

## The NRA Stamp at Nira

The *Fairfield Ledger* contained an item of more than passing interest for Fred Spielman that hot August day in 1933. The Post Office Department in the Nation's capital announced that a new stamp would be issued "to direct attention to and arouse support of the Nation" for the National Industrial Recovery Act. Popularly known as the NRA, this was one of several Alphabeticals that was being spawned at Washington that year. A total of 400,000,000 stamps were to be printed and the First Day of Issue was to be sent from Washington exclusively on August 15.

Now Fred Spielman was more than a well-thought-of citizen of Fairfield. He was also a widely known and highly respected philatelist — specializing in United States stamps. His love for philately was a business as well as a hobby, and his enthusiasm for the "King of Hobbies" knew no bounds. The report on the forthcoming NRA Stamp gave Fred Spielman an idea which he revealed in his story in the October 1933 issue of *Stamps*. As Spielman relates:

The announcement of the issue of the NRA stamp came at the same moment that we discovered there was a town named Nira only 38 miles away, and the only town of that

name in the Post Office Directory. We, Mrs. Spielman and myself, made a quick trip there and found a general store with a small Post Office with 26 mail boxes. The Postmaster was out on his daily huckster trip, buying eggs and chickens. We located him by 'phone and he came in. We told him we were going to try and put Nira on the map, and while he could not exactly get the idea, he could understand the benefits of increased business to a fourth class Postmaster, and was ready and willing to cooperate.

That same day Spielman sent a telegram to Postmaster General James A. Farley, asking that the little post office of Nira, Iowa, be designated to send out the First Day of Issue of the NRA Stamp. Postmaster Yoder sent out a similar request to Mr. Farley. By nightfall Spielman had located Congressman Edward C. Eicher of the First District and excitedly explained what he wished him to do. Congressman Eicher proved just as foggy on the subject of First Day of Issue covers as the Nira Postmaster. He frankly admitted to Spielman that he "didn't know a postage stamp from a Christmas seal" but declared he was willing to cooperate in every way since Nira was located in his District. Congressman Eicher's first job, Spielman pointed out, was to wire President Roosevelt and Postmaster General Farley, asking that the post office at Nira, Iowa, rather than at Washington, D. C., be designated for the honor of the First Day of Issue of the NRA Stamp.

Unfortunately for Nira, the wheels of government had swung into action so fast that this request

could not be granted. On August 5, Third Assistant Postmaster General C. B. Eilenberger wrote the Nira postmaster as follows:

In reply to your letter of August 2, addressed to the Postmaster General, you are advised that it will not be possible to designate your office to first offer the NRA emergency stamp for sale. Because of the urgent necessity of having these stamps available for sale at the earliest date possible, they will be first placed on sale at Washington, D. C., only, as there is not time to make necessary preparations or sufficient notification to stamp collectors throughout the country for their sale at any additional post offices.

Your interest and cooperation in this matter is appreciated, and it is regretted that it is not practicable to comply with your request.

Since this letter was dated only ten days before the advertised date of issuance of the NRA Stamp, the explanation is readily understandable to all philatelists interested in First Day of Issue covers. But all was not lost! Thanks to the prodding of Congressman Eicher, Fred Spielman, and other Iowa stamp enthusiasts, and because both President Roosevelt (himself an avid stamp collector) and Postmaster General Farley saw the Nira request as reasonable and just, it was agreed to give the little Washington County community the honor of being the "Second Day of Sale" for the forthcoming NRA Stamp on August 17.

News of this honor electrified little Nira, Washington County, and First Day Cover enthusiasts

throughout Iowa and the Nation. At the same time it was suddenly driven home to Postmaster Yoder that a tremendous responsibility had been thrust upon him. The sudden decision of the Post Office Department to accord Nira this honor posed an equally difficult problem to those commercial stamp firms who specialized in securing First Day of Issue covers for their many thousands of customers. Would this Nira cancellation on the exclusive second day have equal popularity and value with the First Day of Issue? Would it pay them to make the long jump from Washington to Nira? Or would the primary interest be focused on the Nira cancellation, which itself would have special appeal to rabid philatelic fans? Only time would tell.

Meanwhile, on August 8, 1933, the *Iowa City Press-Citizen* carried the following news release from Washington:

Nira, only town in the United States to bear the nickname of the national industrial recovery act, will be the second city to distribute the special issue of the NRA stamps. The first city will be Washington, D. C.

The federal government has chosen this town's fourth class post office to be the second in the nation to offer for sale the special stamps which are a part of the industrial recovery program. The official sale starts in the nation's capital August 15. Nira's sale starts August 17. The rest of the country follows.

Stamp collectors are expected to flood the post office here with requests for letters mailed with the NRA stamp and postmarked Nira. Postmaster E. J. Yoder has been ad-

vised that a special consignment of the stamps will be forwarded to take care of the anticipated rush of business.

