, 2197 and 2841 respectively chartered in 1864, 1874 and 1882.

