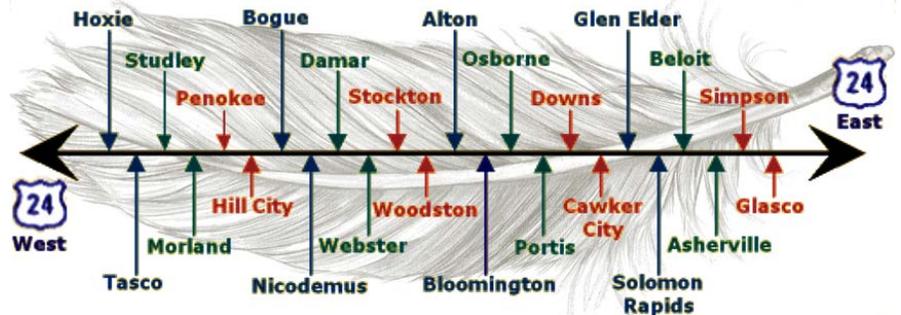
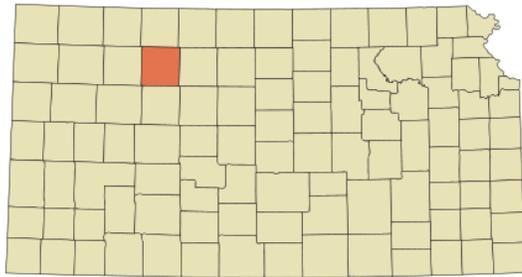




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Penokee, Kansas



Penokee, in Graham County, is located in the Solomon Valley about a mile south of Hwy 24 between Hill City and Hoxie in northwestern Kansas. The community, founded by Ben Chadsey, was originally established under the name of **Redford** in 1888. Redford grew and prospered, largely because of the fertile soil and the Union Pacific Railroad going through town.

► [View Railroads in Graham County](#)

However, it was not long until a problem emerged. Redford's mail was frequently mixed up with the mail from Rexford, Kansas.

The residents, consequently, searched maps for a name that would not be mistaken for another town. They based their decision on the Penokee Mountains near Lake Superior. Renaming their town **Penokee**, it since has had no problem with mistaken identity.

In fact, Penokee, Kansas is the only town with that name in all America.

► [View Google Map location of Penokee, KS](#)

PENOKEE

by Dorothy Taylor

BEN Chadsey was instrumental in founding the town of Reford, now Penokee, by procuring the services of the Union Land Co. to plot the town on the N $\frac{1}{2}$ N $\frac{1}{2}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 23, Township 8, Range 24, Graham County, Kansas. This land was reputedly granted to Cyrus Paxson by President Chester A. Arthur on February 15, 1884. It was later procured by Chadsey who founded the town of Reford in 1888.

The Lincoln and Colorado Railroad came through in October 1888 (soon to become part of the mighty Union Pacific). Shortly after that the first post office was established with a man named Byerts as the first postmaster.

Not long after that Reford mail was consistently getting mixed with Rexford. The post office and railroad officials asked Reford to change its name, so the towns people got

together, along with the officials and the conductor of the jitney (passenger train), and he suggested Penokee after the Penokee Mountains where he was raised near Lake Superior.

It seemed like a good idea so they adopted Penokee as the name. Reputedly Penokee is the only post office in the world bearing that name. The post office was closed June 24, 2006. That was a very sad day because, when they take your post office, they kill your town.

[Editor's Note: Robert W. Baughman's Kansas Post Offices shows no record of a post office at Reford. It shows a post office established at Gettysburg on September 20, 1878, with John Gettys as first post master. The post office was transferred from Gettysburg to Penokee on April 27, 1889, with D. W. Hanna as first postmaster. The Penokee office was closed March 31, 1895, and reestablished February 24, 1905.]

On August 26, 1915, the original depot was struck by lightning and burned to the ground. The new one was completed in 1916. It was one of four built with that design. The Coop board gave it to Ellis.

Pat Millirons established the first grocery store and hardware, and he was instrumental in getting the first rural mail delivery in 1904 with Charley Clark as the first mail carrier. Other businesses were Jim Chadsey and Calvin Green livery barns; Geo. Lovelady, veterinarian; and Fred Sherrill, Wm. H. Summers, and Ed Grant ran blacksmith shops. Floyd and Clifford Egee Hardware grew to be one of the best hardware stores in Western Kansas. After 1891 Lampier built and ran the first hotel, Jeb Shearer put in the first mercantile business, and his wife ran a millinery store.

Roscoe Collins was first cashier of the Penokee State Bank, and he also established the Penokee Lumber Co. James Ebnother put in a drug store in 1918. About the same year the Robinson Elevator was built, with Pat Millirons as first manager. Other businesses included the Cyrus Super Garage, Clint Nickelson Garage, Geo. Franklin Hotel, Frank Nickelson meat market (this building is still standing), and Frank Bean barber shop. Sadie Paxson and Oran Brandt both had creameries. Ed Grant and Bud Hildrebrand built many of the houses in Penokee. Penokee was at its highest boom about the time of the Model T Ford. At that time it had 24 businesses.

In 1917, William Summers Sr. donated the land for the Penokee Community Church, which was built by John and Bob Clark and Dowell Jaminson. The church was dedicated in 1918.

The biggest thing to hit Penokee was the chartering of the Farmers Union Coop on May 20, 1913, with W. H. Higer, Wm. Patterson, F. H. Clark, Art Kobler, T. C. Brummage, J. H. Rutherford, Cyrus Paxson, H. L. Nickelson, C. L. Kobler, Geo. S. Albertson, D. W. Kohart, Fred Kohart, Herbert Kobler, A. G. Clark, William M. Nickelson, A. J. Clark, J. F. Belveal, J. M. Bell, C. O. Spenser, and G. F. Welty as charter members. The Penokee Coop grew to be one of the biggest enterprises in both membership and volume, with branches in Bogue and Hill City.

The first test oil well in Graham County was drilled on Paxson land in 1925, south and east of Penokee. It was a wooden derrick with crude looking machinery. It was quite the attraction for many years.

The school was Riverside School, south of Penokee, later moved to a new school in Penokee, built in 1923 and closed in 1970. After the school closed, the grocery store closed in 1973. The church closed in 1969. The coop sold on April 1, 1995. It is now part of Midwest Coop with headquarters in Quinter. The post office closed in 2006.

The only businesses in Penokee now, besides the grain elevator, are Joe Keith's Spraying

Service, Don Paxson Electric and Water Well, and Kenny Shepard's fencing business. Penokee attractions include Penokee Man, outline in stone, north of town, and the possible site of the 1857 Battle of Solomon Fork (the exact location of which remains to be verified).

There are only 46 residents in Penokee now. But to me, Dorothy Taylor, it's still the greatest place to live.

Stories Of Land Of Man Of Nature