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No trustees, no tax spells end for Quitman

The 150-year-old village of Quitman in western Nodaway County has earned its place in Missouri history. In addition to being the birthplace of a Missouri governor, it also once served as home base for Bilby Ranch — reputedly the second largest cattle ranch in the United States in the late 1800s.



The 150-year-old village of Quitman in western Nodaway County has earned its place in Missouri history. In addition to being the birthplace of a Missouri governor, it also once served as home base for Bilby Ranch — reputedly the second largest cattle ranch in the United States in the late 1800s.

But with a quick vote late last week by the Nodaway County Commission, the tiny town that spreads across a few irregular blocks on either side of Route 113 ceased to exist as a recognized municipality.

Meeting in regular session Friday, the three-member commission unanimously accepted a petition from Quitman resident Roy Heerman asking that the village be disincorporated.

Just what affect that will have in practical terms on the town's 40-odd residents is still up in the air, both Heerman and county officials said. But it likely means that Green Township will take over responsibility for graveling the streets.

That chore was formerly paid for with a municipal property tax levy of just over 97 cents per \$100 of assessed valuation, which County Clerk Beth Walker said totaled only 141,795 for the entire town. The tax came off the books in September when no new rate was set, as required by state law, because no one ran for any of the five Village Board of Trustee seats in April.

Even before last spring's election, the village board was down to only three members, two of whom, Doris Caudill and Keith Hurst, died. The third, Hurst's widow, Vicki Hurst, moved, leaving the village with no remaining elected officials.

Under Missouri law, no tax revenue essentially means no town, so about all that was left for the commission to do was accept the paperwork.

Figures from the 2010 census show that, at the time, Quitman was home to 45 people, 23 households and 11 families. Stores and shops that once served a bustling northwest Missouri farm and ranch community have long since closed, however, as has the school, with local children and teenagers now riding northbound buses each morning to nearby Burlington Junction.

But though Quitman is no more, it leaves behind a colorful legacy, much of which revolves around its relationship to Bilby Ranch.

According to The History of Nodaway County Towns by retired Northwest Missouri State University Professor Bob Bohlken, John S. Bilby moved to the area in the late 1860s and chose Quitman as the headquarters for his cattle trading operation and grain elevator.

Bohlken writes that the town also became a trading post for sharecroppers working Bilby land and was heralded as "the most active cattle-trading town in the Midwest outside of Chicago" after

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getting a railroad line in 1880.

At one time, Bilby's empire stretched from Missouri to Oklahoma to Texas to New Mexico. However, his many holdings were leveraged to the hilt, and the operation collapsed shortly before its founder died in a train accident in 1919.

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