The Opheims were the first white settlers in what is now Griggs County. The only ones that might try to dispute that claim are the Durhams.

C. P. Bolkan 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 later says 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.

There is another reference that the second house in Griggs County was a shanty built originally by a settler named “Durum” and that it was burned down by a prairie fire in the spring of 1885. It seems likely that Durum and Durham were the same person with a different spelling.

The first post office in Griggs County was established in 1880. It was called Durham and was based in Andrew Durham’s cabin a couple of miles northwest of where Highway 45 now crosses the Sheyenne. 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 and permanent settlers in Griggs County. The Durhams were hunters and trappers who built a cabin here, maybe in 1879, but we don’t know if they spent the winter in this cabin as did the Opheims and they didn’t stay very long.

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.