The Opheims were the first homesteaders in what is now Griggs County. Of course there were many explorers, travelers, hunters and trappers of European descent who passed through this area and stayed for varying lengths of time. One of these was Andrew Durham and his wife.

C. P. Bolkan arrived here to homestead in the spring of 1880 and said that when he came here in the spring of 1880 that only the Opheim family was here except a pair of hunters, Mr. and Mrs. Durham who made their home about 10 miles up the valley and only stayed their 2 or 3 years before they sold out. He said later in his interview that they came in 1879, lived in the Romness neighborhood, had a post office for a while, and then sold out and went to Valley City.

The Griggs County Centennial book says that “A shanty built originally by a settler named Durum was the second house built in Griggs County.  In the spring of 1885 it was burned by a prairie fire.” It seems quite likely that “Durum” and “Durham” were one and the same and.

The first post office in Griggs County was established in 1880. It was called Durham and was based in Andrew Durham’s cabin along the Sheyenne River about 10 miles northwest of Cooperstown. . Mr. Durham’s brother-in-law Frank Taper was the first postmaster and his sister (Mrs. Durham) was the assistant.

Frank Taper and Mr. Durham lived in the same cabin. Mr. Taper’s story is that they soon had some trouble and Mr. Durham drove him out of the cabin at gunpoint. Mr. Taper said that he managed to take the contents of the post office with him, which consisted of a few letters.

Mr. Taper’s initial plan was to take the mail to the Opheim Cabin and establish a post office there. He made it about a mile to John Hogenson’s and stayed with them the first night. Mr. and Mrs. Durham went to the Hogenson’s the next day. They were mounted on horses and each of them was carrying a six-shooter. Mrs. Durham said that since she was the assistant postmaster that the post office should remain at the Durham cabin and they took the mail back there with them. Mr. Hogenson said that he never saw Frank Taper again.

The Durham Post Office only lasted a year and closed in March of 1881 and most of the mail went to either the Lee or Lybeck post offices. Lybeck closed in 1882 and then the mail went to Mardell until it closed in 1885, but each of these Griggs County places deserves their own story.

The Opheims were definitely the first homesteaders in Griggs County since they have the claims records to prove it, but the Durhams did build their shanty around the same time that the Opheims built their cabin. We’d like to hear more stories or get more information from you on this event.

Note: A man named Andrew J. Durham died in 1892 and is buried in the Hillside Cemetery in Valley City. He was a Civil War Veteran from New York and could be the same person that the post office was named after.