Four hundred million of the stamps are being printed to keep the recovery campaign constantly before the people. Congressman Edward C. Eicher of Washington called attention to the fact that Nira in his home county was the only community bearing the name of the national recovery industrial act seal.

So after Washington, little Nira, a town of 20 persons, comes next.

The stamp, known as the "NRA emergency postage stamp," will have as its central subject the figures of a farmer, a businessman, an industrial worker and a female employee to typify American industry "as they walk hand in hand in a common determination."

The few days that remained before August 17 were filled with feverish activity in Nira. Not only was the problem of servicing stamp collectors imminent, but Postmaster Yoder had to see that ample food and at least some form of entertainment, which had been promised to them by Fred Spielman, was provided for the hundreds of visitors who were bound to descend upon the little community.

On August 17, 1933, the *Iowa City Press-Citizen* carried a full account of little Nira — a community that overnight became a "stamp collector's paradise." The first stamp cancelled was on a letter addressed from Postmaster E. J. Yoder to President Roosevelt, which was sent by carrier pigeon from Nira to its home cote in Moline. The

bird made the distance of seventy miles in one hour and thirty-three minutes, and upon its arrival in Moline the envelope with its stamp was forwarded to President Roosevelt for his personal collection.

The message, sent to the Associated Press by carrier pigeon, read in part as follows:

This tiny village of 20 souls, nestled in the hills of the extreme northwest corner of Washington county, where train service is twice daily, and telephone and telegraph communication are not the best, and, hitherto almost unheard of, had fame suddenly thrust upon it when the new NRA stamp went on sale. . . .

When Postmaster E. J. Yoder opened his general store, which houses the post office, the barber chair, and the Yoder family, consisting of more than one-third of the town's population, he was greeted by a group of stamp collectors eager to make the first purchase. . . . Scores of philatelists from Davenport, Iowa City, Washington, Fairfield and other Iowa cities came and went after adding the famous stamp to their collection.

There was much excited activity within the general store for on one of the counters were stacks of packages and envelopes containing thousands of requests for the new stamps. They came from all parts of the United States and Canada. Behind the counter stood the postmaster's charming daughter and chief assistant, Miss Orpha Yoder. A bit calmer than the rest of the workers, she was busy opening and sorting the packages and bulky envelopes and arranging the contents in piles to receive the stamp under the thud of the postmaster, who also is automobile mechanic, clerk, driver and handy man for his father. . . .

More than 25,000 letters had been received for cancellation by Thursday morning, for stamp collectors place a high value on first day cancellations. . . .

More than 300 cars, carrying a crowd estimated at more than 1,000, attended the morning events. A tug-of-war and several foot races were to feature the afternoon events, while a large crowd watched the arrival and departure of the morning and afternoon trains, each of which carried a large amount of outgoing mail.

To the far corners of the world letters are going from Nira. Collectors in Holland, Germany, France, Brazil, Japan, Hawaii, and the Samoan islands have all placed their orders.

It was a big day for Nira, a day which was augmented by music by the Brower sisters quartet of Keokuk County, an invocation by Reverend Dewey of Wellman, a speech by Congressman Edward C. Eicher, another by Professor Royal A. Holbrook of Iowa State College (an avid stamp collector who had purchased the first NRA stamps that day) and a benediction by Reverend Edward Deener of Wellman.

It was a big day for the post office and the friendly townfolk of little Nira. The more faithful of the First Day of Issue collectors tarried in the little community, feasting on the truck load of watermelon which Postmaster Yoder personally provided for the occasion and watching the morning and evening trains pull into the little station. Great excitement was caused when the *Des Moines Register* autogiro circled and landed for a few moments at Nira.

The NRA Stamp brought more business in a single day to the Nira Post Office than it had had

in the previous decade. By nightfall, however, the crowd had just about satisfied its demand for the new stamp and folk began to wend their way homeward. Postmaster Yoder estimated that approximately 30,000 three cent stamps had been sold, representing \$900, a "big piece of business in Nira."

The official report of the Post Office Department indicated that 65,000 First Day of Issue covers had been mailed in Washington, D. C., on August 15, 1933. Since the sale of the NRA Stamp at Nira was really a second day feature no figures have been included in subsequent First Day of Issue reports. Moreover, Nira itself was soon to disappear into the limbo of over two thousand other discontinued Iowa post offices.

On October 15, 1936, Postmaster E. J. Yoder mailed a letter to his friend F. A. Spielman in Fairfield in the upper left hand corner of which he had written "Last day Cancel." Thus, Nira, a post office that had been established on April 8, 1880, with Noah Farley as first postmaster, disappeared from the *U. S. Official Postal Guide* to be heard of no more. And the little town itself has moldered away and died — sans railroad, sans post office, sans inhabitants. But a flood of happy memories came back to all those fortunate enough to possess an NRA Stamp with a Nira postmark dated August 17, 1933. Truly, the NRA Stamp brought the biggest day in its life to little Nira, Iowa.